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Perceptions of Globalization among English Language  
Students at Kuwait University: Voices of Ownership

by

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Thesis submitted to the University of Kent for the Degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Nadra Islam, who has supported, guided, and inspired me throughout my life.

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the role of English in the lives of students at Kuwait University. The study unveils a complex interplay between students' attitudes towards learning English and their interpretations of globalization, which is something that is not usually recognized in the classroom.

The study was conducted using qualitative research methodology encompassing ethnographic observations, conversations, and semi-structured interviews. The majority of the data was collected from 17 to 24 year old Kuwaiti students enrolled in the Health Sciences program at Kuwait University. In addition, conversations with five English language teachers at the same university are included to highlight the tension that exists between teacher expectations and learner performance in the classroom.

The main findings of the research reveal that the students had a very pragmatic view of the use of English. As a result, their attitudes inside the classroom did not accurately reflect the importance of English in the rest of their lives. Rather, this importance emerged in how they negotiated the use of English outside of the English language classroom. It was found that the use of English was directly related to how they positioned themselves both within their local social context and in the world. Therefore, although teacher perceptions highlighted students' resistance towards learning English, what became evident through the data analysis was that student attitudes were strongly connected to their interpretations of the sociocultural context in which they were functioning. This also reinforces the importance of adopting a critical cosmopolitan perspective to understand the complexity behind social action rather than relying on simplified and generalized cultural explanations. In addition, the disconnect between student and teacher perceptions brings attention to the continuing prevalence of problems of essentialism in the field of English language teaching and highlights the necessity of being more aware of Othering discourses as well as the relevance of considering context when trying to understand student attitudes towards language learning.

**GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS**

Abaya	long, loose cloak worn to cover the entire body
Alhamdulillah	thank Allah/God
Bidun	stateless Arabs
Bidun Jinsiyya	without nationality (technically ‘without recorded nationality’)
Halal	meat slaughtered according to Islamic traditions
Haraam	forbidden according to Islam and based on the Quran
Hijab	Islamic headscarf
Munaqqaba	woman who wears the abaya, hijab, and niqab
Niqab	face veil that covers the nose and mouth, leaving only the eyes visible
Sharia	Islamic law
Wasta	connections or influence used to help one complete a task or get ahead
Wudhu	Islamic ablution ritual performed before prayer

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 THESIS FOCUS

This thesis explores the role of English in the lives of students at Kuwait University (KU). It reveals a dynamic relationship between students' attitudes towards learning English and their interpretations of globalization. The students describe the struggles they face as they try to take ownership of their lives, particularly when it comes to their use of English and what it represents to them. It is their description of these struggles that unveils how language learning and its use is embedded in a multifaceted environment. This complexity is something that English language teachers do not often recognize or acknowledge, and it is evident in the way they talk about their students' capabilities in class (as will be demonstrated in the data). To address this tension, the research also investigates the pedagogical implications of the role of English as a global language and interrogates the perceptions language teachers have about their students. The main participants in the study are Kuwaiti students, aged 17 to 24, enrolled in the Health Sciences Center at KU in which the 7-year curriculum is taught almost entirely in English. Student voices are juxtaposed against some teachers' perspectives to highlight the difference between student realities and teacher expectations.

This chapter begins with the main research questions. Then, to provide an understanding of my point of view, I present my background as well as a critical incident that prompted me to widen my research focus. A description of Kuwait as well as the context in which the actual research took place is then briefly described. In the last two sections, the significance of this study is discussed, and the layout of the rest of the thesis is presented.

### 1.2 INITIAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My initial research question was:

- 1) What role does English play in students' lives?

As I explored the answer to this question, I discovered that students' use of the English language was largely dependent on their context as well as the image they wanted to project. In particular, their interpretations of globalization seemed to influence their perception of the significance of learning English. Realizing this connection, I expanded the focus of my research and added the following questions:

- 2) In what way is this role connected to their understandings of globalization?
- 3) How does globalization therefore affect students' own self-understanding?

### 1.3 ESTABLISHING MY PERSPECTIVE & BROADENING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this section, I present some details about my background in order to establish the perspective from which I approached the research setting. In addition to describing my own issues with identity, I describe a critical incident that broadened my perspective about how English language learners were viewed. This incident prompted the initiation of this research. I then present the final research questions that are explored in this study.

#### 1.3.1 *Personal Background*

When people ask me where I am from, I sometimes struggle to give an answer. The question itself is simple enough; however, the answer is not that easy. I am from Bangladesh; that is my nationality, it is the passport that I hold, and it is the country where my parents are from. Bengali, the national language of Bangladesh, is the first language I spoke fluently. It is my mother tongue, and technically it is my first language. I started to learn English at a young age, something that was encouraged by my parents, both of who completed their education in Bangladesh and earned their post-graduated degrees in the United States. I attended an international school that followed the American curriculum in Kuwait. At school I learnt Arabic. However, aside from the 3 40-minute classes per week, Arabic was not used much outside the classroom. Moreover, the prevalent use of English throughout Kuwait made learning Arabic relatively unnecessary to function in the country on a daily basis. Therefore, aside from a basic knowledge of the language, I am not very fluent in Arabic, which is why the interviews and interactions with the participants in this study were all conducted in English (as will be discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.4.3 b). After graduating from high school, I went to the United States to complete my higher education.

I was born and raised in Kuwait and have lived in the country for over two decades. Although I was born in Kuwait and my parents lived there for over forty years, due to citizenship laws, we are not Kuwaiti nationals. The only way we are allowed to stay in the country is under sponsorship from our employers. Regardless of not being recognized as citizens, Kuwait is considered home. Though I faced many struggles as a foreigner living in Kuwait, I developed an affinity to the country. I have been there to witness many of the sociopolitical changes in the country first hand. I grew with the country and came to realize that the complexity and multiple layers of society that I could see as an insider were rarely captured by the international media, which seemed to focus more on the negative and aggressive side of the Arab/Muslim world. Thus, I felt like both an outsider and an insider when it came to researching this context. This outsider/insider dichotomy also had an impact on how I viewed my research setting, as will be discussed further in Chapter 5, section 5.4.2 c.

Growing up in this multi-cultural background was not always easy. I sometimes struggled to figure out where exactly I belonged. I came from an economically modest and religiously conservative household, yet was exposed to lifestyles and habits that were unlike how my parents had raised me. This is why some of the findings of the study were surprising to me as the students presented a much more matter-of-fact attitude towards the changes occurring in their environment. Although I was somewhat protected within Kuwait, I was by no means sheltered. I still feel like I grew up in a global environment because of the interactions with people from various nationalities in school as well as during my many travels. The world did not seem foreign, even less so because I knew English.

Having been brought up in such a multi-cultural environment, the simple question of where I am from brings about several issues of nationality, identity, belonging, and language. It is from this perspective that I can relate to much of what the students are talking about in how they see the value of English in their lives. I also understand the balancing act they have to play as they negotiate their family and society expectations with their own ideas that are formulated from their interactions with their peers, what they see in the media, and their own experiences in general. It is from this perspective that I viewed my research setting and my interactions with the participants of this study.

### ***1.3.2 Critical Incident***

The respondents in this study repeatedly emphasized the importance of learning English. This reminded me of a personal critical incident that highlighted the sensitivities involved in teaching English to speakers of other languages. In particular, it made me realize that despite the global spread of English, teacher perceptions of the learning potential of their students were still punctuated with a lack of awareness or acknowledgement of the complexity of cultural and linguistic identity.

The personal incident occurred in March 2003 when I attended my first international Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) conference in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. I was excited about being among thousands of other people who were teachers, just like me, and working with students who were learning English, just like me. However, it did not take long for me to learn that although I was approaching the conference and its attendees as others just like me, I was not accepted as being just like them.

The first session I attended was ‘Considering culture in writing EFL materials,’ (Gordon and Iannuzzi, 2003) during which the presentation addressed designing international student orientation sessions. I listened to the discussion among the American teachers about what they thought international students should know during orientation sessions. They covered topics such

as teaching colloquial greetings (e.g. *What's up?* and *How's it going?*) and emphasizing habits such as the importance of being on time and waiting patiently in line. After listening for a while, I chimed in to give them an example of an incident that happened at my international student orientation at the University of Rochester in 1994 – it is a moment I will never forget. All the international students were sitting in a circle, and an American woman stood up and started talking about personal hygiene. She explained what deodorant was and proclaimed, in an ‘I hope you can understand this tone,’ “In America, we use soap.”

When I relayed this incident to the teachers in the discussion group, they were all taken aback. A Nigerian English instructor who was also present gave an example of how at his university orientation session the coordinators spent a lot of time explaining how Americans liked to do things on time; he said he found this very patronizing. An English teacher from Ecuador relayed a similar incident. Although the American teachers who listened to our examples nodded in agreement that the statements were indeed patronizing, they did not acknowledge the fact that they themselves were discussing similar topics. It ended up being a very constructive conversation with the three of us ‘international’ English teachers suggesting issues to address during orientation, such as who to consult for advice about opening a bank account. These were practical issues that had to do with familiarizing newcomers with the physical environment that many students – international or otherwise – would probably want to know, instead of focusing on giving ‘advice’ based on stereotypes and cultural assumptions.

It was my own personal confrontation with this lack of awareness that enabled me to relate to Othering discourses that my students encountered during their learning experience. The incident I had shared with the other language teachers was an example of how assumptions were being made by the orientation coordinators that international students would need to be taught about personal hygiene. Though that event occurred while I was a student, I found that the reactions I received from other people at the TESOL conference were similar. For example, several teachers spoke to me loudly and slowly as if I was deaf and could not understand them, which was followed by them expressing amazement when they heard that I could speak English rather well. Even though I am no longer a language learner, this first hand-experience of having my linguistic competence judged based on my appearance and assumed cultural background, enabled me to identify with student experiences of being judged or discriminated against based on assumptions about their culture.

I assumed that at the conference I was categorized as someone ‘different’ because I was wearing a *hijab*, since that was the only outwardly obvious sign that I could think of that distinguished me from most of the other participants at the conference. I was resistant to the idea that people were making assumptions about my language proficiency simply based on my

appearance. However, from the reactions I received from numerous people, it seemed like they did not consider the possibility that a) I could be fluent in English, b) I could be American, c) that I might be liberal, or d) that I would be intelligent/intellectual. I had to wonder, could all these assumptions be made just from seeing me in a *hijab*?

There I was, an English language teacher, at a convention that was about teaching English to speakers of other languages, which meant that all their students came from different linguistic backgrounds, and yet it was apparent that many of the attendees were quick to judge my linguistic ability based on my outward appearance. Even though their perception of me changed after we had a chance to speak, many expressed their opinion that my proficiency in English was unexpected and unusual. It was recalling this incident that led me to wonder how these prejudices – or at the very least assumptions – filtered into the language classroom.

### **1.3.3 Focus Points**

Returning to Kuwait after such a rude awakening as to how students were being perceived, motivated me to pursue this line of investigation. I was particularly concerned with how misconceptions about what students were capable of could have an impact on the classroom dynamic, which could change the whole educational experience for both students and teachers. Therefore, based upon my personal background as well as my experience at the TESOL International Conference, I added two more questions to my original research questions:

- 4) How does students' self-understanding affect their attitudes towards learning English at university?
- 5) Moreover, how do students contest negative perceptions others have about them?

## **1.4 UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT**

This section outlines some aspects of Kuwait's sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts and education parameters in order to provide a better understanding of the larger framework in which this study takes place. In this section, I present some basic facts about Kuwait and discuss the impact of its wealth on the development of the country. I will then highlight some issues related to the country's sociopolitical and sociocultural background as well as educational development. I then describe why Kuwaiti students were chosen as the main subjects for this study.

### **1.4.1 Kuwait: A Wealthy Nation**

Kuwait is a small country located in the Middle East between Iraq and Saudi Arabia bordering the Arabian Gulf. It is a very wealthy nation with no recorded poverty among Kuwaiti



nationals. Despite the global economic crisis, Kuwait's oil-based economy has continued to do well. The wealth of the Kuwaiti government has a direct impact on the nationals of the country. Kuwait has developed a cradle-to-grave welfare system that ensures every Kuwaiti citizen is taken care of (Crystal, 1995: 189). Having assurances such as guaranteed employment provides the citizens with a high degree of comfort and stability. However, other areas of development have suffered consequences. The main issue is that "approximately 95% of the Kuwaitis who have been through the public education system end up working in the public sector where earnings are not necessarily linked to productivity" (Burney and Mohammed, 2002: 285).

As a result of the lack of productivity among Kuwaiti nationals, expatriate workers have been brought in to fill the spaces in the job market. This trend started in the 1940s when Kuwait's oil industry started to develop. Since that time, the country has focused on attracting foreign workers to help develop the industry. "This seems to indicate that Kuwait's strategy towards its migrants has not always been based on exclusion" (Longva, 1997: 43). However, with such a great influx of expatriate workers, the government enforced strict nationality and migration laws to ensure the country's social benefits were awarded to Kuwaiti nationals only (Crystal, 1995: 79). Migration policies focused on maintaining "the transient character of labor immigration in order to ensure that the migrants did not settle down permanently in the country" (Longva, 1997: 44). In order to ensure their cultural survival, a non-integration policy was established and formed as the basis for social stability. Therefore, despite 55% of Kuwait's population of 2.7 million being non-Kuwaitis, there is an element of exclusion between local nationals and foreigners (Longva, 1997: 44). The impact of this population distribution is further discussed in Chapter 3, sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.

Aside from providing social security only to Kuwaitis, the majority non-Kuwaiti population was having an impact on the cultural landscape of the country. Having such a diverse, multi-cultural society has promoted the ability to share local space with outsiders as an innate component of living in Kuwait, despite any cultural, religious, and political differences. Therefore, in order to keep up with the progress and changes in the demographics of the country, Kuwait started to develop a:

Western outlook, most typically expressed in its modern infrastructure and its pattern of consumption. Apart from oil and oil-related products, the country produced little. The Kuwaitis imported practically everything they consumed, from foodstuffs and clothing to raw materials and equipment, to plants, and livestock ... The shelves of Kuwaiti supermarkets were filled with French yogurt, German sausages, Belgian salad dressing, Dutch lettuce, Swiss cheese, and American peanut butter. (Longva, 1997: 35)

This demonstrates how the presence of such a high percentage of foreigners and the economic stability and wealth that the country enjoys allowed Kuwaitis to import what was most needed and beneficial for their country, including both products and skilled workers for services.

Thus, although Kuwait welcomes foreigners to come and live, work, and take home the financial rewards of a tax-free income, they also have strict divisions between locals and foreigners. This type of division gives an image of inclusion but still maintains policies and practices of exclusion. Thus, people like my family (as described in the previous section) who have lived in and contributed to Kuwaiti society for four decades still have no political or social rights in the country. This is one way by which Kuwait is maintaining its cultural identity.

#### **1.4.2 *The Sociopolitical and Sociocultural Background of Kuwait***

The division between Kuwaiti nationals and expatriates in the country is clear to see and understand. However, the parameters of the local sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts are often blurred. This is mainly because the idea of citizenship in Kuwait is not clear. There are three basic categories of citizenship in Kuwait: first-category citizens, second-category citizens, and those *bidun jinsiyya* or without (documented proof of) nationality. The division of these categories stemmed from the 1950s when heads of Kuwaiti families were required to register with the government during a certain period. Not everyone, particularly the nomadic tribes of the area, was aware of this registration process. Therefore, those who registered late were labeled ‘second-category citizens,’ which is actually written on their national identification cards. Although Kuwaitis in this category have the same social and civil rights as first-category Kuwaitis, they are not given any political rights. The *biduns* continue to “exist in a stateless limbo” as their status has been further complicated by the large numbers of refugees that have entered Kuwait due to wars occurring in neighboring countries over the years, such as the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s (Tétreault, 2000:46-47). Due to the different benefits awarded to each social class, tensions do arise. However, often clashes that appear to arise from identity and tribal issues can be traced back to issues related to political power or wealth. “Most commonly, such conflicts start with the exploitation by political leaders, for their own ideological ends, of loyalty ties among groups who share feelings of exclusion, deprivation and discrimination” (UNDP, 2009: 5). Tribal affiliations carry a lot of weight when it comes to politics in the country.

Although Kuwait is an urban city State, the Bedouin or tribal groups have relocated to areas that are predominantly occupied by their own tribe. Their tribal allegiance or identity influences every aspect of life. They are patriarchal since the male guardians’ authority is not questioned; and women’s main duty is that of wife and mother. As tribes dominate certain electoral areas, they elect a candidate to represent them. He, in turn, promotes or blocks legislation that these tribal networks support or reject. In other words, the tribal kinship can influence their candidate if he wants to be supported in the next elections. (Al-Kazi, 2011: 173)

Therefore, these tribal affiliations do have an impact on the political landscape of Kuwait. Tribal divisions are not always evident, particularly to non-Kuwaitis because the identifying marker is the family name. While issues of discrimination between different groups were not really raised in this research, the strength of family values and importance of doing things in accordance to their family expectations (as will be demonstrated in section 7.2 of chapter 7) is highlighted. The divisions that comprise Kuwait's sociocultural outline are rather complex. Despite these divisions, however, Kuwaiti nationalism promotes the image of a unified community (Tétreault, 2000: 28).

Over time, Kuwaiti citizenship has been diminishing to primarily focusing on having access to social rights (Longva, 1997: 48). "Affluence is one basis of these regimes' legitimacy, an ideology of progress superimposed on preexisting tribal values of shaikhly responsibility and equality" (Crystal, 1995: 191). The welfare handouts and benefits are now not seen as a source of generosity from the rulers of the country but rather:

more as rights that citizens, not subjects, can claim from the state because of nationality (or as arrangements that clients, through *wasta* connections, can claim from patrons). These policies thus transform the citizens' notions of right, obligation and interest toward the state and the regime. (Crystal, 1995: 191)

This type of expectation has a negative impact on the indigenous population, particularly the youth, because the expectancy of guaranteed employment and financial assistance, without any obligation to pay back, skews their idea of national responsibility. Rather, transfers that are available only to first-degree Kuwaiti citizens, including allowances for raising a family, getting married, stipends for students, as well as "their own private house" for Kuwaiti men, are highly coveted (Longva, 1997: 53). These points are further elaborated on in Chapter 3, section 3.2.4.

### **1.4.3 Education in Kuwait**

Education at all levels is free for all Kuwaiti citizens (Al-Kazi, 2011: 17). Despite investing a substantial amount of money in the expansion of the education sector, the actual growth of knowledge and skills has not developed in the same manner. In fact, on an international scale, the level of productivity, despite the affluence of the nation and resources invested into KU, is low (Burney and Mohammed, 2002: 278). Thus, as is a common trend that has become evident through this research, the superficial growth of the country and various industries seems to dominate and override any deeper growth and progress within Kuwait. This concern is mentioned by students, as will be demonstrated in chapter 6, section 6.2.2.

The provision of free education to all nationals removes the issue of socio-economic class among students. Although there are varying degrees of wealth among citizens, social class stratification is not always obvious. Moreover, the societal divisions that do exist, namely along

tribal and religious lines, are rarely noticeable within the classroom. Rather, issues of class and social standing are concerns outside the university and among older Kuwaitis. Moreover, the availability of free education has not always had a positive outcome. It has been found that:

The provision of free education may have the effect of distorting the types of skills and graduates that come out of the public education system. The first result of this price distortion may be the enrollment of too many students in different levels of education, particularly higher levels. Parents may be more likely to have their children continue their education than they would if the higher levels of education were to involve a real price. (Burney and Mohammed, 2002: 279)

Thus, students may be completing their university education, but they do not always emerge prepared or willing to work in the public or private sectors. Moreover, research has shown that:

There has been no real interest in comprehensive education reform. Rather, the reform has focused on the “engineering” aspects. But improvements to the physical infrastructure of schools and even curriculum revisions are of limited value, unless they are coupled with a much greater investment in the human infrastructure of a free, democratic citizenry. (Faour and Muasher, 2011:3-4)

This discrepancy is something that is noted by the students and will be further explored in chapter 8, section 8.3.4. The development of Kuwait’s education system will also be discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.3.1.

There are some links between the politics of the country and the university environment. Issues such as gender segregation of classrooms, as will be discussed in chapter 6, section 6.3.3, is a policy that is discussed in parliament and implemented at the university level. This type of influence often filters through the Kuwait National Students Union, where the members embrace and promote certain political ideologies that are usually based on their religious or tribal beliefs (Al-Kazi, 2011: 173). Although political decisions do have an impact on education policies, students are usually more concerned with how to successfully complete their university education than getting involved in politics. This topic will be further explored in the data analysis in chapter 8, section 8.3.4.

#### ***1.4.4 Focusing on Kuwaiti Students***

Looking at the historical, sociopolitical, and sociocultural contexts of Kuwait reveals a complex, multi-layered setting. These dilemmas and disparities filter into the university system and affect the students as well as their perspectives on what is happening around them both locally and globally. Therefore, connecting the research questions to my own experiences and my position as an English language teacher at KU, I started investigating what it meant for students at KU to be studying English. Living in Kuwait at a time when significant sociopolitical changes were occurring, I believed that the students were undergoing some sort of reflexive process in determining their stance on the issues in their country, and consequently contemplating, if not

questioning, their own identity. The students' responses about English being a beneficial instrument for their lives and having almost nothing to do with their nationality or culture, led me to question how much responsibility I had, as an English language teacher, to prompt my students to think critically about the implications of studying English, as suggested by researchers like Pennycook (2001: 143).

Through the four years of research I discovered that students' attitudes towards English were very closely linked to both their understandings of globalization and the way they positioned themselves in their immediate sociocultural context. Despite the predominantly favorable attitudes towards wanting to speak English well, they were quite adamant about the pragmatic uses of English, which were detached from any real significance for their cultural or linguistic identity. The responses of the students ranged from being ultra-conservative to ultra-liberal. In the view of some students, globalization, a term that was primarily associated with modernity, was diluting their perception of Kuwaiti identity, while others believed that their Kuwaiti identity was being reinforced and in fact strengthened. Some students, displaying the consumer elements of globalization – wearing Calvin Klein jeans, carrying a Gucci bag, drinking a Dean and DeLuca iced coffee – asserted that globalization had nothing to do with Kuwaiti identity. Moreover, when responding to my questions about learning English, not a single student indicated that learning the language made them feel any less 'Kuwaiti'. Their responses prompted me to further research theories about English being an agent of linguistic and cultural imperialism, and what role it actually had in relation to affecting a person's identity.

## **1.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY**

This research aims to investigate the extent to which English language learners are affected by the spread of the English language – a by-product of globalization. It is important to acknowledge the experiences of the students and realize that they are not unaffected by or unaware of changes that are occurring in their surrounding environment. Moreover, when some theorists promote critical thought and analysis, they are assuming two things: a) the objects of their concern are not critical thinkers, and b) those people are not thinking critically in the way some theorists would like. To have a preconceived notion that some English language learners are not capable of engaging in critical thought is highly reductive.

From some points of view, globalization is causing major changes in society, to the point where cultures and identities are being lost. Although changes are occurring, it should not be assumed that they are happening automatically or are due to lack of critical thinking. Rather, this research reveals how engaged the participants really are in the changes that are occurring around them. Their reactions and voices may not be active or very vocal. Nevertheless, it is important to

remember that even those who choose to be more passive, or choose not to react at all to the changes that are going on around them, are still making a statement about their environment. Therefore, adopting a critical cosmopolitan view encourages deeper analysis of the ideology that underlies reductive discourses.

I believe this research project will illustrate the complex negotiation processes that learners of English go through when deciding what stance – whether active participant or passive recipient – they take in confronting the changes around them. This research is important because it confronts the prejudiced attitudes towards English language learners that still dominate ELT discourses. It also reveals how students can take ownership of the changes brought about by globalization and interrogates its significance through their use of English.

## **1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THIS THESIS**

This thesis has been divided into nine chapters. In this first chapter, I presented the focus and rationale of the thesis. I also introduced my background and experiences that led me to establish the research questions.

The next three chapters focus on the theoretical background of my research. Chapter two presents literature that investigates the driving forces behind the spread of the English language and juxtaposes them against theories of linguistic imperialism. Chapter three is a more detailed investigation of the impact of globalization as the driving force behind cultural change in the world today. The final literature review chapter, chapter four, presents research that analyzes the implications of the increased demand to learn English, particularly examining literature that politicizes and problematizes the existence of uncritical views of learning English. This perspective is then juxtaposed against discourses that (unknowingly) promote cultural stereotyping – including a lack of critical thinking – which is evident in the manner in which some teachers approach the classroom and/or determine the capabilities of their students.

Chapter five elaborates on the details of the research methodology used to conduct this study. Details about the participants of this study are also included in this chapter.

Chapters six through eight present the data that form the basis of the thesis. Data in chapter six demonstrate how understandings of globalization and its association with modernization are seen as a normal part of the respondents' lives. The chapter also explores how the participants use language as a means of representing who they want to be at a particular time, in a particular context.

Chapter seven looks at how the respondents deal with balancing modernity and traditions both within Kuwait, where they are under the scrutiny of their friends and family members, and

globally. The data in this chapter illustrate how students manage the impact of globalization by taking ownership of the changes that are occurring.

Chapter eight, the final data chapter, focuses on how knowledge of English is viewed as a way for students to connect with the rest of the world and also succeed in their academic and professional careers. This attitude has an influence on how they approach learning English at Kuwait University.

The overall conclusions as well as suggestions for further research are presented in the final chapter of the thesis.

## CHAPTER 2 THE PLACE OF ENGLISH IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of learning English is the main recurring theme in the research gathered for this thesis. This perspective primarily stems from a belief that proficiency in English is the key to personal, professional, and academic success. This widespread belief, however, is not unproblematic. Crystal (2002) suggests that the position of English as the language of international communication is not so much related to the specific number of users, but more about the scope of its usage. He notes that a quarter of the world's population, over 1.5 billion people, are competent English speakers. More than the actual number, what is significant is the space that English has occupied, namely as the "dominant voice in international politics, news agencies ... motion pictures, travel, science and technology" (ibid.:16). He claims, "no other language has achieved such a widespread profile – or is likely to in the foreseeable future" (ibid.). The ability to speak English has been connected to gaining access to technology and trade as well as modernity and power (Phillipson, 1992: 6; Kachru, 1992a: 4; Fishman, 1992: 6). Moreover, knowledge of English is believed to be "imperative for any country wishing to access the global community for economic development" (McKay, 2003: 17). As a result of its dominant status, there has been an increasing demand to learn English.

Some theorists view the spread of English as a continued form of linguistic imperialism rather than a purposeful action on behalf of the participant. This type of attitude is representative of Othering discourses that do not view participants as being able to critically engage with events that are occurring around them. Adopting a more critical cosmopolitan view that interrogates the underlying ideology of these claims will illuminate the deeper processes that are occurring when trying to negotiate language use. This study will reveal the extent to which the desire to learn English is based on the respondents' critical understanding of how it would have an impact on their lives. As the reach of English has spread to diverse populations around the world, new varieties of English have been created and questions of language ownership have emerged.

This chapter first presents literature that explores the reasoning behind the increased demand to learn English, particularly standard English that is based upon mainstream American English or British English. Then, literature analyzing the idea of English as a form of linguistic imperialism is presented. In the last two sections, questions of language ownership and the creation of new varieties of English are discussed. To indicate links in this discussion with the study, I shall from time to time refer forward to the data collected. This will not, however, detract from the analysis in the data chapters.



## 2.2 INCREASED DEMAND FOR ENGLISH

The majority of the data in this study support the belief that knowledge of English is in demand because it is held as the main international language that is used to communicate in numerous spheres of life. This is primarily because globalization has made the exchange of goods and information a normal part of most peoples' daily lives. In addition to the commodification of English, becoming proficient in the language has also been associated with a certain amount of prestige. Graddol (1997: 38) regarded English as a "gatekeeping mechanism," suggesting that knowledge of English could open doors to opportunities and success. As a result, people who do not have access to English will not be able to compete on the same level as those who have the opportunity to learn the language (Phillipson, 2009a: 337). The literature in this section reveals that the desire to take part in and compete on a global scale is a salient factor in the continued spread and promotion of English. Moreover, the literature demonstrates that despite the increasing recognition of varieties of English, standard English based on mainstream American and British speech is still preferred over other varieties.

### 2.2.1 *Clarifying the Term Standard English*

There is no exact definition of the term standard English. David Crystal explains this form of English as the one that "carries most prestige and is most widely understood" (Crystal, 1994: 24). In the context of this study, standard English refers to what Trudgill (2011, p. 118) highlights as "the variety of English normally used in writing, especially printing; it is the variety associated with the education in all the English-speaking countries of the world." Referring to this type of English as standard is not to suggest that other forms or varieties of English are not relevant. Rather the term is used to classify a certain type of English. As a result of the expanding use of English, some theorists believe that the "continued use of *inner circle Standard English* as the target of instruction in classrooms worldwide should be re-examined and may even be somewhat inappropriate in a global context" (Farrell and Martin, 2009: 3 emphasis in original). This debate is further discussed in section 2.2.3 of this chapter.

### 2.2.2 *Gaining Access through English Proficiency*

To facilitate the exchange of ideas among people, English has increasingly been chosen as the language of communication among interlocutors from various backgrounds (Fishman, 1992: 23; Taavitsainen and Pahta, 2003: 7). Moreover, English "has increasingly become the language of war and peace, science and technology, commerce and communication" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 240). Aside from the dominant space English occupies through mass media, news, and tourism, fluency in English is also associated with being the key to professional

success. For students, learning English is considered “an important qualification that might enable them to access a global community” (Montgomery, 2010: 101). This sentiment was common among the respondents in this study. They emphasized that their demand for English was pragmatic. It is this perceived importance that drives forward its domination (Phillipson, 1994: 21). Moreover, globalization, along with advances in communication and ease of travel, has facilitated its spread and exposure. Associating the knowledge of English with so many opportunities is a key motivation for learning the language.

Several studies conducted in various contexts demonstrate the perceived importance of competence in English. For example, Kamwendo (2003) explores attitudes towards English in Malawi. Despite some concern about the declining use of the local language, English is still highly revered and desired as a language to be taught in schools. He illustrates how people, including members of parliament, are judged by how well they speak English. These attitudes in society are what appear to keep English in a privileged position. Kamwendo notes that “In parliament, many a time poor English pronunciations or ungrammatical constructions by members of parliament have elicited face-threatening comments and laughter from other MPs” (ibid.: 32). As a result of such prestige attached to English, not only is there an increased demand for English language instruction, but there is also a resistance to the replacement of English by the local language. Kamwendo notes that for some Malawians, “English is almost equal to education” (ibid.: 33). What this suggests is that the drive to learn English is not only representative of a personal motivation, but it also has to do with reactions from others. Being criticized for not being able to speak English and on the other hand receiving praise for being able to speak well are driving factors behind wanting to learn the language.

Another example of positive attitudes towards English is demonstrated in Thøgersen’s (2010) study in Denmark. He found that the participants in his research viewed English as a default language to which they could turn to when facing communication obstacles or misunderstandings with a speaker from another linguistic background. He found the respondents to believe “English has a special status” and that continuing to encourage teaching of English would “thus strengthen Danes’ position in global competition” (2010: 304). Associating benefits to competence in English is not unique to Malawi and Denmark. In fact, in many countries English has reached a high status and has been linked to opportunity and success, such as in Kenya (Abdulaziz, 1991: 395), Kuwait (Malallah, 2000: 22), Mexico (Francis and Ryan, 1998: 27), and South Korea (Park and Abelman, 2004: 645) among others. These studies demonstrate how the perceived benefits of being able to speak English well serve as a primary motivation behind learning the language. In addition, several of the Kuwaitis in this study affirmed that receiving positive feedback and remarks from others contributes to their desire to learn English.

Aside from learning the language, attaining a certain degree of proficiency is also desired. For some, this proficiency is simply aimed at being able to communicate effectively with others. However, there are others who have certain expectations about what represents good English. In most cases it seems like the preference is to learn standard English. This point is elaborated on in the following section.

### **2.2.3 *The Desire to Learn Standard English***

Several theorists have stressed that due to the number of English language learners in various contexts around the world, language varieties stemming from ‘center’ models can no longer represent the language target of English learners. Standard English is classified as a social dialect, but because of the widespread use, it is no longer specifically a geographical dialect. It has “become the standard variety precisely because it was the variety associated with the social group with the highest degree of power, wealth and prestige” (Trudgill, 2011: 123). This perception is also held by most of the students in this study, who associated the English language with the opportunities it provided rather than with the country or culture that the language represented. Although it may not have a specific geographical connection, the models are primarily based on mainstream American or British English. It is often referred to as the English that is spoken on international news programs. While the argument for recognizing varieties of English makes sense conceptually, it is not one that is easy to implement. In fact, Saraceni has noted that the arguments for varieties of English do “not seem to have had a tangible impact [and] struggle to have a visible impact in the classroom” (2009: 177). Some discussions about the varieties of English are included in this section, and further discussion continues in section 2.3.3.

The status of standard English still holds strong, and governments, academic institutions, and people themselves reinforce its privileged position. “The concept of world Englishes has met obstacles because there are many educators and school administrators who support these oppressive social attitudes” (Modiano, 2003: 37). Standard English is perpetuated by many academic institutions that are often responding to client demands, as will be illustrated in the data chapters. The spread of English and its implementation in the classroom has been perpetuated by “the efforts of ministries of education worldwide to provide English-as-a-second-language programmes for their school populations” as well as “the determination of millions of non-native-speaking parents to get English for their children from the earliest possible age, with or without state help” (McArthur, 2003: 20). Therefore, administrators of academic institutions are often reluctant to focus on promoting varieties of English because they are following the demands of their clients. Furthermore, labels that are often given to English language learners, such as ESL or EFL, often present a negative connotation and therefore form the basis for discrimination

(Kachru, 2008: 294). Unfortunately, despite the growing amount of literature about the development of varieties of English (e.g. Kachru, 1992b: 356; Mirhosseini, 2008: 312; Kirkpatrick, 2007: 183; Bauer, 2002: 93), it seems that only a little progress has been made in changing these perceptions.

There seems to be a continued preference to learn standard English. Crystal explores this perspective:

Standard English has too much impact. Standard English is the chief force, existing as an international reality in print, and available as a tool for national and international communication by people from all these countries ... And its position is being reinforced by new technologies. Satellite television is beaming Standard English down into previously unreachable parts of the world, thereby fostering greater levels of mutual intelligibility. (2002: 17)

Regardless of emerging varieties, people still demand standard English, particularly because it is thought to be understood by the most speakers around the world (Kam-mei and Halliday, 2002: 12). There are many problematic issues that revolve around this mentality, particularly when it comes to discriminating against other emerging varieties of English. However, what is revealed through many studies is that the preference for standard English is still very strong, and the belief is reinforced by several factors. Studies, such as that by Grubbs, Jantarach, and Kettem (2010: 559) in Thailand, have shown that language students preferred to learn English from standard English speakers over those who had a non-standard accent or spoke a variety of English even if there was no discernible difference between the effectiveness of teaching between them. Thøgersen (2010: 322) also found that his respondents preferred to work toward achieving proficiency in American English.

It seems like lack of awareness is the main problem behind the hesitation to pursue studying non-standard English, but this impression is one that could be rectified with more exposure to what varieties of English represent. However, promoting acceptance of varieties of English is challenging because positive correlations with the standard varieties are dominant, despite studies that suggest otherwise. For example, Butler examined reactions to different accents. She found that “teachers with foreign accents are perceived by parents and students to be less intelligent compared with teachers without foreign accents” (2007: 734). This negative attitude towards non-standard English prevailed even after her examination revealed that students performed just as well in class regardless of the teacher’s accent (ibid.: 749). This study demonstrates the strong desire to learn standard English.

In another study, Modiano found:

English which distinguishes non-native speakers (NNS) in mainland Europe ... has traditionally been marginalized, in the sense that any difference from Standard English is usually defined as non-standard indicating a stage of

proficiency which falls short of the goal of native or near-native proficiency.  
(2003: 35)

Furthermore, studies, such as Prodromou (2003), found that learners of English retain a stigma regardless of achieved proficiency; in fact, achieved competency is often received with surprise. “Native speakers on the other hand appear to be considered by definition incapable of making mistakes” (Prodromou, 2003: 46). Moreover, some are actively campaigning to achieve native speaker competency, such as found in a study conducted by Zhu (2003: 36) in China. What these studies highlight is the influential nature of people’s perceptions in guiding their attitude towards the type of language they want to learn. The positive attitudes towards learning standard English seem to supersede arguments for learning varieties of English. Moreover, this perspective promotes the opinion that these variations are not valid or prestigious forms of English.

This ideology is problematic because it categorizes “English learners or speakers of non-standard Englishes as flawed unless they are indistinguishable from native speakers” (Nault, 2006: 319). I think the problem with this argument is actually the context. In an English language classroom, the distinction between knowing English and being fluent in English should be made. When speaking in general, “what matters most when people use English is being understood by others, or communicating effectively, not mimicking native speakers” (ibid.). When discussing this issue with some of the participants in this study, they came to the conclusion that speaking with an accent was usually not a problem unless it interfered with their comprehension of what was being taught. When it came to understanding general lecture material, they did not have an issue with non-standard accents. However, when it came to their assessments, such as the listening comprehension portion of their exam during which a script is read aloud, they emphasized that clarity was essential. Once again, they did not specify that it had to be a standard English accent. What they did emphasize was the comprehensibility of the person who was speaking. Their explanation suggests that as long as the course objectives, such as passing a listening comprehension test, were not impeded, the type of accent did not matter as much (#191 CD9). Nault (2006) mentions that the pressure of having to learn standard English leaves many learners unable to reach their goals even after completing years of study, resulting in feelings of stress, inadequacy, and depression (ibid.: 319). This type of description seems overly dramatic. Frustration is surely common for anyone trying to reach a difficult goal. However, in terms of a language classroom, when the goal of the class is to learn a language, then expecting to successfully complete the course is not unreasonable.

The desire to learn English, however, is not just prompted by governments or other institutions. Favorable attitudes towards learning English are also a personal preference. For example, Taavitsainen and Pahta discuss the attitudes towards English in Finland. Parallels

between what they have found in their research can be drawn with what some Kuwaiti students told me about their feelings towards learning English. In their research, they found that most of the Finnish people they spoke to believed that a “working knowledge of spoken English in particular is necessary in the ‘global village’” (Taavitsainen and Pahta, 2003: 3). The importance of English was also expressed by Finns who were “actively involved in international liaisons” as they encountered English on “a daily basis through audio-visual mass media and various forms of popular culture and entertainment, such as the cinema, TV soap operas, satellite channels, and electronic games” (ibid.: 5). Aside from needing English to communicate internationally, the linguistic landscape of countries is changing to reflect the use of English, such as through advertising. This trend is also noticeable throughout Kuwait, particularly because two-thirds of the population is comprised of non-Kuwaitis.

#### **2.2.4 Section 2.2 Summary**

Addressing perceptions of the dominant status of English is important because it was a point frequently mentioned as a feature of living in a globalized world. The importance of knowing English is linked to its status as a language that can be used on a global scale. Moreover, achieving fluency in English is associated with prestige and the key to advancement. With these correlations in mind, the arguments in this section imply that not having proficiency in English prevents access to opportunities and progress. Hence, it is not only the desire to learn English that is important but also the perception that not knowing the language could potentially hold someone back. Thus, what is revealed is the belief that knowledge of English empowers the speaker.

This section also addressed the desire to learn standard English versus a variety of English. Despite the fact that English is being spoken in more areas of the world than ever before, the acceptance of varieties of English has still not gained currency. Resistance to straying from mainstream American English or British English is mainly the result of the perceived invalidity of varieties of English. Furthermore, continued reinforcement from others – whether positive or negative – seems to perpetuate the desire to strive for competence in standard English. Despite the favorable attitudes towards learning English, its acceptance was not without question or critique. More critical discussions of the impact of English are discussed in the next section.

### **2.3 CONCERNS ABOUT THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH**

The previous section highlighted benefits connected to learning standard English, which were mainly associated with its function as a key to global opportunities and as a skill necessary to participate and succeed in a globalized world. However, not all theorists view the spread of English to be without its challenges. While proficiency in English may empower some speakers,

by association this implies that those who do not speak the language are at a disadvantage. This mentality is viewed as a type of linguistic discrimination, and it is linked to arguments of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992: 27). It is these arguments that demonstrate that the spread of English, no matter how positively it may be seen, does raise concern about what English as a dominant language around the world implies.

This discussion is important because it calls attention to the assumptions that are made about students' language learning experiences. This section examines the relationship between the spread of English and its association with linguistic imperialism, which presumes that English is learned at the expense of one's native language, thus causing the atrophy of indigenous languages. As English is being used by people from diverse linguistic backgrounds, this section also explores the impact it has on local languages. This widespread use of English also calls into question the issue of ownership. If people around the world are able to learn and use English in a way that best suits their needs, is it still possible to say that English is a Western language? One form of contesting the dominance of standard English models of English is the development of varieties of English. The implications and concerns related to varieties of English will also be addressed in this section.

### ***2.3.1 Untangling the Links to Linguistic Imperialism***

Historically, one of the main factors contributing to the spread of English was colonization. However, now the demand to learn English is mainly driven by instrumental purposes, such as its uses in travel, trade, and technology. Furthermore, as will be illustrated by the data in this study, people actively choose to learn English even for personal reasons. Despite its demand, there is still concern that the spread of English is a continued form of linguistic imperialism and is playing a role in the deterioration of indigenous languages and cultures.

When I asked some of the students in this study how the use of English had an impact on their national identity, I usually got a bewildered response. They claimed that they had not considered a link between speaking English and their Kuwaiti identity. Rather, they viewed learning the language as a separate tool – a skill to master, a subject to pass. However, several theorists do not see learning a language in such straightforward terms. In his writing, Pennycook asserts that:

to use English is to engage in social action which produces and reproduces social and cultural relations. The worldliness of English refers both to its local and to its global position, both to the ways in which it reflects social relations and constitutes social relations and thus the worldliness of English is always a question of cultural politics. (1994: 34)

Phillipson agrees with this point of view as he notes that “the continued advance of English involves the suppression (displacement and replacement) of other languages and the defeat of

competing imperialist languages” (1992: 36). Both Phillipson (1992) and Pennycook (1994) are worried about how English is being forced upon people. This is especially a concern because English is a language that originated in the West and started to spread as a result of colonialism. Therefore, the fear is that with the spread of English will be the spread of Western-dominated ideology.

The data provided in chapters six and seven illustrate how respondents in this study reacted to this type of ideology situated in Kuwait. Since the dominant Western culture, which is most often represented by democratic and liberal values, is quite different from traditional Kuwaiti practices, concerns would arise in whether teaching this Western language would have an adverse effect on Kuwaiti culture. Moreover, there would be a concern that by learning English, Kuwaitis would either forget or neglect their native language – Arabic. It seems that many countries “find themselves torn between the claims of Western values and their indigenous cultures, between English and the vernacular” (Canagarajah, 1999: 1). Despite this dilemma, given the importance of learning English, particularly to compete in capitalist markets, the learning of English continues to be desired. In addition, it should not be assumed that learners would not be able to handle negotiating the use of the language within various contexts.

Canagarajah discusses the vernacularism movement that is followed by those who oppose the imposition of English on everyday life. The movement aims to promote “the superiority (or at least the equality) of indigenous languages and cultures” (1999: 59). The relationship between English and power is an element that has caused some debate. In discussing the situation in Sri Lanka, Canagarajah notes:

locals had little choice, since it was the key to status and affluence. The secret of the social reproduction carried out by English was that it did not radically change the intra-community status quo; it merely became one more criterion for maintaining the power of the dominant caste groups. (ibid.: 61)

Even Phillipson reports that “the successful learning of English was the primary goal in colonial education systems” and the unsuccessful completion of the goal was blamed on the inefficiency of the locals rather than the imposition of colonial rule (1992: 182). While Kuwait was not colonized in the same sense that Canagarajah and Phillipson are referring to, the presence of expatriates in Kuwait has had a great influence on the way the country has developed. A brief recount of the Kuwait’s historical background will elaborate on how the country’s relationship with foreign countries, namely Britain, has helped shape the country into what it is today.

International interest in Kuwait started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to its location in the Arabian Gulf. In order to “protect British interests in the area,” the British Government created a treaty in 1899 to be signed with Kuwait and thus began to establish a strong presence (AlBassam, 2004: 47). Kuwait continued to flourish and by the mid-1950’s, large parts of the old city were



demolished to make room for new commercial and residential areas. Money and commodities were pouring into Kuwait from their trade with other countries. Therefore, it was no surprise when “American cars” were soon filling the newly paved roads (ibid.: 293).

On 19<sup>th</sup> June 1961, Kuwait gained its independence. With Kuwait’s independence, foreign countries started establishing diplomatic relations, which brought in more international presence, more business and expatriates (ibid.: 308). With the presence of so many foreign workers in the oil sector, Kuwait Oil Company established the first professional English school, called The Anglo-American School, in 1947. As businesses continued to flourish throughout the country and expatriates came to Kuwait with their families, the need for schools increased. By the late 1950’s several schools, based on either American or English curricula, were opened for children of expatriates and Kuwaitis (ibid.: 294).

These schools were established for families of expatriate workers. The local government did not need to make such an accommodation and could have had the foreigners enroll their children in the Arabic-medium government schools that were already functioning in the country. The fact that Kuwait assisted in creating an atmosphere that made the country more appealing to expatriates suggests consent to make this change in their environment.

Phillipson is alarmed that it is not just the deterioration of other languages that is occurring with the spread of English, but that the language is in fact superseding local languages because of its relation to power and success. He claims:

what is at stake when English spreads is not merely the substitution or displacement of one language by another but the imposition of new ‘mental structures’ through English. This is in fact an intrinsic part of ‘modernization’ and ‘nation-building.’ (1992: 166)

The schools that were built to accommodate the needs of the foreigners in Kuwait were not restricted to expatriates; they were also open to the locals. Kuwaitis were given the option of placing their children either in a free, Arabic-medium government school or a private English school where they would have to pay. Thus they could choose the type of education their children received. If indeed there was a perceived threat that the “imposition of new ‘mental structures’ through English” as noted by Phillipson (1992: 166) would have a detrimental effect on the locals, then perhaps the option of being educated in a foreign language would not have been given. This would have reduced any chances of losing the local culture and language. However, this was not the case, thus acknowledging that people are able to make their own decisions on how they want to interact with and incorporate what is happening in their surrounding environment. The participants in this study frequently reiterated this point. Despite any difficulties they may face in terms of learning the language, for the most part they were eager to improve their English because it was encouraged by their families.

Despite the origins of the spread of English and the arguments of linguistic imperialism, I contend that unless there was support to advocate and promote the learning of English, the drastic spread of the language would not be possible. “The macroacquisition of any language requires societal resources. Even if a country chooses to promote the learning of English, unless there is economic support to do this, it is not likely to spread” (McKay, 2003: 17). Therefore, the above fears seem to be misplaced as:

it is in the very nature of human languages, all of them, to be driven by power inequalities. This means that EFL teachers have no special reason to feel guilty about being complicit in a gigantic neo-colonialist enterprise in the guise of emancipatory pedagogy. (Rajagopalan, 1999: 205)

Moreover, motivations for learning English, as discussed in section 2.2.2, demonstrate a functional relationship with the language. Therefore, the other priorities, such as academic success and promotions at work, take precedence over any concerns of linguistic imperialism.

As the demand for English spreads, more and more people from various linguistic backgrounds are coming into contact with the language and are able to put their own stamp on the language. This brings up the question of ownership, which will be discussed in the following section.

### **2.3.2 *Discussions of Ownership***

Crystal (2003) begins his discussion of English as a global language with the issue of ownership. As a consequence of English becoming a global language, “nobody owns it any more. Or rather, everyone who has learned it now owns it – ‘has a share in it’ might be more accurate – and has the right to use it in the way they want” (2003: 2-3). As more and more speakers from diverse backgrounds are learning English, the question of ownership of the language arises. Several participants in this study contest the idea of a single nation holding claim over English. They believe that because they modify the use of English to suit their personal needs and motivations, any Western ideology underlying the use of English is no longer considered relevant. The desire to claim ownership seems to stem from the need to shift the focus from guidelines that have been formulated by ‘center’ originated institutions and academics to those that include input from local contexts. Crystal elaborates on some conflicting feelings that learners of English may have. He says:

You may be strongly motivated to learn it, because you know it will put you in touch with more people than any other language; but at the same time you know it will take a great deal of effort to master it, you may begrudge that effort [] and if you live in a country where the survival of your own language is threatened by the success of English, you may feel envious, resentful, or angry. (ibid.: 3)

I believe this is a rather pessimistic and victimized view of the mindset of English language learners. Having criteria, such as language proficiency, is typical of practically every employment situation. To say that learners ‘begrudge’ the effort they need to put in to achieve a certain goal is to imply that they want special treatment. As Sen notes:

[i]t cannot make sense to see oneself primarily as someone who has been misrepresented, or treated badly, by colonialists, no matter how true that identification may be. There are undoubtedly occasions when that diagnosis would be quite relevant. But to lead a life in which resentment against an imposed inferiority from past history comes to dominate one’s priorities today cannot but be unfair to oneself. (2006: 88-89)

It is with this type of oppressed mentality that fears about having a global language arise, such as those mentioned by Crystal:

[p]erhaps a global language will cultivate an elite monolingual linguistic class, more complacent and dismissive in their attitudes towards other languages. Perhaps those who have such a language at their disposal – and especially those who have it as a mother-tongue – will be more able to think and work quickly in it, and to manipulate it to their own advantage at the expense of those who do not have it, thus maintaining in a linguistic guise the chasm between rich and poor. Perhaps the presence of a global language will make people lazy about learning other languages, or reduce their opportunities to do so. Perhaps a global language will hasten the disappearance of minority languages, or – the ultimate threat – make all other languages unnecessary. (2003: 14-5)

Crystal here puts forward a lot of assumptions. I believe that declarations such as these that are presented by theorists from the ‘center’, such as Crystal, can be interpreted as rather condescending. This tone of argument reflects an element of native-speakerism, which is an ideology “based on the assumption that ‘native speakers’ of English have a special claim to the language itself” (Holliday, 2005: 8). Despite the argument that ownership of English is changing due to the diversity of the speakers, the worry of English threatening local languages and being a form of linguistic imperialism, particularly coming from Western scholars, seems to be ignoring what English language learners are saying. Whether it is because they are striving to gain promotion at work or they want to achieve a certain status that is associated with learning English, the decision is up to the learners themselves. It should not be assumed that efforts to learn English are symbolic of giving in to Western ideology and linguistic hegemony. With such discussions from learners denying the relevance of linguistic imperialism on their learning, perhaps it should be considered if Phillipson’s (1992) argument from almost 20 years ago is still relevant.

Even in Phillipson’s recent continuation of his exploration of linguistic imperialism, he is adamant about institutions based on Western ideology as perpetuating their dominant status through their linguistic capital. He does acknowledge that “speakers of other languages that are subject to linguistic imperialism are not helpless victims, but in a more complex relationship with

the forces propelling a language forward” (2009b: 78). Instead of viewing this as a method of appropriating and taking charge of the changes going on around them, he suggests that the learners are complicit in perpetuating the dominant ideology (ibid.: 79). He does not consider that learning the language can actually be a way to control one’s environment, which is something demonstrated by several respondents in this study. Rather it is the fact that, as evidenced by the data, students learning English “have immense abilities to make English and TESOL what they wish them to be” (Holliday, 2005: 11) that seems to be most relevant.

Given claims that English is no longer owned, it seems contradictory to be so involved in attempting to link the language to a geographic area. English will be appropriated by its users regardless of what the language is called. I agree with Saraceni:

Given the complexity of the ways in which users of English stretch and reforge this language, how they converge and diverge, how they negotiate meaning dynamically, I am increasingly becoming persuaded that the question ‘which English’ is ultimately irrelevant. The academic question for a description of suitable forms of English may be futile, as English is, and should be, in the hands of its users. (2009: 184)

More focus may be needed on unlearning “intolerance of the English of others that is not like theirs, and to develop a more open attitude toward that English and its speakers” (Berns, 2008: 332). The roots of essentialism and fixed ideas of culture are not simple concepts to address.

Berns notes:

socially determined features of bias against an individual language user or a user group, irrespective of their accent, are less amenable to instructional intervention (or less teachable). Nevertheless, experiences in listening to and negotiating with and through other Englishes, and developing strategies for gaining closure understanding, suggest themselves for the classroom that is devoted to mutual understanding. (ibid.)

These attitudes must also be recognized by non-native speakers. Berns quoting Smith outlines:

Although native English speakers will need to change their attitudes and assumptions in shifting toward English as an international language, there are some needed changes for non-native speakers. They too must become more tolerant to the many varieties of educated English and learn about the ways other non-native speakers use English. (Berns, 2008: 329)

This is a very important point. It is about attitude and acceptance. This is the case even if people choose to speak standard English as initially mentioned in section 2.2.2. It is the formation of stereotypes and assumptions that are based upon listening to a person’s accent or construction of speech that is detrimental and causes prejudice.

### 2.3.3 *Understanding the Development of Varieties of English*

The literature in section 2.2 brought up the discussion of resistance towards accepting varieties of English as a replacement for standard English. Further discussions of varieties of English are included here to help illustrate how some arguments are theoretically logical but not always practically applicable. Not a single participant in this study had heard of a variety of English or the term ‘world Englishes.’ Therefore, they were rather confused as to the significance of the concept and were actually amused by the possibility of there being a form of Kuwaiti English.

Graddol (2006: 12) claims that “the phenomenon of English being a global language lies at the heart of globalization.” With increasing interconnectedness as a result of globalization, English has become the most widespread lingua franca and functions to bridge communication barriers between people from different linguistic backgrounds (Crystal, 2003: 9). Amid the blurred boundaries that have resulted from globalization emerges a space for voices to be heard. With the increase in the number of English language learners, some theorists are emphasizing that new varieties of English should be given more acknowledgement and status as opposed to the continued promotion of standard English.

Li (2009) calls attention to the criticism brought on the implications that ‘non-native speakers’ are somehow victims of the spread of English. She also states:

The linguistic correlate of its political influence worldwide – the global hegemony of the ‘killer language’ English – has been the focus of much criticism (e.g. Canagarajah, 1999; Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The NNSs’ desire to appropriate English for personal econocultural benefits is variously interpreted as a sign of such learners falling victim to the hegemony of English in the postcolonial era, in that they have internalized the beliefs and values of the former colonizers without possibly realizing it. Such an analysis has been criticized for underestimating the postcolonial subjects’ ability to judge what is in their best interest and, in the case of parents, the best interests of their children’s multilingual development. (Li, 2009: 102)

It is surely derogatory for anybody to refer to learners of English as victims of the language. Li has observed that “some NNSs are perfectly aware of the global hegemony of English, but rather than being inspired to resist ... this is precisely the reason why they want to appropriate it for their own benefit” (Li, 2009: 102). Rizvi, Lingard, and Lavia note that people are capable of “interpreting, accommodating and resisting dominant discourses” (2006: 256). Again, the notion of agency is vital. People can make decisions for themselves. They may not always be easy decisions to make, but still, there are choices that can be made.

In addition to varieties of English being seen as an incorrect or sub-standard form of English, some theorists believe that the dominance of English has led to biased hiring practices (Canagarajah, 1999: 83; Pennycook, 1994: 33; Ramanathan and Morgan, 2009: 157). While

discrimination is wrong, the example that these authors present illustrates an over-exaggerated claim of this bias. Ramanathan and Morgan discuss an advertisement on a Western-based website that was looking to hire employees for its India-based call-center. Both Ramanathan and Morgan found the language proficiency requirements “offensive” (2009: 157-9). They found the criteria – requiring sufficient conversational skills and a clear accent – to be so insulting that Morgan claimed, “For all intents and purposes, call center want ads could simply read, ‘Only “high class hobnobs” need apply!’” (ibid., 158). I believe Morgan’s reaction to this advertisement is extreme. They found the requirements to be biased because people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds would not have a fair opportunity to apply for the job since they would not have had access to learning the type of English that was required for the advertised job. It seems like Ramanathan and Morgan have disregarded the type of service that the company is offering. A call-based center is a business that relies almost entirely on communication and comprehensibility. They have a legitimate reason to ask for understandable English. Moreover, most jobs have some sort of hiring criteria, which could be based on educational qualifications, language proficiency, or prior work experience. Having such criteria should not be interpreted as a class-based issue. If this line of thinking continues, soon English teachers will not need to know any form of English and will just be hired to supervise classrooms and let the students carry on with whatever language in whatever style they are speaking. Requiring certain qualifications from people who are applying for a job is not an unreasonable request. This should be distinguished from genuine discrimination such as automatically hiring someone of a certain nationality over others because of their assumed competence.

The development of local varieties of English seems to be a positive response in an effort to ensure the survival of local languages. However, if the local varieties are created to be integrated into English curriculums and are promoted for international use, then those varieties will replace the current position of English without necessarily solving the problem of how to ensure the survival of local languages. In establishing a curriculum based on the various types of English, it will be a challenge determining which type of English will be used. Does, for example, Sri Lankan English represent a type of English that *all* Sri Lankans use? If not, then will the ones that are not included under this label be marginalized? Will they not, in turn, try to come up with their own type of English or other language in order to protect their desired local variety? Thus even the recognition of varieties of English does not seem to solve the potential problem of one language being held as more important than another.

Crystal states that international varieties:

express national identities, and are a way of reducing the conflict between intelligibility and identity. Because a speaker from country A is using English, there is an intelligibility bond with an English speaker of country B – and this is

reinforced by the existence of a common language. On the other hand, because speaker A is not using exactly the same way of speaking as speaker B, both parties retain their identities. It is another way of ‘having your cake and eating it.’ (2003: 145)

This type of statement intimates that the only way a person can retain her own identity is by speaking in a unique manner. Moreover, this suggests that speaking in a similar manner means that the participants have similar identities. While it is possible that they belong to a similar social group or even share the same historical and cultural background, each person is still an individual. Moreover, this individuality, as was demonstrated by a number of participants in this study, is expressed in various ways depending on the context. Therefore, their linguistic expression would vary depending on what type of situation they were in and what type of image they wanted to portray. As Kramsch (1998) clarifies, “[d]espite the entrenched belief in the one language = one culture equation, individuals assume several collective identities that are likely not only to change over time in dialogue with others, but are liable to be in conflict with one another” (p. 67). Moreover, the identity that they are expressing should be understood in relation to the context in which the exchange occurs.

These theories also assume that intelligibility always occurs among people from the same background. However, even speakers from the same linguistic background may run into communication problems. The following example interrogates the idea of intelligibility. Mehrotra (2003) conducted a study in Britain, investigating the intelligibility of some Indian English (IE) phrases. What he found in the study was that the degree of intelligibility varied among the people he asked. “The findings of the survey should leave no doubt in one’s mind that the native speakers of English in the U.K. are not unanimous in their views regarding the intelligibility and acceptability of IE usages” (Mehrotra, 2003: 24). Moreover, the study highlighted the point that native speakers should not automatically judge the type of English somebody else is speaking. It needs to be realized that an “international language cannot be bound by a single standard or be loyal to a single culture” (ibid.). Noting that the correctness of British English is not compared to American English, or American English judged against British English, a power discrepancy is found. Mehrotra asks, “Why should then the correctness or acceptability of IE be all the time required to look upon BrE for norms, particularly when the native speakers in Britain are themselves sharply divided in their opinions as has come to a sharper focus in the survey under discussion” (2003: 25)? This study is just one of many that reemphasize the importance of acknowledging differences in the way people speak and realizing that making judgments based on the way a person speaks creates more divisions instead of finding a common thread that ties us together.

Hall (1997) refers to systems of representation in the way we speak. It “consists not of individual concepts, but of different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them” (p. 17). People consequently construct meaning based on their frame of reference, and this frame of reference varies with each individual. As Hall explains:

If the relationship between signifier and its signified is the result of a system of social conventions specific to each society and to specific historical moments – then all meanings are produced within history and culture. They can never be finally fixed but are always subject to change, both from one cultural context and from one period to another. (ibid.: 32)

Even beyond cultural contexts, since each person’s interpretation of an event or experience differs, meaning is subject to change among people. Sen illustrates this by taking religion as an example:

[a] person’s religion need not be his or her all-encompassing and exclusive identity. In particular, Islam, as a religion, does not obliterate responsible choice for Muslims in many spheres of life. Indeed, it is possible for one Muslim to take a confrontational view and another to be thoroughly tolerant of heterodoxy without either of them ceasing to be a Muslim for that reason alone. (2006: 14)

Sen illustrates that even with a specific label, such as being Muslim, the beliefs, practices, and worldviews differ from person to person. This variability becomes apparent as the students in this study – all Kuwaiti, Muslim adolescents – describe how they manipulate language to represent themselves. These views are guided by one’s experience and prior knowledge. At a more basic level, Badger and Macdonald (2010) look at how we process texts and remark that “what we think of as letters on a page or on a screen are just marks until we bring our knowledge of language to those marks” (p. 580). This concept of prior knowledge and experience shaping how we view the world is the cornerstone of how we give meaning to our lives. The influence of sociocultural contexts is further explored in chapter four.

The multiple, continuously-shifting layers that comprise a person’s identity make it impossible to ensure that whatever language is being spoken, or rather, whatever language is taking on a more global role, will appease all its users. Even if several varieties of English are taught and spread, it is inevitable that some will be left out. Currently Chinese English and Indian English seem to be occupying the most space in terms of negotiating a position in World English, which could be correlated to their rising economic and political status in the global field (Graddol, 2006: 32). If this trend continues, it is possible that Indian English or Chinese English could become the next imperial language. Consequently, learners would have to adjust, once again, to a new ‘form’ of English that would be taught in the classroom, as well as a new set of ideologies and values associated with the emerging form. Language is always evolving, thus the search for a



'neutral' language will probably never be achieved to everybody's satisfaction. In the end, even if every person spoke a completely different language, surely the ultimate goal should be clear communication and mutual intelligibility.

While not wanting to discredit or deny the validity of the emerging varieties of English, from the responses of English language learners that are reflected in my data, I wonder if they will gain the acceptance that standard English has already attained. Not only is there the question of acceptability by the learners, but there is also still a question of universal applicability of the varieties that are emerging.

#### **2.3.4 Section 2.3 Summary**

Although the spread of English is associated with many positive characteristics, as elaborated in section 2.2, some theorists view its dominance as a representation of power inequalities. The dominating impact of English has been associated with linguistic imperialism by some theorists. One main fear that has been expressed is that English is spreading at the expense of local languages. What this perspective does not acknowledge is the power of the individual to take ownership of how the language can be used as an expression of one's identity. Thus despite having originated in the West, the extensive spread of English around the world suggests that the language no longer belongs to a single nation or geographic location. Rather, individual users can appropriate the language to suit their needs and the applicability of standard English starts to diminish.

Even though varieties of English are starting to gain more currency, they still have not been able to gain complete recognition or acceptance. This is mainly because the advantages of being proficient in standard English still greatly outweigh those associated with more indigenous forms. Another drawback of varieties of English is that they remain context specific. For example, Sri Lankan English, Chinese English, and so forth all represent variations of English that have been established by the local people in the local context. Thus, this form of English lacks the universality that makes standard English so appealing.

## **2.4 CONCLUSION**

The demand to learn English has significantly increased because of its perceived benefits that are linked to globalization. Some theorists view the dominant role of English as a form of linguistic imperialism and a reinforcement of power inequalities. As the use of English spreads around the world, varieties of the language have been developed. However, despite growing acceptance of varieties, standard English is still the preferred mode of communication, a perception that is reinforced by sociocultural and sociopolitical contextual factors.

The acceptance of varieties of English is challenging because of the prestigious position that standard English holds. However, from the studies mentioned in this chapter, it can be seen that learners of English are able to interrogate the implications of the language they are using. Some are contesting the Western ideologies that may be spreading due to learning English by establishing their own varieties. Others are appropriating the use of English for their own benefit and use.

What is important and perhaps most useful to learn from these discussions, as revealed in the data of this study, is that the power of each individual to manipulate and adjust the language (and all it entails) for his/her own purpose and benefit should not be underestimated. Additionally, greater awareness about varieties of English is necessary in order for these linguistic variations to be accepted.

## CHAPTER 3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter two focused on different perspectives evaluating the role of English as a global language. In particular, it highlighted the increased demand to learn English due to the perceived benefits, such as access to jobs, associated with acquiring the language. The broad preference to learn standard English, based on mainstream models of American English and British English, was described as a continuing form of linguistic imperialism. However, this notion was contested by individuals taking ownership of the language as well as the development of varieties of English as a consequence of the multiple contexts in which English is being spoken.

This chapter presents literature that analyzes the impact that globalization has on local cultures and how that in turn influences attitudes towards language. The chapter particularly explores the disparity between viewing globalization and the spread of English as hegemonic and driven by Western ideals, on the one hand, and as a part of modernity, providing a space for people to negotiate a way to appropriate changes to suit their own lives, on the other. The discussion about appropriation is important because it demonstrates how individual choice affects the role that globalization plays in their lives, just as was demonstrated in chapter two with people deciding what language they wanted to speak and learn. The discussion about globalization is significant because it is *the* larger sociopolitical context in which change is occurring and in which the need and desire to learn English is increasing.

The first section of this chapter analyzes the impact of globalization. In particular, it explores whether globalization is a force of cultural imperialism or if it is empowering and in fact providing space for actual change. The second main section explores the relationship between culture and language.

### 3.2 IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization has increased the movement of people, goods, and ideas across the world. Moreover, with advances in technology, correspondence and collaboration among people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds has grown exponentially. The literature presented in this section explores whether or not globalization is causing a dislocation of local cultures. Thus, I first explore the concept of globalization and its association with cultural imperialism. I then present literature that examines the driving elements of globalization and whether its spread plays a role in the construction or destruction of cultural identity.

John H. Coatsworth defines globalization as “what happens when the movement of people, goods, or ideas among countries and regions accelerates” (2004: 38). Taking the basic

foundation of this definition, it is clear that the essence of globalization is not a new phenomenon. Travel and trade are centuries old. Perhaps what is new is the mode and speed in which this movement is occurring. Indeed, in today's world, this movement has truly accelerated. Despite the obvious presence of globalization, the interpretation and evaluation of this development varies among theorists. From linking it to a form of cultural imperialism to viewing it as a movement that enhances cultural identity, the discussions about globalization and its consequences are complex. This section explores four key questions related to this phenomenon:

- 1) Is globalization an independent, naturally occurring phenomenon?
- 2) Is globalization a force of cultural imperialism?
- 3) Does globalization create an opportunity for local empowerment?
- 4) Has globalization created a space for local change?

### ***3.2.1 Globalization - An independent, natural phenomenon?***

During the time when imperialism, defined by Said (1994: 8) as “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory,” was prevalent, efforts were made to change ideologies, practices, and beliefs of people who were different. This mentality led to colonialism, which Said defines as the “implanting of settlements on distant territory” (ibid.). Imperialism and colonialism are linked to the imposition of new ideologies and attempts to restrict local cultural practices and behaviors in some areas. In essence, they were events that were forced on the locals.

Before claiming that the effects of globalization imitate imperialism and colonialism, it is important to clarify that these forces do not exist in the same manner as before. These two terms implied one-way domination – a more powerful country/entity dominating a less powerful country/entity. One of the hallmark signs of globalization is the trade of consumer products. This in itself points to an *exchange*. This exchange occurs because there is a demand for products and services. It may be that “market demands for products of (usually) American culture merely demonstrates the power of cultural imperialism to shape global tastes to profit U.S. corporations” (Dunch, 2002: 304). However, “this conceptualization attributes coordinated intent and coercive power to “capitalism” or “imperialism,” and little or no autonomy to the people on the receiving end” (ibid.). The notion of autonomy was prevalent in what the respondents in this study had to say about how they were managing and taking ownership of elements of globalization. Their responses support the idea that there should be a deeper investigation of how the country/entity that is being ‘dominated’ is benefiting from the situation. These forces need to be recognized as an interaction in which there is something to gain by each side. “Underlying this deep and almost inevitable chauvinism with the Western gaze and making it even harder to see the real problem is the embedded belief that the foreign Other is being helped” (Holliday, 2011: 79). Therefore, not

recognizing the role of both sides perpetuates the image of a “culturally deficient non-Western Other” (ibid.), and that the only way to improve is with assistance from the West. However, what is also seen is that those categorized as the Other are eager to bring in Western experts to ‘help’ them improve their system. While this may be the case, some of the respondents in this study revealed that the reason they do not see this influence as patronizing is because they are looking at what they are gaining from the exchange and interaction. The availability of superior skills, more experience, and better quality products is the main reason behind the import of Western expertise; it is not simply because they are Western. Some of the respondents in this study believe the West is using Kuwait to gain access to their oil. However, instead of viewing this as a problem, they look at foreign presence as a source of mutual benefit and gain. While some do see it as a trap, they also realize that to be free from this means that they need to locally replace the advantages that they are gaining from foreign assistance. They claim that what they are gaining outweighs any issues that arise.

Interpretations of globalization work both ways. Media coverage of world events and even concepts in movies provide only one perspective of a story. These perspectives are controlled and guided by producers. In addition, the way these images are interpreted is up to the receivers. Globalization has opened up a space in which people no longer have to be confined to a static set of rules or restricted to certain parameters. Rather, exposure to diverse images, products, and ideas paves the way for a broadened sociological imagination. Now,

the deterritorialization of persons, images, and ideas has taken on new force [and] ... [m]ore persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all other forms ... fantasy is now a social practice. (Appadurai, 1996: 53)

This deterritorialization opens a space to experiment with new forms of expression – whether it is through new modes of behavior or language. This is significant because it adds to perspectives and experiences that play a part in identity formation. It also opens up the idea that people need to be flexible to deal with the changes. Blurred boundaries caused by globalization emphasize the need to negotiate how to balance old with new, something that now seems to be characteristic of living in a modern world, as exemplified by several students. The way they negotiate their movement from one context to another exemplifies how one’s identity is not fixed. Instead, their “[c]ultural reality can form around and be carried with individuals as they move from one cultural arena to another. Individuals can have the capacity to feel a belonging to several cultural realities simultaneously” (Holliday, 2011: 55). In addition to adapting from one context to another, the participants also modify their language to represent who they are in that given situation.

Montgomery (2010) notes:

as international students move from one cultural and social environment to another and there are a number of linguistic environments surrounding their new context, there may be a process of reconstruction of meaning through their new social network. In a sense this occurs in order that a new social ‘reality’ may be constructed. (p. 99)

This flexible movement and ability to culturally and linguistically adapt to different environments is a characteristic of a cosmopolitan individual.

When referring to the rapid speed at which globalization is happening, it is easy to forget that it is not occurring automatically. It is people and their decisions that determine the extent and speed at which globalization occurs. As Giddens notes:

the power of the big companies can easily be exaggerated – and is greatly exaggerated by those who say that corporations ‘run the world’. Nations, especially where they act collaboratively, have far more power than corporations, and will continue to do so for the indefinite future. Nations have control of territory, corporations do not; nations establish frameworks of law, corporations do not; nations control military power, corporations do not. (2002: xxv)

Kuwait has encouraged globalization, and this is evident with the presence of expatriate workers. In fact, this presence is a prominent feature of the society. Tétreault and al-Mughni (1995) note that “as the result of the development of the oil economy, Kuwaitis became a minority in their own country, outnumbered by the non-Kuwaiti population which forms the bulk of the labour force” (p. 68). This has occurred not because the foreigners are ‘taking over’ the country, but rather because “foreign workers are much cheaper to employ and, as a result, make up the vast majority of private sector employees” (ibid.). Through programs such as Kuwaitization, some attempts have been made to increase the number of Kuwaitis employed in the private sectors. However, “even though government officials talk about Kuwaitization in the private sector, they provide no rational incentives capable of effecting such a transition” (ibid.). Rather, as seen in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.2), Kuwaitis receive numerous social benefits from the government, including a guarantee of a secure job in the state sector. Therefore, despite government encouragement for Kuwaitis to participate in the work force, other government policies do not encourage them to change their status. In fact, a few of the participants in this study highlighted this as their primary motivation to stay in Kuwait.

Ultimately, what compels the movement of a nation are the people. Therefore, although it may seem that globalization causes foreign ideas and workers to take over a country, it is essential to look at the context in which globalization is occurring before making judgments about it being imposed on a country and its people.

One prominent aspect of globalization is the resulting interconnectedness among people. This interconnectedness increases the need to be understanding and broadens one’s exposure to

people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. On the other hand, the mixing of cultures as a result of globalization may also enhance the awareness of differences among people, and this could lead to conflict. However, acknowledging the interconnectedness caused by globalization may serve as a starting point to dissolve the lines that are dividing the ‘center’ and ‘periphery’. With the flow of ideas, labor, and products across borders, the separating line is becoming more and more blurred. Implementing compartmentalizing labels seems to be creating more of a victim mentality – ‘I am from the periphery and therefore I am oppressed’ – than one of a survivor – ‘I may be from a less-privileged country, but I am trying my best to succeed in my given circumstance and environment.’

### 3.2.2 *Globalization – A force of cultural imperialism?*

Historically, various factors, such as the need for better resources, humanitarian aid, and military support, have driven governments to decide how much they want to incorporate globalization into their country. In Kuwait, the need and demand for imported foreign goods stems from the country’s lack of a domestic production base, beyond oil. Meanwhile, the import of foreign labor allows Kuwait to ‘buy in’ workers to do jobs that the indigenous workforce is either unwilling or unable to do, as mentioned in the previous section. In fact, expatriates make up two-thirds of Kuwait’s population. This demographic make-up has become part of Kuwait’s landscape and has an impact on the changes that are occurring locally. Wheeler (2000) investigates how elements of globalization in the form of media and technology affect Kuwaiti national identity. In her research she finds that the reason:

Kuwaiti media space is so penetrated by foreign discourse is that Kuwait feels it necessary to provide for all the needs of its residents, which means allowing US, Asian, Middle Easterner, and European media to be regularly accessible in Kuwait, via satellite TV ... the Internet etc. (ibid.: 436)

The unrestricted flow of ideas and images provided by satellite TV has caused some discomfort among parts of the population. However, Wheeler (2000) reported that “the government’s response is ‘to adopt an open skies policy’, whereby the government views ‘watching satellite stations as a personal choice’, and suggests that ‘those who don’t agree should not buy dishes’” (p. 440). Furthermore, rather than restrict foreign TV programs, the Kuwaiti government has made attempts to encourage the production of local TV programs and “provide competitive programming with which to woo local audiences away from the foreign channels” (ibid.). Nevertheless, foreign movies and TV shows, in particular American shows that dominate the airwaves in Kuwait, remain more popular than local and regional productions. The way of life portrayed in American television programs was often mentioned as an example of the source of ideas about Westernization. Through her research, Wheeler found that despite the preference for

watching American TV shows, and the overwhelming number of Kuwaitis who watch American TV shows versus local or regional ones, Kuwaitis did not see it as something that affected their national identity. Rather she found that it is the “country’s pre-existing identity structures, like the meaning of oil ... [that] help to secure a sense of Kuwaiti fellow feeling that is not shaken by global media alternatives” (ibid.: 433). Therefore, while all this ‘other’ influence may seem to be a form of cultural imperialism and people may be arguing that local culture is being lost, perhaps another perspective should be taken. First of all, “a simple generalization of a direct link between images in media space and national consciousness” cannot be made (Wheeler, 2000: 437). Moreover, “the act itself of allowing the free flow of foreign media within Kuwaiti national space is perhaps more symbolic of Kuwaiti identity than the meaning of the texts themselves” (ibid.). Changes in the country are not happening at the cost of local identity, but rather – as suggested by several of the students in this study – new values and actions are becoming part of local identity. In addition, the students demonstrated how they negotiate the significance of the foreign influences in their lives.

Even though globalization creates a space for foreign influences to enter a country, the host country still has some control over the effects of this change. Import bans and censorship are two methods that governments can use to control the amount of commercial globalization that develops in a society. These two methods are employed in Kuwait. Anything that is determined by the government to be against local values is censored. For example, due to the guidelines of *Sharia* law, the Kuwaiti government has banned alcohol in the country, unlike neighbors such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Moreover, although satellite TV cannot be censored, other forms of media are edited. For instance, there are only a limited number of DVD stores throughout the country, and even then, their supply is restricted to ones that have been approved by the Ministry of Information. Although the latest movies are shown in movie theaters, they are also checked and censored – up to the point where even a kiss in a cartoon wedding scene is cut. The Internet is another popular site where there is relatively unrestricted access to all kinds of information. Even ones that are blocked by the Ministry of Information can be accessed via a proxy server. In addition, censorship is applied to books that contain any material that is deemed inappropriate. This was also found in the United Arab Emirates. Academic books with “listening and reading passages that touched on dating, romance, teen culture, art, drama, popular music, or movies and all discussion topics that questioned the status quo vanished under the censors’ thick black markers” (Martin, 2003: 51). The interpretation of these acts depends on a person’s point of view. Some may view this censorship as an infringement on a person’s own right to make decisions about the values and ideas she wants to incorporate into her life. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as protecting the local culture from foreign ideologies and cultural practices.



The data in this research expose various opinions towards how much the government should implement restrictive regulations based on their idea of what is suitable for Kuwait. Several students believe that the citizens of Kuwait should be allowed to make their own decisions related to what forms of modernity and elements of globalization they choose to accept or reject from their lives.

These examples show that in spite of the evidence of globalization in Kuwait, the phenomenon is not a rampant takeover that is wiping out the country's culture overnight. Wheeler remarks that even though there is widespread access to foreign media, it "does not interrupt Kuwaiti national consciousness. This does not mean that such texts fail, however, to have any noticeable impact on Kuwaiti lives" (Wheeler, 2000: 444). She notes that although there may appear to be conflicts, "in Kuwait the high penetration of foreign media in the local environment is a symbol of Kuwait's openness to globalization" (ibid.). These findings are not different from what Al-Thakeb found in his research on Kuwaiti society in 1985 (p. 580). Moreover, they are quite similar to those illustrated by the data in chapter six.

Despite being a modern society, the government has taken measures to implement laws that it feels are important for the country. Therefore, it is important to consider the context in which the influences of globalization are occurring. This involves analyzing the discourse of politics and power, which are both linked to the country's economic needs. Kuwait, being financially self-sufficient, is not dependent on other countries for monetary aid. However, it does rely on foreign assistance for people, products, and services.

Given the fact that Kuwait's production base is mainly comprised of oil, the country relies heavily on the import of other foreign commodities and labor, which has contributed to the development of Kuwait's multicultural landscape. However, even though the presence of multiple cultures and nationalities may trigger some form of change, it does not guarantee the deterioration or oppression of the local culture. This circumstance represents the "plural character of culture" which occurs as a "result of the contact between cultural communities and of the consumption of cultural commodities" (Kumaravadivelu, 2008: 12). It is important to note that a 'plural character' is described; people are not one-dimensional. This plurality is evident in Kuwait. For example, there is a divide between the Sunni and Shia Muslims in the country. The conflicting ideologies and agendas of these two groups infiltrate the politics of the country, which in turn affects the people. More recently, protests by the stateless Kuwaitis, or *biduns*, have been frequent occurrences as they demand the right of Kuwaiti citizenship. Despite Kuwait being one nation, societal divides over local issues are complex enough without bringing influences from other countries and cultures into the picture.

Tomlinson (1999) defined the cultural imperialism thesis as “the idea that certain dominant cultures threaten to overwhelm other more vulnerable ones” and indicates that it addresses “a number of fairly discrete discourses of domination: of America over Europe, of the core over the periphery” (p. 80). Dunch shares this view and claims that there are some people who regard:

the global consumption of American cultural products as the new opiate of the masses, the sign of an emerging homogenized world culture of capitalist consumption, controlled by Western media corporations and undermining class solidarity and third world revolutionary potential. (2002: 304)

The basic premise of these perspectives suggests that with the distribution of consumer goods – the ones that are dominating the market – a culture is also being spread. Consequently, users of the consumer products are in fact participating in a foreign culture. As a result of incorporating elements of a foreign culture, the assumption is that their local culture is being suppressed.

Importing international goods, hiring expatriate employees, and investing in foreign-made technology are all consequences of globalization. This, however, does not guarantee that what develops is a homogenized global culture, because that would suggest, “interaction with these goods penetrates deeply into the way in which we construct our ‘phenomenal worlds’ and make sense of our lives” (Tomlinson, 1999: 81-2). Thus, the cultural imperialism theory suggests that the superficial flow of consumer goods has the capability to invade and occupy local cultures and belief systems. However, this does not mean that everyone shares one culture. More importantly, one has to consider whether sharing this capitalist monoculture leads to the destruction of local national culture. Is it right to claim that if “we assume that the sheer global presence of these goods is *in itself* token of a convergence towards a capitalist monoculture, we are probably utilizing a rather impoverished concept of culture – one that reduces culture to its material goods” (Tomlinson, 1999: 83 emphasis in original)? The respondents in the study demonstrate that culture is not that easily penetrable. A Kuwaiti having a cappuccino is no more Italian than an American eating sushi with chopsticks is Japanese. Culture, beliefs, ideologies, and identity go a lot deeper than the clothes we wear, the food we eat, and the consumer practices we follow. As Bernstein (2002) notes, “[c]onsumer culture has spread very fast and comprehensively. On the other hand, the cultural values certainly diffuse less easily than the consumer images flashing on television screens in almost every home on the globe” (p. 245). Thus, while it cannot be denied that the mixing of multiple ‘cultures’ has some effect on the local environment, it is a far stretch to say that the locals are being dominated and that their ‘culture’ is so weak that it cannot resist, reject, or react to globalizing changes. Friedman (2005) believes that although there is “the potential to homogenize cultures,” globalization has “an even greater potential to nourish diversity to a degree that the world has never seen before” (p. 506). The notion of ‘culture’ is

complex and cannot be interpreted as a definitive, restrictive label; even within a single nationality, there are multiple cultures represented based on people's beliefs, ideas, and behaviors. This is also, as Montgomery notes, "because of the diversity in national cultures ... the idea of national or ethnic culture is one that is closely associated with their experience" (2008a: 9). The impact of a person's experience on her cultural identity is highly personalized. Recognizing this complexity and acknowledging the multifaceted realities of people considered to be in the periphery is an essential component to critical cosmopolitanism. Adopting such a view can help promote more understanding of differences among people and hopefully reduce unfounded cultural generalizations.

Despite the interconnectedness that results from globalization, it is important to acknowledge that connectivity does not mean that all places are the same. In fact, the students in this study contest the idea of Kuwait being similar to other countries and emphatically assert their uniqueness through the way they take ownership of the changes around them. Rather, the interconnectedness facilitates communication and the establishment of connections with people around the world. The connection of spaces and the blurring of borders have made it so that "the map of the world has no divinely or dogmatically sanctioned spaces, essences, or privileges" (Said, 1994: 377). Regardless of this fact, each individual is able to construct her own unique space based on her experiences and preferences.

This attention focused on globalization has brought into question whether or not people see "a threat, real or perceived, to their own cultural way of life, compelling them to take active measures to preserve and protect their traditional cultural identities" (Kumaravadivelu, 2008: 138). Another critical question is: does change mean cultural loss or do we just gain a different perspective? In fact, one can wonder if culture is ever lost. Cultural imperialism "risks assuming that importing USAmerican cultural *products* into other countries is the same as importing USAmerican *culture* into those countries, ignoring agency, reception, and resistance" (Rogers, 2006: 482 emphasis in original). Once again, as will be demonstrated by the data, participants of globalization actively engage with their surroundings to claim ownership.

The data in this research challenges the idea that the changes brought about by globalization are a threat to a person's cultural identity. Rather it is seen as a continuous negotiation process with identity and one's sociocultural context. There are some people who might want to follow tradition and avoid actively negotiating with the effects of globalization. There are others who approve of the concept of 'managed globalization', and there are still others who want to see a complete change in their society, incorporating the elements of globalization into their constantly evolving identities.

### 3.2.3 *Globalization – Creating a force of local empowerment?*

Trying to understand the various ways in which globalization can impact a society helps provide a multidimensional picture of changes that are occurring. Moreover, it demonstrates that the effects of globalization are not just a black and white dichotomy. It is essential to look at how contextual factors play a role in the changes that are occurring as well. Apart from negotiations within the local community, it is also clear that:

nations, societies, and communities are in closer cultural contact with one another than ever before. People now have a greater chance of knowing about others' cultural way of life – the good, the bad, and the ugly. They also have a greater chance of directly or indirectly influencing cultural change beyond their cultural community. Consequently, people in many parts of the world see unparalleled opportunities for cultural growth, and equally unparalleled threats to their cultural identity. (Kumaravadivelu, 2008: 148)

Some of the Kuwaiti students in this study expressed how globalization had made them feel even more Kuwaiti. This coincides with Anthony Giddens' idea that globalization can actually act as a force to enhance and strengthen nationalistic identities. Giddens (2002) points to globalization as “the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world” (p. 13). In her research, Wang (2007) emphasizes that people “are not mere objects of cultural influences, but subjects who can reject or integrate culture” (p. 83). Moreover, it is because of the interconnectedness among people that attachment to one's own traditions, values, practices, and so forth, are emphasized. “In the new era of globalization, people become much more concerned about the uniqueness and particularity of their own culture” (ibid.). Many people find comfort in the traditions they learned from their parents and family and keep it at the core of their being – it solidifies who they are. This is not to suggest that they are restrained by their traditions. Rather for some it is a platform from which to distinguish themselves from others. It is also important to remember that while traditions may be a part of the cultural landscape of a country, continuing practices is not mandatory. “Tradition is an orientation to the past, such that the past has a heavy influence or, more accurately put, is made to have a heavy influence, over the present” (Giddens, 1994: 62). The concept of tradition, however, varies from person to person and is more complex than wearing a certain type of clothing or performing a ritual. Apart from links to the past, tradition also has an effect on the future “since established practices are used as a way of organising future time” (ibid.: 62).

Aside from reinforcing local identity, there are also signs of how globalization does not penetrate or break local ways of doing things like conducting business. Yan (2002) illustrates how the effects of globalization are integrated into Chinese culture in a way that is beneficial for them. Yan explains how:

Western-style management and business skills are, in practice, only secondary to the success of many private entrepreneurs, although in public many attribute their success to modern management and technology, in order to fit the widely accepted official narrative of modernization. It is no wonder, therefore, that so many Chinese business elite and managerial professionals hold substantially localized views of the world, regardless of their Italian-made shoes, Swiss wristwatches, and fluent English. (2002: 24)

She explains, “one of the major reasons why the Chinese business elite do not feel the drive to become westernized is that the Chinese way of doing business helps them to survive and succeed in China” (ibid.). Once again, the context of this scenario is important. Yan mentions success in China and is explaining this from one Chinese perspective. The definition of success used in this context may vary from how others define the term. Moreover, not incorporating Western ideals may be a form of resistance and a way to maintain what they feel are important elements of their culture.

This is similar to a trend in Kuwait. For instance, although hospitals advertise modern, Western-made technological equipment, educational institutes advertise the employment of foreign experts, and shops boast about having the latest trends from Paris, Milan, Tokyo, and New York, the majority of Kuwaitis are employed by the government and work in institutions that are not infiltrated by foreigners. Consequently, they are able to maintain their bureaucratic system and influence the rest of the social system accordingly. The Kuwaiti social security scheme is set up to benefit Kuwaitis only. In order to maintain this arrangement and gain from the benefits, Kuwaitis have to work within the system that they have created. Even Kuwaitis who are eager to see a change in the local business environment feel that for the most part, Kuwait has struck the right balance between Western business ideals and local habits. Some may feel that the system needs to be changed, but nobody seems to be in a rush to alter the structure since they receive many benefits from current practices. Furthermore, stating that culture is changing because of an outside force implies that culture was or can be static. However, it is always changing with every contact that is made. Some believe that “alien cultural products are accepted because they have been imposed. Implicit here is a model of culture as a field of ideological domination, in which cultural change comes about through coercion by outside forces” (Dunch, 2002: 307). What this type of perception does not clarify is the role of freedom of choice, which is indeed a very important aspect. Dunch asks some critical questions about such an ideology:

Where, then, does imposition end? Since we all inhabit cultures and accept in some measure the cultural products that come with them, have we all been colonized? Even if we acknowledge (as I would not hesitate to) that abstract social forces like capitalism, industrial society, and/or modernity have significantly restructured human subjective experience, to view that restructuring simply as a process of imposition in which individuals play no active role would be a profoundly determinist conception of human social life. (2002: 307)

Just because changes are occurring does not mean that they are being imposed since there are ways people can decide how to deal with the changes, even in situations where they do not have much control. For example, in Kuwait the government is filtering globalization in a way that they believe will not harm the basic fundamentals of society such as by imposing bans on certain imports, such as alcohol, which is *haram*, or forbidden in Islam. Furthermore, they are using elements of modernity, such as mass communications, to assist them in maintaining traditions and enhancing religious authority. For example, in her research, Wheeler found that even the Internet was being appropriated to suit personal preferences. In particular, she found that several Islamists were using the Internet to preach the message of Islam. “All of these uses of the Internet by Islamist social forces in Kuwait suggest that access to new media technologies can result in enhanced local identity, rather than a subversion of such (Wheeler, 2000: 442). These examples illustrate how elements of globalization can be filtered in a way that is deemed appropriate for the local environment. However, this type of decision-making does create conflict because not all Kuwaitis within the country have the same impression of what is appropriate. Therefore, even when living in a country that is quite guided by government regulations, as will be demonstrated by the data, people can still find a way to decide how to incorporate elements of globalization within the parameters of the society. These actions are symbolic of bottom-up globalization, which is characterized by local empowerment to take charge of how the forces of globalization affect their world, rather than be passively influenced by the changes that are occurring. Participants in this study suggest that this is what is happening in Kuwait as they work to take ownership of the changes occurring in the country.

Another example of contradicting popular images in Western media is that of the women in Iran as described in Honarbin-Holliday’s (2008) study. The author exposes a rich environment in which the participants in her study are resisting against the government impositions and using their own mode of expression, particularly through art. Finding spaces for self-expression sometimes occurs in settings that may seem mundane, but in fact carry a lot of significance. For example, interactions in coffee shops are described as a site of resistance by both Holliday (2011: 102) and Honarbin-Holliday (2008: 109). Similarly, a number of Kuwaiti students, particularly young women, mentioned that being able to go out for a coffee with their friends was symbolic of having freedom to be out in public and socialize without the company of a chaperone, as is most often the case for many of the young women. At the same time, coffee shops are notoriously known as places where men and women can interact discreetly. The complexity behind the action of going into a coffee shop is probably not something that many people would give much thought. However, for these young adults, it carries a whole host of meanings. As Kamal notes:

Sitting in Starbucks and sipping their lattes ... whether these students are dressed in traditional Arab clothing or they are in jeans and Eminem t-shirts, the Arabs do not want to be pigeonholed. They resent the stereotypes including bearded fundamentalist images that represent a lot of what is wrong in the world today; but then they equally resent being seen as products of external influences. (Kamal, 2003).

Therefore, the innocent act of having a cup of coffee is transformed into one that is rich in significance.

### **3.2.4 Globalization – Creating a space for local change?**

While there are some people who are balancing globalization and its impact on local culture, there are others who are proactively using the changing environment to look for new spaces and methods to vocalize their protest – either against the changes brought about by globalization or against the established traditional practices. As Giddens stated, “[l]ife-political problems do not fit readily within existing frameworks of politics, and may well stimulate the emergence of political forms which differ from those hitherto prominent, both within states and on a global level” (1991: 228). While some believe that a balance between modernity and traditions has been struck in Kuwaiti society, there are still elements of discontent. Said (2003: 154) notes that “in Kuwait, there is a liberal culture struggling against the Islamists. But also against the tyranny of one party, oligarchical, or one-family rule.” This sentiment is also echoed by several participants in this study. They demonstrate that it is not only changes related to globalization that they have to deal with, but also the need to work within the parameters of society. Hence, they accept that the new changes of globalization do not occur without consequences.

Although Kuwait may seem to be becoming more modern, there are still many inequalities among the Kuwaiti citizens themselves. Tétreault and al-Mughni (1995: 67-68) focus on these inequalities, particularly in relation to women’s rights in Kuwait. They correlate the struggles of women to attain their rights to those of non-Kuwaitis in the country, whose voices, and often even basic human rights, are not acknowledged. Traditions are juxtaposed against modernity, and there are some people who do not believe that the two can coexist, as will be demonstrated in the data chapters. For some, holding on to their Kuwaiti traditions has become a way to create a national space within the country, where the influences of globalization are not so evident. “Especially potent in a region where imperialism left so much political, social and economic chaos in its wake, appeals to tradition find strong support” (Tétreault and al-Mughni, 1995: 75). Therefore, the results of imperialism in the past and globalization in the present may be why Kuwaitis have held on to tradition to bind them together and find a sense of unity.

Although the effects of globalization may encourage feelings of national pride, there are also others who are using the changes in Kuwait to resist traditional structures. For example, despite being used by some to promote national identity, Wheeler (2000) also found that “the Internet in Kuwait is leading to experimentation, especially among youths, which could lead, sometime in the future, to the interruption of Kuwaiti traditions” (p. 442). She found that:

Internet use by youths is creating new forms of communication across gender lines, interrupting traditional social rituals, and giving young people new autonomy in how they run their lives. Although these capabilities remain tempered by pre-existing value systems, we are seeing important signs of experimentation which cannot help but stimulate processes of change over time as young people redefine norms and values for future generations. (ibid.: 443)

Although this trend of using the Internet for cyber-dating is relatively new, it is still not widely accepted and is most often done in secret. As will be illustrated in the data, the idea that a ‘proper impression’ needs to be given to the rest of society persists. This secrecy even occurs among friends because they do not want to be judged or reprimanded. Therefore, these youths are making a personal choice by deciding to communicate with someone of the opposite sex, despite the disapproval of their family members or friends (Wheeler, 2000: 444).

The variety of reactions to globalization from participants in this research reveals the complexity of the phenomenon. The accelerated force of globalization has created an urgency for people to look at life and evaluate and negotiate their position among the change. An element of cultural discourse is “the power to analyze, to get past cliché and straight out-and-out lies from authority, the questioning of authority, the search for alternatives. These are also part of the arsenal of cultural resistance” (Said, 2003: 159). In Kuwait’s case, cultural resistance is arising either against globalization and the new Kuwaiti identity that is developing or as voices supporting the sociopolitical changes that are occurring in the country.

Globalization cannot always be characterized as a force taking over the world without any restriction. Yan (2002) describes how in China “the country’s elite had accepted the view that globalization represented an inevitable stage in China’s modernization as well as an opportunity to catch up with the developed countries” (p. 20). Instead of being passive recipients to the change that is occurring, she explains how:

to take advantage of this opportunity, the Chinese state has been playing an important role in forming a national consensus, facilitating China’s participation in the globalization process, controlling the direction of economic integration, and balancing the pros and cons of cultural globalization. (ibid.).

Yan calls this ‘managed globalization,’ which I think is an accurate description of how globalization is being incorporated into Kuwait (ibid.).



Continuing her analysis of globalization in China, she emphasizes that globalization does not necessarily mean cultural convergence. It would be “if one merely counted the number of Western cultural items imported into China and consumed by local people. But a closer look shows that, more often than not, the imported culture is transformed and localized, as in the case of McDonald’s in Beijing” (ibid.: 33). Elements of consumer capitalism are quite evident. One of the risks of cookie-cutter stores and businesses, like Starbucks and McDonald’s, is that people might feel that their country is becoming like everyone else’s, thus leading to the homogenization of their country. However, just because similar industries, goods, and services are available in several countries does not mean that the people are becoming homogenized. “It should be noticed that even while they use those goods, people can and do assert themselves as subjects, integrating them in their own way of life” (Wang, 2007: 84). Following Yan’s (2002) example of McDonald’s in China, even McDonald’s in Kuwait has adapted to local traditions and religious expectations by serving only *halal* meat, using turkey or beef bacon in sandwiches instead of pork, and even incorporating a special sandwich, the McArabia, to suit local tastes and please local customers.

Instead of being invaded and colonized, globalization allows learners to appropriate new ideologies and behaviors into their lives in a manner that is most suitable to them. This negotiation is a form of contestation, and it should not be assumed that people are passively falling into a trap of globalization. For example:

lifestyle choices, within the settings of local-global interrelations, raise moral issues which cannot simply be pushed to one side. Such issues call for forms of political engagement which the new social movements both presage and serve to help initiate. ‘Life politics’ [] emerges from the shadow which ‘emancipatory politics’ has cast. (Giddens, 1991: 9)

Life politics involves engaging with one’s environment and exercising agency to appropriate what is best for one’s own lifestyle. These choices are not always easy to make. Breaking away from what is perceived to be the norm in one’s culture always takes careful thought and a certain element of risk because it opens up a whole new world of possibilities. Therefore, the “individual must be prepared to make a more or less complete break with the past, if necessary, and to contemplate novel courses of action that cannot simply be guided by established habits” (Giddens, 1991: 73). Indeed, individuals are responsible for working on determining how much and in what capacity they want to appropriate the new elements of culture into their life.

### **3.2.5 Section 3.2 Summary**

Transnational companies, imported goods, and foreign media are all indicators of globalization that can easily be pinpointed. However, deeper changes that accompany the

movement of goods, people, and ideas is not always easily recognizable. With interconnectedness heightened by ease of travel and communication, interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in various contexts is increasing and so is the exposure to new ideas and ways of life. Some theorists believe that the products and ideas that are spreading as a result of globalization are actually a form of cultural imperialism. This perspective is rooted in essentialist and neo-essentialist ideologies that rely on “straight-forward, neutral categories of cultural description” which minimizes the underlying prejudices (Holliday, 2011: 69). However, as some of the research studies in this chapter demonstrate, culture is not easily penetrable. In fact, some theorists, as well as several of the participants in this research, affirm that globalization actually provides the space to enhance cultural identity. Moreover, even if values changed it would not be because the influence was imposed but rather because individuals are able to choose how and what elements of globalization they want to incorporate in their lives. This is characteristic of cosmopolitanism, in which the “internal transformation of social and cultural phenomena through self-problematization and pluralization” is critical (Delanty, 2006: 41). What is important to realize is that if cultures are changing, then the transformations are happening because of the active involvement of the people. While some people believe that globalization is causing the destruction of local cultures, others believe that it actually helps enhance cultural identity.

### **3.3 EXPRESSIONS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY**

The previous section presented discussions exploring the different ways globalization affects culture. This section explores the link between culture and language. It begins with an investigation of what the term culture implies and how fixed notions of what it represents often lead to misinterpretation, as is revealed in the data chapters of this thesis. This section also examines the intricate relationship between creating meaning and understanding one’s experience. It then analyzes the source of fixed notions of culture and problematizes essentialist discourses within the field of teaching English.

#### **3.3.1 *Concepts of Culture***

Culture and identity go beyond conceptions of nationality, gender, and religion. They relate to other values and ideals that are incorporated from experiences. This understanding is particularly relevant in a language classroom because learner perspectives are formulated on their individual experiences, which in turn shape how they approach, analyze, and conceptualize a text. Gruber and Boreen (2003) find that education “is a ‘social process’ that is multidirectional and shared by a group of learners” (p. 58). Each student in a language classroom brings her own belief systems and ideological framework. Theorists who focus on capitalizing these qualities emphasize

making the classroom a more realistic representation of the complexity of society.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) believes that although all learners in ESL and EFL classes may:

appear to belong to a seemingly homogenous national or linguistic entity, their life values, life choices, life-styles, and, therefore, their world view may significantly vary. In that sense, most classes are not monocultural cocoons but rather are multicultural mosaics. (p. 269)

It is because of the complexity and multi-dimensional aspect that learners bring to the classroom that “its exclusive emphasis on a homogenized target language community and its cultural way of life, the traditional approach to teaching culture has failed to capitalize on the rich linguistic and cultural resources that characterize most L2 classes” (ibid.). This complexity is not reserved only for classrooms with international students. As revealed in this study, students of the same nationality can be equally diverse, a notion that sometimes seems to go unrecognized by language teachers.

The concept of culture is so broad that it may be understandable that there are multiple angles and cultural values that can be incorporated in a persons’ life. However, personal identity takes this to another level. Drawing on theorists such as Giddens (1991), Matthews (2001), and May (2001), Block (2007) provides a definition of identity:

identities as socially constructed, self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions and language. Identity work occurs in the company of others ... with whom to varying degrees individuals share beliefs, motives, values, activities and practices. Identities are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of the past, present and future. (Block, 2007: 27)

This negotiation involves confronting power inequalities and, at times, engaging in conflicting decision making processes. Although culture is connected to nationality in many ways, respondents in this study, like those in Holliday’s (2011) study, clarify “that nation *is* an important category, but an external one which may be in conflict with more personal cultural realities” (p. 44). Thus characteristics that one associates with a particular nationality are not a complete or accurate representation of that person’s cultural or linguistic identity.

Associating adjectives such as ‘modern’ and ‘liberal’ with the West, and adjectives such as ‘traditional’ and ‘conservative’ to the East, skews a person’s perspective. These labels are not mutually exclusive. There are ‘modern’ and ‘liberal’ societies in the East, just as there are ‘traditional’ and ‘conservative’ societies in the West. Attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies are not fixed based on region, religion, or nationality. Globalization, however “disturbs the way we conceptualize ‘culture.’ For culture has long had connotations tying it to the idea of a fixed locality. The idea of ‘a culture’ implicitly connects meaning construction with particularity and location” (Tomlinson, 1999: 28). In this globalized world, this view is changing, and it is apparent

that identity, language, and culture are all flexible because of the increased interactions among people in different contexts who have come from different backgrounds. Giddens (2002) explains that:

as the influence of tradition and custom shrink on a world-wide level, the very basis of our self-identity – our sense of self – changes. In more traditional situations, a sense of self is sustained largely through the stability of the social positions of individuals in the community. Where tradition lapses, and lifestyle choice prevails, the self isn't exempt. Self-identity has to be created and recreated on a more active basis than before. (p. 47)

The dissolution of defined spaces and identities is creating opportunities where individuals must decide for themselves what they want to be and how to demonstrate their identity. It *is* possible to follow traditional practices and perpetuate a popular or mainstream identity. Alternatively, a person can make new choices and build her own identity. The choices are made based on a negotiation process that requires self-reflection and critical thought. Wenger (2008) states that creating meaning is a process that involves being engaged with the surrounding context and environment (p. 32). He clarifies that the word negotiation symbolizes “continuous interaction, of gradual achievement, and of give-and-take” and that meaning is “both historical and dynamic, contextual and unique” (ibid.: 33). Outlining these parameters is crucial as they capture the idea that each person’s perspective is a combination of her past experiences as well as her interpretations of the context in which she is currently working. “The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems” (Giddens, 1991: 5). While these are choices that an individual decides for herself, the sociocultural contexts also need to be considered. There are, of course, others who refuse to let this mentality interfere with how they want to represent themselves. It is by analyzing the social environment and determining how one positions oneself within a context that decisions about representation can be made. The type of thought process and negotiation involved is similar to what Kumaravadivelu (2008) mentions when discussing cultural assimilation as a selective process. He explains:

This selectivity operates in two ways: individuals within an ethnic group may decide to assimilate although the group itself may not, and even those individuals who decide to assimilate may do so selectively – that is, they may assimilate certain aspects of the mainstream culture and not others. (p. 80)

We pick and choose how we want to be, what we want to believe, and how we want to act. The complexity behind the negotiation of one’s context is not always recognized or obvious. When it comes to looking at how ‘others’ are capable of such critical thought, the behavior is “nearly always framed as an exception to the essentialist rule rather than as reality in its own right” (Holliday, 2011: 7). This type of erroneous assumption “may lie at the root of many of the broad

stereotypes that can lead to misunderstanding across groups and individuals” (Montgomery, 2010: 13). What needs to be recognized is that these decisions are based upon numerous factors, such as sociopolitical context, which will be discussed further in the following section.

Even with the challenges of connectivity brought about by globalization, it is important to note that connectivity implies unity, which should not be confused with being the same as each other in terms of beliefs or behavior (Tomlinson, 1999: 28). This complex negotiation process became evident through my research and made me realize that it is not a loss or gain of culture that occurs through the education process; it is just an addition of layers to an ever-changing identity.

### ***3.3.2 Language and One’s Expression of Identity***

One of the defining elements of a person’s identity is related to the language that she speaks. More than just a compilation of words, the language a person speaks represents her ideologies and beliefs (Crystal, 2010: 8). The language that is used, and the way in which it is used, is a reflection of a person’s identity. However, this representation of self varies from setting to setting. Kramsch (1998) explains how people “identify themselves as members of a social group [and] acquire common ways of viewing the world through their interactions with other members of the same group” (p. 6). Speaking the same language and more specifically, participating in a particular discourse, is an element of a person’s identity. People can belong to different social groups, and consequently adapt various linguistic identities.

In the language classroom, students are faced with learning a new language that encompasses its own set of ideologies. Therefore, in this situation, they enter the classroom with their own set of “particularly culturally bounded set of beliefs and values; while they project themselves into an exploration of and engagement with another culturally bounded set of beliefs and values” (MacDonald, Badger, and Dasli, 2006: 260). In some cases this engagement can be problematic. However, it is also possible that learning a new language opens up a new perspective and adds to the students’ educational experience and linguistic capital. Thus, “existing sets of beliefs and values are restructured and extended rather than torn down root and branch” (ibid.).

Nault (2006) claims that a person’s cultural background plays a major role in influencing the way in which an individual expresses and interprets languages; therefore, he believes “if learners are to become truly proficient in their target language, it stands to reason they must be familiar with that language’s culture” (p. 314). However, the problem is that the ‘culture’ associated with that language varies. When teaching English, several sources have claimed that Western or American cultural values are being taught; however, it is not clear exactly what these cultural values are. Moreover, this perspective does not acknowledge how learners of the

language are capable of creatively manipulating its use in a way that is more representative of their identity, as demonstrated by a number of participants in this study.

“Culture and cultural awareness personalises ESL teaching” (Rowse, Sztainbok, and Blaney, 2007: 153). Opening up language classrooms to focus on culture and cultural awareness is a possible way to promote understanding. Through connecting the concept of culture to language, “we invite students in; if we mobilise and operationalise our students’ lived experiences, we invite them in; and, if we open up our teaching to different modalities, we allow the language and culture nexus to flourish” (ibid.). However, such inclusivity may not always be possible (further explored in the data analysis in chapter eight). Nault refers to Spivak for a more critical definition of culture as “the site of a struggle, a problem, a discursive production, an effect structure rather than a cause” (Nault, 2006: 315). Using Kuwait as an example, we can see how culture varies in one country and how expectations vary among people in terms of their reactions to English, and even in their perception of what it means to be Kuwaiti. It is this struggle that does not seem to be sufficiently acknowledged by educators. When discussing culture being disseminated through English language textbooks, it is assumed that students are simply accepting and following what is being taught. However, even though it may not explicitly be evident in the classroom, students are actively negotiating with the input they are receiving from all around them – from the teacher’s approach to a lesson to the content of a textbook to the reactions of their peers to their own personal beliefs. Moreover, the benefits of being able to speak English, as highlighted in chapter two, are not always satisfactorily emphasized. As Ali (2009) finds in her research, the use of English “allows for the expression of the individual cultural identities of its users while at the same time preserving the convenient collective benefit of a language which is intelligible nationally and internationally” (p. 36). This mutual intelligibility is not reserved for non-native English speakers talking to one another. Rather, it is a benefit for all speakers regardless of their linguistic background.

### ***3.3.3 Negotiation of Meaning***

Communicating with others involves an exchange of information. Once the information is given, it is up to the hearer to make sense of its meaning. Misinterpretations do occur, and in some cases it is because of a language barrier or deficiency. However, in other cases it is because of a lack of familiarity with the subject or a miscommunication in the intended meaning of what was said. Sometimes this occurs because of a lack of general understanding and at other times it is because there is a conceptual gap between the two interlocutors. Miscommunication is not necessarily always due to a cultural misunderstanding. At a time when interaction with people from different backgrounds is commonplace, it should be noted that a discrepancy or misunderstanding is a possibility.

Said (1997) emphasizes that interpretation “depends on the willed intentional activity of the human mind, molding and forming the objects of its attention with care and study” (p. 164). Moreover, it is through deconstructing:

national feelings like patriotism or chauvinism to private emotions like fear or despair, the interpreter must seek in a disciplined way to employ reason and the information she has gained through formal education ... so that understanding may be achieved. (ibid.)

This “deconstruction also creates a space for silenced voices to be heard and enhances a different understanding of marginalized groups” as well as previously unrecognized ideas (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008: 226). The complexity of how our personal experiences and backgrounds affect the way we learn, interpret, and approach the world, as well as language learning, has been examined in several studies (e.g. Dyers, 2009: 256; Ribeiro, 2009: 94; Tran, 2009: 272). As a consequence of our backgrounds and experiences, the way we construct meaning differs. This difference is evident in how we communicate – whether it is through reading, writing, or understanding what others say. This is not restricted to only ‘international’ students; this type of interpretive communication happens between everyone. Meaning is subjective and contextual.

We create meaning and give significance to our actions. Therefore, traditions and other cultural practices are continued because we choose to do so. This active responsibility needs to be acknowledged. It is fine for traditions to persist, but the false mentality that this is something that automatically occurs or is something that is imposed needs to be addressed/confronted. As Atkinson notes:

Humans are agentive in creating their environments, but not in a wholly unconstrained way. Cultural models and schemes provide basic guidelines for behavior, but these guidelines are constantly being reworked and remade in the messy crucible of everyday human behavior. (1999: 647)

Members within a community are diverse. However, this may sometimes be overlooked as “communities do attempt to conventionalize the mediation of a sign in order to establish and maintain desired positions and relationships within a social context, such as the family, the classroom, workplace” (Zancanella and Abt-Perkins, 2007: 1). Even though:

much of what people ‘think’ is actually located in socially constructed practices, ... people ... participate in conventional ways of acting and being in the world that exist (in part) independently of their cognitive apparatus and that come to them already deeply saturated with sociocultural significance. (Atkinson, 1999: 638)

What this suggests is that educators need to contextualize what they read, see, and hear and move away from essentialized notions of what learners are capable of doing or achieving. Even research into specific communities needs to be taken in context and then analyzed to determine the relevance of the arguments. For example, Al-Thakeb’s study about Kuwaiti families in 1982

found “clear evidence of strong relationships between the immediate family and the kin network ... Conflict is rare and brief” (Al-Thakeb, 1985: 577). The respondents in this study frequently expressed similar sentiments. However, they also described how despite holding their family in the highest regard, they did face challenges in figuring out how to maintain this respect while carving out their own identity.

The issue with studies such as these is that not enough acknowledgement is given to the complexity behind decision-making and the reasons why certain choices are made. The claim that Al-Thakeb (1985) makes about Kuwaitis’ behavior – that deviation from traditions was due to “urbanization and modernization” and was mostly likely to be “affected by education, women’s employment, and freedom of interaction between the sexes” (ibid.) – was not analyzed or contextualized enough. This lack of analysis presents an incomplete picture, and one that may be taken as truth without considering other dimensions. Similarly, Martin’s (2003: 52) description of female students at a university in the United Arab Emirates, who she claims were not motivated unless they were educated or exposed to Western habits, is one that seems to link any form of sophistication with exposure to the Western world. The idea that all things Western must be right or good is limiting. These issues were also seen in other contexts such as in Japan, where both the lack of motivation to study English and the more pragmatic need to study English to simply fulfill a requirement were primary complaints of English language teachers (Berwick and Ross, 1989: 193; Matsumoto, 1994: 210). When views like these are emphasized, positive attitudes towards English and the belief that it is a beneficial language to learn are sometimes ignored. Thus, teachers often presume that this attitude reflects a negative perception of English, as some of the teacher data in this study will reveal. For example, Montgomery (2010) notes, “it is often assumed that international students are not able to engage with critical thinking tasks because of the influence of their educational background” (p. 34). However, issues with motivation and discipline in the classroom are not isolated to non-Western contexts. For example, an American teacher who taught English in a high school in Philadelphia was suspended for her job because she complained about her students being “out of control” and “rude, disengaged, lazy whiners” in her blog. Moreover, she said that the students would “get angry when you ask them to think or be creative” and they “are not being held accountable” (Walters, 2011). Perhaps instead of linking behavior to a cultural component, one should examine these behaviors in the general context of being a student.

When investigating learning practices in classrooms, some researchers start with generalized statements about what they interpret as a representation of culture. Zhu writes that “Chinese students are strongly influenced by Confucian concepts of learning ... As a result, they are less likely to reveal their opinions, tend to hide their abilities, and seldom challenge the



authority of tutors and parents” (Zhu, 2003: 38). This type of description is not contextualized enough and could be interpreted as patronizing. There could be some students who are shy or are uninterested in challenging authority, but making such direct statements, without any acknowledgement of the plurality of culture and identity, does not account for other possible interpretations.

The use of generalizing assumptions based on stereotypes or single uncontextualized observations is not just seen in teachers from a Western background. In her research, Zhu (2003) wonders what it is that causes Chinese speakers “to ask the native English speakers such inappropriate questions” such as those related to one’s age or occupation (p. 39). While there is an angle of communicative competence that may need to be developed, as she believes that “culturally unacceptable language and behaviour are worse than linguistic mistakes” (ibid.), it could also be asked ‘What causes native English speakers to get offended when asked a question related to their age or occupation?’ Perhaps it should be remembered that conversations go both ways – the listener has to also consider where the speaker is ‘coming from’ and understand the context and intention of the speaker. If the intention is not clear, then the person should ask for clarification. Clarification strategies would be a much better use of funding and teacher training focus. What is appropriate or acceptable is subjective – it depends on the context, the listener’s perceived intentions and a whole host of other issues. Zhu (2003) states:

All in all, culture plays an instrumental role in shaping speakers’ communicative competence, which is related to the appropriate use of language. Generally, discourse appropriateness is determined by the social and cultural conventions of a particular group of speakers. It is therefore necessary to recognize different sets of culturally determined rules in communication. However, the awareness of the role of cultural traits in foreign- language acquisition has usually been neglected in ELT in China. Consequently, there are many situations in which Chinese students are likely to talk inappropriately when communicating with native English speakers. (p. 39)

Studies like this demonstrate how easy it is to fall into the trap of essentialism. Even research that is conducted to build a ‘complete understanding’ and raise awareness of cultural diversity can be problematic (Biao, 2001: 3). Not challenging the use of English in dominant discourses and fields of study could impede the chance of other languages gaining a more recognized status. However, the status that English has reached as a global language makes it “appealing because it is a necessity to become successful [therefore, this] standard creates a binary between English culture and the adapting culture” (Heitzman, 2005: 3-4). Therefore, it seems like until this level of pragmatic practicality of another language arises, English will maintain its current position.

The multiple influences that comprise a person’s identity, and the fact that this identity changes from time to time, from context to context, makes it important to emphasize the fallacy and danger of essentialist notions. This is particularly important when linking these attitudes

towards teaching practices as learner capabilities are sometimes assumed. What the negotiation of identity clarifies is that identity formation is complex, and it involves consciously thinking about what choices a person wants to make.

### **3.3.4 Section 3.3 Summary**

This section focused on the relationship between culture and language in order to investigate whether the cultural changes caused by globalization also had an impact on a person's language. The literature in this section reveals that culture and identity are concepts that people actively negotiate depending on their interpretation of their context. Moreover, one's identity and cultural connection are dynamic. They evolve over time and fluctuate depending on the setting. This fluidity is reflected in a person's language – both the way she speaks and the way she interprets what is said. This link between culture and language has an effect on the language learning process and will be discussed more in the following chapter.

## **3.4 CONCLUSION**

Cultural imperialism is a concept that has sometimes been associated with the effects of globalization. The basic premise of cultural imperialism is that one culture dominates over another and in fact causing the 'weaker' culture to disappear or deteriorate. The literature in this chapter reveals that culture goes deeper than just the clothes a person wears or national customs that a person follows. Moreover, even within one nation, individuals' interpretations of their culture are dependent upon their experiences and personal beliefs. Understanding the dynamic nature of culture is important so that prejudiced assumptions based on stereotypes can be avoided.

Other concerns relate to the transmission of cultural values through educational mediums. Looking at English, which as demonstrated in chapter two is the language spreading most as a result of globalization, concerns are raised regarding what values and ideas are being disseminated via English language textbooks that are created in the West. Some theorists argue that these textbooks are not suitable because the culture that is presented is not one that learners of English can easily identify with. Moreover, some view it as a medium that perpetuates Western domination. However, research, including data in this study, reveals that cultural values are not so easily penetrable and that people are able to contextualize the information they receive in a way that is suitable to their personal context and ideology.

With the values of culture and the notion of identity differing from society to society, and indeed, from person to person, addressing pedagogical issues related to teaching and learning English becomes quite challenging. This notion will be further explored in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4: POLITICIZING THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The use of English throughout the world, which is increasing as a result of globalization, has led to the analysis of how the spread of this language is affecting the local communities in which it is being used (Kachru and Nelson, 1996: 77; Eoyang, 2003: 23). Words like ‘imperialism’ (Canagarajah, 1999) and ‘colonialism’ (Pennycook, 1994) have negative connotations. However, there is still a high demand to learn English because of its role as a facilitator to gain access to opportunities. Thus, the status of English and the increased demand to learn the language has an impact on English language teaching pedagogy.

Chapter two illustrated the link between the spread and status of English and globalization. “Social and economic globalization has necessitated the use of an international means of communication in the world. English has become the language of international communication” (Alptekin, 2002: 32). Being able to speak English is associated with advancement in opportunities. Moreover, the convenience and speed of communication and travel has increased the amount of contact with people from various linguistic backgrounds. This has also contributed to the demand to learn English.

One of the concerns about the spread of English is that it is leading to a loss of local languages. Moreover, as demonstrated in chapter three, the impact of globalization on local cultures is also being interrogated. Since language and culture are inextricably linked, concerns have risen regarding whose culture is being learned through English, and how this has an impact on a person’s linguistic and cultural identity.

One problematic component underlying these concerns is the concept of essentialism, which characterizes the belief that the core quality of a cultural or national group is unalterable. This chapter explores how essentialist views affect the English language classroom. Phillipson (1992) states, “many of the arguments used to promote English internationally are suspect” (p. 8). As a result, the pedagogical implications of English language teaching need to be politicized. Politicizing the classroom involves critically analyzing how and what is taught. Teaching English is bound in its historical sociopolitical baggage, which enters the classroom through textbooks, curriculum design, and the teachers themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to view the classroom from a critical cosmopolitan perspective and understand how both teachers and learners approach the setting. Moreover, adopting this perspective contests assumptions that people from different sociocultural backgrounds are unable to achieve competency in English in the same way as a first language English speaker.

In the first main section of this chapter, literature related to discussions of why and how culture should be addressed in the English language classroom is presented. In the second main section, the applicability of these teaching strategies are analyzed from both teacher and student perspectives.

## **4.2 LOCATING CULTURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS**

As illustrated in the previous chapters, the demand for English is rising despite concerns that the spread of English is leading to a loss of local language and cultures. Some theorists view this motivation as one that is uncritical or based on false hope that simply knowing English will lead to success (Pennycook, 1994: 307). The significance and relevance of such assumptions and the realization that learning English cannot be separated from its social and cultural contexts (Boreham and Morgan, 2008: 72) are further explored in this section.

Literature exploring the reasons behind the need to interrogate the teaching of English is presented in the first main section. The second section examines how culture infiltrates the classroom. The final section discusses how to address culture in class.

### ***4.2.1 Problematizing English Language Learning and Teaching***

The need to problematize teaching English stems from the premise that language is not neutral. Therefore, regarding language as something that is culture-free and value-free does not account for the underlying ideology from the perspectives of both the learners and the teachers. However, even if teaching English cannot be isolated from global and local events, the objective of teaching English should not be forgotten. It is presumptuous to think that the learners are not thinking about these concepts and that they are passively learning without critically engaging with the material. It is “the appropriation by the people of the products offered (imposed) by the dominant culture in order to create oppositional or alternative meanings, identities, and pleasures. In doing so, the agency and inventiveness of subordinated cultures are highlighted” (Rogers, 2006: 484). This type of reaction to English language learning is evident in the data in this study. Through attitudes towards English, students are interrogating the impact that the language has on their lives. The students are involved in the learning process; the way they think and interact with and within their environment in itself contributes to the power relations in the classroom (Jäger, 2001: 38). This form of contesting the environment once again demonstrates the capabilities of language learners and suggests that their participation, or lack of, in the classroom could be representative of their beliefs towards the language. What remains problematic is that “we tend to see a one-way flow of knowledge from the West to language classrooms in less developed

countries through textbooks, theories, and teaching practices” (Spolsky and Hult, 2011: 214). Therefore, these avenues of cultural transmission need to be investigated.

One major point of contention is the ideology that is transmitted via textbooks that are produced in center-based countries. Phillipson (1992) particularly views the control over the market as yet another method to spread linguistic imperialism. Kumaravadivelu (2008) calls for a reassessment of teaching materials in order to make them more culturally appropriate since “textbooks are not a neutral medium; they represent cultural values, beliefs and attitudes” (p. 114). In being designed by the ‘center,’ some believe that the content of the books disseminates the hegemonic ideals of the West, which perpetuate its powerful status. However, I contend that if this is truly a concern of the educational institute, then measures could be taken to either censor the portions that are culturally inappropriate or compose their own textbooks to ensure that the content is suitable for the environment. Employing censorship, however, gives the educational institute the power to decide what is appropriate or inappropriate for learners. Even if this method is followed, something that is inoffensive in their mind might be offensive to some of the learners who use the materials. Consequently, the efforts to satisfy everyone may still not be achieved since the idea of what is culturally appropriate varies from person to person.

Writing textbooks regionally to suit the local culture and also represent the local variety of English may be a more suitable solution. However, producing such a text still cannot ensure that everyone will be satisfied since what is determined culturally appropriate varies among people. For example, Al-Issa’s (2005) study of English instruction in Oman reveals that the textbooks used to teach English have been locally published. Al-Issa (2005) claims this is a method the government uses to ensure that national customs survive; he says “control over the minds of the students is necessary for effective transmission of the selective traditions and for producing domesticated natives” (ibid: 267). Furthermore, he relates Freire’s (1974) ‘banking concept’ to the education system in Oman “whereby teachers ‘deposit’ knowledge taken from the dominant culture in the minds of their students, which is particularly the case in Oman ... Access to English is confined to the classroom parameters and to the school texts” (ibid.). This example illustrates how in Oman, the curriculum is controlled. Therefore, learning is guided with the intention of preventing the deterioration of local cultures and traditions.

It will be quite difficult to find educational materials that are created based on an ideology that is suitable to everybody. Regardless of how a curriculum (including textbooks and teaching strategies) is created or implemented, there is no guarantee that all students or teachers will find it agreeable. As demonstrated in the example about textbooks in Oman, the materials are streamlined based on the idea that the local culture needs to be protected. However, not all Omanis may share this idea. What this scenario highlights is how complex it is to decide how to

address culture and cultural representation in the classroom. This will be further discussed in the next section.

#### **4.2.2 Addressing Culture in Class**

The link between language, culture, and identity is complex and is not something that can simply be taught. The multiple layers of a person's identity and how this relates to the way they use language and perceive culture is not an easy concept to capture. Moreover, a person's identity evolves based on experiences, which are "produced in the context of diverse relations of power, operating at the level of interaction between people, and in the context of broader social, political, and economic processes" (Norton and Early, 2011: 422). Understanding culture has to go beyond asking people to explain or share their own cultural experiences with others. While this does broaden one's awareness of the diversity among people, comprehending the complexity that underlies culture is not that simple. A deeper acceptance and appreciation of difference needs to be established without imposing explanations of how or why a person behaves a certain way. "There needs to be a withdrawal from imposing definitions on the Periphery – to give space to decentred understandings" (Holliday, 2011: 27).

Kumaravadivelu (2003) and Pennycook (1999) advocate capitalizing on the experiences of students in order to enrich the classroom environment. While Pennycook primarily focuses on using students' sociopolitical backgrounds to create a critical awareness of where they stand in society, Kumaravadivelu provides a broader overview of how the English language teacher can provide learning opportunities of the students. Pennycook (1999) presents a rather negative view of the relationship between learning English and the social status of students. He focuses on the fact that:

[w]e live now amid a vast number of visual and graphic associations between English and modernization [] English is linked to processes of modernization not only as the most modern of languages, but also through its supposed role as the means of social and material change. (Pennycook, 1999: 6)

Though the effects of modernization may be positive, Pennycook (1999) suggests that "the role of English in potentially changing people's lives must be seen in the context of the potential harms it may bring to other languages, and the role it may play in the reproduction of inequality" (p. 6). His view of the effects of trying to learn a new language and explore new opportunities does not encourage people to be proactive in taking charge of their lives in order to attempt to reach their goals. In fact, he seems to believe that to rely on or promote individual agency is naïve as "a view of individual agency and choice fails to account for social, cultural, political and economic forces that compromise and indeed produce such choices" (ibid.: 7).

While Pennycook (ibid.: 8) continues to promote the necessity “to go beyond a general respect for diversity and instead view access to education and other domains of use of the mother tongue as a fundamental human right,” he neglects to validate the fact that people do have a choice in the matter of which schools they want to send their children to and what type of education they want their children to receive. Moreover, it is most likely that the demand for English language education is what is driving the development and promotion of English schools. Perhaps if the demand of education in the local language was stronger, changes would be made to accommodate the people’s choice. Surely the type of schools that are prevalent in a country is representative of local demands. Choosing to learn English is not a consequence of ignoring local and global sociopolitical factors in which English language teaching is embedded. The complexity of human identity is a point that is emphasized by Giddens:

If we do not see that all human agents stand in a position of appropriation in relation to the social world, which they constitute and reconstitute in their actions, we fail on an empirical level to grasp the nature of human empowerment. Modern social life impoverishes individual action, yet furthers the appropriation of new possibilities; it is alienating, yet at the same time, characteristically, human beings react against social circumstances which they find oppressive. (1991: 175)

Living in a modern world involves making choices and creating an identity based on the vast number of opportunities and information available. It is necessary to acknowledge that “every culture is heterogeneous, i.e. it is composed of a variety of subcultures, and every situation elicits a variety of responses, even with the same national culture” (Kramsch, 1998: 50). Therefore, by encouraging resistance, in a class of 20 learners, there could be 20 different perspectives. Pennycook is worried about how English, which carries the implication of certain discourses, is being forced upon people (1994: 301). Consequently, he believes it is essential for education systems to teach English in a way that “takes into account both the history of the imposition of the language and the current conditions and implications of its expansion” in order to challenge the idea that “learning English is a natural, neutral and beneficial process” (ibid.). While the learning of English can affect the identity of learners, the way it affects them varies from person to person. Many learners have already accepted that the spread of English may not be ‘natural’ or ‘neutral,’ but this does not negate the fact that learning English has been found to be ‘beneficial.’ As demonstrated in chapter two, the belief in the importance of English, especially when contextualized within the movement of globalization, seems to outweigh any other conflicts that people may have when it comes to wanting to learn the language. These are struggles that individuals confront and negotiate on a daily basis. It is naïve to think that by simply attending an English class, the student has given in to a hegemonic ideal.

It is not easy to balance encouraging forms of resistance and rigorously opposing change. What some may view as an act of cultural protection others may view as an infringement on their rights. There is also the possibility that the students will not react favorably to locally produced texts and not view them as valid teaching materials. With the many variables that go into compiling a textbook and the multiple perspectives and attitudes of the receivers of the information, it is difficult to come up with a solution that will suit everybody. However, if there is truly dissatisfaction with the imported teaching materials, then some effort has to be made to rectify the situation. Importing foreign textbooks and expecting them to completely conform to local ideals is unreasonable – especially when local ideas are not homogenous. I believe language learning is a process that needs to be flexible. Moreover, language teaching needs to reflect this flexibility. Spada and Lightbown (2008) note that:

Language acquisition is not an *event* that occurs in an instant or as a result of exposure to a language form, a language lesson, or corrective feedback. It is an evolving and dynamic phenomenon that is perhaps better characterized by the word *development* (suggesting ongoing change) than by the word *acquisition* (complete and irrevocable possession). (p. 182)

Therefore, interaction and negotiation between student, teacher, and context is necessary.

In order to address the widespread use of English among various communities, Kumaravadivelu suggests that “in the interest of feasibility and usability, it would be necessary to target a cluster of communities, the cultural norms of which may have an impact on the practice of everyday life of a given group of learners” (2008: 174). Kumaravadivelu is making quite an assumption about what kind of culture each learner associates with as well as what kinds of cultures have a significant impact on learners. The cultural norms that are chosen to be significant may not be seen as something that needs addressing in the eyes of the learner as is revealed in this study. Moreover, it cannot be guaranteed that the cultural norms are applicable to all members of that community. There are too many assumptions being made when trying to address variety by being too specific.

Modiano (2009) echoes Kumaravadivelu’s (2008) concerns. Given the rise of multiple varieties of English, it is suggested that teachers now attempt to:

promote awareness of the many varieties of the language for use in multicultural settings without presupposing that AmE and BrE are the standards by which all other varieties are measured. They can, as well, select texts and language-learning materials from cultures throughout the world and in this way promote cultural diversity as something normative. (Modiano, 2009: 67)

Promoting the awareness of how English is evolving in the world is understandable. However, when Modiano suggests selecting texts from cultures around the world, there are potentially two main risks involved. First of all, it does not resolve the issue of power inequalities. Teachers



and/or curriculum developers would have to decide which cultures to cover in class. By trying to be inclusive, it will still be difficult to avoid being exclusive. The second problem has to do with addressing which aspect of that culture should be portrayed. It will be difficult to assure that the representations of a culture are not mere perpetuations of a common stereotype. Given the complexity of cultures and the multiplicity of identities, it will be almost impossible to promote awareness without reducing localities to essentialist representations of the local culture. Modiano (2009) suggests that:

the best we can do at this point in time is to insist that the educational norm, the model learners attempt to mimic, reflects the international functionality of the language, so as to provide L2 speakers an opportunity to engage the issue of identity at some distance from the hegemonic Anglo-American mindset. (p. 70)

Modiano makes a good point about emphasizing the ‘international functionality of the language.’ However, it is not clear what he means when he asks that the model should “mimic” this international functionality. If he is suggesting that elements of varieties of English should be incorporated into the curriculum, then it is still unclear who will choose the language to teach. If the most common varieties of English are represented, then it simply perpetuates the situation currently at hand, and the lesser common varieties are not given a chance to be heard.

Perhaps a more inclusive and thorough mode of instruction would be to promote understanding about the way the English language is changing and focus on strategies that will help students decipher meanings when they encounter a style of English that they are not familiar with or do not understand. If a primary focus of learning English is really about intercultural communication, then it should focus more on the elements of how to communicate intercultural, rather than isolating specific aspects of a culture. As Sen notes, there would be:

serious problems with the moral and social claims of multiculturalism if it were taken to insist that a person’s identity must be defined by his or her community or religion, over-looking all the other affiliations a person has (varying from language, class, and social relations to political views and civil roles), and through giving automatic priority to inherited religion or tradition over reflection and choice. (Sen, 2006: 160)

Therefore, one of the main focuses of language instruction should be to not only promote intercultural communication but also be conscious of Othering discourses. These strategies are not restricted to learners of English. As Yano (2009) asserts, “Native as well as non-native speakers need to learn pragmatic strategies of communication in professional fields and across cultures” (p. 251). One of the other concerns with English language classrooms is actually the Othering discourses that are prevalent but not necessarily addressed or recognized. Montgomery and McDowell (2009) challenge the idea that international students have certain characteristics that prevent them from being able to effectively work with other students in the United Kingdom (p.

1). This is similar to the perception of students at KU. Several assumptions are made about their competency in English. Although not all students denied that they were only superficially interested in participating and completing coursework, what they also revealed was a complex, multi-layered social dynamic that was going on in their university environment and affecting their lives.

Even if one is not intentionally trying to be discriminatory or prejudiced, word choice and how people are spoken about does matter. Care needs to be taken to ensure that by trying to understand elements of other cultures further stereotypes are not perpetuated. For example, Atkinson (1997) conducted a study to demonstrate that the idea of critical thinking was not unique to Western cultures by examining examples from various ‘cultures’ – Japanese, Chinese, and Native North American. He pointed out that though their culture differs from the mainstream individualistic culture of the United States, elements of critical thinking were evident. While I can see that he is addressing how critical thinking occurs in societies that might not be traditionally seen as ones that are ‘capable’ of critical thought, I would be cautious with this type of tone. For example, he cites research on Native North Americans that have “shown them quite typically unwilling to converse with strangers” (Atkinson, 1997: 84) and he cites an ethnographic study carried out by Harklau (1994) about Chinese immigrant teenagers studying in American high schools. In noting their inhibitions with talking to students who were native speakers one of her subjects explained, “Being quiet is considered polite and intelligent because only the insecure ones need to prove themselves smart by talking loud. For that reason, the school [in Taiwan] wanted students to keep quiet in the classroom” (cited in Atkinson, 1997: 85). While this is a direct quote from a Chinese student, I think it is important to remember that this statement is *this* student’s experience and perception and that just because he explained his perception of the significance of silence, it is not the *only* perception. I fear that using such examples without any contextualization or analysis may prompt some readers to equate this one person’s behavior as a cultural reality for all Chinese students. With this line of thinking, when they encounter a Chinese student who *does* talk and interact with native speakers, then they are seen as an exception. There is “a large proportion of teachers and analysts [who] tend to approach cultural teaching/learning as if it were an exercise in creating a taxonomy of differences between familiar and ‘exotic’ cultures (Guest, 2002: 154). This becomes problematic, as cultures cannot be concretely and discretely bound.

Another example of such a description is Martin’s (2003) article about her experience teaching at a women’s university in the United Arab Emirates. The tone and language in her article had quite an impact on both myself and some of the students in this study, as it was interpreted as being quite judgmental. In her description of her students, she made a distinction

between students who had a good work ethic and who were able to meet the “demands of foreign teachers” because they had Westernized values and the students who were not interested in learning because of “social and religious” parameters that the students chose to follow. Martin, however, did not use the word ‘choice’ rather she said that they were “constraints that restrict the majority of the female population” (2003: 51). She continued to say that students did not have any motivation to learn because of the enormous wealth and the availability of others to do the work for them. Moreover, she found it challenging to implement the curriculum that focuses on “independence and initiative-taking skills” because they were “values that have never been fostered before” and the students were “accustomed to depending utterly on others to handle their needs” (ibid.). The author does not hesitate to associate her interpretations of the students’ behavior to a cultural environment that she assumes does not encourage either critical thinking or hard work.

Although Martin (2003) may be describing what she is seeing around her, her assumption that these actions automatically represent the local culture is discriminatory. She says that the women in her class were “simply unable to proceed when given an assignment in which every step was not spelled out exactly and that often proved too taxing on their concentration skills” (ibid.: 52). She does not hesitate to make a distinction between these behaviors as representing Eastern culture and being inferior to more positive values that she associates with the West. She claims that the women did not read books “other than the Koran or turning the pages of a fashion magazine” and that these behaviors were “difficult for a Westerner to envision” (ibid.). She also claims that the few students who were ‘able’ to analyze, discuss, and debate the subject matter at hand were only able to do so because they had studied abroad. Other than these few, “the educational processes and values Western education espouses were totally unfamiliar” (Martin, 2003: 52). She continues to describe that:

Difficulties arose because students were accustomed only to rote memorization and objective multiple-choice exams. Unable to understand the seriousness of plagiarizing material, they freely copied whatever needed, shared homework, and were unwilling to work alone. Although such interaction may be identified as a cultural adaptation, where survival in an inhospitable land depended on mutual collaboration, this behavior added a further challenging aspect to our Western style teaching. (ibid.)

She says that the students are “accustomed to being spoon-fed, students often treated teachers as paid servants” (ibid.). In her continued description of her experiences in the United Arab Emirates she does not take even a moment to consider what other contextual factors were in play in terms of the student behaviors she was seeing. Rather, she questioned teaching American/British style English when she found the Western values not to correlate with the context in which she was teaching. Throughout her article she does not mention choice or show any indication that these

students are critically thinking in any way, shape, or form. These misconceptions are very similar to observations of university students in Kuwait where there are frustrations about students not taking the course seriously. However, as my data will reveal, much more than what is observed in the classroom occurs in a deeper social context. Martin (2003) links social constraints in the context with the call to prayer as “a constant reminder to the women of their priorities” (p. 52). By making such a statement without any contextualization or analysis it may seem like she is assuming those who are religious will not be able to think critically.

Statements that involve making generalizations or assumptions based on experience may represent something real for the speaker, but this should still be acknowledged within the text. Each text is, of course, subject to interpretation. However, providing contextual background lessens the risk of misinterpretation.

#### **4.2.3 Section 4.2 Summary**

The diverse backgrounds from which English language learners come has necessitated the reevaluation of teaching strategies. The focus of today’s classroom is to create a dynamic, interactive, critical classroom that has roots in democratic learning. Democratic learning here refers to a participatory approach to education whereby students and instructors can work together to capitalize on the educational experience (Gutmann, 1999: 3; Peterson and Knowles, 2009: 40). It is important to acknowledge that people can and do choose to learn English of their own volition. While the origin of English may have been in the West, it does not mean that learners are losing parts of their linguistic or cultural identity through learning English. More importantly, it does not mean that the language is being accepted without critical reflection. To assume otherwise would be a form of prejudice.

### **4.3 TEACHER AND STUDENT REALITIES**

The previous section explored various perspectives on how to manage the way culture and Western-dominated ideologies are transmitted into the classroom. This section more closely explores teacher ideologies and how they penetrate the classroom. Current language teaching pedagogies are encouraging language teachers to “move away from a simplistic equation of nation-culture-language” and focus more on raising an “an awareness of linguistic and cultural complexity in a globalized world where practices and perspectives” (Menard-Warwick, 2008: 619-20). The goal is to raise awareness and decrease the association of any problems teachers may have with students to cultural deficiency, which occurs more frequently than people may realize. Aside from teacher perspectives, factors more pertinent to students’ education experience are addressed in the second half of this section.

### 4.3.1 *Teachers and their Ideologies*

When entering a classroom, teachers come with their own ideologies and perspectives about their identity and role. The way teachers portray themselves in the classroom has a significant impact on the “learning process, and the effectiveness of the teacher is a critical variable in achieving educational goals” (Gibelman and Fast, 2001: 455). The description of this role varies from encouraging students to completely analyze their language teaching environment to holding a reserved opinion about getting involved with classroom and language politics. Moreover, teachers have their own views as to what their role is in the classroom. This perspective is usually developed after considering the context in which they are teaching and how they view their position within that environment. Cohen’s (2008) study about the development of teacher identities demonstrated that they are “produced and reproduced as they are negotiated through social interaction” (p. 81). These identities are shaped by “expectations for conduct that are learned in the process of socialization, and are constantly negotiated as people work to fit what they want with the expectations they encounter” (ibid.: 81-2). Despite some theorists’ belief that the context should be questioned and challenged, the reality is that questioning authority is not always possible without severe consequences. Instructors need to consider the potential consequences of their, especially when for some it can be as serious as losing their job. Therefore, in some cases, the most teachers can do is demonstrate an awareness of any inequalities or questionable practices in their setting. The awareness and consciousness that these teachers show when analyzing their environment demonstrate that their identities “reflected the practices they felt were central to their commitment to such a demanding job. These findings contribute to our understanding of how teachers understand, define and accomplish their professional identities” (Cohen, 2008: 80).

Educators need to move away from essentialist ideas about how learners from specific contexts approach studying. While there may be some cultural roots from which certain behaviors are thought to stem, such as Chinese students’ inhibition when it comes to challenging authority (Abbot, 2003), “Westerners should not regard that failure to challenge as merely an illustration of quaint eastern culture in action” (ibid.: 14-15). Abbott (2003) notes that this is also something that “some other cultures discourage” (p. 17-18). Rather than saying there are some ‘cultures’ that discourage questioning, I would change this to say there are some ‘contexts’ in which questioning is not appropriate due to certain factors – and these factors could be time constraints, curriculum constraints, teachers’ inhibitions to discuss matters, and so forth. While the author affirms that lack of questioning should not be connected to a cultural ‘type’, he also needs to acknowledge that there are factors beyond culture that come into play. Similarly, Badger and MacDonald (2007) mention Confucian education cultures as “being characterised by the foregrounding of and

deference towards the figure of the teacher ... this contrasts with some of the views of Western educational cultures where ‘teaching is process or discovery oriented’ (p. 220). Again, focusing on a specific aspect of Chinese culture and stretching it to encompass certain types of student behavior can have an unfavorable outcome. As mentioned above, it is the context in which one is teaching that should be considered. Even within the West there are different teaching strategies and approaches to education. These strategies vary from class to class, depending on the teacher, the assignment, the class, and a whole host of other factors without even considering national or religious cultural parameters.

The tendency to associate problems in the classroom with cultural problems persists.

Montgomery notes:

The idea of culture is one thing that is used when talking about international students, and the phrase ‘it’s a cultural thing’ is often used to explain difficulties in interaction or international students’ approaches to study. Culture is often cited as the concept that illuminates the differences in diverse student groups, but it is a concept that is rarely interrogated. (Montgomery, 2010: xv)

One point that is frequently brought up is students’ lack of ability to engage in critical thinking. Some researchers think that students are unable to complete critical thinking tasks because it is not something that is practiced in their culture (Zoller, Ben-Chaim, Ron et al., 2000: 572). However, teacher claims that students cannot engage in critical thinking probably do not consider what is occurring outside the classroom. As the respondents in this study reveal, what is seen in the classroom is just one part of their lives. Outside the classroom they have to deal with a whole host of issues that require them to be critical thinkers. Therefore, the problem may be that teachers do not acknowledge this added complexity because they are not aware that it exists.

#### ***4.3.2 Teachers Working within Parameters***

An issue raised about teachers not engaging with their students was related to teachers’ own lack of knowledge or ability to address issues that come up in the classroom. “Teachers comment that they often respond to school based problems in ways which they consider to be inappropriate ... usually because of frustration or other forms of heightened emotion” (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg et al., 2011: 100). The researchers also found that the way teachers react is also a manifestation of how they view their context. Therefore, frustrations with policy, curriculum, and so forth are taken out on the students. Teachers need to move from tacit knowledge to self-regulation – knowing what is correct is not enough; acting upon that knowledge is necessary. This should be a part of the teacher training process. Furthermore, Zembylas (2010) discovered that teachers found it difficult to “imagine alternative possibilities” when they faced obstacles in the classroom that occurred as a result of communication barriers between them and

foreign students. Thus, “using discomforting feelings productively through dialogue and emotional negotiation, some teachers were able to transform experiences of frustration, anxiety, and ambivalence into one of possibility” (Zembylas, 2010: 714). These perceptions need to be proactively addressed so that teachers have more tools to work with when they encounter an obstacle in the classroom. Understanding that there are strategies to address behavior that may seem ‘foreign’ to them, without assuming it is because they are dealing with ‘foreigners’, may be a way to help minimize Othering discourses that arise in the classroom.

Another aspect of a language classroom is evaluation and assessment of progress. Troudi, Coombe, and Al-Hamly (2009) researched the role that teachers in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait played in terms of compiling and administering assessments in higher education. They found that “teachers’ views on the nature of assessment were informed by their knowledge of the field of language learning and teaching and by the contextual milieu and sociopolitical factors that govern their employment conditions” (p. 546). Context affects testing procedures. Testing was arranged based on instructors’ interpretation of the social and cultural practices, which were intricately tied up with the sociopolitical makeup of the university. This complexity emphasizes that teachers cannot be judged on what they are doing in the classroom without considering their context. There are several ideal teaching practices, but in reality, they just might not be applicable (*ibid.*).

Teachers are caught between what they need to do to carry out their job and what they recognize as the potential of their students. Blaisdell (2003) recounts the challenges of marking student papers based on a strict criteria. He realizes that although his student papers are grammatically imperfect, they are conceptually rich and sophisticated. However, due to curriculum constraints and the guidelines of the program he is working in, this creativity is not rewarded. This is the reality of his situation (Blaisdell, 2003). The main issue is that pedagogical theories may be advocated and promoted, but for teachers, the “challenge is to transform global theory daily into local practice” (Wink, 2009: 327). Theories about pedagogy, classroom practices, and student realities all need to be contextualized into our classroom and we need to acknowledge what is realistically possible to effectively teach.

Kumaravadivelu (2008) states “language teachers face distinct challenges and opportunities to help learners construct their own subjectivity and self-identity” (p. 46). However, it has been found that “not all of us are entirely comfortable with the idea of doing this. Many teachers, for example, do not see it as their role either to radicalize their students or to disturb their carefully sedimented subjectivities” (O’Regan and MacDonald, 2007: 269). It is not a question of failing to support critical thinking or ignoring the complexities involved. In fact, it is actually because of those complexities and varying subjectivities that this type of advocacy is

problematic. In some situations, the cultural norm may be to *not* question. If this were the case, then it triggering debates would run counter to local customs. It cannot be guaranteed that the line of thought and critical perspective that is being encouraged can avoid being interpreted as an imposition of certain cultural standards or expectations of behavior. Nor can it be guaranteed that what is being taught is the correct focus of the curriculum. Moreover, how are we:

supposed to know that the truth that we wish to prevail and to instill in our students is the *correct* one. More pointedly, on the basis of what privileged insight are we able to make that claim? For we are claiming privilege here, the privilege that we are able to determine for others what the truth is, about power, about suffering, about difference, about the ‘emerging global barbarism’ around us. (O’Regan and MacDonald, 2007: 270 emphasis in original)

In trying to stimulate a global perspective, it is important that teachers do not ‘claim privilege’ by suggesting they know what is best for ‘others.’ It cannot be presumed that the teacher’s culture and ideology is ‘right.’ Moreover, the “assumption of postmethod proponents is that all teachers by default are qualified or willing to conduct a postmethod class with all its social, cognitive, political, and cultural requirements” (Akbari, 2008: 648). However, the context in which teachers are working needs to be considered. Many teachers “are often not willing to participate in any professional development that would task them with extra responsibilities” (ibid.). This is especially because many teachers “are wary of a critical orientation in their classes because they do not yet know the red lines and taboos” (ibid.). The teachers in this study frequently mentioned this perspective.

The idea of pushing language teachers to also become culture teachers is becoming more and more popular. This has also placed focus on building intercultural competence. Risager (2005) distinguishes between cultural and intercultural competence in that the “former involves knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding a specific culture, whereas the latter goes further and encompasses ‘knowledge, skills and attitudes at the interface between several cultural areas’” (p. viii). In order to develop their intercultural competence, teachers have to be aware of the way in which they are culturally determined, rather than taking for granted that their perspective is the natural one. An interculturally competent teacher has to be able to analyse the relationships between different cultures and eventually mediate between those present in her classroom (Bhabha, 1994: 220; Byram, 2000: 10). This type of classroom is “founded on the premise that students’ diverse cultural backgrounds can be used in the classroom to enhance learning, rather than constituting a deficit on the part of the learner” (Llurda and Lasagabaster, 2010: 329). This diverse background applies even to students from the same country.

Identity is shaped by our interactions with our context and environment – it can vary from day to day, from situation to situation. We play an active role in creating our identity and determining where we belong. “We identify, or are being identified, as belonging to socially



organized categories, roles, and so on. It is also participative. It is the lived experience of belonging that constitutes who we are. Therefore, identification is both relational and experiential” (Tsui, 2007: 660). Tsui points out the interactive element of identity formation. Although individuals have a role in developing their identity, this process is also influenced by how others perceive them. Therefore, interpretations of their role in their society and family contexts are contributing factors. Teachers do not necessarily always recognize the impact of these influences on student attitudes and approaches to learning.

Nault (2006) believes that “English teaching professionals need to rethink the answers to such questions as whose culture should be taught, what goals should guide culture teaching, and how culture-related course materials should be designed and selected” (p. 314). While a reevaluation of course materials is necessary, the method of implementing these findings should still be investigated. Very basic questions regarding who will decide the culture that will be taught still cannot be answered. At a time when there are millions of users of English coming from diverse of backgrounds, it would perhaps be more beneficial if the focus is put on negotiation strategies that emphasize techniques to help speakers interpret and decipher meanings.

Adding this type of discussion to the classroom context can help engage students with the material and also enlighten teachers to the extent of their students’ capabilities. Zink and Dyson (2009) note that these preconceived notions about ability have an impact on the classroom because “educators reduce learning possibilities to narrowly defined outcomes when learning through experience is contingent and contested terrain and often located in contexts shaped and defined by the need to achieve specific learning outcomes” (p. 166). This is unfortunate because this interferes with the potential to make the most out of classroom interactions – teachers refrain from pushing students to reach their potential because it is too challenging. By opening up discussion, what may be discovered is that there really is no need to adapt a curriculum to a supposed learning style that is associated with a particular country or culture, as was found in Wong’s (2004: 165) study.

This type of discussion also opens up the scope to work with students to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of their language program. Yang’s (2009) article underscores the importance of language teachers taking the time to evaluate the effectiveness of their own programs. The author found that despite positive responses towards the evaluation of language programs, “in the real world of evaluation practice, making evaluation useful and getting evaluations actually used pose major challenges” (Yang, 2009: 78). Conducting evaluations in a structured manner provides the opportunity to assess whether or not the program or teaching strategy is working and then decide what can be done to improve the experience for both teachers and students. Therefore, it is not only reflecting on what happens in the classroom that is

important, but also designing and implementing a plan to rectify problems. “A related point is that practitioners who wish to investigate or reflect on aspects of their own teaching – particularly aspects that are potentially contentious – do not necessarily have access to the formal mechanisms that provide authorization or support for research” (Nelson, 2011: 479). Teachers are not always able to address or discuss the issues they would like to because they are unsure of the local parameters. Thus any type of classroom engagement should still be approached with local sensitivities in mind. This does not, however, mean that perceived cultural restrictions are actually there. Pushing the boundaries of the classroom may involve treading carefully, but it does not necessarily mean that all areas are off-limits.

### **4.3.3 Student Demands**

Most of the literature reviewed focuses on the concept of providing a fair and wholesome teaching atmosphere from which students can emerge as engaged citizens who are aware of the complexities of the world and in particular the significance of learning English. Although this goal of working towards building critical citizens is commendable, it is irrelevant if the people wanting to learn English are not on the same page. Ideally, “all students should be encouraged by institutions to view themselves as being part of an international community, both whilst at university and beyond” (Montgomery, 2008b: 3). The context of Kuwait is interesting when considering the relationship between the teachers and students. Although teachers sometimes complain about the students’ lack of enthusiasm in class, it seems like the students are the ones who hold the actual power to drive the direction of the course. As a consequence of the way the university is structured, and the amount of influence the student government has on changing policies (more influence than teachers or even some administrators), it seems like there is a shift in the balance of power – the teachers are at the mercy of the local system. Even if the local system encourages and promotes critical thinking and independent work, it does not always support students’ endeavors in such tasks. It would be helpful if the university environment could “provide a space for both students and staff to include critical reflections on their own backgrounds. This may make it clear that their socio-cultural contexts may be relevant and indeed crucial to the curriculum they are studying” (Montgomery, 2008b: 4). This would also help contribute to a more wholesome classroom environment. However, in the end it is the current context and parameters that guide the structure of the class.

Institutions build their courses to attract students. Most of these courses focus on improving a certain aspect of communication – English for traveling, English for business studies, and so forth. When students enroll in a course based on its description and objectives, they are approaching the class with a certain expectation. These expectations and the students’ desired

objective from the language class should be acknowledged. Normally, within an English language classroom, students are focused on one goal: to learn the language. When the objective of a course is to teach English, or a course has been advertised to help students become fluent speakers of English, then that is the reason why students enroll in the class. Students have certain expectations of what they will be taught in a class that they have enrolled in. Kumaravadivelu (2008) asserts that:

in the current globalized environment, even if L2 learners do not go to the world, the world will come to them. Therefore, it is beneficial for them to be aware of the beliefs and practices of a broader network of cultural communities, not just those of the TL community. Such an extended focus beyond the TL community is clearly necessary in order to help them develop global cultural consciousness. (p. 174)

While I agree with Kumaravadivelu, I do not understand how this type of interaction will be relevant in a class where students have come to learn the language. Instead of receiving the information that they have enrolled for, they will be receiving general information about cultures of the world. Unless the students have signed up for a course entitled ‘the implications of the spread of English’ or something similar, they have come to learn the language regardless of the implications. Moreover, it is quite presumptuous to believe that students are not already aware of what learning the English language entails. Especially since, as the data will reveal, students determine their engagement with English based on their interpretation of the context; therefore, what the teachers see in class is not a real representation of student capabilities. It cannot be assumed that the students are simply passive recipients instead of active participants in their surroundings and in what they are learning. Therefore, when researchers like Modiano (2009) claim that if “one attempts to mimic an idealized native speaker” then they become “removed from the true essence of individual identity,” then they are suggesting that the learner is losing a part of her own identity through learning a new language (p. 65). This type of perspective is very narrow-minded. Identities are continuously evolving. A person does not lose her identity when she learns something new. The new information, talent, or skill is incorporated into her identity, thus creating an ‘updated version.’ The attempt to be inclusive and acknowledge differences that may exist among people is commendable, but then it is being assumed that the students want their ‘differences’ to be acknowledged. For example, when it is recommended that Muslim educators work on designing materials that are suitable for Muslim students who are learning English, it is being assumed that Muslim students want this type of text (Nault, 2006: 322). This then brings up the question of who has the authority to choose what goes into the text to represent being Muslim. Moreover, there is the assumption that all Muslim students want to read this type of text. This may be completely untrue and in fact be seen as patronizing. It would be more beneficial, in my

opinion, to teach students how to react when they hear/see/find out something that they disagree with or are uncomfortable with.

Knowledge of English has been associated with academic and professional success and is viewed by many as an essential component of progress and achievement. Keeping up to date with the latest research and technology is a motivating factor mentioned by several researchers (e.g. Malallah, 2000: 23; Oikonomidis, 2003: 56; Csizér and Kormos, 2008: 38). Furthermore, pressure from the academic environment has an impact on how learning is approached. With high stakes contexts, such as the language program at KU, the outlook is much more pragmatic. Therefore, the primary goal is to learn how to “communicate in a practical and functional fashion and achieve the desired outcome” (Björkman, 2010: 1). In analyzing attitudes towards learning English, the context and reason behind the actual learning of English was a factor. For example, Malallah (2000) found that students of *Sharia* at KU, those who were studying Islamic law, had the least motivation for learning English. She clarified these attitudes were not because of a negative attitude towards the language itself, but rather because “those students do not have a real need for English, neither in their present studies nor in their future careers” (p. 36). However, she also found that the students who intended to carry out postgraduate studies abroad or who needed English for their future careers were more positive towards studying English” (ibid.: 39). This motivation behind learning is an important aspect to consider.

#### **4.3.4 Student Criticality**

The principle goal of language teaching is “the demonstration by learners of some form of competence in the language which is being taught” (MacDonald, Badger, and Dasli, 2006: 252). However, with the diverse contexts that learners come from, some theorists have difficulty accepting the idea that “the performance of language learners should correspond in some way to the performance of an ideal ‘native speaker’” (ibid.: 254). This is problematic because they feel that this ideology “fails to cater for communication in English that might take place only between ‘non-native’ speakers” (ibid.). Critiquing the idea of measuring achievement against native speaker norms is one thing, but I think this type of argument becomes problematic when one considers the reality of a situation. Learners are there to learn, and traditionally, assessments are carried out to determine the level of proficiency of students. I am not sure how these theorists propose to assess students when they wish to accommodate for varieties of English. Within a classroom it is possible to have several varieties of English as well as different levels of proficiency. How can a realistic proposal be put forth to accommodate such diversity? I think the labels of native-speaker and non-native speaker carry so much baggage with them that in many cases, the basic point of understanding and communication is bypassed and forgotten altogether.

These same researchers recognize that “correct grammatical usage does not always appear to be necessary for successful communication to take place” and they present the communication strategies that some learners use to negotiate meaning as a justification for straying from a standard form of English by which to assess progress (ibid.: 254-5). Although I completely agree that communication strategies are important for mutual understanding, when it comes to designing a classroom curriculum, I do not think this can be easily applied. Moreover, by restricting this assumption to only non-native speakers, there is a supposition that misunderstandings do not happen between native speakers of a language. This impression also needs to be addressed.

The driving force behind a person’s attitudes and behavior comes from a combination of and interplay between the individual and her social environment. It is through interpretation of the environment and experience that one develops an understanding of their priorities, whether it is their family, their religion, their social peer group, their nationality, and so forth. Moreover,

individuals determine their approaches to particular situations with reference to cultural practices in which they have previously participated. The creative role of individuals in relating one situation to another is supported by social interaction in which social partners suggest connections. (Rogoff, 2008: 57)

Through this perspective, what is considered is not just the immediate environment, but also their position in the world. Moreover, the immediate contextual variables shift; they are not constant. Therefore, behaviors/actions will change depending on the context one is in. Meaning is always negotiated according to the context. In addition, as revealed through the student voices in this study, when it comes to the educational context, a different type of negotiation occurs depending on what the students expect from the course. In this type of situation the students’ academic success in terms of earning a good grade takes priority, thereby, affecting their behavior and perhaps shielding/hiding the ability to think critically.

With globalization blurring boundaries and increased travel and interaction among people, interculturality is perhaps a characteristic of being a global citizen as illustrated by the respondents in this study. This process of interculturality involves drawing on “resources and process of cultures with which they are familiar but also those they may not typically be associated with in their interactions with others” (Young and Sercombe, 2010: 181). Having to deal with new situations “can also lead to innovation and the adoption and adaptation of features derived from other cultural contexts” (ibid.). The students in this study demonstrate a high level of interculturality as they work to incorporate elements from different countries, and even different aspects of their own country, into their way of life.

#### 4.3.5 Section 4.3 Summary

Even if every person in the world wore the same clothes, ate the same food, and even spoke the same language, each person would still be different because of the interpretations of the experiences one goes through. Amartya Sen (2006) discusses the importance of acknowledging plural identities and states that it:

requires clarity of thinking about the recognition of our multiple commitments and affiliations, even though this may tend to be drowned by the flood of unifocal advocacy of just one perspective or another. Decolonization of the mind demands a firm departure from the temptation of solitary identities and priorities. (p. 99)

Confronting the forces of globalization has caused us to question who we want to be. With each decision we make, we are adding to the process of constructing our identities. In some instances, cosmopolitanism has been associated with “a degree of social privilege – the sense of a cultural elite with the means to rise above the petty concerns of the everyday” (Tomlinson, 1999: 189). However, this type of perspective “almost inevitably denigrates local lived experience and practice *by implication* as somehow narrow, benighted, parochial, conservative, incestuous, ill informed, lacking the broader picture and so forth” (ibid. emphasis in original). Being cosmopolitan is more than just adapting or adjusting to one (Western) point-of-view. Like the movement of products with globalization, mutual exchange is involved. Moreover, people have the ability to choose how they want to portray themselves, just like governments have the ability to choose which commercial products they wish to import or export. Despite claims that globalization is pushing the world towards cultural hegemony, Yan (2002) has found that:

anthropological studies of transnationalism have shown that the merging global culture is marked by diversity rather than uniformity because local cultures continue to yield new emergent social entities, new adaptive forms brought into being in order to pursue survival and reproduction both through and in spite of the specific work of capitalism. (p. 34)

Globalization may be providing an element of uniformity, but societies and people are still evolving in their own way and at their own pace. Moreover, being a cosmopolitan citizen involves deciding how engaged one wants to be with her environment (Dobson, 2006: 182).

In trying to promote a more global view of the world, it is important to ensure that it is still not one worldview that is being seen as ‘correct.’ Tomlinson (1999) says that:

cosmopolitans certainly need to be freed from the narrow constraints and prejudices of their home culture, to be open to the diversity of global cultures and to be disposed to understand the cultural perspective of the other. But they also – perhaps more importantly – need to have a sense of wider cultural *commitment* – of belonging to the world as a whole. (p. 186 emphasis in original)

However, to see a person’s home culture as having ‘narrow constraints and prejudices’ is assuming that there is something deficient about that culture. This is a risky line of thought and a

very essentialist perspective. Even subtle opinions along these lines are forms of Othering. Being open to diversity means being open to the idea of possibility. Being cosmopolitan should not involve changing who you are. It should be about deciding how to adapt to shifting life circumstances. Being a citizen of the world should focus on:

having a cultural disposition which is not limited to the concerns of the immediate locality, but which recognizes global belonging, involvement and responsibility and can integrate these broader concerns into everyday life practices. (ibid.)

It is important to remember that “culture is not static; it grows out of reverence for selected customs and habits” (Wang, 2007: 84). Culture represents practices that are still carried out today. However, it should not be surprising to see cultures evolve as each person/family adapts what they feel is important or significant to their traditions. In some cases traditions are not carried on at all. In the end, it is each individual that constructs her culture because “at the source of culture, there is social agency: a group of people with freedom and creativity” (ibid). Allwright (2003) notes:

we may *want* to approach new situations armed with our global principles, but it may be our actual ‘practices, the things we consider most context-bound, that we carry around most easily from situation to situation, and not our ‘principles’. Our principles may be far more context-bound than we would like to think. (p. 116 emphasis in original)

Therefore, even if students are aware and accepting of varieties of English, their attitudes in the classroom may reject learning these varieties if they have more goal-oriented objectives in the class, such as obtaining a high grade.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

In today’s globalized world, it is practically impossible to escape being culturally aware and critical of one’s environment. I think that the theories advocating the spread of varieties of English are trying to be more accommodating, but by establishing so many rules and criteria, and by trying to include ‘everybody’, they are negating the universality of English. Language and culture *are* inextricably connected. Bangladesh is a perfect example of such a country that sought independence from Pakistan primarily because of the national language, Bengali. However, this does not mean that learning Bengali perpetuates a specific mentality and identity. Language, although an important part of one’s identity, is not the only maker of a person’s cultural affiliation or identity.

During my time at Kuwait University, I have taught hundreds of young Kuwaiti students. Despite them sharing a nationality, there were so many other factors that distinguished one student from the next – conservative, liberal, religious, non-religious, cosmopolitan background,

Bedouin background, and so forth. How can I call one issue into question and encourage critical thinking – about their situation – when it may not be an issue? This is also assuming that something is ‘wrong’ with the system that they are in. The situation of the teacher also has to be considered. As an expatriate working in Kuwait, I am not protected by any local laws. If any statement or action is judged to be insensitive or offensive, there could be dire consequences. Such realities should not be overlooked. This type of context illustrates the complexity of the dynamics within a classroom.

With globalization, self-reflection and analysis are inevitable consequences. As a result, individuals are automatically analyzing their environment and making decisions about how they want to live their life and how they want to see their world. If a person/country decides to continue carrying out their traditional practices, it should not be automatically assumed that this is because they are anti-globalization or that they are ‘deficient’ in some manner. People are making choices and decisions based on all the given factors around them and their personal circumstances. Using a particular language, living in a particular country, and prescribing to a particular lifestyle are all elements of a person’s choice. It is not the role of English teachers to go into a classroom and push students into further thought, particularly when they are capable of doing so themselves. Ultimately, why people study English and what style of English they choose to learn is their prerogative.



## CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This research set out to investigate the role of English in the lives of students at KU. To accomplish this, a qualitative approach was used to unravel the multiple layers of the context. This framework provided the flexibility needed to deeply explore the research setting. The methodology enabled me to investigate the variances in student opinions towards learning English as well as their views on the effect of globalization on linguistic and cultural identity. Directly engaging with the participants allowed the development of a thick description through which the multiple realities of their lives started to emerge.

In this chapter, I begin by explaining how I have positioned myself within the research. The theoretical underpinnings of the methodology used to conduct this study are then described. The details related to the data collection are presented in the next main section of this chapter, which is followed by a description of some of the obstacles I encountered as well as an explanation of how these situations were handled.

### 5.2 POSITIONING MYSELF WITHIN THE RESEARCH

As illustrated in the introductory chapter of this thesis (page 2), my personal experience of being treated like an outsider due to assumptions based on my appearance is what originally prompted me to undertake this research project. I knew that labels that could be applied to me – Muslim, Bangladeshi, female – were correct, but that they did not completely define who I am. The experience that people have had with Muslims, Bangladeshis, and females would be a part of their interpretation of how they viewed me; however, this would not be the complete picture. Thus, I wanted to explore how and why others could make assumptions about a person's capabilities and identity simply based on the way a person looked or spoke. I realized as I approached the study and entered the research setting that my own background and experiences shaped how I viewed the world, that what I knew about the context was "itself constitutive of the setting and informed by it" (Pollner and Emerson, 2001: 121). Thus, they shape how I perceive and interpret data. Providing details about my thoughts and impressions during the study and explaining how they were incorporated into the writing is one way I acknowledged my presence in the research (Denzin, 2002: 350-1). During each interaction with my respondents, I not only explored the way they developed their attitudes towards identity and belief systems, but also reflected on my own decisions and choices. This research process raised my self-awareness and made me realize how my position within the context, as a researcher and not a teacher, was an important perspective for future application of the findings within the setting (Pratt, 1986: 49).

This constant negotiation has been an important part of the research process. It is this reflexivity that:

forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with our selves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting. (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 210 citing Alcott and Potter)

It was through continuous inquiry and reflection on the data that my research questions were modified over time, which is not an unusual outcome of this type of study. The respondents were the ones who were driving the direction of the research, and they led me towards new areas that I had not considered before (Spradley, 1980: 35; Eisenhardt, 2002: 11). This further exploration increased my awareness of the complexity of their lives, which is something that I had not paid much attention to when I was involved in the setting as a teacher rather than a researcher. This shift in perspective, from teacher to researcher, is significant in that it allowed deeper engagement with the students and enhanced the quality of both their and my classroom experience.

### **5.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **5.3.1 *Qualitative Research & Postmodern Ideologies***

One of the main themes that emerged from this research was the flexible and evolving nature of identity. The participants demonstrated the various ways in which they assessed and evaluated their context, which then guided their behavior. This active participation in the negotiation of their environment was best explained and explored through the framework of qualitative research. This framework encompasses several research methods, such as observations, interviews, and ethnographies and aims to “implement a critical interpretive approach ... [to] make sense of the [] conditions that define daily life” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: xv). This methodology was most suitable for this research because, as Holliday has mentioned, qualitative research studies “are open-ended and set up research opportunities designed to lead the researcher into unforeseen areas of discovery within the lives of the people she is investigating” (2007: 5). Richards explains:

The broad aim of qualitative inquiry is to understand better some aspect(s) of the lived world ... [the] ability to represent the particular and that this distinguishes it from those sorts of research which depend on generalizability, but it would be going too far to claim this as a defining characteristic. (2003: 10)

Using a qualitative paradigm has provided the space to explore students’ interpretations of their identity and how influences of globalization, namely the driving motivation behind learning English, play a role in their lives. It also offers a space to demonstrate the complexity behind the negotiation process that is involved in identity development.

This research focuses on exploring the multiple factors that shape identity construction, particularly viewing the process of English language learning as a social activity. This mainly involves investigating how individuals interact with others in their environment (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 197). It is this process of developing meaning that is considered important in qualitative studies. Qualitative research is more concerned with the construction of social realities. It is not merely a presentation of observable facts, such as noting and making generalizations based on certain behaviors. Rather, it increases the potential to engage with the respondents to better explore and understand what their behaviors represent and signify. By confining people and their identities to certain parameters, no room is left for reflexivity or change. Social processes cannot be reduced to a universally applied system of beliefs, expectations, cultures, or practices. Hence, it is through a postmodern paradigm, in which “the modern conception of knowledge as a mirror of reality is replaced by a conception of the social construction of reality, where the focus is on the interpretation and negotiation of the meanings of the social world” that this research study has been conducted (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 52). The nature of postmodern ideologies makes room for adjustments that are needed to cope with and make sense of reality. Within the parameters of this research, postmodern refers to paying particular attention to the context in which actions occur. This type of conceptual framework is representative of critical cosmopolitanism, which recognizes the impact ideology has on one’s construction of reality (Holliday, 2011: 13). This perspective encompasses Kumaravadivelu’s concept of cultural realism, which is “based on a simple and straightforward proposition that globalization ... is effectively challenging the traditional notions of identity formation of an individual or of a nation” (2008: 158). It also emphasizes recognizing the dynamic nature of the setting and the complex, fluid characteristics of the respondents, which counters the dominant discourse of globalization as discussed in chapter three.

In postmodern thought, all observations and notations must be contextualized from both the perspective of the researcher/observer and the situation in which the events are occurring. The postmodern paradigm emphasizes that there is “no clear window into the inner life of an individual” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 21). Rather, a person’s view of the world:

is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed. (ibid.)

In the qualitative framework, all elements of an event, including the social, linguistic, and practical constructions of reality, are relevant. The implications of these elements vary depending on the individual. Therefore, “there is openness to qualitative diversity, to the multiplicity of local meanings; knowledge is perspectival, depending on the viewpoint and values of the investigator” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 52). In addition, critical cosmopolitanism acts as a lens through

which to analyze the various constructions of reality. More importantly, it deconstructs the difference between practices and established rules in order to gain insight into what is really happening.

At the core of the research are the tensions, contradictions, and hesitations that illustrate the process of identity construction that individuals go through (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 26-7). These tensions are particularly relevant in this study as the reality of what occurs in a language classroom is juxtaposed against discriminatory assumptions made by teachers of English. As language and meaning-making is personal, and, as Lyotard notes, “in a society whose communication component is becoming more prominent day by day, both as a reality and as an issue, it is clear that language assumes a new importance” (Lyotard, 1984: 16). This inquiry involves reflection and a reinvestigation of the flaws with the discourse of English language education that lead to or promote discriminatory views of people and cultures. Keeping this in mind, “postmodernism is Western civilization’s best attempt to date to critique its own most fundamental assumptions, particularly those assumptions that constitute reality, subjectivity, research, and knowledge” (Scheurich, 1997: 2). Moreover, as this inquiry is a cooperative task in which the researcher and the subjects work together to negotiate meaning, it provides an opportunity to “defamiliarize[s] commonsense reality in a bracketed context of performance and then return[s] participants to the world of common sense – transformed, renewed, and sacralized” (Tyler, 1986: 126). The multiple voices and perspectives add to the richness of the study. Since this type of research “is participatory and emergent, post-modern ethnography cannot have a predetermined form, for it could happen that participants might decide that textualization itself is inappropriate” (ibid.: 129). Furthermore, by not controlling the variables and incorporating the voice of the researcher within the writing, postmodern qualitative research makes it possible “to acknowledge and capitalize on the impact of the researcher, and to have no fear of travelling to the hidden depths and mysterious complexities of reality” (Holliday, 2010: 11). Thus, given the complexity of identity and the importance of self-reflection in the process of constructing one’s own social reality, qualitative research was the most appropriate methodology to use to conduct this study.

Although some researchers (Creswell, 2008: 4; Richards and Morse, 2007: 93; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003: 7) may believe that a mixed-method approach, the use of both qualitative and quantitative strategies, is appropriate, qualitative research in itself provides a broad platform from which a rich, multi-layered, thick description can be composed and shared in a valid way. An integral part of this study is to acknowledge that “all research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 22). As the researcher, I am bringing my own beliefs and

ideologies into the setting. This ideology is shaped by the fact that I was born and raised in Kuwait and have been working at KU for eleven years. Moreover, the data collected from my respondents, though all Kuwaiti, are based on their own constructed social realities. The presentation of data cannot and should not be mistaken for a prescriptive, reductionist image mainly because it is not simply “data” that is written. Rather, the study “is centered in both how people methodically construct their experiences and their worlds, and in the configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape their reality-constituting activity” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005: 484). Through an analysis of how these experiences are constructed, cultural contradictions often arise. These contradictions, and the way in which they are mediated, illustrate the complex nature of identity development (Spradley, 1980: 152). In addition, the researcher’s impact on the study becomes a part of the complex world of the respondents.

Since the data presentation is filtered through the researcher’s perspective, some concerns have been raised about the validity of the interpretations. Murphy and Dingwall describe how some postmodernists, such as Fine, 1994 and Price, 1996, view interpretations as an imposition of ideologies, even a different form of colonialism (2001: 345). The issue of biased reporting and suppressing/misrepresenting the voice of the respondents is especially a problem if the author’s position and point of view is not made explicit within the research process and data presentation (ibid.; Thorne, 1980: 291). Acknowledging and clarifying my voice within the narrative representation of the data helps minimize the risk of biased interpretations.

### **5.3.2 *An Ethnographic Approach***

An ethnographic approach was adopted in order to capture the complexity of what the participants in the study were saying. The emphasis of this branch of qualitative research is to investigate the social context in which participants act. It involves “direct and sustained social contact with agents, and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly *in its own terms*, the irreducibility of human experience” (Willis and Trondman, 2000: 5 emphasis in original). The focus of ethnographies is to record how human lives unfold and to somehow come to terms with “the foreignness of language – of cultures and societies” (Crapanzano, 1986: 52). Using this approach unveiled several layers of the respondents’ complex cultural realities. In addition, it demonstrated how the interpretations of events and concepts differed from person to person and sometimes from context to context. Therefore, what I present reflects meanings within the paradigms that I found relevant.

One of the points that I most focused on was contextualizing each data entry. This involved not only looking at the current context, but also examining the surrounding events as well as the hierarchy and power structure of that environment. “The understanding of the ways in which people come to tell their stories – and what they say and cannot say, and even how they say

it – must be seen as an important part of the politics of the ethnographic project” (Plummer, 2001: 402). Incorporating all these elements allows a more thorough representation of the actions that are happening (Hammersley, 2002: 66). However, by giving the participants within the setting a voice and representing the context in which events are unfolding, there is an element of agency and inclusion within the writing.

This ethnographic study is not so much about finding evidence for pre-existing theories. It is more about finding, unraveling, and discovering something new and then relating the discoveries to theories that are already out there (Willis and Trondman, 2000: 10). Writing up the ethnographic notes involved “mapping an array of constitutive dynamics” to try to reveal the complexity of what was being observed (Fortun, 2009: 169-70). Moreover, writing the data involved acknowledging that reality cannot be neatly packaged or recorded as discrete events. In all actuality, the data was “more messy, more convoluted and more surprising” than I had expected (Gherardi and Turner, 2002: 84). This made it all the more necessary to ensure that each entry was contextualized so that patterns could emerge from which conclusions could be drawn, though still acknowledging that the findings are not necessarily conclusive (Edwards, 2002: 165; Tavory and Timmermans, 2009: 252; Peterson, 2009: 43). There were times when parts of the data were not included in the write-up because they did not fit into a ‘clean’ narrative (Blackman, 2007: 700).

Ethnography involved discovering in-depth details about how English affects students’ lives. It was an appropriate method to follow since it provided me the space to gain actual insight into their complex realities rather than state my opinions or guesses based on my own evaluation. Being involved in the setting, beyond my normal day-to-day interactions with students, provided me with a new perspective. My point-of-view shifted from merely acknowledging the superficial aspect of them speaking English to one that looked deeper into what role speaking English played as a representation of their identity (Faubion, 2001: 44). I kept in mind that “the aim is to theorize social structural constraints and human agency” and illustrate this dynamic in my writing (Gordon, Holland, and Lahelma, 2001: 193). It is important to recognize not only the complexity of student actions and speech, but also that the significance of each action differs from person to person. Therefore, through the data analysis and presentation, I elaborate on perspectives with the paradigms that I found relevant in this study.

### ***5.3.3 Issues of Validity***

It is essential for the research design to address how validity is established. Positivists approach defining validity in terms of concrete procedures that are followed. With qualitative research, concrete research procedures cannot be followed because it is the participants who shape the study. Realistically, when investigating the development of social phenomenon, “the validity

of an account is inherent, not in the procedures used to produce and validate it, but in its relationship to those things that it is intended to be an account *of* (Maxwell, 2002: 39 emphasis in original citing Hammersley). It is essential to incorporate the details related to the development of this relationship. When conveying these details, it cannot be assumed that this is the only valid explanation, description, or evaluation of the situation since we, the researchers, are part of the social context that is being studied. “We cannot step outside our own experience to obtain some observer-independent account of what we experience. Thus, it is always possible for there to be different, equally valid accounts from different perspectives” (ibid.: 41).

Becker explores the problematic concern of how researchers can avoid bias in their methods and in their presentation of data. He claims that researchers pursue the exploration of a group because that investigator already has an invested interest in them. He states that this is dangerous as it is possible for researchers to “fall into deep sympathy with people we are studying” (1967: 240). Becker acknowledges that people who are being researched may make statements to push a certain agenda. This could be seen as the research not being a proper representative of reality. However, he emphasizes that even if the researcher works to “trace an argument to its source in the interests of the person who made it, we still have not proved it false” (ibid.). Regardless of which point of view we are coming from, we, as researchers have “to make sure that, whatever point of view we take, our research meets the standards of good specific work, that our unavoidable sympathies do not render our results invalid” (ibid.). This perspective may not be avoidable, but one way that the claims of bias can be minimized is by clarifying the parameters of the study and specifying who was being studied and contextualizing their point of view. Understanding the context and acknowledging the complexity of the context is essential. Moreover, this also acknowledges that there are probably other points of view that are not being dealt with in the current study.

Given that multiple perspectives of a situation are possible and that it is impossible to note or understand everything that is occurring in the setting or with the respondent, the researcher is only able to write what she thinks of and is exposed to. This omission of information may be interpreted as a reflection of bias within the study. However, this bias “was and is not related directly to the concerns of objectivity that flow from positivist inquiry and that are reflective of inquirer blindness or subjectivity” (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 207). Therefore, by acknowledging any subjectivity that the researcher brings with her into the setting and carefully detailing it in the writing, validity is assured.

## 5.4 DATA COLLECTION

Taking an ethnographic approach, comprised of participant observation and interviews, this fieldwork-based research method enabled me to directly observe and describe behavior, reactions, and interactions in various settings. Writing about my observations and interviews in my research diary, combined with my personal narrative, enabled me to provide thick descriptions, which have been used to analyze the social complexities related to the negotiation of English language use and its role in identity formation (Holliday, 2004: 732; Geertz, 1973: 6). I was conscious of how my own voice was reflected in my writing and noted all my thoughts and emotions related to my observations – some of which were very personal and very emotional. This acknowledgement was a way of “being aware of and managing [my] own prejudices about how things are” (Holliday, 2010: 12). Moreover, the frequent, detailed observations led me to discover emerging themes related to the research questions.

This section presents the details of the actual research process. I begin by describing how and why I chose the setting and the participants for the study. This is followed by a description of my research tools and an explanation of why they were appropriate. The themes that emerged from the data analysis are then presented. In the final part of this section, I describe the obstacles that arose during the course of the study and explain how they have been addressed.

### 5.4.1 *Determining the setting*

Highlighting the complexity of the setting is an important part of understanding both the research process and the data presentation. The implications of what has been happening in Kuwait on a sociopolitical level (as introduced in chapter 1, section 1.4.2) and the actions that are happening on the university campus have some parallels, even though they are not always explicitly recognized as being linked to one another.

In this section I will describe the general Kuwaiti context as well as the more specific university context in which this research took place. I will then address the specific spaces that were used in the study and finally tie them all together to how they are relevant to the study. Understanding the various dynamics within each setting helps present a better picture of why students may be saying and doing the things they are. The complex, dynamic setting allowed me to capture “multiple versions of multiple realities” demonstrating how what is seen on the surface does not reveal the motivations and intentions behind a person’s choices and actions (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 163).



**(a) The General Kuwaiti Context**

Numerous factors such as the wealth of Kuwait, the dominant presence of expatriates in the country, and the political infrastructure, as discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.3), have an impact on how the students in this study negotiate their surroundings and determine their behavior. Therefore, acknowledging the complexity of the general setting of Kuwait is necessary to contextualize what students were saying and how they were acting.

As seen in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.2), the politics of the country influences different aspects of education in Kuwait. In 1965, the Kuwaiti constitution established that education was a fundamental right for every citizen and was compulsory for 6 to 14 year olds. To accommodate this right, money was pumped into the educational system. Books were bought for the libraries and campuses were spruced up to be more inviting. However, aside from the superficial changes of various educational institutes, the quality of education continued to struggle. This is a concern expressed by students (as seen in chapter 8, section 8.3.4) and goes to explain some of the disjuncture behind students' attitudes towards learning in general and English in particular.

**(b) The Specific Setting**

The specific research setting of this study is KU, a government funded university that is free for all Kuwaitis. It is divided into five campuses, each focusing on different disciplines, such as law, engineering, business studies, and medicine. Although there are numerous campuses of KU around Kuwait, the principal site of data collection was my place of work, the Health Sciences Center, which was established in 1973. This location was convenient mainly because I had already been a language instructor in the English Language Unit for seven years at the start of this study and was therefore familiar with both the physical setting as well as administrative hierarchy. The Health Sciences Center, which was established in 1973, is one of the most sought after educational institutes because it holds a lot of prestige. It is one of the most difficult colleges to get accepted to because it has very high entry requirements from high school.

Another reason why this setting was conducive to my research was because of the emphasis placed on learning English. The three mandatory English courses offered by the English Language Unit are critical to the students' future success within the medical program. Students who are accepted into the Health Sciences Center are required to take three English courses: English 181, 182, and 183. In English 181, offered in the fall semester, the students are introduced to basic medical terminology and are taught paragraph writing skills. In English 182, which is offered in the spring semester, the students focus on writing academic essays, again, based on medical information. All students are required to complete these two courses in their first year. After their first year, students are placed into a specific faculty (medicine, dentistry, or pharmacy),

based on their grade point average. Those with the highest grade point average are admitted to their first choice of faculty. There are a limited number of seats for each faculty, equally divided between the males and females. As a result, the students are very competitive, and it is especially fierce among the females who comprise almost two-thirds of the student population. Moreover, among all the courses that are required during the students' first year, English carries the most weight towards their grade point average. Consequently, it is particularly important for them to do well in the class. After being accepted into a faculty, students are required to complete the third course, English 183, which focuses on research methods and oral presentation skills. The pressure placed on the students to succeed in their English classes plays a pivotal role in their attitudes toward studying English and the role it plays in their lives, as will be seen in Chapter 8, section 8.3.4.

The university is tied up with Kuwaiti politics to some extent and the superficial growth and expansion of Kuwait can be seen in the university where grand hallways, featuring trendy cafes and flat screen TVs have been added, but the classrooms remain small and basic. There is a great amount of prestige associated with being accepted to the Health Sciences Center. It is a coveted college to attend; however, spaces are limited due to entry requirements. However, over the past few years, these entry requirements have been adjusted to allow more students to enter the university. However, these students are not prepared for the level of study offered. Moreover, there is a lack of increase in the facilities or support for the students. On the one hand the environment is positive because everyone makes do, but daily frustrations persist.

### **(c) Physical Spaces**

Observations were primarily carried out in classroom settings at the university. I was denied permission to observe other teachers' classrooms; therefore, my research notes reflect events in my own classroom. Observations were also carried out in common spaces in the university, such as the libraries, hallways, auditoriums, and on-campus cafés. By conducting the study at the university, I was able to research the students in a natural setting. Hammersley and Atkinson state that:

‘natural’ not ‘artificial’ settings, like experiments or formal interviews, should be the primary source of data. Furthermore, the research must be carried out in ways that are sensitive to the nature of the setting. The primary aim should be to describe what happens in the setting, how the people involved see their own actions and those of others, and the contexts in which the action takes place. (1995: 6)

Observing and interacting with students on the university campus also allowed me to note how their use of English varied depending on the context, as will be further explained in section Chapter 8, section 8.3.1.

Periphery observations were also carried out in various public spaces in Kuwait, such as cafés and malls. It was in these various settings that I noticed the actions and speech of my respondents differed depending on the setting. With respondents who I met with more than once, I noticed that the closer we were to an actual classroom setting on university campus, the more reserved they seemed to be. However, the further we physically moved from a classroom space on campus, the more candid were their responses.

Interviews were initially conducted in my office. This was very convenient as it was private, and it was a location in which the students felt comfortable. However, due to changes in the structure of the English Language Department, I later moved to a cubicle, which was slightly more difficult to use for interviews since it was not as private. I attempted to conduct interviews in the conference room of the English department, but as it was a common space that other teachers and office employees used, the interviews were frequently interrupted. To help ensure privacy and help the interviewees feel comfortable, I continued to conduct interviews in nearby classrooms that were more private. In three instances I met with students at a café.

**(d) Relevance of the Setting to the Research**

Since 95% of the students in the university were Kuwaiti, the setting was conducive to the study. As an English language instructor, I was able to directly learn about and observe students' attitudes towards learning English and the role it played in their academic and social lives. Moreover, my daily interactions with students both in the classroom and on the university campus in general provided me with numerous opportunities to engage with my respondents. Conversations with the students made me aware of how events at the university reflected social stratification in the rest of the country. Students voiced their concerns about being affected by political decisions that were not only related to educational policies, but also to social actions, such as gender segregation. Many students expressed their involvement in university student government elections as a chance to become a part of social change. The student government at KU is more than a body that organizes study events and social outings for the students. It is a representation of actual political parties (though these are supposed to be illegal) in the Kuwaiti parliament. Aside from politics, the interaction among students provided a rich social environment in which a wide range of relationships could be observed. The university represented a microcosm of Kuwaiti society and culture. This made it an appropriate setting in which to observe the complex interactions between students and explore the role of English in their everyday lives. The multiple layers of the setting provided me with an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the different dimensions of their identity. Aside from KU, the complexity of English

language use is reflected in their non-academic environment as well. The other spaces involved in the research are described in the next section.

#### **5.4.2 Participants**

The core participants in this research were students studying at KU. These students represent a small culture within Kuwaiti society. Political decisions affecting education policy, family pressure linked to being accepted into the Health Sciences Center, and societal implications that shape and influence how the students behave are some of the elements that make this culture, as defined by Holliday, “a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within those circumstances” (2007: 12). Furthermore, these students represent the current generation that is undergoing the lived experience of balancing tradition and modernity.

Even though this setting was selected because of my initial research questions, the complex nature of the site had an impact on the direction of the research. “This arises because [] in ethnographic research the development of research problems is rarely completed before fieldwork begins; indeed, the collection of primary data often plays a key role in that process of development” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 37). Moreover, it was the participants themselves who drove the direction of this study.

In addition to the students, reflections and comments of some instructors of the English Language Unit are included in the data analysis. Moreover, my reflections and thoughts as an active participant in the study are included. The sub-sections below present more details about the role of the participants in this study.

##### **(a) Students:**

###### *Who they Were*

All the participants in this study were Kuwaiti. They did, however, come from different backgrounds, namely in terms of their religion (being either Sunni or Shia Muslims) and their tribal/family affiliations, which were linked to the underlying politics of the country. Although their backgrounds did influence their attitudes, this was not something I actively discussed because of my own position in the university and Kuwaiti society. I was aware that these were sensitive topics, and as a foreigner living in Kuwait I did not feel comfortable openly discussing these issues with the students. Therefore, unless students themselves brought up any of these points, which was not often, I did not actively go down this line of questioning. While these influences do underlie the mentality of the students, aside from the importance and impact of family, politics and religion were seldom brought up. Moreover, since this thesis is not an attempt

to analyze the sociopolitical and religious makeup of Kuwaiti society, I tried to only focus on what life is like for a group of students studying at a specific university.

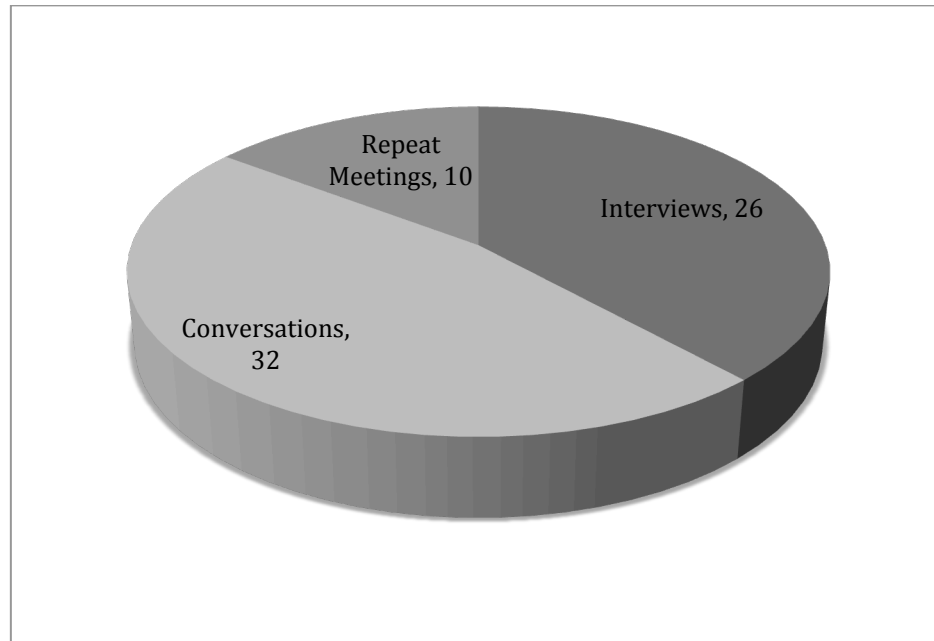
#### *How/Why they Were Selected*

The main criteria I had for selecting participants was that they should be Kuwaiti nationals. Moreover, I had to ensure that the students I interviewed were not currently enrolled in any of the English language courses that were being offered in order to remove the pressures of linking their responses to their performance in class.

Therefore, my initial method of contact with students was to send out a mass email to my former students briefly outlining the objectives of the study and inviting them to participate. A copy of the text of this email is included in the appendix (page A2). Sending out an email gave students a chance to volunteer without feeling pressure to be involved. Responses to the email indicated a willingness to share about themselves and their experiences. I contacted each student who replied and set up an interview date and time. Not every student who replied ended up being interviewed purely for scheduling conflicts.

Aside from scheduled interviews, I also included unplanned, impromptu conversations with students. These would sometimes occur in the classroom, as I was walking to and from class, or when students would come to visit me in my office. Conversations that have been included as data were noted with permission from the students. There were some students who I conversed with that I later interviewed or who I met with several times over the course of the study.

There were a total of 68 students who contributed to this study. All the students were Kuwaiti and were enrolled in the Health Sciences Center. The chart on the next page breaks down each type of interactions. A more thorough breakdown of the details of the students and the interaction schedule is included in the appendix (page A3).



**Figure 5.1: Student Participants**

**(b) Teachers:**

During the course of my research I had many conversations with teachers about their teaching experiences at KU. The responses of three teachers are included in this study. Their experiences provide a different perspective off which student responses to their attitudes towards learning English can be set against. Due to the promise of anonymity, the specific details of the instructors who contributed to this study have been omitted. However, they were all Americans and ranged in age from early-40s to mid-50s. They all had several years of experience teaching in countries other than the United States and had been teaching in Kuwait for one to six years. All the instructors had a Master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

**(c) Self**

I realized that the way I approached the research setting was influenced by my own experiences of the context, both as someone who had lived in Kuwait for many years and an employee at KU, as described in chapter 1, as well as being an expatriate working in Kuwait. Switching perspectives from a teacher to a research also prompted me to look at my position at KU as both an insider and an outsider. I also considered this position when thinking about the validity of the study, which will be elaborated on in section 5.3.3.

### *Participant Observation*

Just before starting this research I had been teaching at Kuwait University for seven years. Conducting this study involved a shift in my perspective – moving from being an insider who was involved in daily interactions with students, to an outsider who was still a participant, but was now observing the surroundings in more detail. I was no longer superficially involved and caught up in my role as a teacher, but instead immersed in the field, with the intention of familiarizing myself with the habits and mentality of the students. A distinction between immersing in the environment and merging into the environment should be made. Emerson et al. state:

Immersion is not merging; the field researcher who seeks to ‘get close to’ others usually does not become one of these others but rather continues to be a researcher interested in and pursuing research issues, albeit in close proximity to the ordinary exigencies of life that these others experience and react to. (1995: 35)

My new role as a researcher required me to become more introspective and look for details that for years I had ignored, or as Spradley calls it “selective inattention” about the daily lives of students without experiencing an overload of information (1980: 55). Positioning myself within the research, details about the process of becoming more introspective become a part of the written study. Although placing my opinions and observations in the study may not seem objective, by keeping a comprehensive record of objective observations as well as subjective thoughts and feelings I distinguish myself from an ordinary observer who does not normally take such a detailed interest in the surroundings (ibid.: 57-58).

### *Insider/Outsider Dilemmas*

My seven years in the English Language Unit was beneficial in terms of gaining access to the research setting as I was already viewed as an ‘insider.’ The students were already familiar with my presence on campus. I often conversed with students outside of the classroom, and these conversations were not always about academic topics. I believe that this made it easier for me to approach them both to discuss my research and ask them to be interviewed. Furthermore, I was already familiar with the location. I knew where students usually studied or hung out, and this enabled me to choose locations on campus that I thought would be good for observations. It also provided me with several chances for opportunistic data gathering.

Since I was not familiar with KU’s research protocols and I wanted to ensure that it was permissible to conduct this research, I first sought permission from the English Language Unit’s director. Although the familiarity and trust that had already been established with her facilitated the negotiation of access to the research setting, I realized “even the most friendly and co-operative of gatekeepers ... will shape the conduct and development of the research”

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 64). Therefore, in September 2007, immediately after being accepted into the PhD program, I wrote a letter to the director of the English Language Unit broadly explaining my research study and asking permission to observe classes for the purpose of collecting data. Since I directly reported to the director of the department, I did not think I needed to ask for further permission. However, to avoid any future problems, I also asked her if she thought there were any other formalities that were necessary before beginning the project.

After submitting the letter, we met to discuss my research. At this meeting she verbally approved the project and informed me that no other formalities were needed. She did, however, caution me about making any waves and making it too obvious that I was conducting research at the university. She also asked me not to observe other teachers' classes for concern that I might interfere with their teaching or cause them to feel as if their teaching was being judged. I took these precautionary steps because I realized that although I was an 'insider' in some respects, I was an 'outsider' in others, namely being an expatriate employee working in a government institution. Therefore, the only way I would be comfortable conducting this research was by having permission from the director.

Although being an insider had some advantages, there were a few challenges as well. I had to remember that while "insider participation may facilitate greater insights, the researcher could be implicated in excessive subjectivity and in privileging one position" (Woodward, 2008: 539). However, acknowledging tensions and possible areas of bias was one way to cope with such situations. One of the main problems I encountered was dealing with a shift between being an instructor to being a researcher. In the past, I had never encountered problems with students opening up to me and discussing various issues in their lives. While this relatively unrestrained willingness to share was a beneficial resource, I had to proceed with caution, as I did not want to ostracize myself and compromise my relationship with the students by all of a sudden being seen as someone who is investigating them rather than simply having a conversation. Thus, I kept in mind that I had to shift my view from being an insider who was familiar with the surroundings, to a participant observer who was still interacting with students and fulfilling the same roles as before, but now trying to see the familiar as strange. "Alternating between the insider and outsider experience, and having both simultaneously" is often involved when engaging in ethnographic fieldwork (Spradley, 1980: 57). Moreover, leaving myself open to discovery was important as "promising fieldwork often leads to something completely different, unexpected, and more interesting" (Marcus, 2009: 22). There are, however, many perspectives of how an insider/outsider can be categorized. While I was a teacher at KU, I was not a Kuwaiti. Therefore, I was a foreign national asking Kuwaitis about their perceptions of culture and identity.



### *Active Participant*

In order to document my role within the research, I included myself as an active participant in the study. My personal experiences and reflections have been included in my corpus of data. These entries, 108 in total, are marked ‘personal reflections’ in my research diaries. These entries were thoughts about my interactions with students as well as general notes on how events in the university and around Kuwait were affecting my personal life. Situating myself within the actual study and acknowledging my role as an active participant has helped me cope with the “fact that behaviour and attitudes are often not stable across contexts and that the researcher may influence the context becomes central to the analysis” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 19). Thus, acknowledging my personal connection to and experience with the research setting (as described in Chapter 1, section 1.3.1) was essential in order to frame the data analysis.

#### **5.4.3 Research Design and Tools**

Data has primarily been collected through observations that were recorded as field notes in my research diaries. Interviews were also conducted. This section explains the rationale behind choosing these research tools.

##### **(a) Research Diaries and Field Notes**

As soon as I began this study, I started to keep a research diary. I began by simply writing down my thoughts related to Kuwait and brainstorming about how to proceed with the actual research. I kept in mind that:

[t]he aim is to capture these in their integrity, noting their various features and properties, though what is recorded will clearly depend on some general sense of what is relevant to the foreshadowed research problems. While it is impossible to provide any description without some principle of selecting what is and is not important, there are advantages (as well as some disadvantages) in adopting a wide focus. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 175)

In starting to take my field notes, I took a cue from Bogdan and made sure that once I chose my setting and started to take notes, I observed and kept track of the details to ensure that my notes were “rich in dialogue and description that give, chronologically, an event by event, conversation by conversation, account of everything” that I saw and heard (1983: 174). Through the detailed note-taking and frequent reflections on my writing, themes finally started to take shape. This analysis was conducted on a weekly basis in order to document how newly developed insights and understandings led to emerging themes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995: 13). This also helped me create an analytic domain and “make focused observations to discover the patterns that existed” (Spradley, 1980: 110) and avoid prejudiced accounts of what occurred in my observations (Geertz, 1993: 154-155).

My research diaries include details about all the observations that were made during the study. These took place in various settings: general public spaces in Kuwait, public spaces in the university, and my classroom. My field notes vary in format but are mainly presented as a stream-of-consciousness that includes details about my objective observations – both what I was observing and how the observation was carried out – as well as my subjective responses to the observations. Moreover, I hoped that through my detailed accounts that I would be able to illustrate the multiple layers of a person’s life and community and provide a more three-dimensional image of who these people were and the space from which they were speaking – something to highlight the unique qualities of the discovery and go beyond turning the community “into something object-like, coherent, whole and separate from ourselves” (Abu-Lughod, 2000: 262; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2001: 361). This documentation is an essential part of assuring validity. It is “critical for the ethnographer to document her own activities, circumstance, and emotional responses as these factors shape the processes of observing and recording others’ lives” (Emerson et al., 1995: 11). Analysis of the data was sometimes also included during this note-taking process in order to prevent diluting the original data (ibid.: 13). However, there were times when my reflections on the data were completed shortly after leaving the setting (Eisenhardt, 2002: 17).

In the beginning, I did not really know what to look for. I was frustrated by the advice that I should allow the data to emerge. I found myself trapped in a neo-essentialist mentality as I went to cafes to conduct my observations, hoping to find something ‘different’ and ‘unique’ that could ‘define’ Kuwaiti identity, all the while feeling foolish and untrusting of my notes as anything more than stereotypes. I soon realized that I myself was guilty of trying to create an overall assumption of Kuwaiti identity, even if it was with the intention of illustrating the complexity of identity. This realization also brought to my attention how quickly and easily one can fall into the trap of making cultural generalizations based on observations – something that characterizes neo-essentialism. As I progressed through the research I learned how “the neo-essentialist rhetoric respects difference at a superficial level and is therefore too quick to draw naïve conclusions” (Holliday, 2011: 21).

In trying to find something ‘unusual,’ I was also conscious of the fact that my surroundings might be so ‘normal’ to me, because I was born, raised, and educated in Kuwait and then returned to teach at the university after studying and working in the United States for seven years. Trying to figure out how to psychologically and emotionally step away from the setting made me realize how complex life actually was. I had originally believed that my interactions with the environment were routine and normal. However, it all of a sudden hit me how

interrelated all actions and reactions were, and I discovered how pluralistic the environment and interactions among students with the rest of society was.

It was not until I physically left Kuwait and returned that I was able to adjust my perspective and gain some distance to view the environment as ‘strange’ and ‘foreign.’ It is from this perspective and through my continuous search for something ‘unusual’, for some sort of conflicting emotions or behaviors that indicated an identity crisis, that I realized it was perhaps just an *assumption* that globalization creates an identity crisis. This observation led me to reevaluate and modify my original line of thought – that learning English conflicted with Kuwaiti identity and was a source of discontent and fragmentation within society. The participants in this study showed me that they were actually incorporating various elements of globalization and the consequences of learning English into their lifestyles and were establishing their own Kuwaiti identity. This identity, however, is not fixed. It continues to transform as people are exposed to new concepts and situations. It is a constant negotiation process. Moreover, my interactions with the various respondents revealed the different value systems among them. These emerging conflicting perspectives have developed into various cultural themes (Spradley, 1980: 152). Through my continued observation, I came to realize that my students were carrying around much more than their English language textbooks in their Louis Vuitton bags; they were carrying their entire identity.

During my first semester of observation, for one class, I merely took notes but did not explicitly tell the students about my research. Even casual conversations with students were noted without direct consent, except for a few cases when students had described something that caught my attention and I asked them if I could use what they were saying for my PhD. The classroom notes that were taken without consent are included in my research diary; however, they are not included in the data analysis within this thesis. From February 2008, at the beginning of each semester, I started to inform my students that I was conducting a research study for my PhD. I gave them a general explanation of what it involved and asked whether they minded if I used information about their attitudes and learning experiences as data. I did not receive any objections from any of the classes that I have taught since the beginning of my research project.

In addition to my observations, my research diaries contain personal reflections about my teaching methods, my thoughts related to my research, and instances in and reflections about my own life. Furthermore, conversations I had with students and teachers are noted in my research diaries. Since all the details are written by hand, I created a detailed, but abbreviated, chart to help me identify and locate the information easily.

## **(b) Interviews**

Interviews that were conducted in this study were pre-arranged meetings with specific respondents. As explained in section 5.4.2a, a specific time was allocated for each interviewee and the intention of the exchange was clearly made beforehand. This type of arrangement allowed me to spend more time conversing with the respondents. It also provided me with the opportunity to discuss and explore their ideas about what role English plays in their lives in more detail. The interviews involved a mutual exchange of information and were not just one sided with me asking all the questions and the respondent providing to-the-point answers (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 2). The participants played an active role in guiding the direction of the interviews. The interviews were all conducted in English because, as explained in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.1) I did not have the necessary proficiency in Arabic to conduct the interviews.

In ten instances I met with the respondents more than once. Although these meetings did have a few question/answer sessions, and they were prearranged in terms of date and time of meeting, the repeated meeting was not an actual interview. Rather, they were conversation that we continued about topics they wished to further discuss. These meetings distinguished themselves from one-time, survey-type interviews as I was able to establish a strong rapport with these specific interviewees and there was “a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds” (Heyl, 2001: 368). The students who I met with more than once voluntarily came to see me and further discuss topics that were on their mind from our previous interaction.

### ***Individual interviews***

I conducted a total of 26 interviews, individual and group, with KU students. In order to ensure that my respondents did not feel any pressure in relation to their interview responses and their grades or position in the English program, I only interviewed students who had already completed the 3-semester English requirement or at the very least were not enrolled in my class. All the students, however, were still enrolled in the university’s 7-year medical school program, and they were all of Kuwaiti nationality.

Some of these individuals also participated in the group interviews. I held a total of four group interviews. In the first one, all five students were in their second year of the medical program. Four of them were previous students of mine; the fifth, a friend of theirs, was a student in another English teacher’s class. The second group interview was with two third-year students who had previously been in my class. On another occasion I met again with three respondents to follow up on some of the points they had raised in their previous interviews. This interview was

conducted at a café. The final group interview was conducted at the university. This interview involved three third year students. The breakdown of interviewee details is included in the appendix (page A5).

### *i) Setting Up the Interviews*

Before conducting the interviews, I used my research questions, reflections on literature, and field notes to generate a list of general questions that I wanted to investigate. The interview questions covered the span of what Kvale and Brinkmann suggested – introductory questions, follow-up questions, probing questions, specifying questions, direct/indirect questions, and interpreting questions (2009: 135-6). The aim of the questions was to explore my respondents' impressions of English and “discover the cultural meanings people have learned” (Spradley, 1980: 123).

I then made a list of some students to contact for the interview. I based my initial choice of respondents on my familiarity with them and on how comfortable I felt. I contacted the potential interviewees either by email, phone, or in person. Arrangements related to the time and location of the interviews were also made in this manner.

In addition to preparing the list of questions and participants, on the day of the interview I also took some time to arrange the actual location of the interview – double check that the room was available, make sure the chairs were properly placed. I even took some time to think about what I wore on the day of the interview not wanting to be too formal or informal to strike a balance between professional and approachable, particularly because most of the interviewees were my former students (Richards, 2003: 67).

### *ii) Conducting the Interviews*

When meeting with the students, their year of study was confirmed. The level of English varied among the respondents. At the beginning of each interview I asked the participants if they would mind the interview being audio recorded. Out of the 28 interviews, 15 were recorded. The ones who asked not to be recorded claimed that they felt their English was weak and that they felt self-conscious about their accuracy and pronunciation. During these interviews I took detailed notes, with their permission, as they spoke. Samples of my interview notes, both recorded and unrecorded, are included in the appendix (page A16).

For my first set of interviews, I chose people that I was comfortable with and already knew. This allowed me to gain some practice and confidence in the interview process. Several of the interviewees provided me with data that I had not thought about before. I included questions related to these new perspectives in subsequent interviews, thus my list of questions continuously

evolved. Also, with each interview I was able to fine-tune my questions as a result of comments, reactions, or observations made by interviewees. For example, one of my questions was ‘What aspects of Kuwaiti society do you think need to be improved?’ The use of the word ‘improved’ triggered a defensive reaction from one of my interviewees. He explained that while he thought systems within the society, such as implementing government policies, could be improved, there was nothing wrong with the society itself. Kuwaiti society was ‘just fine the way we are’ (Fahad #202 I12). Though I had not intended for this word to suggest that there was something deficient about the society, that was the way it was interpreted by the interviewee. Instances such as this one helped me establish a line of questioning that was thorough and sensitive at the same time.

During each interview, I would sit across from the interviewee, with a desk or table between us on which I could place a recorder, if one was being used. Although I kept my list of questions in front of me, I did not always stick to the order or even ask all the questions. The list served as more of a guide to ensure that I covered points related to themes that were emerging from my observations (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 130). Following the guidelines established by Hammersley and Atkinson “within the boundaries of the interview context the aim is to facilitate a conversation, giving the interviewee a good deal more leeway to talk on their own terms than is the case in standardized interviews” (1995: 143). Thus, the semi-structured format of the interviews was beneficial in that it provided the participants with the necessary space to elaborate on points that they felt were important (Dörnyei, 2007: 136). During each interview, I asked my respondents to provide their definition of globalization and then ask them to explain how they saw globalization represented in Kuwait. After establishing their understanding and views about globalization, I asked them to describe to what extent globalization has had an effect on Kuwaiti identity. Then, linking the spread and use of English to globalization, I asked my respondents to elaborate on their impressions about the use and the role of English in Kuwait. Their responses provided insights as to the relevance of cultural and linguistic imperialism theories as consequences of the use of English as an international language. This line of questioning was the basic framework for the topics that were covered in conversations and interviews. Not all the questions were asked in every interaction, nor did the respondents discuss all these topics. Questions were also added or asked depending on what was brought up.

### ***iii) Note-taking & Writing it up***

While preparing the interview questions, conducting the interview, and writing up the details of the interview, I made a conscious effort to keep in mind that the views and opinions expressed during the exchange were representations of what the respondent had developed as part of his or her identity. The data were not to be taken as facts that could be generalized to a larger

population. Rather, the data were personalized glimpses related to how this particular individual interprets his or her reality. Through analysis of the person's speech, actions, and body language, potential contradictions between these aspects arise. As Schostak elaborates, interview subjects are an active part of the interview process and that:

interpretations are made according to the ways in which each protagonist describes the other in relation to their selves. The certainties that are expressed are then open to an examination as to whether these certainties are founded upon illusions, myths, contradictions. But, no final reading is possible since there is always an interpellation, a 'calling out', a 'calling into being' of another reading. Each further reading contributes to the play of difference, a change in what can or cannot be done, said and hoped. (2006: 85)

Data from the interviews were noted in two different manners. During the interviews, I always took notes and wrote them down in a specific notebook. The amount and type of notes written depended on whether or not the interview was being recorded. When the interview was being recorded, I focused on noting non-verbal cues and wrote down points that seemed significant or that led me to follow a new line of inquiry. When the interview was not being recorded, I tried to note down as much of what the person was saying as possible, in addition to non-verbal cues. However, I was always conscious about making eye contact. I did not want the respondent to feel like I was not really listening to what he or she was saying. I was also aware of *when* I took notes. I was afraid that if the respondent suddenly saw me write something down, she or he would become self-conscious. This in turn might 'scare' them from talking about a particular topic. Therefore, I tried to take notes in a calm, consistent manner. In order to try and minimize this distraction, I would often keep my notebook on my lap and usually write without looking. I used my own abbreviations and symbols. I made sure to quote as much as possible in order to be able to present the information as accurately as possible when writing up the data.

Immediately after the interview, I compiled the notes and wrote them out in a more thorough fashion in a second notebook. I tried to include as many details as to what happened, how the information was said, and the context in which it was presented. The data were presented in a more narrative style, though I acknowledged, "life is not composed as a narrative, a linear sequence of clearly separated events joined by adding 'and' between them" (Schostak, 2006: 141). Instead, details were added, not just about what was said, but also about how it was said, to present the data in hope of providing a glimpse of the richness and complexity of what the participants were saying. It presents conflicting emotions and tensions that are experienced; "it is this tension, this eruption of life and the scarring effects of text on the flesh that shapes the narratives of lives" (ibid.).

Students who met me for interviews knew that their responses would be kept anonymous but might be used for various publications. Notes about the interviews have been recorded in a journal (separate from my research diary).

**(c) Casual Conversations**

In addition to pre-planned interviews, I also had numerous impromptu conversations with students. These are marked as *casual conversations* in my research diaries. The interactions were all spontaneous and ranged from a couple of sentences to hour-long conversations about various topics. The students I conversed with were all KU students, some of who were currently enrolled in the English language program. All the conversations took place on the KU campus: either in my classroom, office/cubicle, or in a common space on campus. I had conversations with some respondents more than once, depending on if the opportunity arose. After each conversation I asked permission to use what they had said for my research. In some cases I took notes during the conversation; in other instances I noted the details immediately afterwards. A chart detailing the interactions is included in the appendix (page A3).

**d) Class Discussions**

In addition to interviews and conversations, I held 11 group discussions in class. These were usually based on an article that I had read and I wanted to get students' opinions on how the content was relevant to their lives. Before starting the discussion I informed the students about my intentions to possibly use notes from the discussion in my research. This was not met with any objections. Details of these discussions were noted in my research diary and labeled as *class discussions*.

**(e) Personal Diaries**

During the process of self-reflection, I went back to some of my personal diaries to reread what I had written about my past experiences, both in my personal life and as part of my teaching career. Though I do not keep a daily diary, I have always written down details about significant moments in my life. Some of these incidences have been included as data.

#### **5.4.4 Organizing the Data**

My data notes are all written by hand and are color-coded according to the type of notes being taken (e.g. black for classroom observations; blue for observations in public spaces; purple for personal notes, green for teacher talk; turquoise for interviews). In order to ensure accuracy, I always carried my research diary with me and either wrote my notes while I was observing/having



a conversation with someone, or immediately after the incident. I wrote all my notes on the right-hand side of the page. Keeping in mind that “equally important are the regular review and development of analytic ideas in the form of analytic memos,” my own thoughts and reflections related to the data were written on the left-hand page (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 191). Any emerging themes were also noted on the left-hand page. This strategy enabled me to visually separate my data as Hammersley and Atkinson emphasize “it is important [] to distinguish analytic notes from accounts provided by participants and from observer descriptions” (ibid.).

I ended up with a total of 275 entries based on my observations, conversations, and reflections in my research diaries. I have broken them down into four main types of entries:

- My notes related to observations gathered from the students at Kuwait University are written in black. This includes classroom incidents, observations of students in public spaces within the university, such as the cafeteria, the main lobby, and the hallways. These are labeled *general observations* with the code GO.
- Over the years I also had many spontaneous conversations with students. The topics ranged from complaints about homework to observations about politics. These notes, taken with permission from the students, are also written in black and labeled as *casual conversations* in my research diaries and are labeled CC.
- Occasionally discussions were held in class. These are labeled *group discussions*, with the code GD, and are written in black in the research diaries.
- In addition to talking with students, I have had several conversations with instructors within my department. Most of these were casual conversations, though I have asked them for permission to include the information in my writing. These notes are written in green. These are labeled *teacher talk* with the code TT.
- My observations continued in peripheral locations, outside the university premises and into more public spaces, such as cafés, restaurants, malls, beaches, and streets. These notes are written in blue. These notes were also labeled *general observations* with the code GO.
- Incidences related to my personal life are written in purple. These are labeled *personal reflections* with the code PR. Any details taken from my personal diaries are also written in purple and are labeled *personal diary* with the code PD.

Interviews, individual and group, have been noted in a separate diary. These interviews had been scheduled in advance and most were digitally recorded. Only selected portions of the recorded interviews were transcribed or further elaborated on in my research diaries. Some respondents requested that the interviews not be recorded. During these sessions, I took notes by hand. These notes are written in turquoise and labeled as *interviews* with the code I in my research diaries. By including all forms of data in one type of journal I had a chronological track of each interaction.

To help me organize and analyze my data, I started entering the data into the computer. After entering all the data, I created a chart in which I could organize my notes related to the themes that were emerging – e.g. the importance of English, positive attitude towards globalization; associating English with success and so forth. Within this chart, I indicated the type of interaction from which I collected the data. The categories were as follows:

Type of Interaction	Abbreviation	Type of Interaction	Abbreviation
Casual conversation	CC	Group discussion	GD
Teacher talk	TT	General observation	GO
Interview	I	Personal reflection	PR
Group interview	GI	Personal diary entry	PD

**Table 5.1 – Types of Interactions with Respondents**

Within this chart I also noted the date, the name of the people involved as well as their given alias, the type of meeting/interaction, and location and time of the data collection. I also included columns to indicate what type of participant I was interacting with and how notes were taken. The following abbreviations were used:

Participant	Abbreviation	Notation	Abbreviation
Kuwait University student	KU	Recorded	R
Non-Kuwait University student	NKU	Not recorded	NR
Currently my student	CM	Notes taken during the interaction	ND
Previously my student	PM	Notes taken after the interaction	NA
Never my student	NM	Teacher (colleague)	T
Personal observations/reflections	PR	Not applicable (for personal thoughts)	NA

**Table 5.2 – Details of Interactions with Participants**

A summary of the type of data collected and tag phrases to keep track of any recurring themes that were developing were also noted.

Typing my reflections on the data in italics helped me distinguish my thoughts from notes that were taken during the interview/conversation. Direct quotes are indicated with quotation marks. I color-coded the typescript to match the codes in my research diaries.

Combining the details from my observations with my interviews helped me deconstruct and analyze my data from a new perspective. It was this process that helped me see that what I thought was unusual, was not viewed as unusual by my participants.

Once completed, the data chart was almost two hundred pages long, with around 130,000 words of raw data. In order to help me sift through the data, I created an abbreviated version with just the main headings. As all participants were assured anonymity; therefore, in writing the data chapters of this study, I have used pseudonyms.

It was in typing out the data that I noticed recurring themes, some that were directly related to the original research questions of the thesis and others that emerged from the respondents (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002: 313). What was also made clear through this type of categorization and evaluation was the multiple perspectives that appeared around one theme. This reminded me that the stories that each individual was relaying “exist as only one piece in a larger puzzle. Narratives of the self, however, are strongly embedded within the culture and voices of the surrounding community” (Seaton, 2008: 303). It is important to remember that each narration is just one person’s perspective, and that it is the combination of the multiple perspectives that provided a rich picture of the setting. Moreover, what these dimensions demonstrated was that there were no easy, direct conclusions to be drawn, especially when it came to understanding the various factors that were taken into consideration in identity/belief formation (Silverman, 2006: 280; Watson, 2008: 334). The significance of appreciating and acknowledging the context was also understood through the research, “what we say and how we say it depends on who is speaking to whom, when and where, and with what purposes” (van Dijk, 2001: 108). These were all factors that needed to be taken into consideration. The main themes were then categorized and served as the framework for the data chapters. The organization of these themes is discussed in the next section.

## **5.5 EMERGING THEMES**

Through this research, I set out to investigate what role learning English played in lives of students at KU. Moreover, I wanted to know what shaped their attitudes towards learning English and whether it was related to the way they conceptualized and approached the impact of globalization both within Kuwait and more specifically within their lives. My personal experience of being born and raised in Kuwait and experiencing the challenge of balancing traditional family beliefs and values with those that I had developed for myself, initially led me to believe that the students were also struggling. What emerged from my investigations was that their interpretation of the role of language and culture in their lives and in shaping their identity was very complex. In

analyzing the data, several themes emerged. These themes have been grouped to form the data chapters.

The main discovery of this study was the extent to which students' interpretations of their position in the world drove their desire to learn English. Through the data analysis, several themes emerged that provide some clarification of how this principal perspective is negotiated. These themes, which will be addressed in the next three chapters, are as follows:

- Chapter six:
  - Main theme: Feelings of being members of a global community
  - Sub-themes:
    - Being globalized is a part of being modern
    - Being judged only based on behavior
- Chapter seven:
  - Main theme: Balancing modernity and traditions
  - Sub-themes:
    - Misinterpretation of cultures by others
    - Beyond media images
    - Playing an active role in society
- Chapter eight:
  - Main theme: Using English depending on the context
  - Sub-themes:
    - Taking advantage (personally and professionally) of knowing English
    - Using English to communicate to bridge the communication gap with others
    - Differentiating between English for personal use versus at university

Chapter six presents data that demonstrate how globalization is predominantly associated with modernization, which most of the respondents view as a natural progression of events. This acceptance of modernity does not come easily or without contestation. The students describe how they navigate through societal parameters to figure out how they want to express themselves – through the language they speak, the clothes they wear, and the way they act.

Chapter seven presents a detailed analysis of how students balance their ideas of modernity and tradition. Most students indicated that they were comfortable slipping in and out of roles to accommodate family expectations and their own desires. In fact, this balancing act seemed to be a part of their daily lives. However, data in this chapter will also show that this type

of negotiation was not always acknowledged or appreciated, particularly by foreigners they met when traveling and even some of the English language teachers at KU. In addition to having to deal with negative cultural assumptions, several respondents emphasized that they were most affected through negative media images of Muslims and Arabs, both on news programs as well as movies. Despite these issues, for the most part, students seemed to be able to take control and actively incorporate or reject aspects of modernity and tradition according to their own preferences.

Chapter eight, the final data chapter, looks more specifically at how the interpretations mentioned in chapters six and seven influence students' use and acceptance of the English language. In particular, this chapter presents data that show how the majority of the respondents associate knowing English with several advantages and believe that it can help foster communication with people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds in order to promote more understanding and acceptance. In addition, the data reveal that despite the importance associated with English, it is not always used for purposes other than practical or educational/professional ones. This dichotomous view of the use of the language filters into the classroom and also has an impact on teachers' perceptions.

## **5.6 OBSTACLES**

### **5.6.1 *Personal Challenge***

It took a while for me to figure out how to distance myself from the study in order to be objective about the research. Having been born and raised in Kuwait, it was initially hard for me to draw myself away from the research setting and from personal prejudices against or in support of Kuwait and its people. As Spradley notes, "the more you know about a situation as an ordinary participant, the more difficult it is to study it as an ethnographer" (1980: 61). Therefore, my first main task was related to trying to see things in Kuwait in a new light. Holliday (2007: 20) mentions "qualitative researchers must never forget to approach their own actions as strangers, holding up everything for scrutiny, accounting for every action." This practice of viewing the familiar with a new set of eyes took a lot of time to get right. I had to make a very conscious effort to make sure that I was not assuming anything about events, interactions, or occurrences developing around me. Hammersley and Atkinson emphasized that:

even where he or she is researching a familiar group or setting, the participant observer is required to treat this as 'anthropologically strange', in an effort to make explicit the presuppositions he or she takes for granted as a culture member. In this way, it is hoped, the culture is turned into an object available for study. (1995: 9)

At first I thought that I would have to completely separate my voice from my research. Now, not only do I think that this is not possible, but I also think that I should include my thought processes as I begin to see things from a new perspective – from the setting, to the people, to the way this new vision affects even my personal thoughts and actions. By noting my thoughts that have guided my decisions and actions, I am able to show my work in a disciplined manner, which is part of a qualitative study (Holliday, 2007: 42). It is emphasized that ethnographers “must strenuously avoid feeling ‘at home’. If and when all sense of being a stranger is lost, one may have allowed the escape of one’s critical, analytical perspective” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 115). Having worked at KU for eleven years and established a wonderful relationship with most of my students, it was hard not to make things personal. However, as I conducted the research, it then became a challenge for me to look at Kuwait without criticizing. Achieving this distance took some time to get used to and was emotionally very difficult.

Establishing this distance involved focusing on my own goals as a teacher, researcher, and person. In analyzing my own perspective and acknowledging my own emotions, I was able to maintain more of a distance. I have been very conscious of making sure to adopt an analytical perspective and not a critical one. Furthermore, the act of acknowledging my experience and my status within the research setting and in relation to the participants, particularly those I knew personally, has enabled me to incorporate my own findings and experiences into the data.

### ***5.6.2 Logistical Difficulties***

Although I had been conducting interviews in my office at KU, in January 2009 I resigned from my position as coordinator of one of the English courses that was offered by our department. One of the consequences of my resignation was that I lost my office and had to move to an open cubicle within the department. This posed some problems as to where the interviews were going to be held as there was not enough privacy to ensure a comfortable, confidential interview. I managed to use the conference room in our department for two interviews. However, both interviews were interrupted either by somebody coming into the room, the phone ringing, or the photocopier being used. This contributed to an uncomfortable interviewing environment both for me and the interviewee.

Furthermore, although I received permission from the director of the English Language Unit to carry out my observations and interviews at KU, because of the possible sensitivity of the subject matter and the potential to cause a defensive reaction if my questions are misinterpreted as questioning Kuwaiti identity rather than questions exploring Kuwaiti identity, I felt increasingly uncomfortable about using the university campus as my primary research location.

It has been noted that “who is interviewed, when, and how will usually be decided as the research progresses, according to the ethnographer’s assessment of the current state of his or her

knowledge, according to judgments as to how it might be best developed further” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 138). Due to both these situations, I was inclined to conduct the rest of my interviews off-campus at what I thought might be a neutral site. Although I did manage to meet a number of students at a café, I soon realized that students were generally reluctant to meet outside of university time. Moreover, none of the male students who I had arranged to interview wanted to meet off-campus. In the end I was lucky that a new conference room opened close to the English Language Unit that was spacious and comfortable. I was able to complete the rest of my interviews there.

### **5.6.3 Conflict of Interest**

Hamilton mentioned that fieldwork causes the researcher to question her ethics (2009: 73-74). This is something I had to deal with towards the end of my research. An unexpected difficulty that arose in the final two months of the study was that some students revealed some information about cheating and plagiarizing at the university. One student specifically told me about a ‘research paper bank’ that was available for students to use for their English class assignments. I was caught off guard by his candidness and was not sure what to do. As part of the interview process, I had promised confidentiality so I did not want to be the one who prompted an investigation into this matter. I was, however, conflicted, as I did not want to be seen as compromising the integrity of the English Language Unit. In the end, I chose not to disclose the information about the ‘research paper bank.’ I wanted to maintain my promise to my interviewee.

### **5.6.4 Ethics**

Ethical considerations were made to ensure that the needs and concerns of the people involved in the study were considered and the privacy and security of the participants were a priority. Before embarking on this research, I completed the procedures required by the University of Kent’s ethics committee. From that point, I kept in mind Murphy and Dingwall’s (2001) premise of research being ethical “if its benefits outweigh its potential harm” (p. 340). Clear ethical lines when it comes to qualitative research cannot be predicted and drawn from beforehand. They have to be adjusted along with the research process; the focus has to be on not exploiting or harming the participants.

The issue of informed consent is one that is raised often when it comes to qualitative research because although the setting may be specified, the dynamic interaction between the researcher and the subjects cannot be controlled. Therefore, ethical concerns come up mainly related to disclosing the details of the research to the participants. After the parameters of the research are explained to the participants, the “desire to participate in a research study depends upon a participant’s willingness to share his or her experience” (Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden,

2000: 93). Therefore, by students volunteering to participate in this research, they are giving a form of consent, even if they did not fill out a form, such as with the casual conversations. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that “there are degrees of participation and therefore the consent to participate should take into account the extent to which different participants would be involved” (Halai, 2006: 9).

When trying to decide which method would best be suitable, my first concern was to ensure the well-being and protection of the participants. After that consideration, I focused on the research setting and went about employing tools and methods that would best reveal the dynamic angles of the environment. Interactions with the participants were informative as were covert observations because they helped “reveal what lies beneath without altering the nature of reality” (Li, 2008: 111).

As described in the previous section, three main methods of data collection were used: scheduled interviews, conversations with teachers and students, and observations of daily interactions in common spaces in the university as well as around Kuwait.

At the beginning of each scheduled interview, students were given an informed consent form to sign. The form explained the details and purpose of the research and the parameters in which their responses would be used (a sample informed consent form is included in the appendix, page A6). Before signing the form students were given an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the research goals and objectives. They were also given the option to withdraw from the study if they so desired.

During conversations with students and teachers, labeled as casual conversations, teacher talk, and classroom discussions in my research diaries, consent forms were not used since the interactions were not planned in advance. However, during each conversation, students and teachers were explicitly asked whether I could take notes about what was being said and my intention to use their responses in my research and future publications was stated. I obtained verbal consent from them and ensured anonymity. I included conversations I had with both students and teachers with just oral consent, taking from the guidelines that informed consent could be either written or oral (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, et al., 2005: 11). Furthermore, since “the process of informed consent may ... be continuous, verbal, and incremental throughout the life of the research,” and I was notified that written informed consent was not required according to university guidelines, I proceeded with my data collection (Northumbria University, 2012: 4).

I was aware that just because a form was not signed did not mean that consent was not necessary. At all times, when participants were spoken to and their material was included in the research, I received consent – whether in oral or written form. Furthermore, I was always aware that maintaining the trust of the participants was at the forefront of my priorities.



Dealing with consent when it came to covert observations was a different issue. Covert research cannot, by definition, involve informed consent, because informing the subject would render the research overt. This method was employed because one of the objectives of this study was to investigate how students interacted in their environment, particularly when it came to the use of English. Aside from directly interacting with the students, observing student behavior in their university environment, which proved to be a complex, multi-layered setting, was a beneficial way of gaining such insight. Although I predominantly included myself as a participant observer who both engaged in and observed the interactions within the setting, there was also an element of sitting back and attempting to gain a larger overview of the context. In these cases, marked as general observations in my field notes, consent to be observed was not taken from the subjects. In these notes, only incidents were noted, not personal details about the person that I was writing about. These observations took place in public spaces around KU and Kuwait in general. Although people were referred to in these observations, they are not mentioned by name.

I understood that although covert observations do provide detailed findings that elaborate on the contextual influences of a particular behavior, it has not always been accepted as the most ethical approach to research, mainly because the participants are not informed of their participation or the researcher's activities (Bulmer, 1980: 61; Dingwall, 1980: 873). However, I realized that there were some circumstances when:

it is either difficult to gain written consent and/or is not conducive to the efficacy of the research. For instance, informed consent might not be possible if: (1) Gaining informed consent would change the behaviour of those being studied and would therefore distort the data; (2) Access to the groups or communities might be prevented if the researcher's aims and methods were known; (3) Large populations might make it difficult to gain written consent (whole villages, for example). (Northumbria University, 2012: 4)

In the context of this study, covert observations provided the opportunity to get a feel for the context without involving specific participants and observe behavior in a natural environment. During these observations, I recognized the difference between observations made in public spaces and the invasion of privacy. I acknowledge that I cannot speak for the participants and give a concrete, definitive truth, but what I observe and note does provide a glimpse of what is occurring – adding to the revelation of complex, messy realities. The ethics is proved with sensitivity towards the participants, awareness of how the interaction will have an impact on both the researcher and the participant, as well as the environment around them, and flexibility to change the research methodology if need be.

Murphy and Dingwall (2001) mention reactions to the publication of ethnographic accounts. Although I assured anonymity, I am conscious about how my work will be received. “The publication of ethnographic accounts may expose individuals to other versions of reality

held by those close to them, breaking down protective silences” (p. 342). This worries me on several levels. After reading some of my data excerpts, some of my students replied that they completely identified with what was written. Although they were not part of the study, I wondered if upon reading my thesis, parts would be (mis)interpreted as a representation of factual information or concrete reality rather than contextualized occurrences, something which would be in direct opposition to the intention of this thesis. This worry made me take extra care when presenting the data, particularly with contextualizing data excerpts in as much detail as possible. This concern about misrepresentation or misinterpretation is not so much that about individual articles may be published based on the data that has been collected, but more that the setting of my thesis – the Health Science Center at KU – is explicit.

Despite shifting lenses from a teacher to a researcher, my experience as a teacher at KU for seven years also informed the way I approached the study as well as wrote it up. The parameters of the research developed from my experience. Although this may have meant that some aspects were not covered, such as students’ more personal religious affiliations or political perspectives, but that was a reflection of my interpretation of the society as well as a precaution I took as my position as a foreigner living in Kuwait.

#### **5.6.5 *Finding a Finishing Point***

Finding an ending point to the research process and data collection proved to be challenging, especially because of the recent wave of revolutions in the Middle East. Both the Tunisian revolution, which began in December 2010, and the Egyptian revolution, which started in January 2011, sparked a new level of awareness within the region. While not as dramatic as protests happening elsewhere, protests even occurred in Kuwait. The changes in the region prompted new discussions, and once again added another perspective from which to evaluate events that were occurring locally as well as globally. While the situation in Kuwait is quite different due to the country’s wealth, the realization that there is more to life than just social stability and that the isolation of their life from the others in the country is not always possible seems to be strengthening.

### **5.7 CONCLUSION**

The starting point of this study was my realization that assumptions about identity, and English language proficiency were being made without much critical thought. This led me to analyze my own identity and figure out how I positioned myself both globally and locally. I discovered several layers that all played a role in the construction of one’s identity. In trying to respect this complexity, the data analysis involved attempting to present a real and accurate account of what the respondents were saying and thinking. Thus, a qualitative approach was

suitable as it allowed for the expression of the messy lines that are part of reality. Within the qualitative research, a postmodern ethnographic approach was best suited as it helped situate both myself in the research and my respondents in the world. The data illustrating these discoveries are presented in the following three chapters.

## CHAPTER 6: MEMBERS OF A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

*“Globalization ... it’s about everything being connected in the world, but what’s so amazing about that?” (Mona #94 I2).*

This chapter explores what students at KU are saying about how they situate themselves within the world and within their own society. The majority of the students do not perceive themselves as being very different from other people in the world. At the same time they emphasize their uniqueness and do not see themselves like others either. This dichotomous perspective, of feeling like they have a global connection versus feeling like they are misunderstood and alone, is revealed in their interpretations of the changes that have been occurring in Kuwait, primarily as a consequence of globalization.

In the first main section of this chapter, I present student interpretations of globalization, which they emphatically connect to modernity. These perspectives in turn have an impact on their behavior. For the most part, respondents view participation in globalization as essential for Kuwait’s progress and development. What the section highlights is how normal and natural most students regard the changes that have been occurring in Kuwait. Part of this normalcy is driven by the amount of exposure they have to foreign goods and media as well as their interaction with expatriates working in Kuwait and foreigners when they travel abroad.

The second main section reveals the deeper impact that globalization has on the way students negotiate their identity. At first glance, material evidence of globalization, such as driving foreign cars and wearing international fashion brands, is most evident. However, closer examination reveals how these actions are not the only medium through which students express their identity. In fact, closer examination reveals the complex manner in which they navigate through societal parameters and cultural expectations to express their identity – through the language they speak, the clothes they wear, and the actions they choose.

### 6.2 BEING GLOBALIZED IS PART OF BEING MODERN

*“We get the best products from the Western countries and that helps us to become more modern and up to date” (Noura #139 I6).*

The desire to be modern and connected with popular global trends is a driving force behind most of the choices students make. This section presents data that reveal how students’ understandings of globalization, which is strongly correlated with modernity and progress, influence their lives on a daily basis. Although the overwhelming response towards the consequences of globalization is positive, not all respondents feel that the new influences in Kuwait properly suit their interpretation of the Kuwaiti way of life. In addition to the conflicting

student reactions, the data reveal how student behavior is frequently misjudged due to cultural assumptions. This is particularly evident in the way some of the English language teachers at KU talk about their students.

The following three themes are discussed in the upcoming sections:

- i) globalization seen as a symbol of modernity and progress
- ii) conflicting opinions about the impact globalization in Kuwait
- iii) criticism of modernity as only superficial change

While all respondents do not hold all of these views, the majority of the participants in this study express these opinions in varying degrees.

### **6.2.1 *The Normalcy of Globalization and Interconnectedness***

*“People and countries change over time. It’s a natural thing.”  
(Hisham #212 C29)*

The most striking response that emerged from the data was the matter-of-fact attitude in which students viewed the changes that have been occurring in Kuwait, primarily as a consequence of globalization. When discussing globalization, respondents often equated or interchanged the term with modernization, Westernization, or Americanization. These adjectives reflect the dominant impressions that they have about the changes that have occurred and are still occurring in Kuwait. The term globalization was also related to being interconnected with other people. This section analyzes what respondents associate with these concepts and what kind of impact their view has on their lives.

#### **a) *Globalization associated with modernization***

The initial response to discussing changes in Kuwait was often a reference to new structural developments that have become more visible over the past decade. For example, in a conversation with two students, I asked them if they felt that Kuwait had changed over the years. Hisham replied, “Well, there are more buildings” (#212 C29). Noura said that she thought Kuwait was becoming more international so that it “can become like other countries” (#139 I6). Mahfuza believed that the building of new shopping malls and skyscrapers was a way to show “here in Kuwait we’re like everywhere else. We have movie theaters, shopping malls, big office buildings ... the picture of Kuwait is not like before when we only had houses ... This change is good” (#186 C19). The building of shopping malls and skyscrapers in Kuwait city were the two most cited structural developments of Kuwait. Most of these statements were comparing Kuwait to the way other cities were developing. In particular, Dubai was frequently referenced. Qader explains,

Dubai is really moving forward with their construction ... we have to show that we’re not far behind ... People hear Dubai and they know what it is, but for

Kuwait, no ... nobody knows anything about Kuwait ... the new buildings are the way we can show people we are like other countries ... with modern shopping malls and tall buildings in the city. (#106 I3)

References to Dubai most often come up because it is seen to be the most prominent and quickly changing city in the region, striving to be accessible to people around the world.

When asked about the meaning and significance of globalization, Hani stated it meant, “being more modern and changing with the rest of the world” (#93 C8). He clarified that he did not think that all places in the world were developing in the same way or even at the same speed, but rather globalization reflected, “how you make changes that are best for your country” (Hani #93 C8). Stating that one can ‘make changes’ reflects a belief that active participation is involved in deciding why and how to engage with one’s context. Furthermore, the term ‘change’ in association with globalization suggests outside influences have an effect on what is happening in Kuwait. I found the repeated mention of how the changing physical landscape was an indication of modernity to be quite symbolic. The buildings were an indication of how Kuwait was altering physically. However, not much reference was made to deeper changes in the country. This corresponds with observations regarding the changes in Kuwait as ones that do not penetrate the local culture or customs, as mentioned in Chapter 1, section 1.4. As will be seen throughout the data, despite positive attitudes towards the developments in Kuwait, most references are to superficial, rather than deep, cultural changes.

To probe further into what else besides structural developments were affecting Kuwait, I asked Hisham if he felt that the people or culture of Kuwait was changing in any way, he shook his head and said, “no more than normal.” I asked him to explain his idea of ‘normal.’ Hisham replied, “People and countries change over time. It’s a natural thing.” He continued to explain that this type of change was part of a “developing process.” Aziz, who was with Hisham, chimed in to say, “If nothing was wrong or everything was perfect, then we wouldn’t need to change. But nothing’s perfect, so it’s normal for change to happen (Hisham and Aziz #212 C29). Hisham and Aziz went on to state that they believed Kuwait would continue to evolve “as we learn new things” and “get more experience” in order to “add to the quality of Kuwait ... and make it better” (#212 C29).

The reference to superficial changes and the need for foreign products to improve the standard of living in Kuwait was repeated throughout the study. In fact, this was often the first reaction respondents had when reflecting on how Kuwait has been developing over the past few years, namely that it has been marked by the construction of new buildings, opening of new restaurants, and the import of other foreign consumer products. What I was most intrigued by was Aziz’s analysis of the reason behind why he thought change would occur – it was to strive for improvement, until things are ‘perfect.’ Not only did they acknowledge this development, but

they also believed that Kuwait would continue to evolve as long as there were things to learn from others and help improve the country. This perspective was common among the students. An emphasis on how Kuwait would be able to benefit was always at the forefront of their view.

The development in Kuwait is not explicitly said to be conflicting with the local environment. In fact, respondents do not always question the changes that are occurring around them but rather seem to accept them as something ‘normal.’ This type of response particularly caught my attention since non-Kuwaitis, such as some teachers in this study, often saw this type of attitude as unusual or strange. While it may seem like a lack of questioning is a sign of being victims of cultural imperialism, as discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.2.2, and that students have a narrow or uncritical view of the changes that are occurring in Kuwait, a deeper interaction with the students, as will be illustrated in the upcoming sections, reveal how these occurrences affect their lives.

Many of the respondents suggest that it is not so much that the changes in Kuwait are new, but that they are more evident. In an interview, Aziz explains, “Changes happen more quickly and more clearly now because we can see them and we participate in the changes everyday” (#221 I18). He elaborates,

There were so many things we didn’t know about before, like before the Internet ... but now we can get to know things quickly ... We don’t have to wait for somebody else to teach us or to go abroad to learn. No, now we can find out and do what we want without waiting. (#221 I18)

The acceleration and convenience of new technology has made this possible. Access to the Internet was frequently mentioned as a pathway to promoting interconnectedness and becoming more modern and trendy. The extent of exposure to technology and media also adds to the element of normalcy because it is now a routine part of their lives. Aziz suggests that if they did not have access to information or products locally, then they would travel abroad to ensure they had what they needed to continue to progress and develop.

A significant marker of globalization within Kuwait is the availability of foreign goods and services. Looking at the landscape of Kuwait one can find many signs of globalization – from American restaurants like PF Chang’s and Johnny Rockets to British clothing stores like Oasis and Marks & Spencer to international businesses and banks such as Saatchi and Saatchi and HSBC. The presence of foreign imports over the past ten years has steadily increased and now, as several of the participants in this study affirm, they have become part of Kuwaiti society, and to some extent, Kuwait culture. Several respondents mentioned the material indicators of globalization. For example, Razan says, “Globalization can be seen everywhere. You can see it in the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the cars we drive, the materials to build the houses we live in” (Razan #81 C4).

A dominating explanation for accepting the dominance of foreign goods and services is because Kuwait itself does not produce many consumer products. As a result, it relies heavily on importing goods, whether for practical reasons, such as new technical equipment in hospitals and factories, or for pleasure, such as popular clothing brands and restaurants. These goods and services were not usually equated with luxury, but rather they were seen as ‘necessary.’ Aziz said, “Kuwait only produces oil, so for everything else, we need from other countries” (#221 I18). Omar mentioned Kuwait’s lack of production of products left Kuwaitis “vulnerable” and “reliant on others because we only have money, but we have nothing else much that people can use” (Omar #60 I14). This reliance builds on the belief that these goods are beneficial for the country. The basic underlying connection seems to be that because Kuwait does not manufacture any products locally, there is an increased dependence on importing foreign goods. It is this pragmatic perspective of the need for foreign goods that is emphasized by several of the respondents. Moreover, this attitude corresponds with the belief that, as seen in Chapter 3, section 3.2.2, importing foreign products does not necessarily mean that the associated culture is being imported as well.

Waleed links globalization to the basic principles of economics. He says,

It’s basic supply and demand really. We wanted something that wasn’t made locally, so we imported it ... just like we export oil to those who want it. If we didn’t want it, then it wouldn’t be necessary here ... It’s not becoming more like the West. It’s just about getting what we want. (#147 I7)

Waleed’s response reflects a practical outlook about the exchange of products. He points out that Kuwait is not only importing products, but it is exporting oil as well. He also distinguishes between using Western products and *becoming* more Western. This places a distance between any cultural associations that may be linked to using foreign goods. Similarly, Hanan believes that the changes in Kuwait are about choices. Referring to the import of foreign goods she states, “If the government didn’t think it was good for the people or the country, then they wouldn’t do it” (#133 I5). Waleed and Hanan do not view globalization as a venue through which the West or other dominating forces are imposing a change in Kuwait. Rather, they interpret it as a consequence of choices made based on the needs of the society. Not acknowledging any cultural association is one way that students take ownership of what is happening locally. This perspective also mirrors opinions about the structural development in Kuwait, seeing it as a marker of the country’s progress versus a statement of cultural change. In addition, mentioning choice suggests that ultimately the control of how and what elements of globalization to incorporate remains with each individual. This highlights the active participation in determining how the landscape of Kuwait is changing. This practical attitude is often not considered by others.



The dependence on foreign goods and services was also related to the reliance on expatriate workers in Kuwait. Currently, approximately two-thirds of Kuwait's population of around 2.7 million people is made up of non-Kuwaitis. The high demand for foreign employees and services is linked to gaining knowledge and learning from qualified experts, regardless of their nationality. Razan explains, "if you want to learn something new, then you gotta bring new people to teach you" (#81 C4). Having foreigners come in to share their expertise "makes sense" to her. Leila shares Razan's view and says,

We have a lot of expats working in Kuwait. Having so many nationalities makes globalization obvious. It's like we're becoming parts of one community ... Globalization gives us the chance to learn from other cultures ... Our experience is limited ... when we have other people come into the country and they learned from other schools and stuff, then they can share their experience. (Leila #182 19)

From the respondents' statements, the presence of expatriates in Kuwait is not seen as unusual. The desire for progress is revealed as a driving force for the foundation of the perceptions of globalization.

The presence of a large number of expatriates in Kuwait added to the view of normalcy of seeing foreign products, hearing foreign accents, and associating with foreigners. It seems, for the most part, respondents are used to being in an international environment, even within Kuwait. Interpreting the developments as necessary for Kuwait's progress supersedes other possible negative effects of globalization, thus reinforcing the idea that students are much more naturally cosmopolitan than their teachers imagine.

**b) *Globalization related to the terms Westernization and Americanization***

Aside from modernization, the terms Westernization and Americanization are also sometimes used to describe globalization. Eman equates globalization with Westernization because "most of the modern products and technology that we like to use are from the West" and that it is not local products that contribute to national development. Hence, she expresses a belief that if the country is to become more modern, then it is going to happen through using Western methods and technology (Eman #211 I15). Noura has a similar opinion. She says, "We get the best products from the Western countries and that helps us to become more modern and up to date." She believes this is important "so that Kuwait can be at the same level with the other countries in the world" (Noura #25 I6). Once again, there is repeated comparison with other countries as a way to compete in global markets.

The issue of what constitutes 'being Western' was also raised. Seema says,

Maybe some people can look at us and say 'Oh we're being Western because we wear jeans and stuff like that ... and not *abaya* and *niqab* like in Saudi ... This is the way we are. We change the way in our lives to be more easy and comfortable

... like other countries are also changing to improve themselves, so are we too.  
(#50 C2)

A number of points stand out in Seema's statement. She refers to what other people perceive of them, mainly referring to clothing. She compares their dress culture to that of Saudi Arabia, where conservative clothing is mandatory. In addition, she mentions making life easier for them and as seen previously, compares the changes in Kuwait to those that are happening in other countries as well. Comparing the development in Kuwait with what is happening in other countries in the world demonstrates a level of awareness that students are not always given credit for.

Other respondents equate globalization directly to Americanization. Marouf believes that globalization has to do with becoming more modern but that "it's mainly Americanization because America is so powerful" (Marouf #161 C16). He explains,

America is the country that is in control of the media. So many people see American movies and news programs and these are the things that influence people's ideas. So, it's a bit about control ... Globalization is how we keep a connection with other countries too, like we buy Chinese products and we drive Japanese cars, but there is something more about the lifestyle that we see of America that makes it more powerful and can influence more people. (#161 C16)

Bringing up the issue of control suggests that an element of media domination is not only about entertainment, but is also an attempt to promote a certain image that may have an impact on local culture. However, several students suggest that the popularity of American media actually makes it less unique and more commonplace. This perception corresponds to discussions related to the ownership of the English language, as elaborated on in Chapter 2, section 2.3.2. Since the use of English is so widespread and used by such a diverse population, users manipulate the language to suit their needs and represent themselves. Thus, the characteristic of English belonging to one particular nation becomes irrelevant.

Hisham and Aziz also focus on Americanization because of the popularity of American media. Hisham says he finds the American way of life portrayed on television to be "attractive" and "fun." Aziz agrees with him and says that the lighthearted way that life is shown in movies and TV programs makes it easier for them to become enamored with the American way of life (Hisham and Aziz #66 C29).

With so much acceptance and excitement over foreign products and services, it might seem that it is heavily conflicting with the local culture. However, this appeal with the American way of life is not seen as a threat to national identity. Abdullah does not hesitate to acknowledge that Kuwait has become more modern and is now heavily influenced by American and British popular culture. However, he does not feel that the changes are necessarily affecting his Kuwaiti identity. He explains, "Maybe things are happening that make it seem like we're losing our culture, like becoming Westernized or something, but that doesn't mean anything. I mean, we're

still Kuwaiti. If we wear jeans or wear a dishdasha, we're still Kuwaiti" (Abdullah #91 C7). These perspectives associate development as a positive occurrence, in contrast to what theories of imperialism suggest. Moreover, when it comes to addressing deeper changes, some students approached it as almost a challenge. Abdullah continues to say,

the West is coming in but they will never change us. They are struggling to understand how we think and why we do what we do, but we don't care to even think about them ... They're always trying to find problems with our culture and our society because we're different, but actually, they're different, not us. We stick together. All of Kuwait is one big family. If they come to try and change us, we stick together stronger than before. (#91 C7)

This type of response makes a clear distinction between the West in general and Kuwait. Not only does he emphasize his opinion about the unity among Kuwaitis, but he also demonstrates a critical interpretation of why others might be trying to analyze Kuwait. This type of response is also given by two other respondents, Qader (#106 I3) and Hisham (#260 I24). Qader mentions that issues in Kuwait are "our own problems. It is not for outside countries to come in and tell us what is right and what is wrong" (#106 I3). He mentions "there is a certain Kuwaiti way of doing things and people don't need to understand it. It is for us to deal with on our own." Hisham expresses a similar point of view. He explains,

There are things we do here in Kuwait that are unique to us. We have our own issues and ways of doing things so that's why other people may not understand us. Actually that becomes their problem, not ours. Like when people judge us or criticize the way we do things, it's like so what? Why would I change for somebody else? Who do they think they are? I think it's a waste of time to worry about others too much because we have our own problems. (#260 I24)

I had not expected such a strong response that mainly negates any conflict or direct influence to thoughts or behavior as a result of outside influences. As explained in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.1), from my own experience of being raised and brought up in Kuwait I found it to be quite a struggle to balance the family traditions with the more American ideologies that I was exposed to in school. It was reflecting on this that I realized that perhaps the students had this attitude because the majority of the respondents in the study went to Arabic-medium Kuwaiti government schools and now continue their education locally at KU in which the majority of the student population (approximately 96%) are Kuwaiti as well. The emphasis on the superficial influence of globalization could perhaps be linked to the fact that many had not, and did not need to, integrated with foreigners.

It was difficult to gain deeper insight about the motivations behind these comments. It seems like they put up a shield and insisted that they did not need to be understood. There was frequent emphasis that things were happening as a direct result of choices that they made. Even references to behaviors that looked contradictory, or what I assumed to be contradictory based on

my experience, was brushed off as something insignificant. For example, several students mentioned they had a choice in terms of mixing with members of the opposite sex. However, they also emphasized that parental and societal parameters guided their actions. They did not seem to acknowledge a contradiction between having to work within specific guidelines and believing that they had a choice in terms of how to behave.

This view highlights the way the West is not seen as being in a privileged position. It contradicts the idea of Western influence dominating and destroying local cultures, as discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.2.1. Instead, locals deny that power by appropriating the changes to suit their own needs and the benefit of their own country. Although there are some elements of Western culture that may be appealing, what does not seem to cross the border is the cultural value that may be associated with certain material goods. Students like Abdullah recognize the difference but claims it unites or solidifies local identity rather than cause it to fracture.

When asked whether globalization equaled Westernization, Razan's reply is similar to Abdullah's statement,

No, not really. I mean, I think people say Western or American because they have the most obvious influence. Like they're always in the media and it's their movie actors and superstars we know about and we get the most stuff from them. But I know it's more than that. I mean, you can't say I'm Western because I wear jeans! That's crazy. (Razan #81 C4)

Razan's statement demonstrates an understanding of the complex nature of identity. One's cultural profile cannot be determined simply based on products they use or clothes they wear. It is interesting to note that both Abdullah and Razan, as well as a few other respondents, such as Amal as well as Hisham and Aziz (#158 C13; #212 C29), mentioned wearing 'jeans' as an action that could be mistaken as being Western. In fact, clothing was quite often mentioned as a distinguishing factor of being Western or not; this will be further discussed in section 6.3.2.

**c) *Globalization as a representation of interconnectedness among people***

Another prevalent interpretation of globalization is the idea of it representing a connectedness among people. This understanding is significant as it highlights how the respondents position themselves in relation to their view of the rest of the world. This positioning in turn affects the way they interpret and act within their context.

In an interview, Mona stated, "I hear the word globalization, but I don't really know what it is. I mean, from what I understand, it's about everything being connected in the world, but what's so amazing about that?" She says,

It's cool and everything that we're all connected, but I guess I don't understand what the big deal is. It's like, the whole world even started as pretty much one continent, and like, ya, like all of humanity started with Adam and Eve, so isn't

saying that we're interconnected kinda obvious. I don't know. It's just kinda what I think. (#94 I2)

Mona clearly believes that interconnectedness is not an occurrence that started recently as she refers to the world actually being physically connected and then drifting apart over time. Even her reference to Adam and Eve as the start of humanity suggests a belief that interconnectedness among people has always been present. Although no other respondents make the association on such a fundamental level, several students express similar ideas. Raqeeba states that she does not have an exact definition for globalization, but in her mind, "I think it just means something like being connected." She does not equate anything particularly special to the word, "because I think it's always been here" (#189 C20). Respondents are quite direct in expressing their opinions about globalization and its association to connectedness. Viewing the interconnectedness as having always been present reveals why most students do not engage further in analyzing their environment.

In addition to viewing progress and development in Kuwait as normal, it is also seen as necessary. Omar finds the idea of not changing local behavior and practices over time to be "foolish." He asks,

Can you imagine if after all these years we didn't learn anything? Like if we didn't learn how to make things more efficient and work more smoothly and in an easier way? We don't live in a bubble. We travel and experience things in other countries. Wouldn't it be foolish if we didn't try to use what is beneficial in the other places in our own country? This doesn't mean that if I use German technology then I am betraying Kuwait. It means that I can improve Kuwait in a way to help everybody. It's natural, right? (#206 I14)

Once again, the principal focus is on doing things to benefit Kuwait. His statements also suggest that it would be problematic if no changes had occurred. Noura expressed a similar view,

Look at how much the human race has changed over thousands of years. How can people think that just by following some trends we're losing our culture? We may be changing things here and there, but that's our choice, and that's the way life works, right? (#139 I6)

Both are bothered by the changes in Kuwait being linked to cultural loss. Rather, Noura and Omar's statements suggest that the evolving landscape of Kuwait is normal and expected. This attitude reinforces the control they feel over their environment. While some people may see these changes as leading to a loss of local culture, most of the participants in this study do not share this view. Fahad views the changes as a sign of development. In his interview, he emphasizes, "No, we're just developing. We're not losing ... Let's say you have a country invaded by the U.S. and within 2 to 3 years that entire country changes its identity. They even change their alphabet. That's culture that's lost." Fahad distinguishes this occurrence from what is happening in Kuwait. He says,

You have a country that's just organically developing, without guidance, without anything. It's ... us. If we listen to Michael Jackson coz' I went and bought it and put it in the tape. I wasn't geared towards it; pushed towards it in any way without capping or limiting the growth of local entertainment. Both are there ... now you come to the quality of the work ... that's personal judgment. (#202 I12)

These attitudes challenge the view of globalization as a hegemonic power that causes local culture to deteriorate, such as some of the literature presented in Chapter 3, section 3.2.2 suggests. Students see the development as a sign of proactiveness and progress and something that enhances their culture and is now a normal part of their environment. The attitude of normalcy is representative of a critical cosmopolitanism paradigm that acknowledges how globalization is causing a blurring of boundaries and thus opening up space for more cultural exchange. With increased exposure and awareness, the 'foreign-ness' of being around other people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds begins to diminish.

### **6.2.2 *Clashes between Modernity and Tradition***

*“There are some things that don't belong in Kuwait; it's not part of the Kuwaiti way” (Abdullah #91 C7).*

Although the overwhelming majority of the respondents have a positive attitude towards the impact of globalization in Kuwait, not all the participants share this point of view. Some are critical of the influence of globalization, and they link it to causing changes in Kuwait that are negative or detrimental to society.

When talking to my student Faika about her opinion of the effects of globalization, she looked me straight in the eye and in a contemptuous tone and asked, “You mean like divorce, promiscuity, and obesity?” She goes on to say that it is nice to have variety in terms of places to eat and things to buy; however, if that is all to be gained by globalization, then “it is unnecessary.” “Unfortunately,” she says, “at the moment it's gonna take time to get out from underneath globalization's thumb because it's made us lazy.” She stresses the need for Kuwaitis to be more proactive and responsible in looking out for the future of the country (Faika #59 C3). Pinpointing these negative trends – divorce, promiscuity, and obesity – and relating them to a consequence of globalization implies that perhaps these problems would not be present to affect local culture had so much outside influence not entered Kuwait. Moreover, her statement indicates a belief that these problems originate from the West. Faika's frustration is that the superficial connections to globalization, such as restaurants or TV shows, are primarily having a negative effect because “people don't know what to do with all the information.” She explains, “Like we eat all this fast food but nobody talks about exercise” (Faika #59 C3). This statement raises several points. First, it calls for a closer look at the consequences of superficially adding products

to Kuwait. Kuwait is changing. Not talking about how these changes are affecting the country or what they symbolize leaves some sort of void. Part of it is up to the people themselves to make choices as to how to incorporate these elements into their lives. Another possibility is to be more actively involved in analyzing how these changes are affecting Kuwait. As Faika said being “more proactive and responsible” about the ways foreign products are being incorporated into society will have a much more positive impact.

Waseem feels the same way as Faika. He states that he has “a few reservations” about how Kuwait is changing. Waseem enjoys “how there’s now more variety of everything,” but feels that the mentality of Kuwaitis is changing as well, and this makes him “uncomfortable.” He believes that with “so many choices, people don’t know what to do or think, so they get lost.” He says there are “too many desires now. We want too much, and this is impossible, so it becomes difficult.” Waseem continues to explain how, although there are more opportunities and choices in Kuwait, people cannot just go ahead and do what they want. He corrects himself by saying that “they can do it, but it does not always work.” He gives the example of women wearing shorts or sleeveless shirts in public. While there is no law against dressing in this manner, people still tend to view it negatively. Therefore, if anybody wants to do so, then they need to think before acting, and he believes that “this thinking too much makes things very difficult” (Waseem #153 C12).

Waseem suggests the availability of choices is actually something that may not always be appropriate for Kuwait. This could be because the parameters of society are still strong. Therefore, even if one makes a choice, they still need to consider the reactions of family and the rest of society. The impact of these influences varies from person to person. However, awareness of being judged is mentioned frequently and does have an effect one way or another.

Most respondents feel that the availability of foreign goods and services is a major part of Kuwait’s landscape. However, they also make it clear that integrating these products into their lives, or even choosing not to integrate them but living alongside them, is not always easy or accepted. Some of the issues have to do with the lack of contextualization and analysis that explores how these trends are suitable in Kuwait. On the other hand, several excerpts of data reveal that not having guidelines about how to incorporate changes into their lives actually provides space for them to make their own choices. Perhaps Mahfuza explains it best when she says, “I really see a lot of benefits from globalization. Maybe there are some problems, like not everything from another country will fit here, but you can make it how you want it” (Mahfuza #186 C19). This comment suggests products and services do embody some cultural aspects. However, these aspects are not fixed. They can be modified by each individual in the way she chooses to incorporate them in her life. The notion of choice is also prevalent throughout these responses. Judgments are being made about the changes that are happening in Kuwait, and the

respondents demonstrate how they take ownership of what is happening around them. The struggle to balance modernity and tradition is further explored in chapter seven.

### 6.2.3 *Stunted Cultural Growth: Criticisms of Modernity*

*“Just because they wear the latest clothes and have the most recent technology doesn’t mean that they have become modern” (Barbara #95 TT10).*

As demonstrated in section 6.2.1, the majority of students see the changes in Kuwait as part of a modernization process, which is linked to living in a globalized world. This positive response is one that is seen as unusual by a lot of people. However, students have developed opinions about the changes that are unfolding around them. In some instances, the students are dismayed that the changes in Kuwait are only on the surface. Hamid explains,

I can see Kuwait is changing, but it’s only changing on the outside. What we need is real change, like a change in the mentality of how things are done ... It’s like we have all these great things in Kuwait but it’s just stuff. I still don’t see things for Kuwaiti development or ways to make lasting changes in the country ... like we may have all the latest products, but nobody is thinking about what will happen when we run out of oil. We need to think more long-term ... not just temporary, quick satisfaction. (Hamid #272 GI4)

Mai echoes Hamid’s sentiments and also mentions Kuwait running out of oil as a crucial turning point for the country. She believes Kuwait is “not prepared” to deal with the consequences of no longer having their primary source of wealth. She sees the changes in Kuwait as sources of “temporary satisfaction” (#224 C34).

Hamid and Mai provide another perspective of how modernity is viewed. While they do acknowledge the benefits of material aspects of modernity – having the latest products and technological goods – they believe that the focus on superficial changes will have devastating consequences unless they are addressed. These reactions are similar to those expressed by some of the Kuwaiti students in section 6.2.2. These students are in some ways suggesting that more change is in fact necessary in order for ‘real’ change to occur. This ‘real’ change refers to a shift in mentality that moves from only looking at financial and material advantages to examining the deeper significance of development in Kuwait.

When I shared these student responses with teachers, they were still not convinced. Rather, the response was that the students “are just saying that ... but they don’t really believe it” (Rose #111 TT11). Therefore, even when students display a level of critical thinking, teachers do not easily accept it, which demonstrates how deeply ingrained the negative ideology of students’ lack of ability to be independent learners lies.



Instructors are particularly critical of the material wealth and superficial elements of globalization that they observe in class. “These students are given everything ... they have no idea what it means to work for anything, so they don’t care about their studies” (David #166 TT14). Other comments include, “these students are just spoon-fed” and “they don’t need to work for anything in life, so they don’t care about their education” (Charles #193 TT20; Rose #213 TT24). The presence of so much material wealth, from students carrying the latest designer handbags and mobile phones to driving luxury cars that were bought by their parents as a reward for being accepted into medical school, seems to only aggravate teachers who think that it is more of a “distraction” to the students than an actual reward. “If the parents buy their kids everything without having to work for it, then they’ll never learn what hard work is” (Rose #213 TT24).

These frustrated sentiments are widespread among faculty members. A deep correlation is made between student actions in class and assumptions about how the family is rewarding their child. When I have reminded teachers that the students are 18 year old college students, who, probably like most other 18 year old college students around the world, are not particularly interested in studying, or if I implored teachers not to simply assume that because they have the latest trends that they are unintelligent or unmotivated, I usually received a moment of reflection but then it never lasted. It seems like the immediate behavior that they observe within the college is much more dominating than any possibility of deeper thought and meaning behind the actions of students.

Even though teachers may acknowledge that teenagers and college students in general may not be the most enthusiastic learners, it seems much easier for them to associate the lack of enthusiasm and motivation as a cultural problem than a general characteristic of a college student. I too am guilty of having these thoughts. Trying to work with unenthusiastic students is very frustrating. However, conducting this research and taking the opportunity to learn more from the students themselves opened up a new perspective for me. Acknowledging the importance of research within the university environment and among staff will help start bridging this gap. The source of these teacher perspectives is not further investigated, as it is not the focus of this study; however, delving deeper into the reasoning behind these impressions would be good future research. What students display in the university context and particularly in class is only a fraction of what is really going on in their lives. This will be further explored in the following section.

### 6.3 ALL ACTIONS ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

*“There is a certain Kuwaiti way of doing things and people don’t need to understand it. It is for us to deal with on our own” (Qader #106 I3).*

One phrase repeated by several students is the notion of there being a ‘Kuwaiti way.’ This exact phrase is used to distinguish actions that either were or were not congruent with the ‘Kuwaiti way.’ This ‘way’ represents a particular ideology about how things should be done within Kuwait or among Kuwaiti society. Although most respondents state they are free to choose what language they want to speak or how they want to act, most mentioned that they are still guided by the parameters set by this ‘Kuwaiti way.’ The sections below demonstrate how this perspective applies to what language respondents select to speak, what clothes they decide to wear, and how they choose to act.

#### 6.3.1 *Identifying with a Language*

*“Maybe others will think that if I speak too much English then I’m not truly Kuwaiti, but you can’t change the nationality you have just because you speak a language more or less than another one” (Fajr #86 C6).*

The majority of the respondents believe that globalization is benefitting Kuwait, and to make the most of the opportunities, English is needed. Their active participation in relation to incorporating, accepting, and rejecting elements of globalization is reflected in the way they position English in their lives. Communication is emphasized as an important element of surviving and succeeding in globalization. However, they also mentioned other advantages to knowing the language, such as its link to prestige. They emphasize that English serves as a form of linguistic capital that provides them with access to experiences that greatly benefit themselves and their country. The perceived benefits and challenges of learning English are addressed in this section.

None of the respondents question the status of English and rather accept its position as a global language, which is therefore their motivation to learn the language. However, the data in this section reveal that there is actually a deeper connection to how this impression has been cultivated. The positive attitudes towards English are significantly perpetuated by their experiences and interactions with others.

The notion of English being a beneficial language and one that is essential to succeed in the modern world is one that respondents seem to have developed based on the exchanges and experiences they have had. The emphasis to learn English often starts at home. Sabrina explains that since her parents do not know much English, they encourage her to learn the language. Moreover, she says she finds it helpful when she travels. For her, English is mainly used outside

Kuwait; she explains, “I don’t speak it with my family, but I do when I go out of the country” (Sabrina #97 C9). She claims that when she speaks English, people do not see her “as that strange anymore” because when they look at her and her family, “they might have certain ideas about us because we’re Muslim, but speaking English makes them feel more relaxed, so we also feel more comfortable.” When I asked her how this made her feel, she told me that it is “better for us because otherwise how else can we, y’know, break the boundary” (Sabrina #97 C9). The significance of breaking this boundary is further discussed in chapter eight (section 8.2.2).

Kawthar also emphasizes positive reactions that she and her family receive when they travel abroad. When asked how she interpreted this perceived reaction towards English, she explains,

I didn’t think about it in that way. I mean, sometimes you have to learn something to get the job you want. Like, if it’s a problem for someone to speak English, you don’t need to learn English. You can get a job that does not need English as a requirement. So it’s up to you and what you want. My parents thought it would be good for me to learn English, so they pushed me towards it, and they were right. I have a huge advantage because I know the language. (#223 C33)

The positive responses towards to their knowledge of English, especially when they travel abroad, has played a large role in solidifying the desire to learn English. Qader explains, “I always find that when I travel people react to me in a different way when I speak English, it’s like they are surprised I’m intelligent or something.” After saying this he gave a hearty laugh and said, “Maybe I am!” (#106 I3). For several respondents, the initial encouragement to learn English started at home. The advantages of studying the language are promoted from an early age and thus seem to occupy a natural place in their linguistic profile. Furthermore, the positive responses from other people solidify the benefits of knowing the language.

Another perspective several students have about English is that it is a skill for them to learn. Kareem says, “I’m proud of knowing English. Why not? It’s a talent, like learning any other language. When I get the chance I will pick up another language, like maybe Spanish or Japanese. It’s good to expand your knowledge” (#84 C5). Aside from this attitude, Dawood feels that “English definitely puts me at an advantage for many things ... and I feel my confidence increases because I know the language” (#199 C24). Like any other skill they may choose to learn, achieving proficiency in English is one more element of their linguistic identity.

In addition to being beneficial, a certain level of prestige is also associated with knowing English. Nada describes how speaking English gives her patients confidence in her capabilities as a doctor. She believes there is something psychologically comforting to her knowing English, and that even if the patients themselves do not know the language, when they hear her talking to the nurse in English, they feel more confident (#273 I26). This type of response highlights the prestige that is attached to knowing the language. Although her qualifications and experience do matter, she finds that it is her fluency in English that gives her an extra level of credibility.

Receiving a positive response from other speakers of English has also had an impact on how these respondents negotiate their use of the language. This reflects the research presented in Chapter 2, section 2.2.3, highlighting the preference to teach and learn standard English. Students themselves do not say that they are learning English for the associated prestige. Rather, their continued focus is on the practical applicability of the language, which provides them with more opportunities for success. Although some students do not understand why others would be surprised at their ability to speak English, they do not look further for the root of this surprise. Their reaction of not seeing it as surprising at all highlights the normalcy that the role of English has taken in their lives. While this lack of questioning may seem alarming to some who fear the spread of English is leading to a loss of linguistic identity, what seems to me is that the casualness is actually a way of managing or distancing themselves from the influence.

Not all the respondents took the ‘praise’ offered by outsiders as something complimentary. In fact, a number of students found the reactions to be rather patronizing. “I don’t understand why people get surprised when they hear I can speak English. It’s like they have no idea about anything about Kuwait,” said Mai (#224 C34). Abdulla’s reaction to people’s surprise is, “I think that if someone is surprised that I can speak English, it’s like ‘of course I can, I’m educated.’ They are the uneducated ones for not being open-minded and thinking outside the box” (#256 C38). Regardless of other people’s reactions, the participants in this study still believe in the importance of knowing the language. The attitude the students have towards English is reflective of a belief in its inherent positive characteristics.

The way participants view the significance of English is in relation to how they position themselves within the world, which is based on their interpretations of the impact of globalization. Just as most of the respondents in this study view globalization as a natural process, for the most part they also accept the dominant status of English. In fact, when I asked students what they thought about the position of English none of them said they ever thought about it and were sometimes even bewildered by the question. This further demonstrates how much they accept English as a normal part of their lives.

With such a strong positive association with English, I explored how the language is balanced with the place of Arabic. I had not expected such a distinct compartmentalization of the way they viewed the two languages. English was mainly seen as a practical skill. Arabic, on the other hand, had much more personal significance. When talking about the relationship between language and culture, several students were quick to confirm that Arabic is a major part of their culture. Qader claims, “Arabic is Kuwait’s national language, it is part of our culture. It is part of our heritage” (#106 I3). However, when asked about the relationship between language and their identity, a different type of response was given. Although Qader connected Arabic to his culture,

he explained that “speaking Arabic is a big part of my identity and definitely part of the culture but it’s not the only thing. It is just part of who I am” (Qader #106 I3). Leila provides a similar response,

Just because one person speaks mostly English doesn’t mean that they’re not Kuwaiti. I mean, language is just one part of our culture. We also have our family, our religion, our passion about life. You can’t just take one thing and use that to make the definition of being Kuwaiti. We are everything. (Leila #182 I9)

Most of the respondents are quick to emphasize the language they choose to speak is a part of their identity but is not always the primary defining factor. As Leila describes in the excerpt above, there are different elements that comprise a person’s identity. Therefore, when considering the spread of English causing a deterioration of local languages, it seems that even though some local languages may not be used as much as before, it does not diminish its significance.

Musa says that he never thought about English as a dominating language because “I never got the feeling that I needed to know another language from English and Arabic of course” (#196 C22). This lack of acknowledgement is expressed by a few other students, such as Aziz who said he started to practice English on his own “because I was not learning it enough in my government school, but I knew I needed it to learn more and get to know more things.” He voluntarily and actively pursued studying English on his own, and when I asked him what motivated him to study this language so keenly he said, “I don’t know. English is everywhere. I thought if I want to succeed in anything, then it will be very important for me to learn the language.” When I asked him whether he ever questioned why English was in the position it was in he said “No. I don’t know why that question is important because for me I can see it everywhere so I didn’t waste time to look for another language to learn or something like that” (Aziz #221 I18). He was actually quite bewildered by my line of questioning, as was Qader who directly said to me, “I don’t understand what’s the point of your question” (#20 I3).

Although these responses may seem uncritical, what I think it emphasizes is how English has taken on such a dominating position that some people do not even consider questioning how or why it got there. As the literature in Chapter 2, section 2.3.1 emphasizes, English is seen as a practical tool that helps its users gain access to various opportunities. What seems to be most important is the fact that it is a leading language and knowing English does have certain advantages. Until those advantages are no longer associated with English, the high regard for the language will probably continue. The functional aspect of English is what seems to take precedence. Although the desire to learn the language is part of their identity, it does not negate or minimize the value of Arabic in their lives.

### 6.3.2 *Wearing One's Identity*

“You can't say I'm Western because I wear jeans! That's crazy” (Razan #81 C4).

A frequent theme that came up was how people's character was judged based on the clothing they wore. Several students mention that people are surprised when they see them having a good time or speaking in English as well as wearing a hijab. For example, Seema says that she “didn't get” why people find it so surprising that she does not wear a hijab. She explains, “it's like they only see one-dimension, so if we don't do things in a certain way in their mind, then we're weird” (Seema #50 C2). When I asked her who she was referring to when she said ‘they,’ she replied, “y'know, Americans and Europeans” (#50 C2). Judgment about clothing and attitude was not restricted to foreigners. Students made assumptions as well. The way clothing is associated with a person's character is further explored in this section.

Judgment about a student's academic performance is also sometimes made based on the clothing they wear. Many times teachers have made comments remarking how many girls in their class were not wearing a *hijab* (in the minority) or how many were wearing a *niqab* (also in the minority). The implications of these categorizations are that the non-*hijab* wearing ones represented being more liberal, and thus more educated. This would imply that the more conservative one is dressed, the less intelligent they are perceived to be. These assumptions were brought up even when discussing student reactions to material covered in class. The following excerpt from my research diary demonstrates this.

#### **Research diary [April 3, 2009]:**

One mentioned that one of the students had a problem with discussing one of the texts that had to do with sexually transmitted diseases. I was really surprised when Rose asked her, ‘Was she a *munaqqaba*?’ The teacher confirmed that she was a *munaqqaba*, Rose nodded her head and said that she was not surprised because they were so conservative that they did not want to discuss subjects that were related to sex.

While I do not know why this student found the text problematic, I was really shocked at Rose's automatic assumption that because the student was wearing a *niqab* it was expected that she would be conservative, which in turn implied that she would be narrow-minded. (#193 TT19)

Similar remarks have sometimes been made when marking student papers. For example, it caught me off guard when I heard one of the teachers remark that a student's performance was “not bad for a *munaqqaba*” (#181 TT15). Comments like these demonstrate a belief that conservative clothing, particularly wearing an *abaya* or *niqab* is associated with a student's level of intelligence. Having preconceived ideas about a student's potential performance in class based on their clothing is highly discriminating. It automatically puts students at an unfair advantage or

disadvantage when teachers assume certain capabilities simply based on the clothes a student is wearing. Despite repeated expressions of ‘surprise’ that students are doing well, even when they are presumed to be conservative or religious, the realization to stop making judgments based on clothing does not seem to have happened. The belief in the lack of capability of the ‘foreign Other’ seems to be firmly grounded in an ideology that is contrary to evidence provided.

The teachers, however, are not alone in making these assumptions. Several students also mention clothing as a factor that represents one’s identity. In some cases, students were very critical of the way other students behave. A lot of the guidelines of behavior seem to be based on what the person is wearing, particularly if they are wearing a *hijab* or an *abaya*, which is associated with being more religious or conservative. Therefore, behaviors that are not deemed to be representative of being more modest are criticized. Amal shared some of her concerns,

I think that the problem isn’t really with globalization, but it’s, like, it’s how people use the things that come with globalization. Like in our culture girls wear the *hijab*. Before they’d wear the *hijab* with an *abaya*. Then, it became ok to just wear *hijab* as long as your clothing was loose and didn’t show your body. Now, it’s like – whoa, what’s happening? ... You’ve got girls wearing a *hijab*, with full make up, skinny jeans, and tight, tight clothes. I mean, it’s good we can buy all those things here, but the combination seems wrong, y’know, like it’s not part of our culture. (#203 I13)

Raqeeba also describes her discomfort in terms of how she views the change in people’s behavior. She says, “There’s a lot of Western influence now and so the people forget their values and they want to start dating and going out with boys and wearing tight, tight clothes even if they have a *hijab*.” She says that these changes make her feel uncomfortable, and she feels that “they’re not Kuwaiti.” After saying this, she clarifies, “I mean, of course, they’re still Kuwaiti, like for their nationality, but the way they act is not the Kuwaiti way” (Raqeeba #189 C20). Raqeeba presents an interpretation of the ‘Kuwaiti way’ as being one in which wearing a *hijab* should be accompanied by wearing loose, conservative clothing in general. The modification to one’s wardrobe, such as wearing miniskirts over skin tight jeans is something she finds contradictory to the real ‘Kuwaiti way’. This observation of the manipulation of modern fashion trends to local dressing habits received conflicting reviews. For some, it represented a method of expressing one’s identity through the ‘Kuwaiti way’ while others found it to clash with local customs.

The focus on clothing may seem superficial, but the statements from both the teachers and students demonstrate how frequently judgments are made based on what a person is wearing. What is most alarming about the teachers’ perspectives is that despite evidence to the contrary, assumptions are still made on how a student may perform in class just because she may or may not be wearing a *hijab* or *abaya*. While students also judge each other based on what they are wearing, their perspective is mainly from a social point of view in terms of how they are raised to

behave in society. Their family perpetuates their perspective. Some of the teachers, however, come into the classroom with these preconceived notions, which could affect the way they teach their class and compromise the quality of education they are providing the students.

### 6.3.3 *Acting Strange*

*“They’re still Kuwaiti, like for their nationality, but the way they act is not the Kuwaiti way” (Raqeeba #45 C16).*

In addition to choosing how to represent oneself through clothing, the way one acted is also judged. The responses reveal a ‘Kuwaiti way’ of behaving, which is rather conservative. The students seem quite critical of how other students behave in the university. The impressions vary among students. For example, students who are seen associating with members of the opposite sex are judged as having no morals, while those who are seen to refrain and sometimes even fear mixing with the opposite gender are seen as close-minded. This mentality goes beyond the university parameters. Students reveal that they have to deal with criticism and judgment from others both in Kuwait and abroad. These incidences are further explored in this section.

Gender segregation at KU was implemented in 2007. Before that, even though classes were mixed, there was a natural segregation whereby boys sat to one side while girls sat on the other. Nonetheless, there was mixing among the students, and seeing the interaction, especially in class, was not unusual. However, over the years, the university seems to have become more conservative in nature. There have been various reactions to this trend. Students in general seem to be quick to judge how others are behaving. Students who keep to themselves are seen as being “narrow-minded” and “will have difficulty in the future ... especially as doctors” (Lama #205 C25). There are also students who “mixed with boys” and are thereby being “careless with their reputation ... even if they don’t do anything, it looks bad” (Eman #211 I15). At the same time, students did not seem to care what others thought of them. They are firm in their belief that their parents had taught them the way to behave, and though for some it may not be considered the traditional ‘Kuwaiti way,’ it is their choice. The students demonstrate how they are negotiating their own space to express their identity, but as the data reveals, this is not always easy. Despite positive attitudes about being true to one’s expression of identity, incidents at the university demonstrate that the judgment on behavior is not as simple as following parental guidelines. Hassan elaborates on an incident that happened in the university.

Research diary [October 7, 2007]:

Last year (2006) there was an incident where a photographer came into the cafeteria and took a picture of some males and females sitting together. The photograph was published in an Arabic newspaper saying that the students were



busy flirting with each other instead of studying and that they were in an unislamic surrounding. They criticized people wearing red and pink on Valentine's day and celebrating other such 'Western' events. They even went so far as to calling the females sluts for mixing with males. This article was responded to by the university placing a guard in the cafeteria who was to make sure males and females stay in their sectioned area of the cafeteria. Even male and female teachers were not allowed to sit together.

...

Students have dealt with these segregation laws by studying together in the hallways. I asked Hassan why students didn't protest and he reminded me that after the printing of that newspaper article students had protested. Once again, the photographers showed up and printed pictures of the students – bad mouthing their families (by name) saying that they had no morals.

The students are caught in the middle. If they protest then their family name is tarnished. Therefore, they have to make do with the situation. While the students may be ready to protest, they feel like they cannot act alone and that they have to consider the implications of what will happen to their reputation, and more importantly, their family's reputation if they continue to speak out. (Hassan #16 C1)

It is unfortunate that issues like these filter in to the university system. The consequences of protesting and what it means for themselves/their family are too great to go through with arguing against the rules. It may seem like students are passively accepting what is going on, but they are considering much more severe implications of their actions than people may realize.

Aside from having to deal with judgment within Kuwait at the university, students also experience similar incidents during interactions with non-Kuwaitis, both in Kuwait and abroad. For example, the concept of arranged marriages is mentioned as a stereotype that Eman found was associated with being Kuwaiti or Arab. Eman elaborates that she finds it unusual that "foreigners get surprised when they hear my sisters did not have an arranged marriage." She explains, "Sometimes it feels like people are surprised when they see we are so modern and things are not like in the old days when arranged marriage was popular ... We're changing, but that's normal, right?" (Eman #211 I15). Eman's story is just one of several examples of assumptions based on stereotypes that were experienced. These assertions are significant because they illustrate how the language of Othering is somehow almost engrained in the way some people speak. Mentioning that people are "surprised" that things did not happen in a certain way or that they are seen as "weird" for behaving in a non-stereotyped way reveals how deep the notion of difference lies. These expressions also show that students are surprised by other people's reactions. They seem to have an awareness of how culture is not fixed and that change is normal. From this perspective, what they find surprising is that those from more seemingly modern and Westernized countries do not seem to have adopted this open point of view. These examples also highlight how, as

discussed in Chapter 4, 4.2.1, it is presumptuous to assume learners' capabilities based on preconceived ideas that are usually based on cultural stereotypes.

These responses reveal that the concept of modernity embodies different meanings. Respondents emphasize the personal aspect of identity and the agency displayed in making choices. Moreover, the impact of family guidelines of establishing the meaning of the 'Kuwaiti ways' is shown to be the most significant factor in terms of determining behavior. However, as seen in the conversation with Hassan, even the reputation of families can become tarnished. In general, the students realize that they are being judged, both within Kuwait and abroad, and having been aware of this from a very young age is what has trained them to be more flexible in the way they approach and interpret interactions with others. At the same time, this upbringing keeps them resolute in their beliefs.

#### 6.4 CONCLUSION

*"We are everything ... we're becoming parts of one community" (Leila #182 I9).*

The data presented in this chapter challenge idea of globalization as a form of imperialism, a term that is correlated with an imposition of values that are contradictory to local ways of life. Responses from the participants of this study illustrate that they are not passive recipients to the forces of globalization. Rather, they negotiate their own space within the changes that are occurring in their country. Moreover, respondents focus more on the progress and development achieved from globalization rather than any challenges they face because of differences associated with other cultures or countries.

Primarily associating globalization with the process of modernization is revealing in that it is not viewed as a hegemonic power that is greatly affecting Kuwaiti culture. Rather, the way these students are saying that they are affected is quite contrary to what others think. The respondents clearly focus on the benefits of globalization and use the terms Westernization and Americanization as more popular phrases rather than ones holding deeper significance. This illustrates how their focus is mainly on incorporating trends that are beneficial for Kuwait. In addition, the data illustrate how the respondents differentiate between *changing* and *being changed*. They demonstrate how they are critically interacting with what is occurring in their surrounding environment. The most surprising theme that emerged was the normalcy that was associated with the changes occurring in Kuwait. The data demonstrate how the majority of the respondents equate the changes in Kuwait with progress and often call it a 'natural' and 'inevitable' consequence. It is this end result that surpasses any other effects. Moreover, their interpretations of globalization emerge as the driving force behind how most of the students' interpret their position in the world and their desire to learn English.

Although the adjectives Americanization and Westernization were sometimes interchanged with the term globalization, the changes in Kuwait were primarily linked to the import of material goods and services rather than learning a new culture. Moreover, the presence of a high number of expatriate workers represents interconnectedness and mutual exchange. The data suggests that this exposure adds to the normalcy of living in an international environment. The opportunity to interact with foreigners has also broadened their perspective and made them more conscious about how they interact with others.

The positive attitudes towards globalization and the spread of English did not develop suddenly or by chance. Several of the respondents primarily focused on the benefits of the changes that were occurring. This pragmatic outlook of what could be gained from globalization seems to minimize the influence of cultural implications associated with some of the imported products. This did not, however, mean that the incorporation of foreign elements came without problems. There are some adjustment issues with how trends are incorporated within Kuwaiti culture. What is interesting is that most of the respondents are not concerned with what people from other countries think of them. Rather, they are more concerned with how their actions are perceived locally.

Distancing themselves from being compartmentalized by how others view them is one way that the students resist being commodified. They state that they are in much more control of their own identity and constructions of culture, which are indeed very complex. Despite this control, the data reveal how students have to constantly battle being judged by others. Students describe how their knowledge of English brings a reaction of surprise from other people. This is particularly so if they are dressed in more conservative, traditional clothing, namely wearing *hijab*, *abaya*, or *niqab*. The quick judgments that are made based on what language the students are speaking or what they are wearing demonstrates how engrained certain characteristics are viewed. These assumptions are not just made by foreigners. The students have to deal with judgments within Kuwait as well. This is particularly the case when it comes to how they behave among Kuwaiti society. The various ways in which students have to deal with how others view them reveals how much they have to negotiate with their context in order to establish their own voice. While many assumptions are made about the students lacking critical thinking abilities, especially in terms of dealing with the parameters of their society, what the students reveal is that their lighthearted approach is not so much naïve as it is a way to lessen the value of these presumptions. As Razan explained to me, “I am not worried about changing or losing who I am ... if others have a problem with it, then it’s their problem, not mine” (#81 C4).

## CHAPTER 7    **BALANCING MODERNITY AND TRADITION**

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### 7.1    **INTRODUCTION**

*“We need to do what is best for Kuwait and for ourselves. If this means putting up Starbucks to make others more comfortable, then hey, let’s do it” (Nada #273 I26).*

In this study, students reveal that their drive to learn English is founded upon the desire to be a part of the rest of the world. Globalization is understood to be a force that makes access to other countries and foreign products possible. At the same time, it opens up the potential to interact with others in order to continuously develop, as individuals and as a nation. The data in the previous chapter revealed that the participants in this study are mainly guided by family expectations and the guidelines of a relatively conservative society. However, interacting with people from other cultures and nationalities provides new perspectives from which students can evaluate the choices they make in their lives. For the most part, the changes in Kuwait are not seen as changing the core of Kuwaiti identity or culture. There are, however, also some participants who find the direction Kuwait is heading in to be challenging. Although viewed positively, balancing modernity and tradition is not always easy.

This chapter delves deeper into the details of this balancing process. It is divided into two main sections. The first section presents data that illustrate how respondents interpret their contextual parameters and how this influences their behavior as they attempt to carve out their identity. The data is then set against teacher impressions of how the students manage with this balancing act. The second main section focuses on what students have to say about how negative images of Arabs and Muslims in the media affect their lives. This theme frequently came up when describing impressions that others had about their identity. The section concludes with discussions of how media can be appropriated to project more positive images of Muslims, which is an important goal for a number of respondents. Overall, knowledge of English is key in dealing with these issues, namely to promote understanding and also understand what others are saying about them.

### 7.2    **MISINTERPRETATION OF CULTURE**

*“We have our own issues and ways of doing things so that’s why other people may not understand us” (Hisham #260 I24).*

The notion of Kuwaiti identity varied from person to person. However, one consistent element associated with being Kuwaiti was the importance of family. Family expectations seemed to be the primary guide to students’ actions. Despite being rather unified in the belief that family

guidelines were the cornerstone of appropriate behavior in Kuwait, some individuals express that they experience some difficulty finding their own voice within these parameters. Students seem to have a very contextualized view of behavior; how people behave once they are outside the country is one matter, but within Kuwait there are certain guidelines that need to be followed. This is similar to the ‘Kuwaiti way’ described in chapter six (section 6.3). People do not necessarily abide by these unwritten-but-generally-understood guidelines. However, the parameters are acknowledged even if they are not always followed. This section explores how students negotiate through balancing modernity and tradition in terms of creating their own space and dealing with negative reactions towards their expressions of individuality.

### 7.2.1 *Creating One’s Own Space*

*“It’s easy because we’re used to living in this way ... You just figure out what’s the most important thing for you, then you can figure out everything else” (Jawad #207 C26).*

Students are quite vocal in describing how they balance doing what their family wants and expects from them with following their own desires and ambitions, which are not always the same. Upon discovering the various angles of their lives, I wondered how they felt about having to juggle their identity that varied depending on their context. I had expected to hear that it was quite a struggle; however, I was quite surprised by the confidence they displayed as they described how they nonchalantly switched in and out of roles.

The respondents seemed to casually accept switching hats and modifying their behavior, and in some cases shift from one persona to another, depending on their context. The primary motivation for this was that they do not want to upset their families. Kareem, who is in a particularly difficult position as a homosexual who comes from one of the most well known conservative families in Kuwait, describes some of the conflicts he faced. In talking about his homosexuality, Kareem says, “I’ve always known that I was gay. I haven’t been open about it because you know how closed-minded Kuwaiti society is ... I only tell people I trust.” I asked him about his family’s traditional background and how that affects his identity. He explains, “I know it’s weird. Our family is one of the most religious ones in Kuwait, and both my sister and I are gay! ... I would never tell my family though. I think it would kill them.” I asked him how he felt about having to keep his lifestyle a secret. He responds,

*I could tell my family if I really wanted to, but their pain is not worth it. When I can, I’ll leave Kuwait and live my life the way I want to, but for now, while I’m under my father’s roof, I’ll play by his rules ... I mean, this is part of my life too, I’m Kuwaiti and that’s the way things are here. (Kareem #38 I1)*

Kareem's situation is a complex one. His decision and his statement 'this is part of my life too' shows that he has incorporated having to hide part of his lifestyle as part of his identity. He is not just gay. He is also Kuwaiti. Even though homosexuality is taboo in Kuwait, it does not mean that both elements cannot be part of his identity. What Kareem is saying, however, is that he chooses how he wants to manage his identity within the society at large. This choice is determined by his interpretation of how his family and society will react to his sexual orientation. Among his personal group of friends, he can completely be himself. However, when it comes to other contexts, such as the workplace, the university, or around his family, he is more reserved with what he says and how he behaves.

Mai shares a similar experience (#248 C37) about how she feels a different type of freedom when she travels because she does not have to worry about what others will think about what she is doing when she is out with friends. She believes that Kuwaiti society in general is quite judgmental and that "all eyes are always on you to see if you did something right or wrong" (#248 C37). This type of pressure can be very restrictive. Therefore, when traveling abroad and being in a country where not everybody knows your family's name, more freedom is felt. What is also revealing about this is that it seems another angle of students' personality emerges when they are outside Kuwait. The phrases "be myself" and "finally be free" came up a number of times when discussing the appeal of traveling abroad, particularly to non-Arab countries (Noura #139 I6; Zeenat #218 C30). These statements made me realize how much what we see of our students in the classroom is only a fraction of who they really are. Their much more engaged and stimulated personality appears to mainly find space to emerge outside public spaces. This switching of behavior is one of the ways in which they balance traditions and modernity in their lives. Under the public eye, such as the university, they may be more conservative and traditional, but they are more liberal in private contexts or when they travel abroad. Thus, even though the duality may not be obvious in Kuwait or evident in the classroom, it does indeed exist.

Seema also mentions the pressure she feels about people in Kuwait judging her behavior (#264 C39). She feels this pressure "even though my family is ok with how I am, I can't be free because others judge me." She explains that others might interpret her behavior in a negative way, which would reflect badly on her family. However, she asserts that her parents "teach me to be responsible and act properly. They know I won't cross the line" (#264 C39). When I asked her what the line was, she mentions doing drugs, drinking alcohol, and dating. The concept of family's being judged is similar to what Hassan relayed in chapter six (section 6.3.3) in the incident about reporters publishing slanderous articles in the newspapers when writing about male and female students mixing on the university campus. These incidences demonstrate how even if

students have the desire to act or say something, they consider the people around them and have to consider how others will judge their actions.

The overall concern of the majority of students was that they do not want to publically do anything that is against their family's wishes or may tarnish their family name. Some may view this as a collectivist act – prioritizing the community over one's personal desires – versus an individualist one. However, these labels are inaccurate and misleading, as they do not capture the complexity behind what is really happening with the students. In fact, due to the complexity of culture and the different layers of one's identity, labels, as discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.3.1, are highly misleading. What students reflect in their responses is a combination of both thinking about the society as well as determining what is best for their own lives. Moreover, students like Kareem demonstrate how they make a distinction between their private and public lives. This balancing act is not always evident. Rather, what dominates is the image they project for society, which suggests a more conceding, non-critical type of behavior. In addition, there are some students who refuse to compromise. They want to act however they want, regardless of the consequences. These students may be seen as exceptions to the general obedient behavior, but in fact forms of taking ownership of identity occurs on different levels. Whether one decides to strictly follow parental guidelines, modify them according to their own preferences, or completely do things in their own way, they are making an active choice.

### **7.2.2 Disbelief in Student Claims**

*“Poor things, I would be frustrated too growing up here ... they're restricted from doing almost everything” (Rose #111 TT11).*

The complexity students express is surprising because this part of their lives is not something that teachers deal with or recognize on a regular basis. The main impression teachers have of their students is what they see in the classroom. The teachers do not generally believe that students are actively selecting the way in which they behave. From conversations with staff members it seems like they hold on to a single perspective – the students are restricted from behaving freely and therefore not only are they not given the space to act individually, but also that they are incapable of doing so. This restriction is seen as a result of students being overprotected and sheltered by their family, and therefore, not possessing the ability to think or behave independently. Most student behaviors, particularly negative ones, are blamed on influences of local culture. These assumptions about local culture seem to be made based on what teachers see happening in the rest of the country. The financial support the Kuwaiti government provides the citizens of the country and the use of *wasta*, or personal connections and influence,

to bypass rules are two issues that were frequently mentioned in correlation to problems teachers encountered in the classroom.

One of the teachers at KU is convinced that the way parents treat their children is revealed in the way students expect to be treated by teachers. She expresses amazement that “these students never have to do anything for themselves ... how can we expect them to think and write on their own?” (#111 TT11). In addition to assistance from family, every few years the Kuwait government clears the private debts of all Kuwaitis. This gesture is seen to give the students the impression that they do not have to take responsibility for their actions, even after graduating from university.

*Wasta* is a second problem that affects the students. The use of *wasta* is rampant throughout the country. Instead of following proper channels, family connections are used to help accomplish tasks or gain favors. In fact, many in Kuwait believe that even simple tasks cannot be done without the use of *wasta*. The influence of *wasta* is often seen in the university when parents try to use their influence to push for grade changes for their children. Although the English language unit has a strict policy against submitting to these external pressures, it is challenging for teachers to deal with. Charles believes that parents “think they can just bully us into giving their child the grade they want ... Why don’t they take a look at the reason behind why their child is struggling” (#194 TT20). Using *wasta* is seen as trying to “take the easy way out ... and not deal with reality” (Charles #194 TT20).

Charles brings up a number of points that he correlates with students’ lack of motivation in the classroom. The main problem is that parents trying to use *wasta* for grade changes set a bad example for the students. It gives students the idea that complaining about something will get them what they want versus working and learning from their mistakes. Another concern is that by parents wanting to take short cuts, they are not giving the students a chance to work hard and gain a sense of accomplishment. In some cases, students are seen as having the potential to do well. However, with interference from parents, they are not always given the chance to push the students to their potential because parents usually demand to see positive results immediately. Barbara’s mention of reputation and image also parallels what students say about it being important to give the right impression to the rest of society. So it seems like the image that is projected is more important than acknowledging the steps taken to reach the end goal.

Some students do acknowledge this problem but they also do not deny taking advantage of the system because it is for their benefit (more discussed in chapter 8, section 8.3.4). Therefore, they are stuck in a vicious circle. What the teachers see, however, is the side of the students that is trying to take a short cut. Even when discussing the possibility of students being critical of their surroundings, the teachers do not accept the idea. The manifestation of the behaviors in class and



in relation to classwork and exams seems to be too negative. In fact, when I tried to encourage teachers to take another point of view by highlighting some of the various contexts the students have to deal with, such as family expectations and their own discovery being young adults in a new environment, they remained unconvinced. Rather they sometimes accused me of going soft on the students and not seeing the situation for what it really is (#253 PR99).

Their reactions made me realize how deep negative associations go. Even when the majority of the students do not act in this way, the few that do create problems by not completing their assignments or cheating on exams are rarely forgiven or forgotten. The issue of cheating is discussed in more detail in section 8.3.4. There are some contextual factors at play here. It is this context that has to be differentiated from who the students really are. Negative perceptions of students lead to negative feelings in the classroom, which can have an impact both on how teachers teach and students learn.

The data demonstrate the impact of context on one's behavior. On the one hand, students are trying to figure out how to express their identity as they try to strike a balance between traditions and modernity. On the other hand, despite claiming to be aware of the conflicting expectations in society, they are not always believed by others, namely teachers who are judging their learning potential based on what they see happening in society at large.

Student attitudes and behavior in class do not reflect the value they place on knowing English. Even I only discovered the significance of learning the language after engaging with the students. Therefore, one initial step to rectify misunderstandings is for teachers to take the time to recognize that students are more than just bodies in a classroom. Understanding their perspective can make room for a more dynamic educational environment for both teachers and students.

### **7.3 BEYOND MEDIA IMAGES**

*“We are more than what the media shows us to be” (Eman #65 I15).*

During the data collection process I began to realize that dealing with judgment is not uncommon for these students. Not only were their peers judging them, but their teachers were also judging them. The students are constantly on guard about what kind of impression they give to those who are around them. Even if they do not change their behavior according to each context, most students expressed awareness of how contextual factors have an impact on their behavior. Locally, the family support provided in Kuwait seems to give students a feeling of protection. Being in their own country, they are able to access the resources and support needed to deal with any conflicts of problems they may encounter. This is not, however, usually the case when interacting with foreigners.

Several students discussed how they often have to explain themselves when they meet foreigners. They find that most of this is because of the presentation of Arabs and Muslims in the media. The next two sections present some excerpts that illustrate what kind of situations the students have to deal with and then demonstrate how the students address the issues. The way they negotiate through these encounters emphasizes the importance of knowing English as a way to foster understanding and promote communication and acceptance.

### **7.3.1 *Reacting to Negative Media Images***

*“They generalize a lot. There are American murderers but you don’t see us treating all Americans in that way. We know it’s an individual act so we don’t generalize. But they look at us differently, like all Muslims are the same and we’re all terrorists” (Jameela #98 G11).*

The opening quote presents an observation that crimes are not always linked to nationality or religion. However, when it comes to Arabs or Muslims, there seems to be a greater likelihood of the crime being linked to the ethnicity or religion. Many of the students believe that negative images in the media encourage these perceptions. What is most significant is the number of students who have personally experienced discrimination or racism based on misguided stereotypes. This type of interaction is jarring because they find themselves in a situation where they need to confront or cope with such a judgment. The way people interpret media images can only be assumed; however, going through the actual experience of being discriminated against leaves no doubt regarding how they are being perceived. These personal experiences of discrimination have a very profound impact on not only how they believe they are viewed by the rest of the world, but also in terms of determining how they want the rest of the world to view them. It is from this perspective that English, once again, is highlighted as a necessary instrument to help create understanding and minimize tensions.

One of the primary culprits of spreading negative images of Arabs and Muslims is attributed to media coverage. For many people, media coverage is the only basis upon which the Arab world is understood. Without further critical exploration into what the culture and religion really represent, much room is left for misunderstandings to develop. This point came during a group interview I held in my office with five young women. During the interview, the role of religion in their lives came up. Each person in the group interview emphasized the importance of religion in their lives but were distraught at the negative images of Muslims and Islam that are presented by Western media. In particular, one of them brought up the Oprah Winfrey show in which she said that “even when Oprah chooses people to represent the Middle East, we’re happy that she’s chosen people to represent us, but she ends up, like, mocking us” (Nabeela #98 G11). Somaya expresses her frustration at how “the media misrepresents Muslims. They’re currently so

focused on terrorism that all the Muslims have a bad name” (#98 G11). Nabeela then told us what she and her family experienced while vacationing in London in the summer of 2005, which is when the London bombings happened. She said “the next day everybody kept staring at me and my family. It was embarrassing and uncomfortable. People looked at us different and I was like, we didn’t do that, ok, so why are you staring at us?” (#98 G11). Nabeela’s discomfort during this type of reaction is an experience that several other respondents had as well.

The association of Muslims with violence is a common misconception, and this is evident in the way some people react towards the students. The ideas of Muslims that are portrayed is of a radical Islam that presents them as potential terrorists. This presents a distorted image of Islam, and with the global spread of news agencies such as CNN, this image can reach all corners of the world.

In another instance, one of my students, Hani, had just returned from a trip to London during which he had a great time. He told me about an incident that happened to him late in the evening when he and his friend were standing outside having a cigarette. They were laughing and talking to each other in Arabic. A man who was clearly intoxicated came up to them and asked, “Hey, are you guys terrorists or something?” Hani said that all he could think of was,

this guy was all smelly and drunk being loud and disorderly with his buddies on the streets of London and he had the nerve to come up to us and call us terrorists? I mean what’s that all about? We were just standing around and laughing. What gave him the right to be so rude? (#93 C8)

Even though one may argue that this man did not know what he was talking about because he was intoxicated, it is upsetting to think that the one association that he did make when he heard Arabic being spoken was to terrorism, despite his drunken state.

When I asked Hani how he handled the situation he explains,

My parents taught me how to control myself. My dad says nowadays it’s really important because people look at Arabs in a strange way. So I have to just deal with it ... I don’t react because I know it won't solve any problems. (#93 C8)

One of the things Hani was taught while growing up was the importance of maintaining composure if ever attacked or criticized. I had not expected to hear how cautious Hani was about his behavior with others. His defensive reaction is a response to what he had been taught by his parents, which influences the way he now sees the world. He says he now interacts with others with caution, “because I don’t know how they’ll react when they find out I’m Arab” (#93 C8). Perhaps looking at Hani one would not assume that he puts in this much level of thought when acting with other people. Although he states that he is aware that not everybody looks at him like a terrorist, he said, “I just want to be prepared.” Hani’s perspective illustrates a high level of criticality as he explains how engaged and aware he is of his surroundings and of how other

people's impressions of him may necessitate him to take some sort of action. He also made me aware that his parents explicitly addressed the global perception to encourage him to be cautious.

Aside from viewing Arabs as terrorists, several students encountered situations where people were just generally surprised that they could have fun. Zeenat explains,

When I went to London, and like there were some people that saw me, that I speak English, and wear a *hijab*, and that I'm happy, they get surprised. And when they hear that I drive a nice car and I go to university and I live with my family and enjoy it, they get even more surprised. For me, I feel surprised that it is surprising to them ... People may think that we are spoiled, but then I think that we are lucky *Alhamdulillah* for everything we have and for the fact that we can have anything. I don't have to be afraid to be religious and modern in my country. Like look at Badriya {and she points to Badriya's *hijab*}, she's got a Gucci hijab on, see, that's cool. We're religious and modern ... I like to show this side when I meet other people, both in my own country and when I travel to other places. (Zeenat and Badriya #218 C30)

Zeenat and Badriya address a common misconception that being religious or conservative means that one cannot be happy or have fun. This perspective is strange for students like Zeenat and Badriya because they have been raised to adapt to their surroundings. Moreover, they do not see any limitations with being religious, which is an attitude that seems to be unusual for many people.

Several students have experienced similar incidences of their Arab, Muslim identity being questioned because of certain perceptions held by foreigners. Although a lot of the problems are associated with Western media propagating negative images, some students believe that it is not solely the responsibility of the West. An element of personal responsibility is also expressed in relation to helping provide a positive impression and change the views of other people. For example, although she blames the media for perpetuating false images of Islam, Somaya says,

the media doesn't present true Muslims in a good way, it's also the Muslims' fault for not telling more people about the good side of our religion and that these people who are terrorists are not real Muslims. They're just using the name of Islam, but in fact it's *haram* to kill innocent people. So they're wrong. (#98 GI1)

Using media to promote cultural understanding is emphasized by a number of respondents. The idea of using the media to promote positive images of Islam, Muslims, and Arabs is repeated often. Most importantly, it is emphasized that these programs should be transmitted in English, "Otherwise, what's the point," asks Qader. His take is that the more easily people can access and "understand what we have to say and how we are, then they will not think about us in such a negative way" (#106 I3).

I found the acknowledgement that individuals should play an active role in negating these stereotypes to be refreshing and optimistic. Despite believing that there is a skewed image of Arabs, Muslims, and Islam, the resounding thought that seemed to echo through many of the

respondents' voices was that helping people understand what their culture represented and working to maximize positive experiences was essential, and English was the best language to do this in because it is the language that reaches the largest number of people in the world. It is through their ability to speak English that students are able to reduce their foreign-ness and actually describe their identity so that they are not misunderstood. This attitude demonstrates that the desire to learn English simply because it is seen as prestigious or is linked to opportunities, as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.2.2, is only one perspective. The students share a much deeper desire to connect with the rest of the world in order to share experiences and grow from these exchanges.

The promotion of negative images is not directly associated with the West intentionally trying to demonize the image of Arabs and Muslims. In the end, most students equate the responses to ignorance of what the religion is truly about and the fact that the media can distort perceptions. Through this mentality, students demonstrate a more understanding attitude. Very few were enraged by the discrimination but rather most were mainly dismayed. While some want to proactively change this perception, many say 'it is their problem' and continue to live their lives as desired without allowing others' views to have an effect on them. This is particularly significant because it shows how students distance themselves from negative images. Although this may help them avoid conflict, the lack of active engagement in correcting the negative perceptions increases the chance of fostering prejudices. Instead of proactively trying to rectify these negative images, one of the main solutions to handling these perceptions is the resolve to stay in Kuwait. The motivation for this is discussed in the following section.

### **7.3.2 *Modifying Behavior for Personal Gain***

*"They say 'we do not negotiate with terrorists,' but we are the ones that have to negotiate with them" (Hani #93 C8).*

This introductory quote illustrates the power inequalities between 'us' and 'them' when referring to the West versus the East, and particularly in this case, the Arab, Muslim region of the Middle East. Hani believes that it is the Arabs that are being put on the spot to prove that they are passive, humane people and not terrorists as viewed by some people. This type of pleading for a favorable glance is seen as irritating by a number of students.

Although it may not be ideal, students adjust their behavior to cope with their context. Decisions are made based on how they can gain the most advantage from a situation. Students do not deny the benefits of financial stability and other benefits of living in Kuwait, but they also express a deeper reason for staying in Kuwait – it minimizes the cultural clashes they may face in other countries. This perspective is elaborated on in this section.

Noura explains,

It is much better for me to stay in Kuwait because I can take advantage of a lot of things. My family is here and so are my friends. They can help me whenever I want or need so that is very helpful ... cannot get this type of help in other countries. (#139 I6)

This reference to having help is similar to what teachers actually find frustrating about students living in Kuwait. From the teachers' point of view, as demonstrated in section 7.2.2, family assistance is seen as being detrimental and causing students to lose their independence. However, from the students' point of view, staying in Kuwait is important because they have a support system that can help them succeed. From the responses in the previous section, it is clear that facing discrimination because of their religion or ethnic background is problematic. Even if students learn how to cope with or focus on educating others, it is quite a burden to carry. Therefore, many believe that staying in Kuwait is one way to avoid potential confrontation.

One of the questions that I asked some of the students was why they chose to study in Kuwait and if they had contemplated studying abroad. Only a few students mentioned that they would have rather studied abroad, mainly in the United States or United Kingdom, than in Kuwait. The majority of students elaborated on the various reasons why they chose to remain in Kuwait.

One of the main explanations for not traveling abroad to study was to minimize discomfort and chances of discrimination because of their Arab, Muslim identity. This concern intensified because of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. The event, which was carried out by terrorists who were from the Arab region and claimed to be Muslim, triggered a whole new set of challenges. These challenges are very relevant for the students at KU as several of them experienced being associated and grouped in with terrorists because of their background.

Hisham says, "9/11 changed everything for us ... nobody will ever look at us in the same way again" (#260 I24). He continues to explain that the attacks were "so horrible and on TV they keep saying Arab terrorist and Muslim fundamentalist, people cannot forget these strong images" (#260 I24). Thus, once again the impact of media perpetuating negative responses is internalized and included as part of how they evaluate their place and how they believe they are judged by others. Hisham is not alone in his sentiments. Several other respondents feel the same way (such as Lama #205 C25 and Fadeela #98 GI1).

The development of several private foreign universities was mentioned a number of times as a significant consequence of the September 11 attacks. Fajr explains, "After 9/11 it became difficult for us, especially boys, to go to the States to study" (#86 C6). She reckons that this circumstance prompted the establishment of universities such as the American University of Kuwait. She thinks that it is "nice because now we have the option to stay here and get a good

education, like from an American college without going there” (#86 C6). She does note, however, that the universities adapted to ways that were more suitable for the locals. She explains that this means “people use *wasta*, they follow Kuwaiti rules and they cannot do things the way they should be” which she clarifies as meaning “the way it is really done in the universities abroad” (#86 C6). Her explanation suggests foreign universities are modified to fit local standards, needs, and expectations. These examples support the literature presented in Chapter 3, section 3.2.1 about the advantages of staying in Kuwait, particularly because of how Kuwaitis are taken care of by the social structure within the country. They also demonstrate how staying in Kuwait does help minimize confrontations. It also shows that had these problems not existed, perhaps students would be able to take advantage of other opportunities offered in other countries. However, due to the uncomfortable impressions of Muslims and Arabs, which many have confronted on a personal level, they have chosen to stay in Kuwait. Moreover, they have their family there to protect and support them.

Therefore, the perspective that teachers have of students staying in Kuwait to escape responsibility is just one angle of the story. What they do not see is the more serious implications having to do with racism on a global scale. From the responses it seems that students encounter much more discrimination and judgment versus understanding and acceptance. While they confront being judged as conservative and restricted, they believe that the West is not liberal when they are so judgmental. At the same time, they do see the Western world as holding power, especially due to media presence. Taking in all these perspectives requires balancing their traditions with modernity. The purpose is to appear less foreign and promote understanding. Most students believe English is necessary for this interaction to occur. Even if they believe that they are being more understanding, because Western countries, namely the United States and England, hold so much power, they feel like they have to prove themselves as being approachable and ‘normal.’ These issues show that dealing with matters of prejudice is complex. No matter how open-minded and liberal a person (or country) may seem to be, there are still underlying prejudices that need to be addressed.

#### 7.4 CONCLUSION

*“We may be changing things here and there, but that’s our choice ... and that’s the way life works, right?” (Noura #139 I6).*

The data in this chapter demonstrate how students at KU are balancing various factors in their lives. This perspective is hardly acknowledged among English language instructors. One of the main issues that is revealed is that students feel an enormous amount of pressure from family and societal expectations. Although students claim to be taking the changes in stride, what they

reveal is a complex negotiation process involved. They seem to be continuously weighing the pros and cons before acting. The teachers rarely see this level of critical thinking. Instead, they frequently judge the students based on what they see in the classroom, which is often lack of enthusiasm towards learning English. Further engagement with students and the realization that students are much more than what goes on in the classroom can add to a more accepting environment. This deeper engagement can serve to enrich the classroom experience both for the teachers and students.

For the most part, it just seems like students are working to reach a certain goal. On the one hand, they are trying to find a place within Kuwait where they can express themselves – as an amalgamation of both modernity and tradition. On the other hand, they are aware of how they are judged outside the country. One reaction to this is to stay in Kuwait and take advantage of the safety and comfort that is provided in Kuwait. The benefits of staying in the country outweigh any challenges they may face with trying to balance their Kuwaiti traditions with elements of modernity. Staying in Kuwait, however, does not lessen or negate their curiosity to explore the world. Rather, they learn how to negotiate with the parameters of society and discover their own voice. Moreover, the majority believes that it is through speaking English that this discovery will be possible.



## CHAPTER 8 USING ENGLISH DEPENDING ON THE CONTEXT

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### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

*“Because I know English I can know what is happening in the world too. I am not here on my own, but I can learn new things and the way other people are thinking and doing things” (Sabrina #97 C9).*

Throughout this study, almost every participant emphasized the importance of English. The data in chapters six and seven demonstrated how students viewed their position in the world. Chapter six illustrated how students believe the use of English is necessary to participate in globalization and take advantage of all it has to offer. Through student responses, the connection between language and identity emerged. What was most significant about the role of English in their lives is that it was associated with prestige and gaining access to opportunities for their future success. Despite all the positive connections between globalization and English, the respondents reveal that negotiating the place of English in their lives is not always easy. The data in chapter seven highlight how there is an attempt to balance modernity and tradition. Within this attempt to find balance, English is used in various contexts to negotiate and express one’s identity. This particularly came into play when explaining themselves to others in order to promote understanding and seem less foreign as they cope with being discriminated against. The ability to communicate with people from diverse linguistic backgrounds was also mentioned as an advantage of knowing English. The respondents expressed that this was particularly beneficial when they traveled to other countries.

Waleed felt that knowing English was most beneficial when he traveled. He found that “in a lot of countries the road signs are in English and another language, so it’s being used as a *universal* language. At least it is a language that most people can communicate with each other” (Waleed #147 I7 – emphasis added). The focus on communication was also made by Sabina who said “If you want to interact freely with others, to know English is helpful” (#160 C15). This was also echoed by other respondents, such as Zeenat and Badriya (#218 C30). Faika thought it was an important skill that everybody should learn,

because it helps us communicate with each other and especially when we travel, it helps us get around and if we get lost and need to ask a question, almost everybody seems to understand at least a little bit of English, so they can help you out. Ya, English is really important. In fact, I think that English needs to be taught more so that it can be more helpful for us. (#59 C3)

Almost all the respondents referred to the idea of everyone using English to communicate as something that was ‘normal’ (#228 I19). Moreover, the idea of it being ‘helpful’ adds another dimension to the practical use association with the language, which is the primary motivation to

study English. Their focus on the benefits of knowing English was a dominant theme throughout the research.

This data in this chapter continue to focus on what students are saying about the importance of English. In the first section, the advantages associated with learning English are discussed. The second main section presents data that distinguishes the positive attitudes towards learning English for their personal gain versus their attitude towards learning English in an academic environment.

## **8.2 ADVANTAGES OF KNOWING ENGLISH**

*“We gain a lot for our lives from knowing English” (Dawood #199 C24).*

The data reveal that the widespread use of English in Kuwait is mainly seen as a consequence of the interconnectedness that has resulted from globalization. Knowing the language allows them to take advantage of what globalization has to offer. One of the most frequent beliefs stated by respondents was, as Noura said to me in an interview, “English was necessary in today’s world” (#139 I6). She explains her statement by saying that it is a language that can be seen and heard “everywhere” because people “use it as a common language to communicate.” Other respondents make similar statements, such as Saleh who claims “English is *the* language of the world today” (#188 I11 emphasis in original). Upon hearing such emphasis on English being ‘necessary’ and deemed ‘*the* language of the world’ I proceeded to investigate upon what basis these claims were being made. This interpretation of English as a global language was linked to several factors, which are explored in this section.

### **8.2.1 Accessing the Rest of the World**

*“Whenever I travel I feel comfortable because I know English ... nothing is strange to me” (Leila #182 I9).*

All the respondents in this study believe it is very important to learn English. However, the degree to which English plays a role in their lives varies. In general, reactions to English as a widespread language in the world were not taken as a surprise by any of the respondents. Many emphasize that English is in fact a necessary and beneficial skill, particularly to access different forms of media – namely movies/TV, the Internet, and news programs.

In addition to referring to the language as being widespread, several respondents mention that the dominating position of English around the world is actually something that ‘makes sense’ to them. Waseem expresses his opinion that “It makes sense to learn English because most of the important and popular information in media is in English” (Waseem #153 C12). Additionally, Kawthar mentions, “We can get access to so much information through the Internet and also the

documentary TV shows. So English is important” (#223 C33). Access to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are also mentioned. Some respondents claim that being involved in such sites makes them feel connected to the rest of the world. Rowena explains that it is through the Internet that she can be involved in “events that are happening in America and other places in the world. I am not apart because I live in Kuwait. The whole world is now open to me” (#112 I4). Sabrina also makes a similar statement claiming, “because I know English I can know what is happening in the world too. I am not here on my own, but I can learn new things and the way other people are thinking and doing things” (#97 C9). Rowena and Sabrina’s use of phrases such as “not apart” and “not here on my own” suggests feelings of interconnectedness linked to both knowing English and having access to the Internet through which they learn about others. This also intimates that not having the capacity to interact in this manner would keep them isolated. Their knowledge of English facilitates their understanding of what is happening in the world around them. Establishing this connection seems to be very important.

When I asked the participants if they ever thought about the spread of English as a representation of power inequalities, most said that they had not thought about its spread in this manner before. Rather, the use of English was interpreted as something that made “sense” for them to do. For example, Adel (#228 I19) believed that “it’s either going to be English or another language that we will have to know. So, since English is so common and popular, it *makes sense* to learn it” (emphasis added). The idea of English as a “universal” language, as mentioned by Waleed, and it making “sense” to use the language, as mentioned by Adel, was also mentioned by other respondents, such as Razan, (#81 C4), Hanan, (#133 I5), and Marouf (#161 C16). The responses of these students suggest that there is a positive attitude towards the usefulness and function of the English language. Not only is their attitude positive, but it also demonstrates a general acceptance of the English language. In fact the majority of the KU students involved in this study make statements to support this point of view. Adel continued to say that:

it is more normal to expect someone else to know English, even if he is from another country like Spain or Argentina. Like, they will know Spanish *and* they will know some English. Same thing like for somebody from Philippines or from India or from Sweden. They all have their own languages, but then at least to communicate, they can speak English. It’s better for everyone to have a global language like this. (#228 I19 – emphasis in original)

The dominating role that English has been given is revealed through the terms that are used to describe the language – necessary, everywhere, universal, global. Despite such strong associations with the language, not a single student in this research correlates it to a nation or particular place in the world. For example, in an interview with Aziz, he expressed the importance of learning English but clarified that it didn’t mean he was “becoming more American” because “well it’s not

just the language of America anymore ... people anywhere and everywhere speak the language” (#221 I18). Even Fajr, in explanation of her comment “English is the language of the world now,” said that the users of English are now able to “make it what we want and choose how we want to use it so it works for us” (#86 C6). Similarly, students like Razan claimed that the widespread use of English “doesn’t make it seem like it’s the language of just one or two countries ... it’s our language too” (#81 C4). This type of perspective demonstrates how students are not only learning the language as a skill, but they are also incorporating it into their identity. When they embrace the language in this manner, they claim it as their own, thus removing any direct links to a particular nation. This also provides some insight into how their surroundings are interpreted. Instead of viewing goods as being Western or American, it seems like once a product or person enters Kuwait, it takes on a new identity and a new meaning. Not only does the country’s landscape change, but so does a part of the character of the product or person. For example, wine glasses that are sold in the American housing store Pottery Barn are labeled ‘red water’ glasses because wine is illegal in Kuwait (#242 GO55). Although the labeling may not make sense, it demonstrates how a foreign product has been rebranded for the local market. Thus the product is bought not as something that is American, but just as a household product that will be used in Kuwait. Similarly, when it comes to English, by viewing the language as universal, students seem to negate the need to correlate the language with a specific place, thus contesting arguments related to ownership of the language, such as those presented in Chapter 2, section 2.3.2. These responses also give the impression that English is the language that most people would use to communicate with people from different nationalities, thus reinforcing its lingua franca role.

### **8.2.2 Using English to Bridge Boundaries**

*“They might have certain ideas about us because we’re Muslim, but speaking English makes them feel more relaxed, so we also feel more comfortable”  
(Sabrina #97 C9).*

The desire to learn English to communicate with others and to better understand English TV shows and movies was not unexpected. However, the number of respondents who associated using English as a tool to facilitate understanding and acceptance with people from other linguistic backgrounds was unforeseen, especially because they wanted to communicate for a specific purpose – to bridge communication gaps and present their culture and themselves as something that is not unapproachable or violent, as previously mentioned in chapter seven (section 7.3.1). The students demonstrate that they are taking it upon themselves to connect with others. “I think when people hear us speak English they can relax a little because ... like they see

us wearing the hijab and it is strange for them ... but when I talk in English, then we can connect” (Zeenat #218 C30).

Several respondents mention that knowing English is an important way in which they can learn about other people’s perspectives. Waseem references news programs that are shown in Kuwait. He mentions CNN and the BBC news reports as “good ways in which I can learn what is happening around the world.” He also states that though there are Arabic news programs, “from the Western news programs we can know their point of view” (#153 C12). Marouf (#161 C16) also makes a distinction between Arabic and English news programs. He says that tuning into English news programs helps them “know that they are saying about us” and describes how understanding English provide the opportunity to access different perspectives. This action acknowledges different points of view and believes it is a way to be prepared for interactions with people from other countries. The students demonstrate an awareness of the negative images of Arabs and Muslims and therefore use this knowledge to decide how to behave. This is similar to what Hani (#93 C8) said in the previous chapter about his parents teaching him about how to handle confrontation in a calm manner.

Respondents reveal an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards learning English. They see a practical and immediate advantage to learning the language. This is mainly related to being able to use the language in order to access media and as a lingua franca to communicate with other people, both in and outside Kuwait. These arguments contest concerns such as those presented by Pennycook (1999), detailed in Chapter 4, section 4.2.2, that see learning English as forcing students to adopt a certain ideology. However, students demonstrate that they are able to manage these ideologies, particularly because they view speaking English as purely instrumental and do not believe that their language choice has a direct effect on their linguistic or cultural identity.

### **8.3 DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN PERSONAL USE AND ENGLISH AT KU**

*“The English we learn in the classroom is so different from how we use it everyday” (Hamid #272 G14).*

From the data presented thus far, it is clear that English holds a significant place in students’ lives. They associate numerous advantages that range from communicating with people within Kuwait, to mastering the skill in order to gain opportunities, to using it as a tool to foster understanding among people. After hearing so many positive responses I was surprised to find a relatively detached attitude towards learning English as part of their academic curriculum. The importance placed on knowing English did not correspond with their attitude towards learning the language. This discrepancy is important to note as it clarifies why some teachers interpret students

as being disinterested and unengaged in class – for the most part it is because they actually are not interested in being in class. The reasoning for this attitude, however, is not just a cultural problem as some teachers believe, as seen in chapter seven (section 7.2.2). Rather, the attitude towards English at KU also has to do with the way they interpret the function and workings of the context.

In this section, two main themes are covered. First, what becomes most apparent is the impact of context on decisions that are made in terms of behavior. This attitude also manifested itself in the way students describe how, when, and why they use English. Their reasoning is explored in the first section. Despite the importance that almost all the students express about knowing English, what emerges is a clear distinction between their personal use of the language and their attitudes towards studying it as part of their university requirement. The second main section demonstrates how and why there seems to be a correct time and place for using English and how this distinction has an impact on their attitudes towards learning English at the university.

### **8.3.1 A Time and a Place for Using English**

*“I use English mainly when I’m outside with friends or something like that ... never at home with family” (Faisal #272 G14).*

Some students are very critical of being seen as losing their identity as a result of speaking English. Some even express amusement at the concerns linguists have about the impact of English on culture and identity. They do not seem to view language in the same manner. For them, English is a pragmatic skill. Examples of people learning other languages are given; students like Kawthar ask, “Are people worried if somebody learns Italian that they are becoming more Italian?” When I asked her why she thought this was the case, she replied,

it seems like a power trip, but to be honest, I don’t really think about it that much. I mean, I have other things to worry about. If there are people who want to worry about me losing my identity because I’m learning a language,” she laughed, “then they can go ahead. It’s one less thing for me to worry about. (#223 C33)

Qader associates “fear” that the West was losing the uniqueness of their culture. He explains, “we’re not losing anything. We’re taking from here and there and building with our traditions and beliefs. But maybe the West feels like they are losing control over their language so we should not speak their language” (#106 I3). Dawood also interprets issues about language ownership as a result of feelings of loss of control. He says,

I don’t think it’s about us saving our language, I think it’s another way for them to keep a barrier between us. So for me, I will learn English, and maybe I’ll learn another language. I’ll do what I need to benefit my life and help my family. (#199 C24)

A number of points are brought up here. The first is the perception that arguments such as those of linguistic imperialism are actually negative and are based on the idea of keeping ‘us’ and ‘them’ separated. By laughing at this thought, they are negating the impact that some theorists feel that the spread of English may have. Although some students are very critical and see the West as trying to keep them/the Arab world alienated, they still do not change their opinions of English. Rather, for the purposes already discussed, they still see it as a skill to master in order to take ownership of how they are being represented. These statements provide a more cynical view of the issues that have been raised in terms of the spread of English being a form of linguistic imperialism, such as those presented in Chapter 3, section 3.2.3. They suggest that perhaps some theorists are arguing against the spread of English in order to maintain power inequalities and perpetuate the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy. With such importance placed on English, I wondered where Arabic fell in the picture.

Arabic was viewed as having a completely different role in their lives. A number of respondents emphasize Arabic as an important part of a person’s identity; however, it seems to hold more personal significance than practical application. This is in contrast with English, which has a much more pragmatic purpose and is used to feel connected to the rest of the world and communicate with others to promote a positive image of Arabs and Muslims. Within Kuwait, however, the use of English is more complicated and often juxtaposed against the use of Arabic.

Saleh, who is very comfortable using both English and Arabic, believes that English is very important when it comes to interacting with people; however, he does not approve of it being used in the same manner within Kuwait. He explains,

I don’t like people, I don’t like Kuwaiti people who speak English all the time, even at home. I mean, I’m Kuwaiti, I speak English, this is something good, but that doesn’t mean that I need to speak English all the time. I don’t feel like it’s affecting me, as long as I can communicate sufficiently in my original language, which is Arabic, but ... I don’t find it nice when Kuwaitis don’t speak Arabic anymore. It kind of loses their culture. (Saleh #188 I11)

Saleh clarifies that using and learning English does not necessarily have an impact on a person’s cultural or linguistic identity as long as the person’s ‘original language’ is not affected. His statements emphasize a distance between what is appropriate locally and within Kuwait versus what is used with others or outside of Kuwait. In a way, it seems like the students are creating their own ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy. Being able to speak English minimizes the need for foreigners to learn Arabic, thereby keeping their national linguistic identity highly personal.

Despite some of the respondents’ impression about there being an appropriate time and place for the use of English, there were subtle phrases within students’ comments that expose a much deeper significance of the use of language, particularly the way it was used within Kuwait. For example, Aseel says that the students who went to a government school, which is taught in

Arabic, are at a “disadvantage” because their English is not good. She claims that they “will struggle to give a good impression;” when I asked her why she believes it is, “because to speak English well it means something. It’s like you could learn something so important ... because you can use it everywhere” (#246 I20).

Despite the emphasis on the usefulness of English, respondents reveal frequent use of the language is interpreted in many ways. On the one hand, there are some students, such as Saleh, who disapprove of the use of English unless necessary. On the other hand, there are students who have to deal with these negative perceptions. Continuously saying positive things about English, but it cannot be used all the time. Maha reacts to this impression by saying, “The ones who don’t know English are just jealous. They want to use it naturally, so they can’t. Instead of learning, they just become haters” (Maha & Mahta #216 G12). Mahta responded, “They think we’re showing off, but it’s not that. It’s like, it’s just what’s more comfortable for us. Why they think that way, I don’t know. I speak English coz’ it’s easier for me” (#216 G12). Maha continued, “What’s worse is when they try to fake it. Oh my god, it’s so pathetic. Like they’re trying to show they know English, but they don’t, so they’re just creating this fake English to try to fit in” (#216 G12). While Maha and Mahta are adamant about not being judged for speaking in English, they also criticize those who cannot speak English well.

Mahta clarifies, “It’s not that you have to be excellent in English if you want to speak it. No, it’s not that. It’s just that when you’re trying to fake your way through it, it’s pathetic. Ya, it’s like they think they’re fooling everyone, but they’re just being fools” (#216 G12). When asking her to further explain what she means by ‘fake English’ she said, “Y’know, it’s like English á la Arabic.” They explain that this new form of English is beyond the ‘simple’ usage of English and Arabic in the same sentence, such as ‘Are you going to the store *gabl jamea ou* after you’ve finished classes?’ In this sentence *gabl jamea ou* means ‘before university or.’ This type of sentence is commonly heard both around the university and around Kuwait in general – whether it is just one word or a whole phrase within a sentence. English á la Arabic, as Maha and Mahta explain, is completely different (#216 G12).

English á la Arabic is a fusion of English and Arabic within the same word. More specifically it is the merging of Kuwaiti Arabic (which is distinguished from other forms of Arabic) and English. For example, the suffix ‘*ich*’ refers to females in Kuwait and the suffix ‘*iya*’ is used to refer to adjectives. For example, instead of saying ‘Love you, bye!’ they would say ‘*Love-ich*, bye!’ Rather than saying ‘How cute!’ they would say ‘How *cutiya*.’ Aside from phrases, new words have also been invented. For example, the word ‘*bint*’ in Arabic refers to girls. When talking about girls with ‘liberal’ values, they would be called ‘*liber-ints*.’ Students



who were particularly religious were called ‘*deenatics*,’ which is a combination of ‘*deen*,’ which is the Arabic word for religion, and ‘fanatics’ (Maha & Mahta #216 G12).

When I asked them if they thought this concept of English á la Arabic was a new variety of English that could or should be taught, they said no because it was not an academic type of speech, rather it was just for personal or social situations (Maha & Mahta #216 G12). Eman (#245 C35) mentions this new type of language as a “code that we use for ourselves”; she indicates that it is personal and that to teach it would make it lose its value.

I had never paid attention to this type of language before. I was aware of students speaking a mixture of Arabic and English, similar to code-switching, but had not realized how creative they were in terms of combining Kuwaiti specific elements of language with English words. With the complex judgments about when and where to use English, this new language seems to provide a space in which the students can experiment with using English in a way that is appropriate locally.

The idea of Arabic being a code and being used personally also places a distance between them and outsiders in Kuwait and the rest of the world. This is parallel to the way they view the impact of globalization. By deciding what role globalization and English has in their lives, it seems like they are able to manage the influence and take ownership of how it will impact them personally without loss of culture or identity. This interpretation runs parallel to the description of managed globalization described in Chapter 3, section 3.2.4.

Their responses also demonstrate the amount of judgment students place on each other when it comes to speaking or not speaking English. The data illustrate how complicated the link between language and identity can be when it comes to how others, particularly people in Kuwait, perceive them. Students do not mention being concerned with what non-Kuwaitis have to say. It is the judgment within Kuwait that matters and thus they have to negotiate this pressure on their own. This is not evident on the surface and certainly rarely considered in the classroom. The next section explores how this dichotomy is reflected in the classroom.

### **8.3.2 *Negotiating the Significance of English within KU***

*“We don’t practice the English you teach us in class ... when it’s not real for us, it doesn’t make sense” (Aseel #246 I20).*

Apart from social and practical use, the medical students at KU who I spoke to mention that learning English is important for their academic as well as future professional career. As mentioned in chapter five (section 5.4.1), all the students at the Health Sciences Center are required to take three semesters of English. Failing or doing poorly in their English class has

serious consequences on their academic career. Therefore, the students are under a lot of pressure to succeed in their English class.

When addressing the issue of having English as a mandatory subject, second year student Abdullah comments that it is important since “all the main research is published in English. Knowing English gives me more access to information that is necessary for me and beneficial for my country because I can apply what I learn to help improve healthcare in Kuwait” (#91 C7). I asked him whether having the courses taught in English makes it more difficult, he says that he does not think it was easy, but it is something that he has to do since there are no medical colleges where teaching is done in Arabic in Kuwait. I asked him if he would have preferred it if the courses were taught in Arabic he replied, “Not all of them. At least this way we can learn both at the same time, y’know, medicine and English. If I learned medicine in Arabic, then I would have to spend more years learning the information in English again.” I asked him why it would be necessary to learn in English, he said, “Because everybody speaks English. I don’t want to be left out. No matter what, I know that I need English for better chances of success.” In response to whether he thought this was fair, he said:

These are the rules. *Nobody ever* likes the rules but that’s the way it is. At least it’s a good thing, you know, like something that is helpful for me. It’s not like making me take a subject that I’ll never use. (#91 C7 emphasis in original)

Abdullah associates several benefits with learning English and believes it is necessary for his success. He rationalizes that he would have to learn English in any case in order to keep up with current research. Moreover, Abdullah uses several strong phrases emphasizing, “everybody speaks English” and suggested that not knowing English will cause him to be “left out” (#91 C7). He is not alone in having this type of attitude towards learning English; several other students, such as Khalil (#220 C32) and Arwa (#191 CD9), to name a few, have the same opinion. In addition to its importance, Abdullah also clarifies that learning the language will eventually benefit himself and his country. This interpretation suggests recognition of a greater importance and significance to learning English than just succeeding in his studies and his career. It also demonstrates how students in general are not conflicted about learning the language. Mentioning the benefits to one’s country echoes the acceptance that was expressed in regards to the effects of globalization in Kuwait (as seen in section 6.2.2). This highlights the priority placed on doing things for the benefit of Kuwait despite any personal struggles that may arise.

### 8.3.3 *English for Academic Success*

*“The English they expect from us at the university is not real ... we don't use it like this in our lives, but we have to study it, so we try” (Fajr #86 C6).*

The respondents in this study emphasize a relationship between knowing English and feeling like they are a part of the rest of the world. Despite this importance, it appears that different criteria take precedence when evaluating the importance of learning English as a required part of their academic program. As mentioned in previous chapters, the English language curriculum at the Health Sciences Center at KU is very focused and rigid. Although the courses focus on comprehension and composition, the general objectives of the programs are to promote critical thinking, encourage independent study, and foster learner autonomy. This section explores how students evaluate these objectives in relation to the course design and assessment procedures.

The general consensus about the English language program at KU is that it is too difficult and rigid. This opinion is primarily based on the lack of preparation from their high school education. Aseel explains,

Government schools did not prepare us for college. We only memorized from books and copied lessons ... Nobody taught us like you want us to write here. It is very difficult. For the ones from English schools, they can do it no problem. But for us, we don't know where should we start or how to study material like this. (#246 I20)

Aseel is not the only one who expresses such a frustration. Unfortunately, despite the repeated acknowledgement of the disparity between the curriculum design in Kuwaiti government high schools (free to all Kuwaitis) and implementation of English programs at KU, no steps have been taken to rectify this gap. Aseel compares the struggles of those coming from Arabic-medium schools with those coming from English-medium schools and suggests that the latter group has an advantage. While this may be true to some degree, it does not mean that students from the government schools cannot succeed. In fact, every semester several students who were educated in the Arabic high schools do extremely well in English class. Despite this evidence, many students continue to use this excuse as a crutch. Jawad says that he does not think what the teachers expect from them in English class is “fair” because “in high school, we only repeat, we didn't think.” He then asks, “How can I answer these questions? I don't understand what they are asking” (#207 C26). When I asked him about his study strategy he clarifies, “Of course I have to study to do what I can. I *have* to get a good mark to get into Medicine. But it is too, too difficult.” He continues to explain that they needed more preparation both in high school and in college in order to accomplish the course objectives.

This perspective echoes concerns mentioned by Faika (#59 C3) and Waseem (#153 C12) in chapter six (section 6.2.2) that not contextualizing elements of modernity could lead to

problems. Similarly, requiring English but not providing appropriate support makes it difficult for students. The way the courses are weighted, English is stressed, but lack of support for both the teachers and students weakens the program and increases the struggle for both parties. Moreover, the practice that is necessary to perfect the language is limited with these especially critical societal judgments that take place if one speaks English instead of Arabic, as demonstrated in the previous section. With all these factors combined, despite the stress on the value of English, the space to practice it freely is limited. The complexities of the setting are not always recognized by instructors nor are they acknowledged by administrators. Therefore, as discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.2.1, it is important to take the time and shift perspectives from teacher to researcher in order to investigate how the context has an impact on student behavior.

#### **8.3.4 Working within the University System**

*“We know that the Dean won’t do anything, so we’re not afraid” (Mishary #265 I25).*

With competition and the struggle to do well, students at KU are in a tough position. The issue of getting good grades is frequently mentioned. The urgency to do well is not simply based on the pride of receiving an ‘A’. It also has to do with being eligible to the Faculty of their choice. Therefore, there is an immense amount of pressure to receive a good grade. This pressure, apparently, sometimes leads to using any means necessary to attain the desired mark, even if it means cheating. Mishary explains,

We know that cheating is wrong, but if we do it, we’re not bad people. We don’t see it as doing a bad thing because we need to get a good a mark. If the system was fair for everybody, then people wouldn’t be cheating. But the system here is not fair, so we have to do what we can. (#265 I25)

Mishary continues to describe how an ‘essay bank’ is available for students to use. This bank consists of previous term papers that are freely distributed to students who ask for them. Although he looked a bit sheepish when he told me that this type of resource was available, and he assured me, “Miss, I didn’t use it for your class,” he did not seem disturbed by the fact that some students could get away with simply borrowing someone else’s paper instead of doing the work on their own. When I asked him why students were not afraid of being caught and punished according to the plagiarism policies of the university he replied, “Nothing will happen. We know that the Dean won’t do anything, so we’re not afraid” (#265 I25). He went on to explain how many students who were educated in the government schools, which are taught only in Arabic, struggle when they come to university and suddenly face having to take almost all of their classes in English. He queries,

How can it be that we study all our lives in Arabic and so suddenly they make us study in English? The students really struggle ... it's like a shock to the system, and it doesn't make sense. And what's worse is that they made English class have five credits! That means that students have to do really well in English class if they want to succeed and continue in the program. That's a lot of pressure for students to be under ... If the university isn't reasonable with their rules, then we have to take matters into our own hands. (#265 I25)

Mishary's explanation of cheating in college is contextualized into how he interprets the inconsistency in the value system at KU. It seems contradictory to him to have schools taught only in Arabic and then automatically switch to a university that is mainly taught in English. There are some students who interpret this as unfairness and lack of support then resort to cheating; they feel that the system is imbalanced so they can be unfair in return.

At the same time, Mishary himself was a graduate from an Arabic high school. When I asked him how he could explain why his English was so good, he said that he practiced. He explains,

My father always encouraged me to learn English. This is the best way that I can know what's going on around me and stay on top of things ... I practice English on my own. I watch movies and I read. That has helped me really improve my English so the course hasn't been difficult for me. (#265 I25)

Despite coming from an Arabic government school education, Mishary demonstrates how his father's encouragement to improve his English motivated him to take it upon himself to work on improving his English. When I pointed out his success despite coming from an Arabic school background, which was the main excuse students gave for cheating on homework assignments and exams, he just shrugged his shoulders and did not have an answer. He speculated that it was just laziness on the part of the students and in the end said, "sure, the students can improve if they want to, but I still don't think the university is being reasonable ... English carries too much weight, and it's not practical for us to use it so much" (#265 I25).

In the end the importance of doing well supersedes the strategies used to achieve this goal. This type of attitude is what perpetuates the frustration that teachers feel. Cheating is an issue that teachers hate to deal with, and it is a constant problem in the department. Even though the majority of the students do not cheat, the ones who do, cause a lot of aggravation, particularly, as Mishary indicated, because there are no consequences for their actions if they happened to get caught. This attitude and behavior demonstrates one way students are contesting their environment and interrogating the significance of English. This is also how they contribute to power relations within the university context, such as those discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.2.1.

Students who use this type of resource are not concerned with the rules against plagiarism because they realize from past experiences that the rules are not followed up by the

administration. As a result, they decide to take advantage of the relaxed policies and use whatever resource available to help them do well in their courses. At the same time, students like Mishary do distinguish their behavior from representing their true character. Mishary says, “we’re not bad people,” rather their actions are merely to achieve a certain end goal (#265 I25).

Not all students use the essay bank or cheat in order to get ahead. In fact, there are several students who are very vocal about the unfairness of the lack of implementation of policies. The following entry in my research diary illustrates this point:

Research diary [December 5, 2008]:

Hessa and Abrar came to see me today expressing concern about students using previous students’ essays. I didn’t even know that such a bank existed, but I was pretty upset to hear about it. I understand their frustration. However, when I asked them to tell me the source of the papers or who was using them, they wouldn’t talk. I feel bad for the students who are trying their best but aren’t doing as well as those who choose to cheat. However, there’s really no way for us to prove that they are cheating. So when students like H&A come and report it ... it’s even more frustrating because without proof, we are helpless.

It’s tough being seen as not having any control over what the students do. It was even more frustrating when H&A asked what type of steps they could take to launch a complaint ... but I didn’t have an answer for them. They said it wasn’t fair that the rules weren’t implemented and that they suffered for being honest. They were really disgusted with the lack of discipline and accountability throughout the university.

Although I agreed with them I had to watch what I said and how much I empathized. The last thing I want is to get into trouble for saying that the university needed to follow-through with their policies instead of having them just for show. I tried to assure them that in the end students who cheated on their essay would not get away with it on the final because there was no way they would be able to cheat on the exam or fake answering the comprehension questions. They understood what I was saying but I don’t think I satisfied them. I don’t blame them for being upset. They were right to complain at there not being a forum for discussion or place to address student complaints. I really don’t know what the solution is. I just know that the teachers are stuck in a similar place. It’s really tough to be in such a position and not have any real power to do anything. (#162 PR 72)

It seems like many students have picked up on the lack of accountability at the university. This has translated into different types of actions. There are the students who choose to take advantage of the flaws in the system and cheat or plagiarize, and there are others who do not. I can understand the frustration of those students who struggle to get good marks by being honest. What these responses highlight are the difficulties experienced by students as well as teachers when it comes to implementing certain policies. When teachers express their frustration about student attitudes and behaviors it is usually done in a negative tone and often with a cultural correlation. For example, one teacher complained that students are “so babied and coddled” and

that she was tired of “society treating them like they don’t have to do anything” because it made “our job so difficult because they don’t value the hard work we’re putting into teaching them” (Rose #46 TT2). In another conversation with this instructor she said, “it feels like they don’t take their work seriously and nobody holds them accountable ... These kids can get away with anything” (#49 TT3). This type of complaint is common among instructors, for example, in terms of dealing with discipline issues in class, one of the instructors said he just could not seem to enforce the rules,

it’s like they look at me as if I’m crazy when I tell them to come on time or put their phones away. This is the problem with the university handing everything out to the students for free. They don’t know how to work for anything. (Charles #184 TT16)

These statements stem from interpretations of student attitudes in class. However, as the students’ responses reveal, their attitudes in English class are not representative of their attitudes towards English in general, nor is it reflective of their capabilities. The distinction between having a strictly pragmatic view of what happens in class and using English for practical purposes outside of class is the source of this disconnect. Some students do not follow the rules because they know there will not be any consequences. Unfortunately, the lack of implementation of rules has a direct impact on teachers and without further exploration into how or why these attitudes exist, teachers will probably continue to interpret these student behaviors as direct reflections of cultural and societal flaws versus an act of contesting their environment. It is these misinterpretations that highlight the importance of taking the time to be aware of Othering discourses that are still dominant in the field of education, as discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.2.2.

Therefore, the obsession with receiving an ‘A’ in the course greatly interferes with students’ enjoyment of the class. Their attitudes in class and towards assessments do not reflect the importance that most of them expressed about the practicality and importance of English. Whereas English for daily use, to understand movies or talk to friends, is viewed positively and eagerly, having to study English at the university is resented. The motivations behind this resentment seemed to primarily stem from their dissatisfaction in how they are prepared for college and the lack of support within the university. These comments reveal a tension between teacher expectations and student desires.

## 8.4 CONCLUSION

*“We can control how and when to use the language so that it is in the best way for us” (Razan #81 C4).*

The perceived benefits of knowing English, such as it being a medium through which to connect with the rest of the world, dominates any other interpretation. This view also supports what respondents say about globalization as a way to connect with others (section 6.2.1). Perhaps this type of interpretation would fall under the category of the effects of linguistic imperialism in that the urgency to learn English was driven by its dominating status. However, as revealed in the previous sections, an instrumental practicality is associated with the language rather than one that is seen as dominating the local language or culture. Also, not associating English with a specific country suggested they were not being forced to learn a language that represented a specific country or culture. Students seemed to don the attitude that learning English was a skill that others were trying to learn, and they would benefit from learning the language as well.

The data from this study demonstrate how, due to the status of English, which the respondents themselves have positively interpreted and continue to perpetuate, they find ways to creatively incorporate the language into their lives to suit their needs – whether it is for academic, professional, personal, or social reasons. It seems like most students would learn English on their own because of the benefits and importance they associate with the language. However, learning it in a controlled environment under pressure changes the perspective from which they view English. Their attitudes as expressed in class, disinterest, lack of engagement, are not linked to their ability though they are often correlated by teachers.

Despite displaying an interest for learning English, students do not always display the same amount of enthusiasm when it comes to studying English at the university. The structure of the university context plays an important role in perpetuating this attitude. Several students do not feel like they have the proper resources to learn English in the way that is required by the university. Therefore, in order to cope with achieving the requirements, some students choose to take short cuts to achieve their goals. This behavior, which is often criticized by teachers, is not interpreted by students as being something bad. Rather, they view their actions as a means to an end. This highlights a distinction between learning and using English on their own terms versus having the terms being dictated by someone else.



## CHAPTER 9    IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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### 9.1    INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis was to explore the significance of learning English in the lives of students at KU. More specifically, this research explored how the students were contesting – through their actions – cultural assumptions based on Othering discourses that are prevalent in English language teaching.

The purpose of a critical cosmopolitan approach is to open up space for discussion and change. It is not about coming to a final realization of what culture represents, but rather accepting the fact that there is no finality in cultural representation; it is to accept others on a more fundamental level of being themselves rather than being like someone else/me. Although several theorists use the terms ‘Center’ and ‘Periphery’ to describe mainstream Western culture versus the marginal world, I have attempted not to use these terms as I find them problematic. Making them proper nouns in itself – giving them a form of capital – plus visually fixating adjectives – Center (in the middle of it all) and Periphery (on the outside) – seems to negate the whole point of being more inclusive. Moreover, neither myself nor any of the students in this study have used these terms to locate ourselves within the world.

In chapter one, I introduced my research questions and explained the rationale behind conducting this study. In the subsequent three chapters I presented literature that explored the ideology underlying current views related to the place of culture in the English language classroom. The literature particularly focused on the pervasiveness of Othering discourses in English language teaching. The research methodology that was followed to conduct this study was elaborated upon in chapter five. It also included a detailed description of both the research setting and the participants who were involved in the study. The data analysis is presented in chapters six through eight. This final chapter presents the following:

- a review of the main findings of this study
- the general implications based on the themes that emerged from the data
- an overview of some of the limitations of this study
- potential research studies related to the findings of this study
- a few concluding remarks

### 9.2    MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study revealed the significant role English played in the lives of KU students. The importance placed on learning the language was primarily driven by their interpretations of globalization. The effects of globalization in Kuwait had an impact on students’ lives on various levels. This was demonstrated in the way they negotiated their use of language and adjusted their

behavior, which was guided by both local and global parameters. This level of engagement with their context is rarely seen in the English language classroom, which is a place predominantly viewed as a functional space with one target – to learn English. This focused attitude is also a reflection of their beliefs about the purpose of learning English, which is linked to their assessment of their context. Since this level of critical reflection about language is often not seen in the classroom, students' disengagement with learning is often interpreted as a lack of ability to think critically among other reductive ideas anchored in Othering discourses. The data reveal that students' reactions towards these discourses, however, reflect an element of detachment from the criticisms and also demonstrate how they are actually engaged with their environment. These findings are further discussed in the sections below.

### ***9.2.1 The Importance of Knowing English & its Relationship with Globalization***

The students who participated in this study used many positive adjectives – important, prestigious, necessary – to describe their opinions about the role of English in their lives. These attitudes (described in Chapter 8, section 8.2) were primarily motivated by the widespread use of English and the prestige associated with knowing how to speak the language well. They also believed that knowledge of the language allowed them to advance both academically as well as professionally. Speaking English was thus seen as a key to success and access to various opportunities. Aside from the benefits they personally experienced from knowing English, the positive attitude was also continually reinforced by praise they received from others about knowing English and encouragement to continue pursuing study of the language, as detailed in chapter 2, section 2.2. All this positive promotion, as discussed in Chapter 2 section 2.2, seemed to reinforce the importance of learning English.

In addition, being connected to the rest of the world was mentioned as a positive consequence of learning English. Students realized what an asset English was when it came to communicating with non-Kuwaitis and non-Arabs both in their country and when they traveled abroad. Aside from the ease of communication, several students also believed that knowing English gave them a sense of belonging in the world (chapter 8, section 8.2). With negative media images of Arabs and Muslims on television, along with the tragic historical events related to the region, such as the 2001 9/11 attacks in the United States, being able to speak English made them feel like they were less strange, less foreign, less 'other'.

The desire to learn English was never correlated to it being a language that represented a specific country or it representing a certain idealized (Western) culture. Rather, students asserted that they wanted to learn the language because they saw it as a tool to use to participate in

globalization. It gave them access to media, facilitated travel, and enabled communication on many levels, as explained by several students in Chapter 6, section 6.3.

Some theorists view this type of acceptance as uncritical and are concerned that an unquestioned acceptance of English gives too much power to Western nations, who are often seen as the owners of English. Phillipson (2009b: 79) suggests that by learning English, students are “complicit in perpetuating the dominant ideology.” These concerns, as addressed in Chapter 2 section 2.3, also focus on the idea that not knowing English puts non-users at a disadvantage in terms of access to opportunities. These concerns stem from an oppressed mentality, which does not seem to be present among the students. Rather, because of the global environment that they are being raised in, where intercultural images are easily found at their fingertips, students are refreshingly assertive and confident about what the use of English means to them (chapter 6, section 6.2).

The widespread use of English brings forth questions of ownership and discussions related to the development of varieties of English (discussed in chapter 2, section 2.3.2). Crystal (2003) asserts that no one owns English anymore because it is spoken by so many people around the world. The respondents in this study echo this sentiment when they claim that they see the language as an instrument to use for their individualized needs. The attitude towards English – both standard English (as defined in Chapter 2, section 2.2) and varieties – shows how issues of English belonging to a particular nation do not apply (discussed in Chapter 8, section 8.2). The main view of English focuses on practicality and functionality (as addressed in Chapter 2, section 2.2). This perspective illuminates a deep engagement with the significance of learning. Student responses demonstrate how arguments about passive acceptance of the importance of English neglect to address the role of choice in the matter of learning a language. Therefore, rather than focusing on trying to teach different varieties of English, it seems more beneficial if language classrooms concentrated on developing intercultural communicative competence instead.

Students do not deny that there is a link between language, culture, and identity. However, they insist that language is just one element of a person’s identity. Moreover, the use of language varies from context to context thus carrying different meanings and showing that they are in control of how much and where they use a language. Even if the desire to learn English is driven by external forces, such as academic pressure or key to participate in globalization, each individual still has an element of control. They can exercise their agency by choosing when and how to use English. This is discussed further in the following section.

The existence of transnational corporations, institutions, and industries has necessitated the need for a common language in which to communicate, and English has taken on this role. While this common language could have been Arabic, the national language of Kuwait, English

seemed to be the more ‘logical’ language to choose because it is the most common language used to communicate among the expatriates of various nationalities who are working in the country. The language has been seen as being beneficial for career building, ease when traveling, and general communication. Respondents demonstrated a ‘matter of fact’ attitude and did not feel that learning English or the fact that English has been adopted as a lingua franca to be oppressive. It is possible that the students’ perspectives are a reflection of the sociopolitical context in which they exist, juxtaposing conservative Islamic, Arab values and practices with more liberal Westernized ones, which is a comparison often focused on in the media. Some people may view globalization and the spread of English as forces of cultural and linguistic imperialism. However, the participants in this study have revealed the complex negotiation process that they undergo as they determine the elements of globalization that they wish to incorporate into their lives. Invariably the attitude towards learning English was positive. The responses suggest that knowledge of English empowers the speaker. Moreover, their active participation in negotiating the use of language demonstrates how their efforts to learn English are not symbolic of giving up their identity. This will be discussed further in the following section. The highly positive attitude was surprising because based on my experience at the university, students did not often speak English unless required to and their reluctance in class made it seem like they were not interested in learning the language. However, as described in Chapter 8, and as will be discussed in section 9.2.3, this is not the entire picture.

### ***9.2.2 Cultural and Linguistic Identity in the Midst of Globalization***

Some discussions about globalization (covered in Chapter 3, section 3.2) suggest that it is creating a homogenous environment and contributing to a deterioration of local languages and cultures. The participants in this study acknowledge that the landscape of Kuwait is changing, but do not find that it is becoming like any other specific country. Rather, they insist that the changes are part of a natural development (Chapter 6, section 6.2). Although there have been some mentions of concern about foreign influences not always being congruent with local customs and traditions, the attitude that most of the students seemed to have was that multiple cultures can coexist and do not need to compete with one another. This reaction was primarily based on the fact that students had a pragmatic view of why the changes in their country were occurring (discussed in the data in chapter 7, section 7.3). They believed that the changes that were occurring in Kuwait were for the country’s, and their own, benefit. More significantly, what the students recognize is that an exchange is occurring (as demonstrated in data chapter 6, section 6.2 and explained in Chapter 3, section 3.2). The idea of exchange highlights the fact that the changes are not a non-negotiated, dominating occurrence. Furthermore, students acknowledge the

flexibility and fluidity of identity construction. Despite participating in consumer elements of globalization, they emphasize the fact that they are not losing their culture or identity. Instead, they are continuing to build their identity based on their experiences. Students are making their own choices as they consider the local context in the decisions they make along with their own ideas and values. This demonstration of agency is evident in the data presented in chapter 6, section 6.3.

Some theorists view this attitude as being naïve. They see the adoption of English and the importation of foreign goods as one that is perpetuating a one-sided domination. This type of attitude reflects an essentializing mentality whereby the agency of the people to have control over their environment is not acknowledged. The spread of English does carry cultural implications of a dominating, historic past and symbolizes suppression and displacement (as discussed in chapter 2, section 2.3). This perspective, however, is not the one that the respondents in this study are coming from. Instead, they mainly focus on the benefits they gain from knowing the language (chapter 8, section 8.2). Moreover, by adapting the language and determining how, when, and where to use it, they are further appropriating it and making it their own, thus claiming ownership and removing any deep associations of the language with another country or culture. Similarly, even though foreign products are being imported, they have been adapted to suit their personal needs and fit into their own personal culture. The data challenge the idea that globalization threatens linguistic and cultural identity and they reveal a complex negotiation process with identity and sociocultural context. While cultural products and languages do carry values, the users of these products and languages have a choice in terms of how to incorporate it in their lives. The students in this study demonstrate how this is done (chapter 6, section 6.3).

The idea that imports and expatriates lead to a loss of culture is not looking at the richness and tenacity of culture or the people who are able to control how they see their lives (as described in Chapter 3, section 3.2). In fact, what many students suggest is that the heterogeneous environment that is created because of globalization – namely the import of foreign goods and the hiring of expatriate laborers, as described in chapter 3, section 3.2 – is one that has helped them be more culturally aware and understanding of others. These attitudes demonstrate how identity is not fixed but rather is socially constructed. The respondents in this study demonstrate how it is possible to belong to various cultural realities depending on the context. The ability to adapt to and function in these diverse contexts is characteristic of a cosmopolitan individual.

This complexity contests assumptions of homogeneity and lack of critical thinking and submission to the environment. The students demonstrate that they are not passive and that they are engaged actors with the environment. Perhaps the power of English is something that only learners of the language can understand and value. They are the ones that are choosing to learn the

language, and this is motivated by how they see it can add value to their lives. The theory of linguistic imperialism, (as discussed in chapter 2, section 2.3) is that the West is dominating, but the data in this study demonstrate that learning English is a way to control the environment and appropriate changes that are occurring in the surrounding context. The language is used to represent their needs, beliefs, and identity. The choices that are made require critical thought and self-reflection. This process may not always be obvious; therefore, it is important to move away from essentialist ideas that just because the action is not seen that it is not going on nor are people capable of them. This is further applicable when it comes to student performance in the classroom, which is discussed in the following section.

### ***9.2.3 Identity in the English Language Classroom***

The demand for English instruction is high because of the benefits, already discussed in Chapter 2 as well as section 9.2.1 in this chapter, associated with the language. Despite the demand, approaching the English classroom is still problematic because of the discourses of power and cultural implications linked to the subject. Some theorists argue that it is not possible to teach the language without its link to discourses of colonialism and imperialism. A primary concern of some of these theorists, such as Pennycook (1994) and Kumaravadivelu (2003) (Chapter 4, section 4.2), is that teaching English perpetuates the dominance of the language. Moreover, the materials used to teach English, as well as the teaching approaches, may not be suitable to the local context. Consequently, these theorists suggest adding a cultural component to English language classrooms whereby the implications of power as well as its current status as a global language are interrogated.

While promoting awareness of the issues surrounding the spread of English is valuable, the suitability of these topics of discussion also comes to question. These discussions could be unsuitable due to local cultural sensitivities that may not be known, time and curriculum constraints in the classroom, and students' general lack of enthusiasm for the subject, as discussed in Chapter 4 section 4.3. With these obstacles, the discussions surrounding the implications of the global spread of English do not always occur. This may suggest that the learning of English is going by uncontested. However, the responses from students, as outlined below, demonstrate a level of criticality that often goes unnoticed among educators.

#### ***a) Student Opinions***

The importance that students place on learning English to feel part of the world and make sense of globalization, as elaborated on in Chapters 2 and 6, is not always evident in the English language classroom. The purpose of studying English appears to be separate from the practical

applicability of the language in a non-academic setting. Students were rather adamant about focusing on the main reason behind why they were attending English class – to learn the language. While this may suggest that students are being uncritical of their actions, they reveal (Chapter 8) that there are many other factors that underlie their decision to learn and speak the language. Instructors do not usually recognize these issues mainly because often they do not engage with students on this level. This is particularly the case when instructors feel the pressure of having to complete a certain curriculum within a limited timeframe and prepare students for various assessments.

Most students state that they would rather just learn the target language instead of engage in debates about ownership of the language or its significance. This attitude should not be taken as uncritical. Students demonstrate that because of the complexity of their society and the constant negotiation of identity there is no need for instructors to urge students to think critically about their environment. Students are already aware of the complexities. They are naturally manipulating the language to suit their needs, and this is done after their evaluation of the context.

The assumption of passivity is problematic. Students face daily struggles in deciding what may seem like simple things, what to wear, what language to speak, how to behave with their peers, on a daily basis. These issues are important because, as discussed in Chapter 6, section 6.3, they are aware of how people in their local context might judge them. Just because this level of analysis of their environment may not be evident in the classroom does not mean that it is not happening. Therefore, it should not be assumed that students are uncritical of their surroundings. (Chapter 3, section 3.3) These issues highlight the fact that focusing on teaching a certain culture or even stressing the problems of the spread of English may not be necessary. What would be more productive is to promote intercultural communication skills in the classroom. These issues should also raise awareness of Othering discourses from the part of teachers against students' capabilities. It is up to the students to decide what to do with their knowledge. This requires fostering a critical cosmopolitan environment – for both the students and the teachers (more discussed section 9.3).

#### *b) Student Reactions*

Teachers come into the academic setting in order to fulfill their job requirements and meet their teaching objectives. Students come to class in order to learn what they need to pass the class. Although these goals may appear to be parallel, this study revealed several tensions between students and teachers. The teachers often linked issues, such as frequent student absences and plagiarism, to a cultural inefficiency (as seen in Chapter 4, section 4.3). The students, on the other hand, did not interpret their actions in this way. In their minds, as revealed in the data

(Chapter 8, section 8.3), they were taking ownership of their learning environment, which they felt was not appropriately organized, by finding ways to accomplish their goal. Therefore, the interpretation of the parameters of their context was what influenced their behavior, not some assumed cultural problem. Directly associating these actions to a cultural flaw is highly symbolic of Othering and essentializing discourses.

Despite issues that teachers may have, students do not seem to be very affected by the criticisms. This is mainly because in the end, whether they are described as lazy or uncritical, they are there for one purpose, and that is to learn the language. What the students reveal (Chapter 8) is that there is a whole host of other issues under the surface that teachers are unaware of. Moreover, it seems like they have a good grasp of how the university is structured, and therefore they use the system to their advantage, even if this may go against what they really believe and what the teachers expect of them. They are doing what they need to do in order to succeed. Not all students believe that their actions are right, but they do find them necessary in order to get ahead.

#### **9.2.4 Section 9.2 Summary**

The findings centered on the unexpected ease with which students were dealing with the changes occurring around them, namely as a result of globalization. The students' positive outlook towards learning English did not, however, correspond with teachers' impressions of their attitude or ability when it came to learning English. The teachers' resistance to acknowledging the level of critical thinking among the students is representative of underlying Othering discourses in the field of English language teaching, as was discussed in chapter two.

The purpose of this study is to raise awareness and decrease the negative associations teachers may have about certain cultures and student capabilities.

What is necessary is good teacher training so that teachers are aware and reminded that there are different factors that manifest themselves in the classroom. They should also be conscious of how detrimental stereotypes can be. It is important to remember that identity varies from context to context. Adding some discussion to the classroom about their educational experience, hopes, priorities, and expectations may shed some light on their motivations behind being in class. It may also help teachers form their expectations and attitude towards the class. Even small interactions that do not take up much class time or stray from the curriculum can help explore and reveal the complexity underlying the students can provide a richer classroom environment for both the students and the teachers.

The students demonstrate that they are critically living on a daily basis thus demonstrating how interculturality is perhaps a characteristic of being a global citizen. Taking the time to unearth the motivations and ideology behind behavior and attitudes is a key aspect of creating a critical cosmopolitan atmosphere in the classroom.



### 9.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The evidence presented in the study demonstrates how students are taking ownership of not only the way they approach their academic environment but also how they cope with misunderstandings about their assumed cultural identity. The findings of this study contest some of the current theories that imply globalization is an agent of linguistic and cultural imperialism. Moreover, the study reveals that even if changes are occurring, the students are capable of finding their own voice and identity without the ‘help’ of anybody else.

The findings of this study demonstrate that a deeper connection needs to be made between what should ideally happen in the classroom and what is realistically possible within the context. This study unravels both the weaknesses and the potential to perpetuate prejudiced perceptions in the classroom even when trying to focus on and acknowledge the complexity of identity. While critical cultural awareness is important, the respondents in this research demonstrated that they were already actively engaged in taking charge of their environment. This tension highlights the necessity to first consider the context in which students are learning, and teachers are teaching, and then assess how realistic it is to implement language policies.

A look at the lives of young Kuwaiti adults provides a rich image of the diversity among people who share the same nationality and the same religion. Although certain trends may reflect values that are often associated with Westernization in contrast with the more conservative lifestyle that stems from Kuwait’s traditional background, the data collected suggests that many people are incorporating the elements of both lifestyles to create a new trend. This new trend should not be viewed as a threat to local identity or a contradiction to the traditional image nor should it be as some sort of ‘exceptional’ phenomenon. Rather, it should be accepted as a result of thoughtful reflection that results in an ever-evolving identity.

Attitudes towards globalization and the spread of English as a result of globalization were revealing. The participants in this study did not feel like they were victims of this global phenomenon. Rather, they viewed it as an opportunity for them to make choices about how they wanted to live. They were active participants in their social reality, which is complex, and they are continuously negotiating with their environment. Their actions should not be reduced to generalizations about cultures such as collectivism versus individualism. A person is not traditional ‘simply’ because he comes from a country that has been historically categorized as a ‘collectivist’ nation. Moreover, these decisions should not be seen as negative. The context in which all actions are taken and decisions are made must be considered.

Teaching and learning English may carry political ideologies; however, the English classroom is not necessarily the space in which these critical discussions should be carried out. Teacher and student realities must be recognized. It is understandable that culture cannot be kept

out of the classroom as each one of us carries our cultural history wherever we go. However, it does not need to be made the focus of the class. Often teachers are not in a position, or given space, to discuss these topics. Moreover, most students are more concerned with succeeding in achieving English proficiency to further their academic success than involving themselves in discussions related to the power and politics of language. We need to consider student and teacher realities in order to determine the next course of action for English language education around the world.

As the world is changing because of globalization, it is important for people to be engaged in a constant self-reflexive process that allows them to negotiate their identity amidst potentially conflicting lifestyles, such as being conservative or liberal. This also involves critical thinking about the language that a person uses and how that affects his or her identity. The implication of the data is that living in a globalized world automatically involves reflexive, critical self-analysis. Once again, critical thinking may be promoted as part of the curriculum, but the data illustrate that being aware and negotiating with one's environment goes beyond looking at the language being used. There are more concrete, relevant tensions that need to be dealt with.

Culture and language are inextricably linked, not just because language is used to reflect cultural understandings but also because cultural assumptions about students' capabilities feed into the classroom. Therefore, addressing culture in teacher training allows for space to be aware of difference and to separate that from deficiencies, especially because regardless of awareness of and explicit rejection of being discriminatory, negative or prejudiced attitudes seem to frequently manifest themselves in the way students' performance is addressed.

Moreover, although students may seem one-dimensional, what is not visible in the classroom is their negotiation of how and when to use English. Viewing English as a practical tool results in a different attitude reflected in class. It is easy to make assumptions based on what is seen in class, but teachers have to take the time to look deeper, or at least realize that what is occurring in the classroom is not all that is happening in the students' lives. Their attitudes and actions are deeply driven by context.

Figuring out the parameters within class is not always easy, but it is not impossible either. Teachers have to be willing to do it and take a chance to engage with their students. The complex picture of KU demonstrates how culture is not definable. Even generalizations are neo-essentialist and room has to be made to acknowledge the underlying cultural processes that are at work (Holliday, 2011) rather than justify student behaviors based on cultural assumptions – positive behaviors linked to exposure to the West versus negative behaviors associated with non-West. Therefore, showing caution with how words are chosen and how the class is addressed is the first

step in recognizing this complexity. Seeking appropriate methodology is an unending dynamic process in relation to ‘how to teach’ and ‘learning how to teach’ (Holliday, 1994: 164).

While students may have to work towards negotiating the meaning of their own lives, given the multiple factors in their context, they have demonstrated that it was not necessarily the teacher’s role to prompt, promote, or propagate any views. When it came to English class, they mainly wanted to adhere to the curriculum. Furthermore, the data reveal that students were engaging in critical analysis in other parameters of their life, such as what language to speak, how to act, and what to believe. Assumptions that teachers need to guide them in terms of how to think critically continue to support a belief in the superiority of the Western way.

The sum of these findings points to the importance of recognizing that there are different types of globalization. Unlike top-down, Western-centric globalization, which ignores non-Western cultural realities, what the respondents in this study are demonstrating is characteristic of bottom-up globalization. Instead of being guided by a dominant world-view, they are speaking from the margins and claiming the world. By stating that globalization has always been present (Chapter 6, section 6.2), it can be argued that this form of ownership and cosmopolitanism has always been an inherent part of Kuwaiti society. This enactment of bottom-up globalization is largely unrecognized by modern essentialist trends.

The interpretations the students in this study have of globalization demonstrate how people are no longer individuals who operate independently from what is happening in the world. Globalization now blurs the boundaries between cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity. In some way, shape, or form there is an impact, and the negotiation of this impact is important to acknowledge and explore. Critical cosmopolitanism, as described in chapter 5 section 5.3.1, takes into consideration this exploration and strives to investigate upon what basis people construct their reality.

Embracing a critical cosmopolitan standpoint encourages looking at a context from a bottom-up perspective, one that views the impact of global events from a local standpoint. In an educational context, this type of approach focuses on developing a more holistic view, not just of the students, but the entire teaching context as well. This type of closer examination will help reveal the ideologies that underlie reductive discourses about students’ academic capabilities. Assumptions such as students being capable of critical thinking because they have been exposed to a Western education system (demonstrated in Chapter 3, section 3.3.3), or students being unable to work independently because they have been spoilt by belonging to a collective society (Chapter 7, section 7.2.2) are examples of Othering discourses that still prevail in the field of English language education. Student behaviors that are exhibited in the classroom are only one fraction of who they really are, and rarely present a complete picture of what they stand for.

Teachers need to recognize that there is a relationship, not just a one-way influence as theorists of imperialism suggest (Chapter 3, section 3.2). In today's globalized world, it is not possible to exclusively look at nationality or ethnicity and explore how identity is shaped by global influences. Rather, it is now necessary to understand how the global affects the local and how the local makes sense of the global. Further engagement with students is necessary in order to reveal such complexities.

The critical cosmopolitan framework contests the claims that cultural and linguistic imperialism are leading to cultural homogeneity because such theories do not give enough credit to the power of individual agency in developing their own ideologies. As the data reveal, people are not simply accepting the changes that are occurring around them. They are negotiating their environment, whether it is by resisting or accepting. In either way, there is a dialogue occurring that is not often recognized. Taking the step to explore and discover this dialogue and the motivations behind the exchanges will help develop a deeper understanding of what is happening versus just accepting a simple cause and effect relationship.

The data illustrate that the students are aware of factors that influence their own culture (Chapter 6, section 6.3.3), such as government mandates for segregation of university campuses, and their identity as formulated by others, such as negative impressions that the Western world has of Arabs and Muslims (Said, 1997: 9). Amid these perceptions, they demonstrate that they are actively dealing with issues related to their identity in their own way. Moreover, being aware of the diversity in their own country, even among the Kuwaitis, it appears that their identity is something that they wish to negotiate on their own. This highlights the fact that there is some type of critical thinking process involved in making decisions about their lives, particularly in choosing which rules to follow and which ones to disregard. The students demonstrate that they are involved in making their own decisions as they attempt to balance their own identity and choices within a society in which family expectations and religious guidelines are traditionally highly revered. This level of complexity suggests that perhaps thinking critically about global events and local developments is not dependent on someone else, particularly an 'insider', talking about their own community and helping them decipher their identity – as Canagarajah (1999: 5) discusses. Rather, it seems that the process involves people discovering boundaries and possibilities for themselves. This proposed point of view suggests that perhaps it is not the place of an English language teacher, who may be considered a representative of the Western world, to provoke critical thought when students are potentially actively negotiating their identity on their own time, in their own way.

This level of negotiation is not always evident in the English language classroom where students and teachers come in focused on a specific purpose – to learn/teach English. Therefore, it

is important to realize that even among students from the same nationality in one classroom it is clear that globalization creates diversity, particularly because the students exercise their agency to decide what to incorporate or leave out of their lives. While some of this may be because of family issues, since family is very important (as elaborated on in Chapter 7, section 7.2) it still reflects what type of ideology they base their decisions on. This highlights the importance of framing the local context against wider local and global developments. Therefore, the recognition of cosmopolitan students also involves the development of cosmopolitan teachers. This level of awareness must be focused on in teacher training in order to raise consciousness and develop strategies of how to develop a critical cosmopolitan classroom.

#### **9.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Conducting this study over four years and collecting over 130,000 words of raw data revealed a wealth of discoveries. It is unfortunate that due to space and time constraints more data could not be presented. Besides this, there are two main limitations of the study: the choice of university and the type of interactions with the language teachers. Broadening the context and scope would have revealed further paths for discovery.

##### ***9.4.1 Choice of University***

This study was conducted at the Health Sciences Center where English is not only a mandatory subject, but also given much importance for both the students' current academic success and future professional careers. The majority of the most up-to-date, cutting edge research for medicine is published in English, not Arabic. Therefore, the students had a very high drive to master the language for their own success. I wonder if this motivation would be as strong in other colleges, such as *Sharia* or law, where the curriculum is taught mostly in Arabic and aside from one or two mandatory English classes, it is barely visible. Thus, the emphasis on English at the Health Sciences Center illustrates only one overall perspective.

##### ***9.4.2 Interaction with Language Instructors***

The conversations with teachers that are included in this study are based on informal, passing conversations. In-depth interviews would have perhaps provided more insight as to their ideology and reasoning behind the statements they made.

## 9.5 FUTURE DIRECTION FOR RESEARCH

The findings and data of this study could serve as a platform for a good deal of further research. The main emerging theme was that teacher ideologies and the context in which teachers work have a great impact on how much, if at all, they can scrutinize and adjust their practices and evaluate student reactions. Moreover, because of this limitation, problems are often linked to cultural issues versus the context of the learning environment. Therefore, two areas that will be valuable to explore in greater detail are:

- the foundations of teacher ideology
- current curriculum design and educational policies

### 9.5.1 *Focus on Underlying Teacher Ideology*

Teachers' perceptions of what constitutes good, effective teaching is rooted in a particular ideology – one that varies from person to person depending on their own background and experience. Finding the root of these ideologies would be one starting point to deconstructing the place of culture in the classroom and its implications for teaching and learning potential. Understanding the source of one's ideology is particularly relevant in the language classroom. Considering the idea that language, identity, and culture are linked (Kramsch 1998), it seems presumptuous to assume that a teacher's identity and beliefs are ones that need to be taught to the students.

Taking these views into consideration will perhaps urge teachers and researchers to look at the bigger picture and see how the acceptance of individuality, patience with communication, and understanding of the sameness among humans is a more wholesome view than creating divisions through inner, outer, and expanding circles and notions of 'us' and 'them'. This would perhaps lead to a more progressive attitude towards teaching English. Moreover, by emphasizing the complexity of human interactions and identity development as well as the significance of considering a person's sociocultural context, this research focuses on the importance of moving away from essentializing discourses and becoming more critically aware of our cultural assumptions and tone when involved in intercultural communication.

### 9.5.2 *Curriculum and Policy Development*

One problem that teachers experienced was not having enough time or space to address any cultural issues that arose in class. Moreover, although the importance of raising awareness about cultural diversity and multiple cultural realities is important, there does not seem to be a broadly applicable guide that teachers can use in class. Moreover, if a cultural component is not explicitly mentioned as a required part of the curriculum, then both teachers and students may

hesitate to address those issues. Therefore, it is essential to officially include exercises to increase critical cultural awareness as part of the program, if it is expected to be taught.

There needs to be a realistic realization of what is possible to teach. Often there is a disconnect between what administrators, teachers, and students want. Therefore, each party is coming into the educational institute with different goals.

## **9.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Through this study I hope to have made a contribution to broadening the understanding that notions of culture are not simple, and I hope this understanding enhances and enriches relationships and experiences of both students and teachers. This thesis is a demonstration of the complexity that underlies student attitudes and behaviors in the classroom. Their lack of interest and participation in English class is not a reflection of their lack of ability. Rather, their behavior is a reflection of their interpretation of what is going on around them. Their views of the politics of the social and cultural aspects of Kuwait, the world, and their lives come forth in the way they behave and the language they choose to speak. Looking at this context-specific example demonstrates the complexity that lies within people of one nationality.

The study itself has been a learning process for me. I had originally thought I had a 'liberal' and accepting idea about cultures, but I saw elements of a neo-essentialist perspective in my own ideology. This made me realize how easy it is to be drawn into simplifying cultural ideas, usually for convenience. The most significant thing I gained through this discovery was that it enriched my experience and interaction with my students. I discovered a whole new level to which I could take my class and although I always believed in the potential of my students, now I feel like I am able to take the steps necessary to accomplish this task. One of the elements that held me back from doing this before was the fear of crossing a cultural line; however, I have realized that the sensitivity to cultural difference is not as pronounced as I thought it would be. I discovered that the students are willing and able to engage in critical discussions without taking offence. It is not that I did not think this was possible before, I had just been afraid to try it before. Although I still believe that one needs to carefully consider one's own position in the context, I am no longer afraid. It is possible to push boundaries without crossing them.

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## **Appendix**

Email sent out to students requesting participation in the study	A2
List of participants	A3
Data Collection Schedule	A5
Consent Form	A6
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**Email sent out to students requesting participation in the study**

[Date]

Dear Students,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting as part of my PhD, which focuses on exploring the role of English in students' lives.

Your participation would involve being interviewed about the role of English in your life. The interviews can be conducted at your convenience in terms of time and location, and you are guaranteed complete anonymity. Each interview will probably last approximately one hour.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ms. Ayesha Kamal  
Email: [missayeshakamal@yahoo.com](mailto:missayeshakamal@yahoo.com)

**Table A1: List of Students who Participated in the Study**

The list below is of students who participated in the research; they were all of Kuwaiti nationality. Specific ages were not mentioned; however, their year of study was noted.

Respondent #	Data Code	Pseudonym	Year of Study	Gender	Repeated Interactions
1	#16 C1	Hassan	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Male	
2	#38 I1	Kareem	6 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	#84 C5
3	#50 C2	Seema	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Female	#151 I8; #229 G13; #264 C39
4	#59 C3	Faika	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Female	
5	#81 C4	Razan	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	
6	#86 C6	Fajr	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Female	
7	#91 C7	Abdullah	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Male	
8	#93 C8	Hani	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
9	#94 I2	Mona	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Female	
10	#97 C9	Sabrina	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Female	#214 I16
11	#98 G11	Fadeela	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Female	
12		Nabeela		Female	
13		Jameela		Female	
14		Zahra		Female	
15		Somaya		Female	
16	#103 C10	Eilaf	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Female	
17	#104 C11	Halima	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Female	
18	#106 I3	Qader	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
19	#112 I4	Rowena	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Female	
20	#133 I5	Hanan	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	
21	#139 I6	Noura	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Female	
22	#147 I7	Waleed	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
23	#153 C12	Waseem	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
24	#158 C13	Bader	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Male	
25	#159 C14	Aliya	6 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	
26	#160 C15	Sabina	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Female	
27	#161 C16	Marouf	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
28	#180 C17	Wijdan	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	
29	#182 I9	Leila	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Female	
30	#183 C18	Adeeba	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	
31	#185 I10	Mai	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	#224 C34; #248 C37
32	#186 C19	Mahfuza	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Female	
33	#188 I11	Saleh	6 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
34	#189 C20	Raqeeba	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Female	
35	#195 C21	Amina	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Female	
36	#196 C22	Musa	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
37	#197 C23	Sara	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	
38	#199 C24	Dawood	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Male	
39	#202 I12	Fahad	6 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
40	#203 I13	Amal	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	
41	#205 C25	Lama	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Female	
42	#206 I14	Omar	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
43	#207 C26	Jawad	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Male	
44	#208 C27	Muneera	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Female	

45	#210 C28	Basil	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
46		Akbar	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	#215 I17
47	#211 I15	Eman	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	#245 C35
48	#212 C29	Hisham	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	#260 I24
49		Aziz	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	#221 I18
50	#216 GI2	Maha	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Female	#229 GI3
51		Mahta	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Female	#229 GI3
52	#218 C30	Zeenat	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Female	
53		Badriya	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Female	
54	#219 C31	Nisrine	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	
55	#220 C32	Khalil	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
56	#223 C33	Kawthar	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	
57	#228 I19	Adel	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
58	#246 I20	Aseel	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Female	
59	#247 C36	Sulaiman	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Male	
60	#250 I21	Dihani	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
61	#252 I22	Malik	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
62	#254 I23	Taher	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
63	#256 C38	Abdulla	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Male	
64	#265 I25	Mishary	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Male	
65		Hamid	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Male	
66	#272 GI4	Faisal	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Male	
67		Sultan	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Male	
68	#273 I26	Nada	6 <sup>th</sup> year	Female	



**Table A2: Interview Schedule**

A total of 36 students were interviewed. Of these, 26 students were individually interviewed, of which one was included in one of four group interviews. The table below presents the pseudonyms of the participants who were interviewed. It also indicates the date and location of each interview and whether or not the interaction was audio-recorded.

<b>Interview #</b>	<b>Data Code</b>	<b>Participant(s)</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location of Interview</b>	<b>Recorded (R) or not recorded (NR)</b>
1	#38 I1	Kareem	Nov. 2, '07	Café	NR
2	#94 I2	Mona	Apr. 21, '08	KU	NR
3	#98 GI1	Fadeela, Nabeela, Jameela, Zahra, Somaya	May 5, '08	KU	R
4	#106 I3	Qader	May 12, '08	KU	NR
5	#112 I4	Rowena	May 22, '08	KU	NR
6	#133 I5	Hanan	Oct. 16, '08	KU	NR
7	#139 I6	Noura	Oct. 29, '08	KU	NR
8	#147 I7	Waleed	Nov. 9, '08	KU	NR
9	#151 I8	Seema	Nov. 18, '08	KU	R
10	#182 I9	Leila	Mar. 17, '09	KU	NR
11	#185 I10	Mai	Mar. 24, '09	KU	R
12	#188 I11	Saleh	Apr. 7, '09	KU	R
13	#202 I12	Fahad	Jul. 9, '09	Café	R
14	#203 I13	Amal	Jul. 9, '09	Café	NR
15	#206 I14	Omar	Oct. 22, '09	KU	NR
16	#211 I15	Eman	Dec. 6, '09	KU	NR
17	#214 I16	Sabrina	Jan. 25, '10	KU	R
18	#215 I17	Akbar	Jan. 25, '10	KU	R
19	#216 GI2	Maha & Mahta	Jan. 25, '10	KU	R
20	#221 I18	Aziz	Apr. 12, '10	KU	NR
21	#228 I19	Adel	May 11, '10	KU	NR
22	#229 GI3	Maha, Mahta, Seema	May 15, '10	Café	R
23	#246 I20	Aseel	Oct. 13, '10	KU	NR
24	#250 I21	Dihani	Oct. 26, '10	KU	R
25	#252 I22	Malik	Oct. 27, '10	KU	R
26	#254 I23	Taher	Nov. 4, '10	KU	R
27	#260 I24	Hisham	Dec. 12, '10	KU	NR
28	#265 I25	Mishary	Mar. 21, '11	KU	R
29	#272 GI4	Hamid, Faisal, Sultan	Apr. 18, '11	KU	R
30	#273 I26	Nada	Apr. 20, '11	Café	R

## **Informed Consent**

Perceptions of Globalization among English Language Students at KU  
Ayesha M. Kamal (Department of Applied Linguistics, University of Kent)

### **Introduction:**

My name is Ayesha Kamal and I'm investigating the role of English in the lives of Kuwait University students. As part of my research I am investigating people's notion of identity, in particular what it means to be Kuwaiti, and how people see the effects of globalization in Kuwait. Moreover, I am investigating the role of the English language, not only as a part of globalization, but also its effects on identity and culture.

### **Procedures:**

Participation in this research project involves answering a few questions about the abovementioned topics. This will take approximately an hour of your time. With your permission, I would like to digitally record this interview. In some instances, I may need/want to follow-up on your comments in the future. Please write your email address and phone number below if you consent to being contacted.

Email address & phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Confidentiality:**

The information provided by you will remain confidential. Nobody except me will have access to it. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time. However, the data may be seen by an ethical review committee and/or a review board and may be published in a journal and elsewhere without giving your name or disclosing your identity.

### **Agreement:**

I have read and understood this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [ayesha.m.kamal@gmail.com](mailto:ayesha.m.kamal@gmail.com) or +965 9939 9466 or +44 (0) 787 6154660.

Thank you so much for your time & contribution.

## **Interview Questions (PhD Research)**

### **Identity & Kuwait**

- 1) In your opinion, what does it mean to be Kuwaiti?
- 2) What would you say are defining elements of Kuwait's culture/traditions?
- 3) How big of a role do you think religion plays in Kuwait's society? What kind of role does it play?
- 4) What role does family play in Kuwaiti society? How does that affect individual behavior?
- 5) What are the best things that Kuwait has to offer?
- 6) What are areas that need improvement?

### **Shifting the view to globalization's effect on Kuwait,**

- 7) How would you define globalization?
- 8) What elements of globalization are evident in Kuwait?
- 9) How do you think globalization is affecting Kuwait? (in terms of economy, politics, society, culture, and identity)
- 10) Do you think globalization has had a positive/negative/neutral impact on the cultural identity of Kuwaitis? Are the traditions fading or growing stronger?

### **Assumptions about Kuwaitis**

- 11) How do you think Kuwait is viewed by the world at large?
- 12) What do you think perpetuates this view?

### **English in Kuwait**

- 13) What role do you think the English language has in Kuwait?
- 14) How often do you use English in the workplace? In your social life? In other instances, e.g. shopping, going to the movies etc.
- 15) Do you think the role of English is a form of Western influence on Kuwait?
- 16) Do you think learning English has an effect on changing Kuwaiti identity?
- 17) How important to you think it is for Kuwaitis to learn English?
- 18) Despite the fact that there are so many non-Kuwaitis in Kuwait, what do you think about them being required to learn Arabic instead of everyone learning English in order to communicate?

### **Student Life in Kuwait**

- 19) Why did you choose to study in Kuwait and not abroad?
- 20) How has life been at KU? What kind of experience have you had?
- 21) How much is Kuwait society reflected in campus? E.g. political decisions/societal influences – is there any link between how life is in general in Kuwait & how life is as a student?
- 22) Do you think coming from an English school background vs. Arabic school background affects how a student does at KU?
- 23) What do you think can improve the program?
- 24) What do you think needs to be done to better prepare students for KU?

### **Your final thoughts**

What do you see as Kuwait's future (and how do you see yourself, your generation, and the next generation contributing?)

Are there any other comments you'd like to share in general about the use of English/Kuwait/Kuwaiti identity or any other points?

**Interview Notes 1: Recorded Interview****Interviewee: Fahad [code #202 I12] – 40.05 minutes**

Me	Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research study. I'd like to start off with a very general question – What does it mean to you to be Kuwaiti?
Fahad	Being Kuwaiti is just like being Kuwaiti like everyone else. We have to work, we have the same issues as anyone else. I don't feel like [pause] like it's not a question what is the difference between being Kuwait and living in the US. If that was the case, then I would tell you I would not be able to practice myself. I couldn't wear my national attire, or I've become too Westernized too quick. All of these things whatever the situation is. So you're asking me what it's like to be Kuwaiti when I'm in Kuwait, I feel 'normal'
Me	Ok, so can you give me some background about – what would be the top three traditional, cultural things that you would say represent Kuwait. The most symbolic.
Fahad	I would say community, it's a very big community society. We focus on community not individuals. Ummm very close-knit. Umm very big on tradition and culture. Ahh what else I would say? [pause] Easy to penetrate and become part of the society; it's welcoming. [pause]
Me	So, what in terms of religion, how big a role does religion play in society itself?
Fahad	Ahh huge, um we have more mosques in Kuwait than in Cairo and Cairo is a ... We have more mosques in Kuwait than Cairo and that shows religion plays a huge role. Whether people believe or not that is another question.
Me	And what about family? What kind of role does family play?
Fahad	Family plays a huge role. They look out of you till you die. That's a negative extreme I guess and I difference between Kuwaiti society and Western society. Umm you just, you're always cared for and looked after. Now whether you accept that care or not is something else, but it's always there. I mean, for example, you – they support you to go to college, whether emotionally, financially, and all that – when you're back they still support you. They work with you to find you a job and then when you want to get married, if you want, they can help you find a person. When it comes to financial responsibilities of that engagement, they also help you in that. When it comes to kids, when it comes to their schools, if the family is well off, they will also help you with that. They will help you on and on and on financially and emotionally, not just financially. And the support is always going to be there. A lot of, a lot of, I mean, even if you take out the financial aspect, let's say it's a middle class, lower middle class family, they'll still open up – The rule is actually, they'll open up their doors if you want to get married, and you can live with them until you save up enough money on your own to move to your own apartment. Depending on what you can pay. So it's a very close-knit, very supportive. When you slip you have people to hold you as opposed to individual based societies, like the United States. It's like you're on your own; you're fresh out of college you're on your own or you're fresh out of high school and you're on your own. And you make your own mistakes and you suffer your own consequences [um] you wanna go back to marriage thing, parents will help you if you ask for it, or they'll help you out of their own will or [inaudible] Some will some won't and you know the whole story. That's it very supportive environment of men and women.
Me	So, now looking at Kuwait, what do you think are the areas that still need improvement in terms of any aspect, whether it's government or education whether it's health care whether it's society. Any part.

Fahad	Well, I think the word improvement can only be applied to the process of things like government and all that stuff when you know what's the correct thing to do and what's not the correct thing to do. That we can improve on. Like obviously corruption. That we can improve on. Society we cannot improve on. Because improve it to what? Do we need to develop through civil institutions or do we need to mature, maybe that's a word ... but we don't get fixed. We're fine the way we are. Ya like any place in the world. You fix the process you don't fix society. You fix the system.
Me	What comes to mind when I say the word globalization? How would you define it from your own perspective
Fahad	When it comes to the business cycle, when it comes to things in our own country, something that we've always been into, we've always been ... had. Business and commerce and living in Kuwait has always been based on international trade. Globalization means a big deal to companies that historically have been self-sufficient. And right now they're closing down shops in their country to open up in another country or the opposite. Or there is labor movement from one country to another whether it's European countries, Asian countries, American countries, American continent countries where it makes sense. They have pre-globalization, they have post-globalization. At one point they make their own food, their entire labor force was from their own country; they had laborers from outside who came in to do the hard work. Technologically sufficient, financially sufficient, that was it. The cycle goes full circle within their own borders. You take countries like Kuwait, I don't know about the rest of the world, region, Gulf, and you we've always been in a sense globalized? Does that make sense?
Me	Yes, being a port for trade, there's always been some sort of ...
Fahad	Features are from out of Kuwait. The food we eat, it's always been from out of Kuwait, the spices, and all that kind of stuff. The rice, even the dates we get them from Iraq. So, if you went into someone's house back in the 20's or 30's, pre-oil. What do you see? You see global ... You see regionalization if you will. You see the dates are from Iraq, you see the spices are from India and from some other places, you see Bukhoor is from India, Oman, and all these other places. The fabric is from China or whatever, umm the wood is from India and Oman and places in Africa, which made the house. What do you see? We've always, we've always been globalized. All our products come from outside, we just now matching it up with oil. Does that make sense? Does that answer your question?
Me	Yes. It does. So then, now, even though Kuwait has always been globalized, as you say, how about now. I mean, looking at society again and especially post-1990 with the American military force. I mean, a lot Kuwait has grown so much, especially since the late 90's. Do you that's just – Well, what do you think about that? Is it a product of globalization or is it something else?
Fahad	No, I think we're just catching up. We take from the mid-80's up until 99, 2000, it was complete stagnation. Big zero. If you want to measure it by performance in stock market – stagnation. Measure it by, even, jobs in private sectors and all that, stagnation. Even travels, all that I mean it was a dead period. So what. So what's happened since 1999, we've been catching up with ourselves, with where we should have been anyway. I mean, office space was a ... what's the word ... was scarce. Now it's catch up, and it's a clear indicator that we're not, we're not growing exponentially. We're catching up with where our growth should have been. You look at the population from right now we're at 2.9, 3 million. 5 years ago we were at 2.7, 2.6; 5 years before that we were 2 point something. That's not humongous growth, not at all. And you see where that growth is also; you see the Kuwaiti population 15 years ago was around 700 now it hit a million. So half of the number you see from the last 15 years is that number from local growth; local population growth, more

	babies. Ya. So where is that growth? I'm not saying that its; I'm saying that growth in the definition on graphs it goes up every year; everything goes up. But take a step back and look at what should have happened in the last 15 years/20 years and you see this growth should have been back in the 90s if we hadn't had all these other problems.
Me	So, do you see globalization as Westernization or Americanization or do just go by what your definition was? Given this whole interaction with trade. Or do you see that Kuwait is becoming more ...
Fahad	Culture wise?
Me	In any aspect
Fahad	I think we're definitely Westernized. We have huge influences from the West. I mean, any, any culture [slowly said] is going to be influenced by the US in the last 50 years. I mean, just look at what happened to Michael Jackson and the following he had. He's an example. You go to Germany, you go to China, you go anywhere. So the rest of the world is heavily influenced by US media, US entertainment, US showbiz, and American and Western. Right now I see us becoming more like the rest of the world; more international.
Me	Do you think this is, again, going back to being Kuwaiti, it is taking away anything from Kuwaiti identity or you know the traditions? Is anything being lost?
Fahad	No. We're just developing. We're just, not losing. We are developing. With our country, you see, whatever is being said, especially on TV, and I always get pulled back. Let say you have a country invaded by another country, invaded by the US and within two to three years that entire country changes its identity. They even change their alphabet. That's culture that's lost. You have a country that's just organically developing, without guidance, without anything – it's us. We listen to Michael Jackson coz' I went and bought it and put it in the tape ... I wasn't geared towards it; pushed towards it in any way and without, without capping or limiting the growth of local entertainment. Both are there ... available. But, now you come to the quality, the work of this, that's personal judgment. Either this is better or this is better. You go to Turkey, there's a clear example where you can see identity was lost because half are Christians. It became from an Islamic country to a sectarian country now ... read the old literature about Turkey. That is a case where overnight there was a change of identity, where all that identity talk can apply. You come to Kuwait though and everything was done by decision. You walk, you go out and you walk on the beach you find a girl in a bikini and a girl dressed top to toe in black.
Me	Going back, you had mentioned the alphabet you know before when you were talking about Turkey. Just something related, part of something that I'm looking at is the role of English. Now, because of globalization and all this trade, English has now kind of become this international language if you will. A lot of people are using it to communicate. And the same thing is happening here in Kuwait. I mean, I'm just looking from teaching at the medical school, students are required to learn English because all the research is done in English etc. Umm how much do you use English for your work. Do you use it a lot?
Fahad	A lot, lot.
Me	How about socially?
Fahad	Socially, see I'm half half, because the people I hang around with share the same background that I have which is ... we are skewed towards the West, but that's just us; we're a minority in the society. The majority of the society is pro-Arab. They have American Idol and now Gulf Idol, it's a Bedouin thing. It encompasses poetry and everything. Visually it's not

	<p>attractive to me, but that doesn't mean it's not art. It's a competition between two groups – poets and that's it. This guy says a couple of verses, this guy talks about the beauty of the verse and how it rhymes and it has to be well structured, there are rules for that and then it goes back and forth to score more points. So, that is one thing. It's not American Idol.</p> <p>I'm not part of that society. I never listen to Gulf Idol kind of stuff. My family doesn't, but that doesn't mean ... that's not majority and I'm the exception. And we <i>are</i> the exception. So, if you want to look at society, culture, and how we internationalize whatever, most of the time I'm self-absorbed and when I look at people around me speaking in English and I mean ... I am Kuwaiti and I met you through a friend and you are Bangladeshi and we have friends who come from the same place and all that kind of stuff. It doesn't mean that the rest of the country is like this.</p>
Me	Right. So, looking at the position/spread of English. Is it an imposition by making it a requirement for students. Do you think that's a negative thing?
Fahad	Absolutely not.
Me	And do you think by learning English it's going to influence their Kuwaiti-ness in any way?
Fahad	No. Absolutely not. They need English. Especially for doctors who work in international places and study abroad and all that.
Me	So what do you think about it being English, does that irritate you or anything? How come we have to learn English to compete or to be in the circle and why isn't it in another language? Why isn't it Arabic?
Fahad	Well, it's obvious why it's not Arabic.
Me	Why is it not Arabic?
Fahad	Coz' lack of prose in the Arabic industry and commerce and business ... and entertainment. That's what happened with English. Most of the suppliers are Western, western educated and you see the quality of the works. We don't watch it because it's American it's because the stuff these guys do is better quality. It's just quality and that's what gets us. It's not being skewed to the West, being pro-Western, truth be told, they have better products.
Me	Right
Fahad	<p>I want to be entertained. That's all I want. So.</p> <p>Back to the language thing, I went off on a tangent for a second.</p> <p>No, I don't see a problem.</p> <p>I know people who don't speak a word of Arabic and they're more Kuwaiti than anyone I know. They just speak English, but they're very family oriented, they pray 5 times a day, they do the whole shebang, which I don't feel a part of ... but it doesn't mean anything.</p> <p>What we don't have in Kuwait is punk lifestyles. We don't have the trend where there are piercings and tattoos all over the face and that's when you say What happened to Kuwaiti culture, and you walk down the district you see people skateboarding and stuff. That's when you see it and think What the hell's happening? If it's over night of course, ya.</p> <p>But of course what's happening here are changes, but they're not mainstream. So, the issue is not there. You have people who have pink hair in Kuwait, but for every person who has pink hair you have a thousand who have dark hair. Does that make sense?</p>

Me	Yes it does. So, my last question is What's the future of Kuwait? How do you see Kuwait in 25 years? Any major changes, any progress, not progress, but any more developments in what way would it be developing?
Fahad	I just want to clarify a point. We talk about growth and this is who we are, but I didn't mean that this is Kuwaiti will always be Kuwaiti. What I meant was, when it comes to improvement, you can improve the process. You can improve the work culture because it is clear what is a bad work culture and what is a good work culture – it's efficient, it doesn't have corruption, it's effective and achieving its objective. I know you can talk about education, what's good and what's bad. When it comes to society, our society, whatever improvement, it is subjective. For my point of view I could see 1,000 things that could be improved in society, or it could be convenient to me and you would come up with your own – it's personal. But does our society need to be improved as a whole – on the cultural aspect, this is who we are. If we change, then that's who we are. If we change again, then that's who we are. It's not an improvement. There's nothing wrong with me. Does that make sense?
Me	Yes. What do you think will happen when the oil runs out? Are Kuwaitis prepared?
Fahad	Ok now it's a whole other topic. It's not about culture it's not about religion. Okay. The government is corrupt. The system is corrupt. Everything is one humongous bureaucracy. Ideals. The ideals are not even ideals. Like if you ask what are the ideals they'll say – We want to make life easy for Kuwaitis. Don't do that! That's not going to help. There's a whole domino effect. So on that side it's a complete mess. The system itself is inherently wrong. You have lack of vision, a lack of good managers in the government on the executive level and on the mid level and even ... it's just ... when you look at government you don't get the best. You get people who can help you calm society. That's how you choose your ministers. Again that's the problem; it's inherent in the system. So, where will they be 25 years from now, let's say in 25 years there's no oil, then we're definitely screwed. But if something happens. If someone comes in and starts managing this country [pause]
Me	What's it going to take to make these changes?
Fahad	An awakening within – actually just an awakening
Me	Do you think it's going to happen? In our lifetime?
Fahad	Yes. Yes I think it will happen in our society. I think it will take more time. I think these things get worse quick. It sounds bad, but when things go bad, that's when people step in and make things work.



Interview Notes 2: Non-recorded Interview [Notes taken during the interview – only a few sample pages]

Interviewee: Kareem [code #38 I1]

Interview #1:  
KT → Kareem  
6th year

November 2, 2007  
@ Ruby Tuesdays  
1:30 pm

① Kuwaiti

"I hate it"

Q&A = "materialistic, greedy, arrogant"

Future = bleak "nobody wants to work  
4 anything anymore."

Gov support = "handicap" + employees  
= "space fillers" who go to work just  
to collect a paycheck "Do no real work"

"That's why they're so depressed and  
sad."

No incentive/motivation/pride in work.

"They resent the new changes in  
Q&A so they feel it's too late to  
take advantage of them."

- clarification - older generation

- Newer generation + care

"can do what they want"

new idea

finding balance

②-4 Family + religion = v. imp.  
"cornerstones" "foundation for  
guiding life in Q&A"  
"guide our behav. and choice"

①

Sometimes "conformity" esp. if own par KT  
 ≠ parents, but "you make a decision"

Q8 = sb2u "very conservative even though  
 we look modern." → money "thrown @  
 everything w/o knowing the  
 investment"

only looks?

Needs work / unbalanced - not  
 all ready for change.

women + right to vote = struggle

"There is nothing unstable about  
w voting, but it's the shift in power  
 and potential for experiencing new  
 territory that = scary."

Fear new/old = scared

not just  
 re  
 religion

own experiences/conflicts

Being gay - "would love to share w/ my  
 family but they wouldn't understand."

"I've always known I was gay. I haven't  
 been open abt. it b/c you know how  
 cl-minded Qfi society is. I'm not hiding  
 it, just choosing who to tell. I only  
 tell people I trust."

"Not easy" "this is my life"

Family - general perception  $\neq$  what is (KT) really happening.

"I know it's weird. Our family is one of the most religious ones in Kuwait, & both my sis & I = gay!"

contradiction

"I would never tell my family though. I think it would kill them."

self-sacrifice - worth it?

"I could tell my fam. if I really wanted to, but their pain  $\neq$  worth it. When I can, I'll leave Kuwait

his realities

and live my life the way I want to, but for now, while I'm under my father's roof, I'll play by his rules... I mean, this is part of my life too. I'm Kuwaiti and that's the way things are here."

looking @ context, culture,  
own interp = guidelines

People judge - don't care; family = "worth the sacrifice"

wants to start own family?

"very careful abt. the decisions I make"

actions  $\neq$  abt. now - "gotta think

of the future" - thinking ahead

(F3)