

# Building Cultural Bridges in Education



# Building Cultural Bridges in Education

Edited by

Nataša Bakić-Mirić  
and Davronzhon Erkinovich Gaipov

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P U B L I S H I N G

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The Editors.



# INTRODUCTION

NATAŠA BAKIĆ-MIRIĆ  
AND DAVRONZHON ERKINOVICH GAIPOV

This book comprises a collection of peer-reviewed papers from the fifth international conference – *Building Cultural Bridges: Integrating Languages, Linguistics, Literature, Translation and Journalism into Education* – which took place at Suleyman Demirel University in Almaty in April 2013.

Scholars from around the world, including England, Serbia, Qatar and Kazakhstan, came together in their shared interest to build cultural bridges and produce diverse ways of approaching constant challenges and changes in today's world to expand horizons in language, education, linguistics, literature and intercultural communication.

Comprehensible in nature, the book focuses on the need to address diverse issues and highlight the need for a comprehensive account of current major global trends and represents an initial step in the process of building new cultural bridges in education around the globe.

The emphasis in this book is on promoting an understanding of and appreciation for the rich and varied contemporary theoretical assumptions surrounding the abovementioned fields and disciplines. The papers represent rigor and relevance in discussion of numerous, and always varying, cultural aspects in scientific discourse and lexis.

The book opens with an article written by plenary speaker, Prof. Chris Kennedy from the University of Birmingham, UK. He argues that one effect of the spread of English, as a global language is the creation of cultural hybrids, a phenomenon that can be investigated through the analysis of and reflection on various texts illustrating such hybridity.

Alan Weber's contribution details the initiatives, efforts, and challenges faced by the Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (WCMC-Q) Writing Programme in establishing a culture of reading and critical inquiry in the State of Qatar in the Arabian Gulf.

Brent Davis discusses the use of the concept of ideology to combine the study of British and American culture. In his opinion, understanding the British and American worldviews leads to a better understanding of the English language, English teachers and translators.

Nataša Bakić-Mirić introduces intercultural communication as a medium of cultural diplomacy. In her vivid discussion, she also focuses on how it helps people to foster mutual understanding when interacting with the culturally different others and how it reduces misunderstandings between cultures.

Madina Ashirimbetova and Shynar Baigozha cover an enlightening topic on how Kazakhs see Americans and how stereotypes influence the judgements we often have about other people.

Aliya Aimoldina and Sholpan Zharkynbekova investigate rhetorical features in business letter writing by Kazakhstani students taking the English for Business Purposes course as well as the current linguistic situation in Kazakhstan and a political directive on trilingual policy in Kazakhstani intercultural business communication.

Nadežda Stojković and Slađana Živković propose that today, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is not just a language of professional and technical occupations but a medium of contemporary ideology of globalization that creates our reality. In the authors' opinion, ESP can be seen as a tool that enhances skills and knowledge attained for both professional development and career advancement to comply with the needs of the global economy.

Sholpan Gumarova and Lidiya Strautman discuss the invaluable benefits of using internet video lessons in the course English for Physics as one of the most successful methods of stimulating students' interest. Additionally, the paper considers the types of classroom activities based on internet video materials.

Reza Pishgadam and Bob Adamson give a new outlook on the applied ELT and textbooks used in the classroom. They suggest that ELT textbooks should be written to enhance both intelligence and language proficiency.

Damira Akunova, Sholpan Zharkynbekova and Atikul Agmanova present interesting research on the analysis of the current state of English in the educational space of Kazakhstan. Their paper also investigates the place, role and peculiarities of the function of the English language in the higher educational system. Additionally, they highlight the use of code switching as one of the main peculiarities of bilingualism among Kazakhstani university students.

Juldyz Smagulova and David Landis critically examine current school literacy teaching practices in Kazakhstan. They draw on ethnographic observations of the classroom literacy practices in a Kazakh-medium school in Almaty. Their analysis of classroom interaction suggests that understanding of literacy as a technical skill and understanding of literacy as an educational tool (to do school) are predominant in Kazakhstani primary schools.

Davronzhon Erkinovich Gaipov and Kuralai Kuderinova investigate writing system reforms, and phonological and lexical changes that have taken place in the Kazakh language until now. The authors also focus on

social and political factors of development and formation of the current Kazakh writing system.

Gulnara Yeleukulova presents and discusses a piece of Kazakh oral epic developed by a warrior-poet and orator – Akhtamberdy. This rare surviving piece of oral art from the nomadic Kazakhs, as Yeleukulova points out, is invaluable because it is the story told by the people living in the years of bloody wars between the tribes. As a result, the epic legacy of the *zhyraus*, as well as the legacy of Akhtamberdy (one of the surviving warrior-poets), is valuable for being not only the historical narration, but also the epical generalization and synthesis of the real historical events.

Georgeta Rata analyses the Turkish borrowings/loanwords that have attained different degrees of assimilation into the Romanian language analysing the evolution of Turkish borrowings in the field of cuisine (especially names of foods and ingredients) from the point of view of their usage restrictions, word formation and semantic evolution.

Finally, Nadiia Govorun examines various sociolinguistic factors and the criteria for differentiating the dialects of Middle English as well as morphological and syntactic features of the development of the verb phrase for the most widespread Northern and Central/East Midland dialects.

The book will be a valuable contribution to the fields of education and applied linguistics because it offers useful ways of thinking about different bodies of knowledge. It will also be a valuable asset to teacher educators, researchers of language and education and students because it offers a diverse range of topics, such as cultural diplomacy, intercultural communication, English for Specific Purposes, conception and uses of literacy, writing systems, translation and literature. Furthermore, this book should serve as a guide to improve the building of cultural bridges in education the world over, which, from the editors' point of view, is crucial to the development of mutual understanding in the modern world.

In conclusion, the editors hope to have provided an overall picture of the issues dealt with by the scholars who have contributed to this volume. Our purpose is to highlight that contemporary scholars look upon these issues through a dynamic global prism and beyond any strict set of rules, which would otherwise lead them to ignore the ever-shifting bridges in education, language teaching, linguistics, literature and culture, and the accompanying global cultural reality in general.

Lastly, the variety and complexity of these essays offer fresh views to the topic postulated in the title of the book. Therefore, we believe that they will additionally stimulate intellectual curiosity and research as well as further development of new ideas within the fields of education, language, literature and cultural studies.





# CHAPTER ONE

## ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE: CULTURES AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

### CHRIS KENNEDY

#### Outline

I should like in this short article to suggest that one effect of the spread of English as a global language is the creation of cultural hybrids, a phenomenon that we can investigate with our students through their analysis of and reflection on various texts illustrating such hybridity.

#### 1. Introduction

English is currently the major global language used by both 'native' and 'non-native' users, and indeed users of English as a second language now outnumber users of English as a first language. L2 speakers are using English for social communication and in such domains as law, business, science, media, and education. Not everyone is content with such a situation. Some point out the negative aspects of the global spread of English, including Phillipson (2008) who fears that English may have a subtractive influence on other languages and cultures rather than adding benefits.

#### 2. Users of English

Some time ago Kachru (1985) distinguished the various users of English by using a metaphor of circles of influence – *the inner circle* of native speakers (e.g. USA; Canada; UK); *the outer circle* of speakers of English where English is used within the country together with other languages (English as a second language: e.g. Malaysia; India; Nigeria) often a legacy of colonial rule; and *the expanding circle*, countries where English is spoken as a foreign language for use primarily outside the country internationally. The current reality reflects a more complex situation. Thus the concept of native-speakers living solely in the inner circle is now contested. Singapore and the Arab Emirates in Kachru's model are amongst

the nations of the outer circle and expanding circle respectively but some Singaporean and Arab families are more comfortable using English which they regard as their first language. Moreover, the compartmentalisation of circles and use is no longer self-evident since in any one country English may be used within certain specific domains and local languages in other domains. English is increasingly being used in situations within a country for academic and business purposes. There has been a rapid expansion for example of English-medium universities in both outer and expanding circle countries. International business organisations may also have a policy of using English as a lingua franca within their organisations, especially if they employ a multilingual workforce. The concept of lingua franca (again contested by Phillipson [2008], who prefers the term *lingua frankensteinia*) is powerful since many more people who do not share a first language are communicating with each other globally and using English as a common bridging language.

We must also not assume that one group will speak one language compartmentalised from another. Multilingual Kazakhstan is a case in point where languages and their uses are in a constant state of fluidity and flux. Most multilingual situations are associated with a high degree of code-switching and code-mixing, encouraged by the rapid expansion of the internet. There will be a degree of hybridity as one culture influences and is influenced by another. To take an example of this hybridity from pottery-making, a modern potter from England, Felicity Aylieff, has been collaborating with Chinese potters to produce traditionally-shaped Chinese vases but decorated with modern designs. The traditional shape of the Chinese vase interacts with modern Western designs to create a hybrid work of art, bringing two cultures together in striking and original ways.

### 3. Hybrid Cultures

Since cultures and languages are inter-linked we should expect cultures to influence languages and for hybridity or mixing to occur. To give what may appear at first sight a mundane example, I recently purchased a sandwich from a cafe at Frankfurt Airport and the staff put the sandwich in a paper bag. On the outside of the bag a job advertisement to work in the sandwich bar was printed. Restrictions of space and cost prevent a reproduction of the text showing colours and fonts, so much visual information has been lost, but the text read as follows:

Jobs zum Anbeissen!

Jetzt frisch bei casualfood am Frankfurt Airport.

Zur Verstärkung für unser Team suchen wir ab sofort Service/Verkaufspersonal in Vollzeit, Teilzeit, oder als Mini-Jobber.

Casualfood – we care for good food.

The advertisement is written in German for a German audience but what is significant is the amount of English in the text in the form of loanwords or innovations derived from English. Some of these borrowings/innovations are:

*Jobs* – A loanword from English with the first letter capitalised to fit the German grammatical rule that nouns should have their initial letter in upper case.

*Bei casualfood* – *Casualfood* (sic) is a German company but it has adopted an English title and one which shows a creative collocation in that 'casual' and 'food' do not normally collocate.

*am Frankfurt Airport* – There is a perfectly appropriate German word for airport (*Flughafen*) and yet 'Airport' is used together with the German grammatical system (*am* – meaning *at*).

*Unser Team* ('Our team') – *Team* is clearly a loanword used with upper-case 'T' to render it grammatically correct in German.

*Service/Verkaufspersonal* – Service and Personal are loanwords.

*Mini-Jobber* – This term means a temporary worker in German. The word does not exist in 'native-speaker' English but it appears to be derived from the English items 'mini' and 'job', creating 'Mini-Job', with the person involved a 'Mini-Jobber'. This is an interesting case of influence from English that has resulted in the creation of a new lexical item in German that would not be used by a 'native-speaker' but makes sense in German.

*We care for good food* – the brand slogan is in English not German.

There are therefore many instances of 'English' in the advertisement absorbed into German. The next question to ask is why such loanwords occur. There are several reasons but deficit is one, where the word does not exist in the receiving language; dominance is another where the donor

language has a degree of power and people feel obliged to use its lexis; there is a symbolic use where the language user wishes to convey a particular identity, perhaps one of modernity or efficiency for example; and in some cases it may simply be that the loanword is easier to use or that the users of the receiving language enjoy the creativity of new lexical items.

What I wish to suggest is that just as I have analysed the *casualfood* text, we should encourage our students to do likewise, asking questions about the culture that is presented, comparing and contrasting it with their own and discussing reasons why certain cultural aspects are present.

## 4. Questioning Cultures

Let me give as a further example: an English newspaper advertisement for a bank which shows the image of a dog called Barney (not reproduced here) which has eaten a debit card, as a result of which the customer has no access to cash or purchases. The text reads as follows:

Barney's had crisps, two shoes, a bone and unfortunately your debit card

(Picture of dog)

Get emergency cash when you need it

We know these things happen. So we help by giving you emergency cash from our ATMs if your NatWest card is lost or stolen. You can withdraw up to £300 of your money if you are an online or telephone banking customer, or up to £60 even if you're not. All you need is the money available in your account and at least £25 available to use this service. Isn't it time you switched to a more helpful bank?

The bank provides a solution to the customer's problem since it claims to be able to issue customers with cash even if they lose their debit cards, and in this way the bank attempts to persuade readers of the advertisement to become new bank customers.

I suggest we can, together with our students, question and reflect on the cultural implications of the bank text. It is a different kind of exercise from that which we conducted with the *casualfood* text above, in that we are now not considering loanwords but the cultural content of an English newspaper advertisement. Readers will no doubt create their own questions to excite the interest of their particular students and get them reflecting on the text's cultural aspects, but some queries might be:

- What is the significance of the dog? What does it tell us about the domestic culture of the readers the advertisers are targeting? Why have the advertisers used the image of a dog?
- What lifestyle culture is indicated by representing the loss of a debit card as a considerable personal problem?
- What societal culture is being presented by the mention of online and telephone banking?
- Why is the bank trying to attract more customers?
- In what ways does the advertisement represent a consumer-culture?
- What political culture or ideology does the advertisement reveal?
- Would you find a similar advertisement in the students' local culture (C1)? Why/why not?
- In what ways does the advertisement reflect an English inner circle culture? (C2).
- Does the advertisement reflect an international English-speaking culture in any way? (English as a lingua franca -C3)

The cultural classifications - C1; C2; C3 (Cortazzi and Jin 2004) are useful since they remind us that we should be exposing our students to different cultures not only source (L1) or target (L2) cultures but also international cultures (L3; L4 etc.). We must at the same time take care not to present students with a fixed notion of cultures and stereotypes but ensure they analyse both their own cultures and those of others and recognise the complexity and hybridity of cultures.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I have tried to demonstrate that the spread of English as a global language has resulted in a complex interplay between local and international languages and cultures producing fluid hybrid forms, and that we should expose our students to examples of such influences to develop their skills in cultural analysis and reflection.

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# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN AN ARAB GULF COUNTRY

ALAN S. WEBER

### Outline<sup>1</sup>

Public education and formal reading instruction (except for a small number of *Kuttab* or Quranic schools) first began in Qatar in the 1950s. Qataris derive from nomadic Bedouin tribes (*beddu*) and settled coastal Arabs (*hadar*) who transferred knowledge orally before the advent of Egyptian curriculum education and later western-style pedagogy after the discovery of oil in 1939. Thus literacy (both in Arabic and English, which has now become a *lingua franca* due to the presence of large numbers of expatriate labourers) is a recent phenomenon in Qatar and the *Khaliji* Arabic dialect is still mostly unwritten in favour of the classical *fusha* or Modern Standard Arabic used in textbooks, literature, and the media. Reading is therefore a recently acquired habit in the Qatari society. This contribution details the initiatives, efforts, and challenges faced by the Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (WCMC-Q) Writing Programme in establishing a culture of reading and critical inquiry in the State of Qatar.

### 1. Introduction

The Pre-medical Programme of the Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (WCMC-Q) – an American branch campus in Doha, Qatar – requires the completion of two writing courses that teach reading and writing strategies using humanistic themes such as literature, philosophy and film. In addition, the Writing Faculty also engages in extensive community and institutional outreach literacy activities, such as organising national English conferences, literary lectures, the Debate Club and published volumes of

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of a paper presented at the International Conference, Building Cultural Bridges in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 25-27<sup>th</sup> April, 2013.

student essays and fiction. The WCMC-Q library has also developed an information literacy programme in collaboration with the Writing Programme to teach *critical* and *analytical* reading of source materials. These programmes have been forced to confront the inherent orality of the native culture as well as the existence of dialectical variants and diglossia among native Arabic speakers who are expected to be proficient in English in the medical programme.

Reading here will be defined both in its commonplace meaning of reading literary texts as well as a wider hermeneutic process of symbol decoding, specifically critical and analytical reading in which one actively engages with an author and text. Both the mechanical aspects of reading (recognizing vocabulary and genre, construing literal meanings) as well as higher order cognitive tasks such as understanding irony, humour, satire, decoding symbols, and developing a reader-writer relationship are all serious concerns for educators in the Gulf.

Numerous educational histories and general histories of both the region and Qatar have remarked on the oral nature of Gulf Society (Fromherz 2012; Al-Misnad 1985). Qatari youth have enthusiastically embraced the cell phone, ostensibly as an extension of oral culture. Qatar's cell phone penetration rate according to the ITU is one of the highest in the world at 132% in 2010, compared to the average of 88% in all Arab States (ITU 2013). However, Geser and others have argued that cell phone devices instead of expanding oral communicative possibilities have had both a "regressive" and "subversive" impact on culture "because they empower informal micro-social networks to communicate much more efficiently beyond any institutional control." (Geser 2006, 9)

Although seemingly directly linked to orality, the situation of cell phone adoption in the Gulf is complex and may not be the best means of investigating the relationship between literacy and orality. As Geser has argued, for example, the introduction of the cell phone may have caused a loss of the social dimension of orality, in that users tend to communicate in closed networks and may even use the phone as an avoidance mechanism. Goggin argues additionally that "it still remains very unclear – and is probably quite unlikely – that the nature of communication radically changed with the use of cell phones" (2006, 5).

Social media and an Arabic language online dialectical variant called *Arabizi*, which uses an alphanumeric Roman alphabet to imitate Arabic orthography, has gained tremendous popularity in online communities across the Arabic speaking world. But again the question arises whether this new social media use is a new modality of communication or simply



an extension of traditional Bedouin oral communicative strategies, such as the majlis and diwan.

The majlis (from the Arabic root "to sit"; plural "majalis") is a custom that has survived into the cell phone age. Technically a meeting room as well as the act of meeting, the majlis serves various purposes such as family or neighbourhood gatherings, in addition to on a larger scale the meetings of national legislative assemblies such as Oman's Majlis al-Dawla and Majlis al-Shura. Qatar also has instituted an Advisory Council (Majlis Al-Shura), which proposes legislation to the Emir of Qatar. At the personal, non-administrative variety of majlis gathering, news, religious affairs, philosophy, history, stories, poetry and events are transmitted, discussed and analysed. Thus the local majlis performs many analogous functions to fiction and non-fiction reading with respect to shared knowledge. For example, sharing local news learned through visits to neighbours, coffee shops, and other majalis, replaces newspapers; traditional story-telling replaces fiction novels and novellas; and reciting poems serves the same function as sustained silent reading of books of poetry, etc. The majlis represents the one central social, political and cultural custom of the Arabian Gulf that has successfully resisted the forces of modernization. Researchers at VCU-Q University in Qatar determined in 2009 that 77% of Qataris attended a majlis at least once a week and 45% gathered every day (*Peninsula* 2009). The fact that 75% of these majalis involved ten or more people demonstrates the size, ubiquity and social nature of these meetings.

Many features of orality can be mapped onto reading and possibly they are essentially the same process in different forms. Orality tends to be more fluid however, and allows forgetting, which is helpful in a condition of shifting tribal alliances, since past obligations or cooperation can be emphasized instead of times of conflict. Thus the older historical narrative is not fixed and can be readily and expediently adapted to new conditions. "To forget" and "forgetting" generally hold a negative connotation in western culture, associated with old age, carelessness, or irresponsibility (forgetting one's duty, for example); however, in the digital age, when one's electronic footprint can now be stored potentially in perpetuity, the 'right to be forgotten', has arisen as a key concept in internet law and philosophy. Electronic (or written paper) records can fix a person's identity, an especially troubling realization, given that Facebook and Google keep data in perpetuity, even when claiming to delete it. The flexibility of Bedouin cultural memory and the possibility of forgetting serves many useful functions in the Gulf, and allows more flexible identity formation to suit current socio-economic realities (Weber 2011a).

Reading in a literacy-based culture, on the other hand, which does not necessarily replace orality in a polarized binary with an inevitable evolution towards literacy, does possess some obvious and distinct positive communicative value. The written text captures the linguistic utterance of great masters, what Victorian critic Matthew Arnold called "Touchstones", lines or phrases that could be used as paradigms or exemplars to compare against other pieces of literature to form critical judgments. Thus we have recorded and preserved to a more or less accurate degree what Shakespeare, Rumi, and Dante actually said. The phrasing, lexicon, and stylistics of these authors have subsequently impacted both the written and spoken forms of their respective languages as ordinary language users have drawn aphorisms, metaphors and turns of phrase from them and later poets and writers have consciously imitated them. Critics from Ong to Havelock have argued that literacy freed the human mind from the constraints of oral composition, and allowed new modes of thought.

Engaged reading or textually based critical inquiry is a new concept in Gulf education – the banking model has been the predominant mode of pedagogy since the establishment of the Kuttab or Quranic schools. Memorization of the holy word of the Quran, religious interpretation (*tafsir*) – although this was normally carried out by the instructor and not the students – and some simple mathematics were the focus of these Gulf schools in the pre-oil era (Weber 2011b, 2011c). There is a strong literalist movement in the Gulf which interprets Quranic texts as being literally true rather than formal, mythical, analogical, or anagogical, as per Northrup Frye's symbolic schema. This outlook restricts the number of allowable reading strategies, focusing often on correct pronunciation of the words.

The mechanization of printing which began with Gutenberg in the 15<sup>th</sup> century produced cheap reading materials and expanding reading and the efficient and rapid spread of knowledge. Combined with widespread public schooling in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and America, the result was more knowledgeable, technically literate populations who demanded more participation in governance. Literacy is now so normative in OECD countries that it is difficult to imagine an oral-based culture and how its consciousness as well as day-to-day functions are structured and organised. Thus modern thinkers, including the pioneers of orality research Milman Parry, Albert Bates Lord, and Walter J. Ong, have all struggled with the 'primitivist' label applied to oral cultures as well as the privileging of the written text in the western world.

The charge of primitivism and lack of complexity among oral cultures, however, can be easily refuted by two simple examples: oral legal systems and Gulf poetry. An examination of two well know oral systems of law,

the Albanian oral law *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit* (Tarifa 2008) or the yearly public recitation of the oral Icelandic law by the law speaker (*lögsögumaður*) at the *Alþing*, Europe's first parliament, demonstrate that fully functioning law systems do not require written records.

In addition, the folk poetry of the Gulf, now known as *Nabati* poetry (probably a reference to the Nabataean civilization, but a term rarely used until recently) formed various communicative functions and shows that oral poetry is almost identical to written forms in complexity, genre, and content. The *Hadu* or camel driver's song was both a work song to drive camels, but also appeared in many variations to sing about love, war, history, and to deliver panegyrics. The *'Arda* is both a war dance and war song genre performed throughout the entire Gulf region. The *Sāmri*, possibly of Dawāsir tribal origin, was a praise song, but evolved into a general means of communicating news and stories (Jargy 1989, 178-83).

Silent reading, a common European social custom, even when it is done in public, is a solitary act, and thus it does not easily integrate into the highly social nature of Gulf society. Gulf reading consists primarily of newspaper reading (but often done in groups or in the majlis, interspersed with personal comments and discussions), internet reading, and social media use. Interestingly, as can be witnessed in the author's own academic institution, internet reading is often also a social process in the Gulf with students gathered around public computer screens reading together and discussing and interacting. However, reading internet-based information without a guiding expert can be a fragmented experience, and the information accessed is often inaccurate and poor quality (not assessed, peer-reviewed or fact-checked). Information literacy (assessing sources for reliability, accuracy, and bias) is a learned skill that must be explicitly taught. Also, highly technical science and medical information is frequently not available since it is expensive to produce and generally exists only within fee-based databases, purchasable e-books or via institutional library catalogues not publically accessible. Therefore the social reading and internet reading of the Gulf is probably not adequately fulfilling the recognised needs to educate Gulf populations in the minimum of science and technical knowledge that is required to succeed in school, enter the modern workplace, or become informed citizens. Thus the necessity for teaching critical and analytical reading skills at all education levels, since they are not natural or spontaneous processes.

## 2. Discussion

Walter J. Ong in his classic study *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982) has linked the rise of literate culture to individuation, and the development of the concept of man as separate from his social or tribal unit – the most useful feature of his book is that he did not privilege orality or literacy and attempted simply to describe their history and development. Oral communication is still the primary mode of communication in the world as measured by any metric. The Whorfian hypothesis theorizes that language and cognition (patterns of thought) are highly inter-related; thus the oral-based narrative structure of mnemonically-figured, recursive, repetitive, and redundant language featuring stock characters that can be created and re-created by the rhapsode (and ordered to be retrieved easily from memory), would, according to Whorf, structure the way an oral culture interprets reality, i.e. encouraging such ideas as history as cyclical process, or reality as mythic and symbol-based, to name just a few common world view ideas.

One main feature of writing, as Ong has pointed out, is that it is an entirely artificial process as opposed to oral utterance which is natural (Ong 1991, 82). Writing creates a 'context-free' form of language and distances the author and audience of utterance since the author cannot be directly queried. However, this is precisely what the scientific method consists of – a highly structured, protocol-based artificial system of truth finding. Thus Gulf societies, which are all attempting to create 'knowledge-based economies', will have to confront the scientific and empirical world-view as a mode of thought and a mode of linguistic exchange, one that is communicated in writing (the peer-reviewed scientific article). The western scientific approach, however, has been criticized in Arabic thought as a secularist, even anti-religious and anti-Islamic philosophy, a way of thinking linked specifically by conservative Muslim writers to western value systems. For example, advances in stem cell research and abortion technologies such as RU-486, are associated by conservative Muslim Sheikhs with western disregard for the sanctity of life. Thus Arabic intellectuals and religious figures will need to assess this paradigm shift to a literacy-based world view and what accommodations or compromises can be made, or if this model will fundamentally alter Islamic consciousness. Suggesting that literature and written texts should be privileged over traditional oral culture in the Gulf is highly problematic. One hypothetical solution would be multiple consciousness, blending various cognitive elements: but, with the fundamental emphasis in Islam on *Tawhid*, or the oneness and unity of

both God and creation, this view may be rejected as a form of divided consciousness or 'schizophrenia.'

The Arabic language is a difficult language to read, as commented upon by many Arabic speakers themselves, since the written form consists only of consonants and is normally written without diacritical vowel markers (*harika*), and Arabic uses a root system to construct word family meanings. Thus different words with the exact same orthographic appearance (homographs) must be decoded from context. For example, دقيق can mean precise, thin, or flour.

According to UNESCO, the Arabic speaking countries have some of the lowest literacy rates in the world, with only 62.2% of 15+ adults able to read and write, below the world average of 84% measured from 2000-2004 (Hammoud 2005, 3–4). In 2010, the Arab states' literacy rate was 75% (UNESCO 2012, 3). Gulf literacy rates, however, are higher.

Several reading specialists and language educators have remarked on the lack of reading culture in the Gulf (Shannon 2003; O'Sullivan 2008; Kiranmayi 2012; Kandil 2001). The Center of Excellence in English at the Higher Colleges of Technology in the UAE (Al Ain) devoted an entire conference in 2008 to "Cultivating Real Readers." As Kiranmayi writes concerning Omani students: "this absence of reading culture in Omani students results in the absence of any background knowledge, which is critical to comprehension of reading. The hobby of reading is in rather a sordid state as there is nothing much to encourage it. There are no public libraries; most of the reading material is imported from abroad and hence expensive" (2012, 25). As Atari points out, reading is a cumulative process and infrequent readers are at a distinct disadvantage since they lack significant context and accumulated linguistic knowledge to decipher new utterance, logical structure, or grammatical variance: "skilled readers comprehend texts by actively constructing meaning, integrating information from the text with relevant information from their background knowledge" (Atari 2004, 322).

A 1991 study by Jazzar of Arabic home literacy among six Emirati students found a strong correlation between the number of books in the homes and test performances in both English and Arabic, suggesting that the greater amount of background knowledge gained from home reading positively impacted general academic performance (Jazzar 1991, quoted in Gobert 2009, 55). A controlled study of 74 Saudi medical undergraduates by Javid and Al-Khairi at Taif University revealed that the introduction of pleasure reading into the experimental group increased both reading speed and reading comprehension, and a questionnaire revealed that students would continue pleasure reading in the future (Javid and Al-Khairi 2011,

219-20). Thus encouragement of pleasure reading appears to be a productive strategy to develop a literacy culture. Gobert argues, however, that Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) for Emirati students may not be effective, since students do not form the proper grapheme / morpheme associations, and thus clearly new reading strategies specifically aimed at Gulf students' reading challenges need to be developed, piloted, and assessed (55–56). Developing proper reading habits and effective reading strategies appears to be a set of skills that must be explicitly taught, rather than simply providing interesting books for students and opportunities for free unstructured reading.

The lack of a culture of reading among Gulf Arabic speakers has been linked to a number of factors, including the late introduction of public education to the Gulf in the 1950s and 60s, poor instruction in *fusha* in the schools, diglossia, educational neglect and illiteracy in the less wealthy Gulf countries such as Yemen and Oman, and political structures that discourage public debate and a participatory society. Synovate Research instituted phase 1 of its Pan-Arab survey of reading habits in 2007, focusing on Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Morocco. Although containing over 20 times the population of Qatar, Saudi Arabia is culturally very similar to Qatar since they both follow salafist theology and share the Hanbali school of fiqh, and the ruling Al-Thani family as well as many of the prominent tribes such as the Al Murrah originated in the Nejd region of Saudi Arabia or in the Rub al-Khali desert which spans the borders of the two countries. Thus data from Saudi Arabia can reasonably be applied to Qatari readers, who were not included in the Synovate research. According to Synovate, readers in Saudi Arabia read primarily "newspapers and magazines and are mainly interested in topics related to politics, news, and current events" (3). In addition, Saudi readers who read books are mostly interested in the Quran and Prophetic stories – and judging from the books found in local Qatar bookstores and at the annual Doha Book Fair, Qatari readers are also mainly readers of religious texts. Over 44% of Saudi readers reported that they had stopped reading at ages 19–25 (the years of school to work transition), but when they did begin to read again later in life, 63% indicated that they started to read again because "I found interesting books" (163–65). This is an important finding for the field of continuing adult literacy, since it suggests that national literacy efforts could be directed at supporting a diverse publishing sector, and financing book fairs, libraries and reading clubs that increase the ready availability of books that correspond to readers' specific interests and needs. A common complaint about imported textbooks used in the Gulf in higher education is that they are not sensitive to the Muslim context, for example,