The McChicken Phenomenon: How Has English Become a Prevalent Language among Kuwaiti Youths?

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Abstract

The worldwide influence of the English language is undeniable, given its common use in various forms of international entertainment, social media, the Internet, and so on. English has affected many countries' languages, and Kuwaiti Arabic is no exception, as evidenced by the so-called "McChicken" phenomenon. This phenomenon refers to the widespread use of English by young Kuwaitis who have low proficiency in Kuwaiti Arabic. However, despite the everyday use of the term in colloquial speech, the phenomenon has remained underexplored. In light of the above, this study investigates the development of the "McChicken" phenomenon. Through an online questionnaire survey and audio-recorded interviews, this study uncovers how Kuwait's young generation came to rely heavily on code-switching in their communication. This study makes a significant contribution to the literature because it sheds light on this pervasive and rapidly spreading, yet barely understood phenomenon. Further, this study delves into a topic that highlights cross-cultural identities and perspectives.

Keywords: World Englishes, EFL, code-switching, code-mixing, Kuwaiti English

1. Introduction

We are all familiar with McDonald's McChicken sandwich, one of the brand's internationally recognizable offerings. In Kuwait's context, it is not only a popular dish in the country's many McDonald's locations, but also a fitting representation of a group of people affected by an increasingly common phenomenon that has significantly changed the way Kuwaitis communicate. This phenomenon is a form of code-switching between the Kuwaiti Arabic dialect (hereinafter, KA) and English that has significantly impacted local language, leading to members of older generations or individuals who are fully versed in their mother tongue but with a relatively weak grasp of English to refer to code-switching individuals as "McChickens" (Vela, 2014). Meanwhile, another term is used for the extreme deviation from KA: "Chicken Nuggets". While McChickens refers to bilingual individuals with the ability to communicate in Arabic, Chicken Nuggets refers to persons whose proficiency in KA is so weak that they can only communicate properly in English. For this study's purposes, we concentrate on those individuals considered McChickens, not the outliers. To illustrate how McChickeners speak, the following are examples, gleaned from the interviews we conducted, showing the interference of English at the phrasal (example A) and lexical (example B) levels, and the hybridization of daily greetings (example C):

> A. *daxalna il-maṭʕam bass **it was so busy that** mā gidarna nigʕad*
>
> 'We entered the restaurant, but **it was so busy that** we couldn't find a seat!'
>
> B. ***farmat** il-jihāz? **Sayyavt** gabil lā t-**farmit**?*
>
> 'Did you **format** your PC? Did you **save** [your files] before you **formatted**?'
>
> C. ***Hi** shlōnkum?*
>
> '**Hi**, how are you (pl.)?'

This study clarifies and analyzes how the McChicken phenomenon came to be, that is, how the English language has come to play such a large sociocultural role in Kuwaitis' daily lives. Thus, the research question is: How did English come to be a prominent part of Kuwaiti speech?

This is an area of interest because although McChicken is a commonly used term in colloquial speech between generations—grandparents use the term to describe their grandchildren who only speak with them in English—, the phenomenon itself has not been documented or researched thoroughly. Alshammari (2019), who briefly writes about English-speaking Kuwaitis, or the McChickens, states that the term "McChickens" emerged in the early 2000s. Based on interviews she conducted with young Kuwaitis who attended private schools in Kuwait, Alshammari (2019) defines McChickens as a term "used to refer to teenaged Kuwaitis who studied in private American or British schools and often chose to speak English even when they were not required to" (p. 97). Unsurprisingly, the English language has transformed and influenced many countries and languages worldwide (Crystal, 2003), including Kuwait, which has been significantly altered by this process. Our objective was to understand how this process altered the Kuwaiti youths' language. Research that is accessible to this group that is demeaned for not having a good grasp of Arabic might aid them in understanding how this concept came to be. Instead of wondering, 'why am I so bad at Arabic?' or, 'why did I not care about my mother tongue as a child?' hopefully, this research will help them understand the different aspects that made English so prevalent in their lives.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The following section discusses how the English language was introduced to Kuwait by recounting how the Anglo-Kuwaiti ties developed. Next is a discussion on the spread and interference of English from Kuwait's perspective, and the state of the research on the code-switching phenomenon in Kuwait. Thereafter, the data collection methods are discussed, followed by the research results and an in-depth discussion of these results. Finally, the concluding remarks are provided.

1.1 How the English Language Permeated Kuwait

1.1.1 Anglo–Kuwaiti Relations

Kuwait is situated in West Asia, a region where four languages have predominated for many centuries, namely, Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish. Kuwait's history as a settlement dates back as far as 1613 (Slot, 1998). As of 2022 and during this study, the total population of the country is approximately 4 million people, with slightly more than 1 million Kuwaiti citizens. Hence, Kuwaitis are a minority in their own country. The nation's economy is known for its oil exports and currency, which is ranked among the world's most valuable currencies. Currently, Kuwait is in a state of diglossia, with the official (written) language being Arabic; specifically, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the "high" variety, and KA is the "low" (spoken) variety used at home and in daily conversations.

The history of Kuwait is short compared with many countries worldwide. Nevertheless, it is rich in cultural diversity, and is experiencing economic and social growth. It is also home to many languages, dialects, and accents. A melting pot of cultures, Kuwait has been highly influenced by its neighbors since its founding. In 1899, the ruler, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, signed a protection agreement with the British Empire for Kuwait to become a protectorate of Britain (Abu-Hakima, 1988). The presence of British residencies and agencies in Kuwait strengthened the Anglo–Kuwaiti ties. In 1904, S. G. Knox was appointed the first political agent in Kuwait (Arbuthnott et al., 2008: 169), but official British contacts with Kuwait date back to 1775, when the desert mail between the Gulf and Aleppo was dispatched. In fact, the East India Company's earliest contacts with the Gulf occurred in 1616 (Tuson, 1979: xiii, 133).

Given that Kuwait was a protectorate of the British Empire for 62 years, it is unsurprising that Kuwait has a long history of exposure to the English language and to bilingualism. However, English has even deeper roots, having entered the lives of the Kuwaiti people prior to the colonial expansion of the British Empire. Today, English is the major language of the Gulf. Smart (1986: 202) notes three varieties of the English language in the Gulf States: British, American, and Indian. Perhaps the first known introduction of English to Kuwait was by a group of missionaries during what was called the "Arabian Mission" (Scudder, 1998). The Arabian Mission originated in America and comprised a group of evangelists that aimed to spread Christianity to Arabs through healthcare and education. With stations already set up in neighboring countries such as Iraq and Bahrain, the missionaries viewed Kuwait as a strategic site for their station because of its proximity to trade routes. Thus, the Arabian Mission started operating in Arabia and the Gulf in 1889. Eventually, the Arabian Mission officially established itself in Kuwait in 1910. In 1911, it opened a hospital and the American Mission School, where missionaries taught languages and sciences. They taught mostly English, geography, Turkish, and held classes on Christianity (Albateni, 2014).

By the early 1910s, the American Mission School saw an increased number of students, mostly owing to its advantages over the newly opened Mubārakiyya School; that is, the American Mission School taught a wide range of languages and sciences. The Kuwaiti people sought to enroll their children in the American Mission School because they perceived bilingualism to be an advantage and thought that if their children spoke English, they would perform better in trade and work. Another advantage was that the missionaries provided night schooling, which was popular

for older Kuwaitis who had to work in the daytime. While there was an attempt to increase sciences in the traditional Kuwaiti schools, this was met with resistance by some people who considered these courses unimportant compared with religious studies. However, over time, the continued success of the American Mission School ended. In 1921, a rival school named Aḥmadiyya opened. It taught English and other classes, such as history and geography, but it did not include any classes on the Bible or Christianity. Both the Mubārakiyya and Aḥmadiyya formal schools followed a traditional schooling system that focused mostly on the Quran, through reading, writing, and memorization (Stephenson, 2019).

By the 1920s, Kuwait was in the process of establishing its economy, which flourished with fishermen, merchants, sailors, and shipbuilders. The Kuwaiti people earned reasonable revenue with their many pearl divers, who sold their most in-demand natural pearls to the United States and Western Europe (Casey, 2007). This industry brought about widespread economic prosperity, especially with the increase in Kuwaiti merchant agencies that opened up in and around the Indian Ocean (Al-Nakib, 2016). Kuwait was booming with economic growth, and in 1961, Kuwait gained independence from British rule with the end of the protectorate treaty (Casey, 2007). This paved the way for Kuwait's economic and social growth, helping it become the modern country it is today.

After the 1990–1991 Gulf War, Kuwait's economy boomed, and American and British retail chains flooded into the country. Al-Rubaie (2010: 45) describes this as an "aggressive introduction of Western consumer-trade labels, which also encouraged local Kuwaiti consumers to learn English in order to orient themselves in the market." She further explains that the Kuwaitis' access to international travel, the introduction and advancements of technology, and the globalization of the consumer market are all valid factors in the proliferation and dominance of English in Kuwait (Al-Rubaie, 2010).

Consequently, the term "McChicken" was coined by native speakers of KA who disapprove of this kind of linguistic behavior. Given that McDonald's is a ubiquitous American restaurant in Kuwait (which opened in 1994) and McChicken, an internationally recognizable name for a sandwich, native speakers chose the term "McChicken," as they saw the westernization of Kuwait's dialect, culture, and society with the proliferation of American and British chain stores. The people of Kuwait and Arabia, in general, regard themselves as being the purest among the Arabs, in both language and race. Native speakers who discourage the permeation of English words and phrases into Arabic utterances often worry about "tainting" the purity of their Arabic language and heritage, let alone influencing their Kuwaiti identity through American imperialism. These native speakers are either old KA speakers who have only a basic knowledge of English or are uneducated in English. In addition, older people who feel antagonistic and ambivalent about English reject the option of giving English a privileged status.

1.1.2 The Presence of English in Daily Conversations

It must be acknowledged that the motivation behind the McChicken phenomenon is not just immigration or colonization, which, in general, is the case in several studies on code-switching. Rather, this linguistic behavior is motivated by "economic power, prosper[ity], prestige, and globalisation" (Mahsain, 2014: 17); the latter two being the most prominent.

The quick advancement of technology in the 1990s had a big impact on the global spread of English. Television sets, airing a host of easily accessible and popular Western channels, became widespread. The newer generations (Kuwait youths) grew up watching American children's shows from the Disney Channel and Cartoon Network, and simultaneously immersed themselves in Western culture through movies and books. The extensive accessibility of the English language and Western media heavily influenced the language proficiency of the younger people of Kuwait.

Holes (2011: 130) describes globalization as a "multi-faceted phenomenon" and elaborates on how the McChicken phenomenon resulted from globalization. Code-switching, the McChicken phenomenon in the present study, can be viewed as a consequence of globalization. Arabic–English code-switching resulted from diverse and major historical events that occurred in Kuwait. Al-Dashti (1997) posits that the emergence of the English–Kuwaiti code-switching is a direct result of the English language becoming a central aspect of the lives of young Kuwaitis, thereby transforming English into a second language, rather than a foreign one (Al-Dashti, 1997; Akbar et al., 2020b). The importance of English is demonstrated by the newer generations of Kuwaitis who are more versed in their second language, English, than in their mother tongue.

If a language is not seen as an official language in a country, it can be made a priority through foreign-language teaching (Crystal, 2003). This is the case in Kuwait, where English is not an official language but is considered an essential language for a Kuwaiti citizen to know. McArthur (1998: 48, 51, 54), for instance, states that English in

Kuwait is both a lingua franca and a secondary language in education and is a "significant additional language" (McArthur, 2005: 48). There are two education systems in Kuwait: private and public (government). Statistical sources have estimated the number of Kuwaitis studying at private schools in Kuwait to be 70,764 (i.e., 18% of Kuwaitis study at private schools; Al-Azmi, 2017). In private schools, the curriculum is based on either the American or British education system, with some exceptions that follow Indian, Pakistani, Armenian, or bilingual systems. In most private schools, the language of instruction is English, with Arabic language classes and Islamic studies included. In public schools, the main language is MSA, with English classes classified as foreign language instruction. However, a native fluency in English is required for admission to the top Kuwaiti universities, which mostly use English for teaching (Akbar, 2007; Dashti, 2015). English proficiency is also required as a prerequisite for any high-ranking job, regardless of the field. According to Al-Rubaie (2010: 262), even among English language teachers in Kuwait, English is viewed as an "all-purpose lingua franca;" that is, the most accessible and convenient language for communicating with people from different backgrounds. This is one of the many reasons why in Kuwait there is a demand for schools with a Western education system; English is viewed by the Kuwaiti people as a necessity for basic education, higher education, and tourism (Dashti, 2015).

Regarding the Kuwaiti youth, it is common for them to code-switch between KA and English, which can occur with English words incorporated into Arabic sentences or vice versa. The speech pattern of many educated speakers is filled with English/Turco-Persian/Hindi/Standard Arabic–KA code-switching, code-mixing, and hybrid forms. In fact, Holes (2011: 138-139) has found evidence of borrowing from twenty-seven different languages—from Swedish to Malayalam—in the Arabic dialects of the Gulf. Over time, since the discovery of oil in the late 1930s, Gulf Arabic (including KA) has acquired a mass of English borrowings. Consequently, a new form of language has emerged, which may be referred to as "Kuwaiti English." This variety of English is considered part of the "English Languages" or "World Englishes" that are reviewed in the scholarly works of Braj Kachru, Tom McArthur, and David Crystal, who study the "pluralism" of English. To elaborate on how Kuwaiti English, or Kuwaiti Educated Arabic, sounds and looks like, we briefly explain its basic pronunciation and lexicon below.

In educated speech, both /v/ and /p/ sounds are virtually retained when pronouncing borrowed English words such as *vāyrus* for "virus;" *avinyūz*, "avenues;" *plēstēšin*, "PlayStation;" and *pāwar bank*, "power bank." The sounds of /v/ and /p/ would otherwise be changed to /f/ and /b/, respectively. In terms of lexical borrowing, the Arabic of Kuwait is permeated by both old and trendy English words. The following is a selection of words borrowed from the English language that have become permanent fixtures in the Kuwaiti lexicon:

Table 1. Examples of lexical borrowings of full English word forms in KA

KA lexeme	English gloss
smīt	"cement"
tāyir, *tuwāyir*	"tire, tires"
midgar	"mudguard"
balanti	"penalty (via metathesis)"
bōdar	"powder"
blāk	"plug"
kindēšin	"air conditioner"
fāwal	"foul"
jims	"GMC car" (an initialism in English becoming an acronym in KA)
birmēt	"peppermint"
igzōz	"exhaust"

Table 2. Examples of loanblend compounds (KA with English)

KA lexeme	English gloss
šarīṭ vīdyu	"video tape"
kart aḥmar	"red card"
barīd iliktrōni	"electronic mail"
jihāz fāks	"fax machine"
talifõn naqqāl	"mobile phone"
imtiḥān fāynal	"final exam"

1.2 Literature Review

The status of English in Kuwait and English–KA code-switching began to attract the attention of Kuwaiti linguists, especially regarding its sociolinguistic aspects or how English came to play such a key role in Kuwait, in the 2000s (Abouquthailah 2020; Akbar, 2007; Akbar et al. 2020a; Akbar et al. 2020b; Algharabali et al., 2015; AlRumaihi, 2021; Čeljo, & Zolota, 2018; Dashti 2015; Mahsain, 2014; Malallah, 2000; see also Davies et al., 2013 for studies on code-switching involving Arabic), as well as the greater effect of the phenomenon on bilinguals and its ramifications on an individual's Arabic proficiency.

Kuwait's linguistic landscape is bilingual, characterized by English and Arabic street signs, shop signs, and more. Čeljo and Zolota (2018) describe linguistic landscapes to determine which languages are most important and prominently used in the private and public spheres of a country or city. Their findings state that English has a "prominent international role" in Kuwait (Čeljo & Zolota, 2018: 123). Akbar et al. (2020a) has also investigated the linguistic landscape of Kuwait and the influence that English has on it through billboards by exploring the controversial sociolinguistic shift in the diglossic varieties used in billboards. In Kuwait, billboards are printed in MSA, KA, or English. A key finding in Akbar et al.'s (2020a) study is that Kuwaitis reflected a strong rejection of the trendy KA billboards over MSA. However, English has not been viewed as a threat to the official language of Kuwait, that is, Arabic.

Another study focuses on the so-called Arabīzī (a portmanteau coined from ʿarabī ["Arabic"] and inglīzī ["English"]), which is a recent phenomenon that comprises the writing of MSA or any of its variants in Romanized alphabets (Akbar et al., 2020b). One of the interesting findings in their study is that public school students view Arabīzī users as losing their national identity while young Kuwaitis graduated from English private schools view Arabīzī as a practical and innovative way of communicating in social media platforms. Akbar et al. (2020b) concluded that the Westernization for Kuwaiti English school graduates reflects an openness to the world, but never a sign of a lack of national identity.

Few quantitative studies have been conducted on attitudes toward English from a Kuwaiti perspective or from that of people living in Arabic-speaking environments. For example, a study focusing on attitude, motivation, and achievement in the English language was conducted with the participation of Kuwait University students who were enrolled in English classes. This study, which was carried out in 2000, concluded that Kuwaitis have positive attitudes toward learning English and value English as an important language that will aid them in their future careers (Malallah, 2000). Another study by Al-Rubaie (2010: 2) evaluated bilingualism from teachers' perspectives, focusing on their attitudes toward English as a global language and the "merging of language and culture in English language teaching." Meanwhile, AlRumaihi (2021) has demonstrated that being a bilingual speaker in Kuwait is an advantage: It opens new socioeconomic opportunities, thanks to globalization and English as a lingua franca.

While there are studies on Kuwait and the linguistic aspects of KA, few studies focus on the emergence and importance of English and how it has affected the generations that have been heavily influenced by it. Specifically, there has been no research on how the English language was introduced to the Kuwaiti people and how it has affected Kuwaiti society over time. A single study by Dashti (2015) discusses the role and status of English in Kuwait by employing Braj Kachru's model of non-native Englishes. Dashti (2015: 33) shows that Kuwaitis view English as a prestigious language and that they use it as "sign of social glamour."

Although the previous studies address the status of English in Kuwait, less is known about how English became a prevalent language among Kuwaiti youths. Additionally, none of the abovementioned studies has addressed the McChicken phenomenon verbatim. Accordingly, in this study, we clarify this issue by investigating how the English language came to be used in Kuwait, and how it has transformed generations of Kuwaitis. We also analyze how bilingual Kuwaitis view their own bilingualism, their thoughts on the respective languages (Arabic and English), the connotations these languages have for them, and how bilingualism has changed the Kuwaiti youth as a whole. Younger generations are increasingly speaking more English than KA or even MSA, and some individuals are not even proficient enough to carry out basic conversational dialogue in MSA. Accordingly, this study sheds light on the effects of English, how it has morphed into a language of Kuwaitis, and why it has become more prevalent than Arabic in Kuwaitis' daily lives.

2. Method

Seventy-six participants took part in an online questionnaire survey that consisted of questions about bilingualism (KA and English) and language proficiency. The participants were recruited through word of mouth and by sharing the online questionnaire on social media and messaging applications (WhatsApp, Messenger, etc.). The questionnaire

was shared to individuals and groups who could be categorized under 'McChickens.' We removed the results of anyone who, after responding to the online questionnaire, was deemed not eligible for participation in the study. Eight participants, who had filled in the online questionnaire, participated in face-to-face audio-recorded interviews. All participants were Kuwaiti, born in 1990 or later. Thirty-nine of the participants were aged 18–25; 25–31; and 4, below 18 years. An age limit of 31 was chosen, as most Kuwaiti youth characterized as 'McChickens' are not older than 31 years. This is because the importance of English did not spread throughout Kuwaiti society until the mid-1990s. Fifty-two were female and 24 were male. Thirty-eight of the participants attended public schools, and the other half attended private schools.

The online questionnaire consisted of 23 questions, all of which were in multiple-choice format. The first part of the questionnaire focused on demographics such as age, gender, whether the participants were of Kuwaiti origin (i.e., both parents are Kuwaiti), and whether they attended public or private schools (elementary to high school). The second part of the questionnaire included questions about which language they considered their first language (not mother tongue), their language proficiency in both languages (KA and English), and what they thought about their language classes at their respective schooling systems (private or public). The questions on language proficiency involved scales, ranging from beginner to native level. There was also a scale for rating the quality of language classes at school. The data were collected and analyzed through JASP (Jeffreys's Amazing Statistics Program). The purpose and design of this online questionnaire was to provide an overview of the Kuwaiti youth categorized as McChickens. It was used to highlight any differences in their education (public vs. private schools), comprehension levels, and how they engage with English through social media or entertainment.

Regarding those who participated in the audio-recorded interviews, four attended public schools while the other half attended private schools. Half of the participants were female and the other half, male. In these interviews, the participants were asked open-ended questions regarding their preferred language, how they view the generational gap when it came to code-switching, and what they think of the respective languages in terms of difficulty and cultural connotations. Compared to the online questionnaire's broad overview, the purpose of the audio-recorded interviews was to provide insight on how the participants viewed their own bilingualism and their opinions on the respective languages. Furthermore, they help to delve further into the inner workings of a "McChicken" to understand why and how they code-switch regularly, why they rely on English more than their mother tongue, and understand their upbringing and relationship with Western entertainment growing up.

The objectives of these methods were (1) to provide an overview of the McChickens using the online questionnaire, including understanding their background and showcasing any differences between education and upbringing, and (2) to understand *why* this is the Kuwaiti youth's reality and why they continue to use English and code-switching using the interviews.

3. Results

Regarding the online questionnaire, of the 76 respondents, 52 (24) considered Arabic (English) their first language. In addition, while all participants were bilingual, this does not mean that they displayed native fluency in their second language. However, 49 of the respondents thought of themselves as fluent in both their first and second languages. The participants who attended public (private) schools identified Arabic (English) as their first language.

Both parties rated the second-language classes at their respective schooling systems as unsatisfactory, believing that the classes did not aid in improving their language skills. The majority of participants engaged in social media in English, while only 11.8% used social media strictly in Arabic. This result suggests that most participants believe that social media play a role in determining which language they use to communicate, but entertainment had the greatest influence on their language. An overwhelming majority of participants (89.5%) believe that entertainment (TV, music, books, etc.) had increased their daily use of the English language.
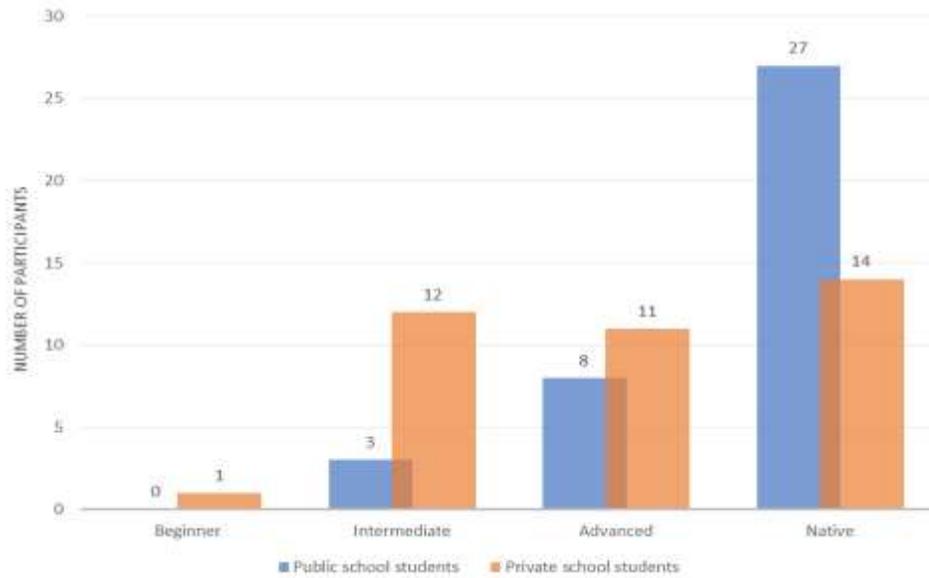
Figure 1. Arabic proficiency levels of public and private school students

Description: The graph showcases a greater number of students with native proficiency in Arabic in public schools than in private schools.
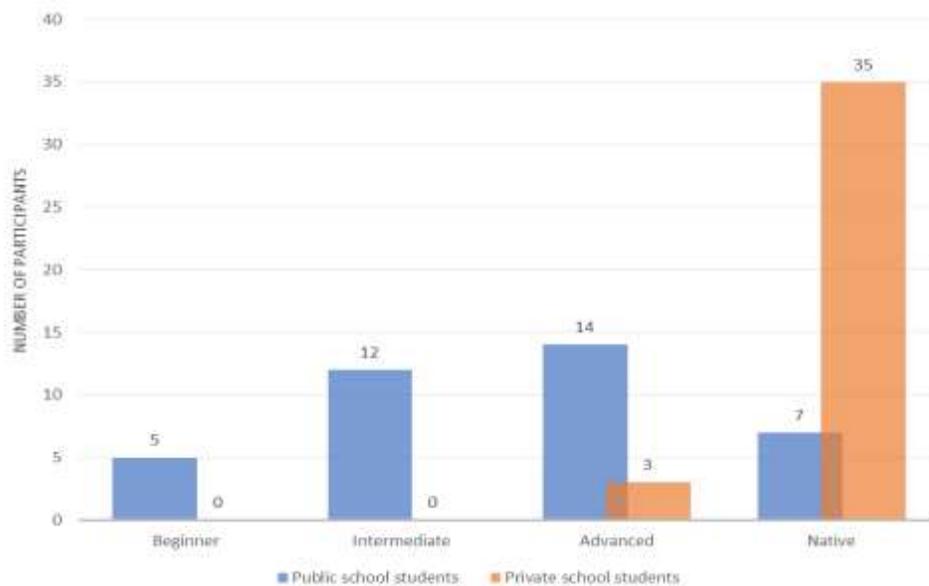

Figure 2. English proficiency levels of public and private school students

Description: The graph showcases a greater number of students with native proficiency in English in private schools than in public schools.

In the latter half of the questionnaire, participants were asked about code-switching as a conscious choice when speaking with people of certain age groups. The results showed a generational difference regarding which language the speakers use depending on to whom they speak. For example, Kuwaiti bilinguals choose to speak with their parents, grandparents, and extended family predominantly in Arabic (KA). Regarding the language used when speaking with their parents, 60.5% (35.5%) use Arabic (English). An even larger difference is observed with regard to grandparents: 89.5% of participants speak with them only in Arabic. As to communicating with their cousins, 50% (38.2%) use Arabic (both English and Arabic). The generational gap is underscored by participants' responses regarding which language they use to speak with their friends or peers. They practice code-switching, that is, use both English and KA interchangeably. When conversing with friends, 53.9% of the participants use both English and

KA, which highlights their preference for code-switching in this context. The results are similar when asked about colleagues; 46.1% (34.2%) practice code-switching (use Arabic). When asked what language they prefer to use in the future when speaking with their children, 69.7% of the participants prefer to use Arabic and English, while approximately 17.1% prefer a monolingual approach, selecting to use Arabic to teach their children. These responses provide insight into what Kuwaiti youth think with regard to teaching their children languages and their attitudes about languages in the future. In short, their responses indicate the importance they place on teaching their children both languages, which is understandable given the current sociocultural situation.

As for the audio-recorded interviews, most of the participants displayed some code-switching; however, their main language of communication was English. The participants that attended private schools expressed their embarrassment at not being able to express themselves fully in Arabic and stated that they have subpar skills when it comes to reading and writing in classical languages (i.e., Arabic) and MSA. It was shown that code-switching depended on the type of listener, and that the participants would switch languages depending on the comprehension levels of the person they speak with. We asked a bilingual, female, private-school graduate how much Arabic she speaks compared with English, and vice versa; she said:

> Very little. My Arabic has basically stopped developing since the age of, like, four. My English is as fluent, as much as it can be, but my Arabic is… can I say trash? My Arabic is trash.

A recurring theme expressed by participants is that they would not be able to speak with their grandparents in English, even if their grandparents understood the language. It was more appropriate to speak with them in KA. In some cases, their elders would even criticize them for their heavy reliance on the English language. A female, bilingual, public-school graduate further expanded on this (with code-switching):

> aḥis **I speak to them** yaʕni ib illi uhma mirtāḥīn fīh. iḏa āna itkallamt, **my friends** illi yitkallimōn ingilēzi akallimhum, bass jiddām yadditi aw yaddi mustaḥīl.

> 'I feel like **I speak to them**, like, in what [language] they're comfortable in. If I talk, to **my friends** who speak English, I'll speak [English], but in front of my grandmother or grandfather, no way!'

Regarding the difficulties and cultural connotations of the respective languages, all the participants, regardless of education, viewed Arabic as a difficult language in terms of grammar and complexity. It is important to note that they viewed the main language as difficult, but not their own Kuwaiti dialect. This shows that even with a public school upbringing in which the curriculum is predominantly taught in MSA, it is still difficult for the young Kuwaitis to grasp the language fully. One participant stated that, growing up, she viewed Arabic as an archaic language, associating it with being "backwards." When asked about what he thinks of the Arabic language, a bilingual, male, private-school graduate said:

> Well, the Arabic language is notoriously difficult, simply because the nuance[s] in it kind of exceed[s] anything that I would have [encountered] with the English language... So, the fact that the same word pronounced exactly the same way could mean 50 different things based on context is fascinating to me. But yeah… And also for cultural connotations, I just, I love the Arabic language. It is a beautiful language that's very expressive, if you know how to use it.

By contrast, when asked about the difficulty and cultural connotations of English, most participants had little to say, exclaiming that English is a straightforward and easy language. The participants noted that entertainment played a major role in the increased use of English in their daily lives, starting from childhood and growing up with television. They grew up watching Western cartoons on Disney Channel and Cartoon Network, and famous American films and TV shows. They also grew up while technology was booming, and video games heavily influenced them. A female participant who graduated from private-school stated:

> Everything we watch is in English, except during Ramadan where we switch to Arabic shows. And it's so refreshing when we do, you know? We're like: "Oh my god! We didn't know this word! We didn't know people said this!" So yeah, entertainment definitely does (increase the use of English).

Another participant, public-school graduate, noted that she related more to Western culture than her own Arab culture because of the heavy Western influence:

> If I were to go on any of my social media accounts; they're all in English. My algorithm is predominantly- it's a lot of the western culture rather than my own culture. I think it's just something that I relate to more than the Arab culture.

An important finding from these interviews is that Kuwaiti youths are more influenced by media and entertainment

than education. This is evident from the fact that the interviewees from private schools attended British schools; yet, they spoke with an American accent. When asked about this observation, they commented that the same applies to most of their peers. In the next section, we discuss the underlying reasons for these findings and their connotations.

4. Discussion

What are the underlying reasons for the 'McChicken' phenomenon in Kuwait, and why is it so extensive among the young generations of Kuwaitis? First, the Iraqi invasion heavily affected the state of Kuwait in terms of language use, causing general attitudes to be more open to foreign influence, which was further encouraged by the rapid globalization Kuwait experienced in the 1990s. During this period, English started to become a second language rather than a foreign one. In addition, educational systems were reformed, and British and American curricula became more prominent, which, in turn, increased the accessibility of English language classes. Today's young Kuwaitis grew up in environments surrounded by English-speaking people, in contrast to the situation before the invasion, when English use was not widespread. Moreover, U.S. aid in the Gulf War strengthened the ties between Kuwait and the United States, whereby Kuwait became incrementally more westernized, as American brands entered the country. This process, as well as a national gratitude for the U.S. Army, made the English language a prestigious language in Kuwait. From the 1990s onward, this prestige, coupled with the progress of technology, heavily influenced the language of the younger generations. As revealed in the results of the questionnaire, television and entertainment have had a heavy impact on the younger generations that were raised during and after the 1990s. Moreover, regarding language learning, children are extremely impressionable. Given the prevalence of Western entertainment with English as the dominant language, it is difficult not to learn the language to a certain extent and to be influenced by it. In addition, the media developments in the recent decade have significantly altered "World Englishes," with ripple effects on other languages across the globe (Crystal, 2003). These effects have been intensified by the widespread use of the Internet since the late 1990s, and in recent years, by the use of social media. It is common knowledge that the Internet has globally revolutionized communication and English language learning. English is predominantly used in online media, even with recent advancements in technology, making the Internet multilingual and more accessible.

Moreover, the Internet is a main medium of communication in the modern world. With people conversing through platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and others, it is almost impossible to navigate the web without at least a superficial knowledge of English. Regarding the Internet's popularity and heavy daily use, the younger Kuwaitis are more capable of navigating the Internet and social media. In a world that revolves around the Internet, the most popular "trends" reach most people regardless of age or class. These trends are mostly generated from Western cultures and are adopted into cultures worldwide in general, and in Kuwait in particular. Mobile applications, such as Instagram and TikTok, are extremely popular and accessible means of communicating with people, regardless of their location. Such simple methods of global communication have significantly increased the use of the English language. The results, regarding conscious code-switching when communicating with certain age groups (grandparents, parents, colleagues, friends, etc.), highlight the prevalence of the McChicken phenomenon in Kuwait. It is not as acceptable to speak with older Kuwaitis in English or to code-switch as it is when speaking with peers. This is because older Kuwaitis are not as well versed in English as the young Kuwaitis are. Moreover, older Kuwaitis view code-switching in a negative way. The fact that most participants code-switch or speak in English with their cousins, colleagues, and friends suggests their comfort in and acceptance of the English language and code-switching.

Furthermore, a few important points were brought up in the interviews, regarding the attitudes surrounding code-switching and being more versed in the English language. The results showed that young Kuwaitis are extremely comfortable with English to the point that they use it when they find their own mother tongue too difficult. According to Al-Rubaie (2010), there has been a decrease in interest in Arabic literature, and that MSA is considered too difficult and outdated. However, the case in which people are not relating to their own culture, especially Arab culture, can be viewed as a sense of orientalism. Orientalism, as Said (2001) coined it, is the way in which the image of the Eastern, Arab, and Asian people, are distorted and exaggerated, usually in the sense of being exotic, archaic, and uncivilized. This historical concept has had its repercussions especially through language, where even native Kuwaiti speakers may view their own mother tongue as backwards and relate it to negative aspects such as sexism and aggression. According to Al-Rubaie (2010), the "Anglicisation of the nationwide school curricular" poses a major problem in society because importance is not given to the Arabic language for children (p. 104). The fact that, as adults, these participants feel ashamed of their own lack of comprehension of their native language is a result of these orientalist ideas that they have tried to unlearn, or more specifically, the marginalization of the mother tongue. Meanwhile, classism plays a big role in language, especially in Kuwait. This situation is tied with ideas of

orientalism, where the West is seen as superior and efficient. Bilinguals often look down on Kuwaiti monolinguals for not speaking English. They are seen as less intellectual and quite conservative. People who speak a global language at a native level regard this ability as linguistic power and consider themselves superior (Crystal, 2003). This classism is so rooted in society that even at the opposite end, those attending public schools, look at bilinguals as "losing their national identity," or "representing a diminished manhood (when practiced by male Kuwaitis)" (Akbar et al., 2020b, p. 214). However, the stereotype against bilinguals is much more apparent with the widespread use of the term McChicken. They are made fun of and ridiculed by adults because of envy or contempt at the apparent loss of nationality and identity. All these tie into what Crystal (2003) describes as "linguistic triumphalism – the danger that some people will celebrate one language's success at the expense of others" (p. 15).

5. Conclusions

This study analyzed the growing "McChicken" phenomenon in Kuwait, which refers to young, bilingual Kuwaitis that are fluent in English but have a low proficiency in the colloquial Arabic language of Kuwait. The study focused on understanding why this generation relies heavily on code-switching and how English has taken a prominent role in the way Kuwaitis communicate. In Kuwait, Arabic is the official language, and English, among others, is widely used at home, in businesses, the media, and workplaces. Moreover, both Arabic and English appear on official road signs.

Nonetheless, the following question remains: Why are the Kuwaiti youth called McChickens? The answer to this question is an accumulation of everything the Kuwaiti people have been through in terms of globalization and Westernization. Moreover, the use of the term McChicken arose from the powerful influence of advertisements from Western corporations, which has a direct effect on language. Indeed, the influence is so profound that a term has been coined after McDonald's: "MacDonaldization [sic.]" (Crystal, 2003: 95).

Regarding the research question, we have shown that the McChicken phenomenon is both a result of globalization and a consequence of how the English language has directly shaped the attitudes of Kuwaiti youth. The way younger individuals understand their own bilingualism stems from classism and orientalism and is seen as a way to keep pace with the rapid modernization of Kuwait. Our results demonstrate that private school students are more comfortable speaking English and using it in their daily lives, although not with their grandparents or elders. They are ashamed of not being fluent in their mother tongue, Arabic, with which they have difficulties in grammar and comprehension. They are immersed in Western culture and media and thus, tend to relate better with such views than those held by their parents. Meanwhile, public school students are more versed in Arabic and KA; however, they are still heavily influenced by English through various forms of entertainment and social media exposure. In summary, the social and linguistic landscape of Kuwait is ever changing, because of not only globalization and the influence of English, but also the economic and social upheaval and technological advancements that Kuwaitis have experienced following Iraq's invasion.

One must realize that the McChicken phenomenon is part of the inevitable language change that is taking place in Kuwait. Although language change is considered innovative and progressive (Cushing, 2018), some people's attitudes towards change, as we have noticed, can be rather conservative. Anti-McChickeners bemoan language change because they uphold linguistic purism and disregard that languages change because society changes. As such, the McChicken phenomenon is partly a sociocultural phenomenon and partly a linguistic one.

Prior to this study, no clear evidence of the McChicken phenomenon had been reported. However, the current study is limited by the relatively small sample. Nevertheless, this work offers valuable insights into the evident increase of code-switching, which is the main force driving the emergence of "New Englishes" globally. As in the case of Kuwait, this phenomenon started out at the lexical level, as a loan-word, and is now found in stretches of utterance at the syntactic level. Several questions remain to be answered. In particular, whether we should call Kuwaiti-English code-mixing a variety of English, a hybridization, or something else is not yet clear. It is hoped that this research has contributed to a deeper understanding of the rise of English as a global language in the Arabian Peninsula.

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