



## The reconstruction of academic identity through language policy: a narrative approach

Hadeel ALKhatib, Michael H. Romanowski, Xiangyn Du & Maha Cherif

**To cite this article:** Hadeel ALKhatib, Michael H. Romanowski, Xiangyn Du & Maha Cherif (2021) The reconstruction of academic identity through language policy: a narrative approach, *Asian Englishes*, 23:3, 313-329, DOI: [10.1080/13488678.2020.1785184](https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2020.1785184)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2020.1785184>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 06 Jul 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1618



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)

## The reconstruction of academic identity through language policy: a narrative approach

Hadeel ALKhatib , Michael H. Romanowski , Xiangyn Du  and Maha Cherif 

College of Education, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar

### ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine how language policy affects the reconstruction of academic identities in a time of rapid and significant changes in contemporary higher education. Through a narrative approach, we explore how a top-down language policy chaperones the process of redefining the perceptions of our positions as academic faculty working at Qatar University, recognized as the world's most international university. Three main themes emerged from data analysis: language identities; narratives of exclusion and self-exclusion; and working in a Third Space. We conclude that the linguistic status quo poorly serves university staff in contemporary higher education and maintain that language policies must be aligned with, and better reflect, the sociolinguistic realities of university life in a global era.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 13 June 2020  
Accepted 17 June 2020

### KEYWORDS

Language policy; academic identity; higher education; internationalization; narrative approach

## Introduction

In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu (1988) initiated attempts at 'exoticizing the domestic' through portraying a picture of the academic world, not only as a realm of dialogue and debate but also as a sphere of power. He paid close attention to the ways through which academics' habitus is constructed within the higher education field. For Bourdieu, academics' habitus encourages critical reflection and discloses the assumed objective qualities of academic discourse, not as impartial but, instead, as a by-product of academics' conformity to the field's norms. Bourdieu countered the view that academics have complete freedom to choose futures of their own making. He urged academics to reflect on their positions within the higher education field and examine how their academic identities are persistently reconstituted. Although many scholarly works have responded to Bourdieu's call, precious little has been written about how language policies reconstruct academic identities at a time of rapid and significant changes in higher education worldwide.

In this article, as academics, we attempt to examine how language policy impacts the reconstruction of our academic identities. We scrutinize how a top-down language policy chaperones the journey of redefining the perceptions of our roles as academic faculty working at Qatar University (QU), recognized as the world's most international university (THE-WUR, 2016).<sup>1</sup>

**CONTACT** Hadeel ALKhatib  [hadeela@qu.edu.qa](mailto:hadeela@qu.edu.qa)  College of Education, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

We begin this article by providing a brief conceptual background on the dynamics of both academic identity and language policy reformations in contemporary higher education. Nevertheless, we do not go far in this direction as there is already a wealth of information in the existing literature in these respects. We aim to provide the reader with a conceptual understanding regarding elements of continuity and change in the discourses of both language policy and academic identity over the last few decades. Next, we trace the trajectory of QU's language policy, under which our academic roles operate. On the one hand, we pay special attention to the relationship between the university's strategic plans for internationalization and its language policy. On the other, we highlight the challenges faced by the university in enabling national legislation that promotes Qatar's official language, Arabic. We then introduce narrative inquiry as the mode of our investigation before presenting the data analysis and interpretation. Finally, we present concluding remarks on how the linguistic status quo poorly serves university staff in contemporary higher education.

### **Continuity and change in language policy**

Over the past half-century, language policy, both in theory and practice, has been influenced by epistemological, socio-political, and macroeconomic changes. In theory, language policy has moved from a focus on positivistic epistemologies, centred on finding technical solutions to language problems, towards a more critical stance in understanding the role of language(s) in the reproduction of social and economic inequality. This includes a renewed interest in language planning emerging from a changing world, where nation-states are becoming more varied and diverse and, at the same time, more global and international (Ricento, 2006). Such epistemological reorientations were intensified by and intermeshed with more extensive socio-political and macroeconomic changes, such as the weakening of the nation-state as a consequence of globalization (Ferguson, 2006), the advent of neoliberalism as an economic ideology that favours unfettered free markets over public institutions (Piller & Cho, 2013), the massive migration fluxes (Ferguson, 2006), and the global spread of English as an unstoppable juggernaut (Demont-Heinrich, 2007). In effect, these changes have opened up space for regional and national minorities to assert their distinctive identities (Skuttnab-Kangas, 2003), for growing awareness of endangered languages and cultures (Rehg & Campbell, 2018), for changing postures towards linguistic diversity (Piller, 2016), and for speaking against the linguistic hegemony of the English language (Phillipson, 2018).

More importantly, in light of this study, previous changes have led to a perennial question of language in contemporary higher education. Over the last few decades, the internationalization of higher education has increased dramatically and has brought student and staff mobility to a level that has never been seen before. Jenkins (2018) argues that language is often overlooked when discussing the internationalization of higher education. She writes, 'language per se is simply not considered important in HE [higher education]: It is seen merely as the means that enable us to carry out HE's teaching research and administrative functions' (p. 15). However, she reminds us of the manifold complexities relating to language use, which include 'the role of language in identity, the causes and effects of language ideologies, and the influence of language attitudes' (p. 15). In many contexts, English has been considered the standard language of

knowledge production (Liddicoat, 2016). In teaching, ‘universities are increasingly adopting English as a medium of instruction in some course or some disciplinary areas as either the main or an auxiliary medium of instruction’ (Liddicoat, 2016, p. 232). Likewise, there has been an emphasis on English as the language of publication (Hamel, 2007). Hence, in Anglo-Saxon universities, the prime concern has been to help international students and staff better fit in linguistically (Liddicoat, 2016). Still, non-Anglo-Saxon universities have been increasingly facing the need to plan languages to respond to the changing internationalized linguistic context in which they operate while also aligning with national language policies that promote indigenous language(s).

### **Academic identity: then and now**

According to Henkel (2010), ‘there have been profound changes in the way in which we think about identities in higher education workforces’ (p. 5). For Clegg (2008), universities are becoming ‘more complex and differentiated spaces’, and, as such, ‘academic identities are expanding and proliferating’ (p. 330). It was customary to understand academic identities within communitarian theories, in which identities are constructed and developed within defining communities with strong normative power, and individuality is both distinctive and embedded. However, the global trends of commercialization, marketization, and massification have led to seismic changes in universities worldwide. Henkel (2010) sets out the implications of these trends for academic identities. For her, academics became a less cohesive group as the workforces of universities have expanded and diversified. In effect, rigidly defined boundaries between functions and categories of universities’ staff have loosened, and structures have become more provisional. The forces that brought about these metamorphoses are multiple and interactive. Wider political and economic processes led universities to adopt more open, inclusive, and market-based systems. This led to the competitive struggle over achieving the status of a world-class university and led to the advent of newcomers, so-called ‘semi-professions’, seeking recognition and status. All of these metamorphoses brought with them various forms of external and internal regulations.

The focus in universities has shifted to outputs, outcomes, control mechanisms, performance-based budgeting, and market-based competition. Academic identities are renegotiated as academics encounter new expectations and pressures in their work environments (Leisyte & Wilkesmann, 2016). Like this, academic identity is no longer seen as ‘a process in which visible continuities in the achievement of professional self-definition and esteem are foregrounded, a function of stable community membership, boundary maintenance, established divisions of labor, and hierarchies of authority’ (Henkel, 2010, p. 3). In lieu, academic identities are nowadays considered ‘a project or continuous process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction in the context of multiple and shifting collectivities and relationships’ (2010, p. 4). Under such a continuous project, higher education institutional success is no longer seen as a collaborative and collective achievement, but rather as a consequence of individual and competitive attainment. Academic identities become atomized, and higher education institutions become little more than the sum of their atomized parts (Evans & Nixon, 2015).

In such an era of ‘supercomplexity’ (Barnett, 2000), under which the discourse of academic identity has been reconstructed, academics should, as Edward Said (1993)

advises, provide an attempt at ‘opposing and alleviating coercive domination, transforming the present by trying rationally and analytically to lift some of its burdens . . . secular intellectuals with the archival, expressive, elaborative, and moral responsibilities of their role’ (p. 386). In this article we examine how language policy, as an institutional mechanism that links us as academics to the professional spheres, has been redefining our roles and activities, and hence reconstructing our academic identities. We next describe the language policy under which our academic roles and activities operate.

## Language policy context

In this section, we trace QU’s language policy trajectory over the last two decades by discussing the White Paper issued by the university to determine its future direction for the 2017–2020 strategic planning cycle. The document begins by promising the university’s community and stakeholders a ‘quantum leap’ (Qatar University, 2016, p. 3). It points out that:

Qatar University has become internationalized; it is ranked as a leading institution internationally in terms of global partnerships and is comprised with a diverse faculty who have the potential to infuse the curriculum with a global perspective, which complements the context of Qatar, that itself is an increasingly internationalize country. (Qatar University, 2016, p. 5)

However, this does not go without facing challenges. The White Paper acknowledges conflicts in determining the university’s language policy.

Referring to Qatar’s 2030 National Vision of turning the country into a competitive knowledge-based economy, the document retells the story of Qatar’s educational reform. Through the Education for a New Era reform launched in 2002, the Qatari leadership sought to prepare Qatari citizens for the twenty-first century’s challenges. The aim was to provide a series of professional degree programmes that bridged the gap between tertiary education institutions and the labour market, specifically in the fields of petroleum engineering, business, and health, with a focus on English as the medium of instruction in public schools and universities. As such, QU enforced the English language as the ‘medium of instruction’ in almost all programmes, as the ‘normal’ language for internal communications, and as the ‘accepted’ language for research activities.

According to the White Paper, a decade after the reform began, English as the medium of instruction proved to be ‘ineffective as it created a barrier for students’ success’ (Qatar University, 2016, p. 28). Between 2002 and 2012, QU’s language policy became a fiercely debated issue, especially after the revelation of Qatar’s Third Human Development Report (2012), which argued: ‘Qatar has made large investments in education and training infrastructure for Qataris, and multiple opportunities now exist. But education performance is not progressing at a commensurate pace, despite a decade of reforms’ (III). According to Qatar’s five-year National Plan (2011), the problem is that fewer Qataris are gaining admission to college, and more are dropping out of higher education. The report focused on low enrolment levels for Qatari males, attributing this to the fact that many students avoid public higher education because of its English-language prerequisites. Furthermore, it has been argued that enforcing English as the medium of internal communications and research activities has, among other factors, led to a

dramatic decrease in the number of Qatari faculty. In 1998, the percentage of Qatari faculty was more than half of the total faculty body (53.7%). Yet this number had dropped to less than 20% by 2012 (Qatar University, 2012).

As a result, the White Paper explains that, in 2012, the Qatari government issued a law declaring Arabic as the medium of instruction at public educational institutions. The White Paper explains that the university has activated the law in some programmes, while other programmes, specifically technical ones, are considered necessary in the local market and continue to be taught in English. This was mainly driven by concerns over the university's graduates' employment chances. Nevertheless, this has created a 'linguistic gap between high school graduates [being taught in the Arabic language] and QU English study requirements' (Qatar University, 2016, p. 28). Concerns over the university's global ranking have complicated the situation. The White Paper points out that the university has been steadily moving 'towards ranking enhancement' as this serves to raise 'the international profile of the university' (2016, p. 28). Shifting into Arabic has been seen as a threat to the university's research activities as 'Qatar University has seen a much wider focus on international partnerships rather than on a regional level' (2016, p. 34).

In addition to referring to the university's obligation to align with Qatar's 2030 National Vision of establishing a competitive knowledge-based economy, the White Paper also stresses that 'there is a need for the university to be responsive to the cultural sensitivities regarding the language used' (Qatar University, 2016, p. 28). Referring to the 2016 draft law on the Preservation of Arabic Language that makes it a requisite for all official institutions in Qatar to use the Arabic language in all of their documents, contracts, correspondence, publications, and advertisements, the White Paper acknowledges that this also puts pressure on the university to enforce Arabic as the medium of instruction and communication.

All previous linguistic complications have accumulated to the extent that the White Paper concludes: 'Qatar University is unable to satisfactorily meet the expectations of all of its stakeholders' in regards to its language policy' (Qatar University, 2016, p. 28). To conclude, QU's language policy has been changing and continuously adopting new elements resulting from unresolved clashes. It is from within such clashes that we construct our narratives to outline the impact on our academic identities.

## Methodology

This article utilizes narrative inquiry to reflect on the ways in which language policy reconstructs academic identities. 'Narrative inquiry is human-centered in that it captures and analyses life stories' (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 13). Increasingly, researchers in higher education have been embracing narrative inquiry to explore their experiences (Anderson & Anderson, 2012), and to develop 'a deep understanding of the messy academic world' (Keller, 1998, p. 269). It has been argued that narrative inquiry is especially appropriate for studying career trajectories in higher education (Cohen, 2006), because it recognizes 'the individual's right to agency in defining themselves and the professional values and practices they consider central to their particular roles' (McMahon & Dyer, 2014, p. 27).

To construct our narratives, each of us wrote about her/his own experience with QU's language policy. We then exchanged our narratives for an initial reading. Following the

exchange, we conducted a discussion regarding the narratives we had produced, and we later transcribed our conversation. It is important to note here that narrative inquiry, in its essence, is closer to the philosophy of postmodernism, which maintains that there are subjective and multiple truths. As such, the narrative inquiry does not strive to produce any conclusions of certainty; neither does it claim to represent the 'truth'. Instead, it aims at 'verisimilitude' such that the results have the appearance of truth or reality (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 13). As such, we are fully aware that our narratives can never be stories set in objective reality.

### **Analytical procedures**

Shenton (2004) posits that it is not satisfactory to apply the measures of traditional qualitative approaches of validity and reliability to narrative inquiry. For him, the validity of narrative inquiry is closely related to 'meaningful analysis', whereas the reliability is not the stability of the measurement, but rather the 'trustworthiness' of the notes or transcripts. The ways through which we attempted to conduct 'meaningful analysis' and to ensure the 'trustworthiness' of the transcripts are discussed next.

We first conducted a manifest-level analysis followed by a latent content analysis (Berg, 2009). The former provides 'an objective and descriptive account of the surface meaning of the data' (2009, p. 344). The latter facilitates generating a 'second-level, interpretive analysis of the underlying deeper meaning of the data' (2009, p. 344). In more concrete terms, the analytic process involved various stages. We first looked at our narratives in order to identify initial codes. We then carried out a second-level coding to categorize the prominent topics under a smaller number of main patterns to serve as the focus of the analysis. Next, we moved on to making interpretations and theorizing following Berg's view of latent content analysis as a way for researchers to 'examine ideological mind-sets, themes, topics, symbols, and similar phenomena, while grounding such examinations to the data' (2009, p. 343).

To ensure the 'trustworthiness' of the transcripts, we share with the readers excerpts from our narratives combined with our initial coding, considering that coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act (Saldana, 2009). Our aim is to create a prolonged engagement between the readers and the transcripts in order for them to gain an understanding of our analytical procedures, as well as to decide whether our experiences are similar to other situations with which they are familiar.

Given that narrative writing is a self-reflexive practice, we are deeply aware of how our positionalities impacted our narratives. In the analysis provided in the following section, we give an inward look at our histories, privileges, subjugations, and aspirations, each of these entangled with the others. Before this, it should be mentioned that we are from different nationalities and disciplinary backgrounds. We are also located at very different points of the academic hierarchy. For the sake of consistency in data presentation, Table 1 presents the necessary information about our positionalities.

### **Data analysis and discussion**

This section tells our narratives, and provides reflections and analyses. Throughout the narratives, some of us deliver autobiographical accounts whereas others deliver broader

**Table 1.** Authors' positionalities.

Author code	Country of origin	Academic position	Linguistic skills	Definition of oneself
H	Qatar	Assistant Professor	Arabic: native speaker English: C1–C1–C1–C1	'I am a Qatari Assistant Professor'
M1	United States	Professor	English: native speaker	'I am an American Professor'
X	China	Professor	Mandarin: native speaker English: C2–C2–C2–C2 Danish: B2–B2–B2–B1	'I am an international Professor'
M2	Tunisia	Associate Professor	Arabic: native speaker English: C2–C2–C2–C2 French: C1–C1–C1–C1	'I am a Tunisia Associate Professor'

Our linguistic skills is demonstrated in table (1) according to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages.

contextual explanations. The case is different in each narrative. However, what all of the narratives have in common is the attempt to relate academic identity to language policy, language policy to institution, and institution to more significant concerns in higher education. Our discussion in the following lines is organized around three emerging themes: language identities; narratives of exclusion and self-exclusion; and working in a Third Space.

### *Language identities*

We initiated our narratives by giving perspectives on our language identities understood as 'speakers' favourable attitudes towards, acceptance of, and defence of languages that they believe help them express a specificity that is theirs' (Anchimbe, 2007, p. 12). We all had the experience of moving to new cultural and linguistic environments in the search for education (in the case of H) or work (in the cases of M1 and M2), or both (in the case of X). As such, we had to make a new life mediated by a new language. We then moved on in our narratives to outline how our language identities have been interacting with QU's language regime. We found that our language identities, in effect, are judged and/or challenged, rather than serving as a resource to be drawn on. The following excerpts are examples from our narratives:

H: I am a Qatari Assistant Professor . . . Although I embarked on an eight-year academic affair in the U.K., I have never attained English language proficiency, perhaps for two reasons. First, I have always struggled with my linguistic fossilization through which my incorrect English language pronunciation becomes a habit and cannot easily be corrected [Language learning problems]. Second, during my stay in the U.K., I lived in Muslim-dominated neighborhoods where the Arabic language, not English, was my link to my neighbors, who would send their children to me to improve their reading of the Quran. I found my identity through Arabic. It defined me, and provided me with comfort and familiarity I needed [Language affiliation]. Upon completing my Ph.D.; I returned to Q. U. to resume my work duties. I was seen as an 'elite bilingual,' a Qatari who masters English as a global language and has acquired the Western educational values [Language identity being judged]. Yet, it was not who I am; a fossilized English speaker and a critic of applying Western epistemologies in an Arabic context.



M1: I am an American Professor ... My language ability is limited – coupled with the 1960's approach to teaching English – site words. I have zero abilities to pronounce words in different languages other than English [Language learning problems]. If I were told that I have to learn Arabic before accepting my job at QU, I would not have taken the position ... it is interesting that I work in a university – these individuals should understand learning styles, abilities, and disabilities. This is not the case when it comes to learning Arabic. If a Western colleague learns Arabic, the common thought is well, he or she learned Arabic – how come you have not? You are here for 10 years and do not know Arabic. Why not? You do not want to learn Arabic! It seems like a personal issue. Colleagues reduce learning Arabic as simply a preference [Language identity being challenged].

X: Having grown up in China and afterward studied and worked in Denmark for 16 years, I am trilingual. Besides Chinese and Danish, I speak English [Language identity]. Moving to Q.U. seemed to be an interesting journey for my career path. My initial impression was it was a highly international institute – more than 75% of the faculty members were non-Qatari, many colleagues held Ph.D. degree from English-speaking countries. This was a much more multicultural picture than the places I used to work – China and Denmark ... An interesting aspect concerning my academic identity is the difference between how I am looked at and how I see myself: it is a strange feeling to be regarded as one of the American professors as long as I am not a native-Arabic speaker, although I see myself more an intellectual with rich international experiences and global perspectives [Language identity being judged].

M2: I am a Tunisian Associate Professor, and I am trilingual: Arabic (Tunisian dialect) is my mother tongue. French was my second language as it was the medium of content course instruction in my K-12 education. When I joined QU in 2007, I started teaching English and in English. I also was surrounded by English native speakers, which provided opportunities to be exposed and to use English in everyday communication. Thus, English has become a second language for me. At times, it turns out to be my favorite language of communication even outside the university [Language affiliation]. Some colleagues would think I am a French speaker, or I master French better than Arabic. Some would use the little French they know when addressing me. A Qatari colleague offered me once a French version of the Quran as a gift [Language identity being judged]. When the medium of instruction shifted to Arabic at the college in 2012, some colleagues started explicitly expressing their discontent with my relative lack of knowledge of classical Arabic. They would urge me to speak more in Arabic and to work on developing my Arabic writing skills, too. They never did that when the instruction was in English [Language identity being challenged].

These excerpts show that H is more comfortable carrying out her professional life as much as possible in her native language, Arabic, because of her second-language fossilization. Mention must also be made here that she adopts a form of cultural and linguistic maintenance through her attachment to the Arabic language. Yet this maintenance markedly negates the perception her colleagues have constructed for her as an 'elite bilingual'. Being a UK graduate means that she has currency in QU, which values degrees from higher education institutions based in the West. The assumption is that Qataris

graduating from western higher education institutions are likely to be able to publish in English-language journals, and as such help the university improve its global rankings. Therefore, her educational credentials put her in a privileged position within the university. Nonetheless, what adds more ‘value’ to this privilege is being a Qatari national in a majority of non-Qatari faculty body. Qataris holding PhDs from English-speaking countries are considered ‘elites’ occupying a relatively high social/power hierarchy position. At many times, H represents the college in meetings at the university level. In her narrative, H mentioned incidents in which she demanded Arabic communication in such meetings, especially in those related to a micro policy such as academic accreditation. She justified her linguistic demands in such meetings by arguing that ‘the whole process of academic accreditation that I am being asked to contribute to is hard to comprehend. I preferred to digest this hardship in my native language; Arabic.’ Although all her colleagues were usually Arabs in such meetings, her requests were usually met with a reminder that she is a UK graduate and would be able to continue meetings in English. In this sense, her language identity is being judged. In effect, her awareness of this has led to constant attempts to better her English, as will be further outlined in the subsequent sections.

In marked contrast to H, M1’s English monolingualism is challenged by a local ethnic desire to learn the Arabic language. As he outlines in his narrative, his lack of interest in developing Arabic language skills is due to language learning-related problems. Regardless of this, M1 acquits himself reasonably well in the country mainly because, as he believes, ‘living in Qatar, you do not need to speak Arabic to survive or thrive’. Qatar is frequently portrayed as a multicultural society. This portrait of diversity is a result of different waves of migration patterns, which started since the oil discovery in the 1940s. Migrants now vastly outnumber Qatari nationals, with a ratio of 88%, and English has functioned as a bridge language between different nationalities. Still, the access to closed identity groups – such as Qataris and other Arabs working at QU – requires some sort of border crossing, which in most cases is realized through the adoption of linguistic and cultural emblems of the group. As such, the attempts of Arabizing M1 can be seen as much about inclusion as it is about exclusion. It is an invitation to join the group by adhering to its cultural products, as well as a reminder for him not being part of the group. In effect, the requests for a linguistic alignment that M1 has been receiving obligated him to catch a few Arabic words and use them now and then in different contexts only to appear closer to the group.

Both X and M2 are trilingual. Although speaking multiple languages assumes multiple capabilities and proficiencies, X’s and M2’s language identities are operating in confined spaces. Throughout her narrative, X described herself as being ‘an intellectual with rich international experiences and global perspectives’. Despite her desire to be viewed as such, she is judged by the language she uses; English. For her, English is the most ‘natural’ language to be used in academia, especially in a highly international institute such as QU. However, often among Arabs, English is symbiotically linked to the United States. She argues that ‘People in the college are used to either Americans or Arabs. They do not know where to put me. Therefore I am being categorized with the American group.’ This, she believes, simplifies her academic identity.

Likewise, although M2’s trilingual language identity provides her with the chance to establish a common ground with almost everyone (since she is proficient in Arabic,

English, and French), she is still judged narrowly for being from Tunisia, where French is the undeclared official language. Although they often coincide, nationality and language are not synonymous. Nationality and the language which relates to it (in this case being Tunisian and speaking French), despite their appearance as a stable and lasting essence of oneself, are, in fact, subject to processes of change and social reconstruction. This is evident when M2 argued that French was her second language as it was the medium of instruction in education and the means of communication outside the formal educational context where she evolved. Yet, because of a lack of practice, English has taken over. She stressed in her narrative that ‘because my first language (Arabic), is more valued at QU than in universities in Tunisia, I have become more proud of me being an Arabic speaker’. However, this has prevented her from receiving demands to improve her native language, Arabic, as it is supposed to be the focus of the university’s new language policy.

The excerpts discussed give the reader an idea of how our language identities went through critical experiences. In effect, this could only impact our senses of our selves and our academic roles. Ultimately, new subject positions were likely to occur. The upshot is that we were forced to inhabit spaces of relative exclusion or self-exclusion, as the following section further explains.

### ***Narratives of exclusion and self-exclusion***

Whitchurch (2013) notices that much of what has written about academic identities in contemporary higher education has tended to include narratives of exclusion. This article is no different. Throughout our narratives, patterns of fragmentation, senses of self-estrangement, and passiveness were found. Central to these patterns is a language-based dichotomy, whereby Arabic is the dominant language at the college level while English is the dominant language at the university level. This means that, for M1 and X, their work efficiencies are affected by the lack of knowledge of Arabic. It also means for H that her interaction dynamics, for instance, in meetings, is challenged. For M2, this means there are dramatic changes in almost all aspects of her academic life, as outlined in the following. Coping with these various statuses and functions of languages, we described how we had felt the need to adopt through various coping strategies, as the following excerpts explain:

H: [In a specific meeting in English] ... I was not able to contribute, and I felt passive [Passiveness]. These feelings have recurred in many other meetings that I was asked to attend for different purposes. Speaking with foreign English accent, I felt embraced to participate with a thought or argument [Senses self-estrangement]. I had the impression that demanding Arabic in any of the meetings that I had to attend led to categorizing me as unprofessional as if I do not belong to the professional group [Narrative of exclusion]. After several incidents, I decided to maintain the image of the ‘elite bilingual’ that my educational background has imposed on me and quit my Arabic linguistic demands. So I prepared my self for meetings, wrote, and practiced utterance. I found that I must decide, moment to moment, whether to use English or Arabic in meetings [Coping strategy]. I learned that my identity as a member of the professional group has to be routinely created and sustained through the language I use.

X: A new language policy was implemented in Q.U. – only the Arabic language is requested for official meetings at the college. Initially, I showed an understanding of this policy to empower Arabic identity in an era of English intrusion. Nevertheless,

gradually I started to feel the change in my work life. If an academic institute is seen as a community of practice where members who have a shared repertoire of actions and discourses mutually engaged in a joint enterprise, the professional identity development process shall also be a collaborative learning process. With this belief, I expected sufficient opportunities for brainstorming, sharing ideas, constructive peer comments, and communicating on action plans together with colleagues. Maybe there are many such moments in official events held in Arabic, which I have missed. A dilemma gradually appears in my professional life – between my enthusiasm to contribute to the new ideas and the limited participation in the on-going practice due to the current language policy. My participation in any college decision-making activities is little <sup>(a)</sup>. I feel living in silent respect <sup>(b)</sup>. My feeling of belonging is moving from feeling eager to engage in feeling a guest and outsider at the moment <sup>(c)</sup>.

M1: How do I feel when meetings in Arabic? At times, I feel that I should have learned Arabic. Other times I feel glad that I do not know what is fully going on – ignorance is bliss [Narrative of self-exclusion]. If anyone wants me to know something that is occurring at the meeting, they will switch to English. Also, kind colleagues will translate, so I am able to understand the content of the meeting. There are times that the whole conversation has been in Arabic, and then I am asked what do I think? Or do you want to say anything? About what! I have no idea what is going on, and then I am asked to provide input [Senses self-estrangement].

X: A new language policy was implemented in Q.U. – only the Arabic language is requested for official meetings at the college. Initially, I showed an understanding of this policy to empower Arabic identity in an era of English intrusion. Nevertheless, gradually I started to feel the change in my work life. If an academic institute is seen as a community of practice where members who have a shared repertoire of actions and discourses mutually engaged in a joint enterprise, the professional identity development process shall also be a collaborative learning process. With this belief, I expected sufficient opportunities for brainstorming, sharing ideas, constructive peer comments, and communicating on action plans together with colleagues. Maybe there are many such moments in official events held in Arabic, which I have missed. A dilemma gradually appears in my professional life – between my enthusiasm to contribute to the new ideas and the limited participation in the on-going practice due to the current language policy. My participation in any college decision-making activities is little [Passiveness]. I feel living in silent respect [Narrative of self-exclusion]. My feeling of belonging is moving from feeling eager to engage in feeling a guest and outsider at the moment [Senses self-estrangement].

M2: The language policy that prevailed until 2012 was in my favor, giving importance to my specialty ESL [English as a second language], allowing me to advance in my professional life and getting promoted, and advancing my research skills and getting published easily. I was encouraged to present in conferences both inside and outside the country. I was very active as a researcher because I felt various stakeholders considered topics related to my area of specialty as important. I was also needed as a teacher educator; I was solicited to offer a large number of workshops to train teachers and prepare them to use best practices in ESL. I never felt threatened that I might be

fired. I felt confident that my contract would be renewed automatically. I felt secure, needed, and valued as an ESL instructor. Since 2012, a decision was made to go back to Arabic as a medium of instruction. That marked a radical change in my career. The shift deeply affected me. I felt my specialty lost importance [Narrative of exclusion]. I started feeling insecure, started to be concerned whether my contract would be renewed or not. I even accepted to teach courses in Arabic, such a hard task for me. I had to do that in order to last in the college. My scholarly work decreased, and I had to get involved in research relating to general education rather than my own area of interest; ESL [Coping strategy].

Both H and M2 reported a sense of exclusion. For H, her relative inability to participate in certain activities that demanded English had a significant impact on her sense of belonging to the 'professional' group. While exclusion challenges individuals' central need to belong to a social unit and could lead to several dysfunctional reactions, including self-defeating perceptions, it may lead to more 'positive' responses. H's near-native English proficiency was self-scrutinized. She tried harder to engage with the majority and conform more strongly to the linguistic norms. In this sense, she was able, to a certain extent, to adopt in uncomfortable linguistic situations.

Similarly, feeling left out, M2 reported her outsider status in just about all academic aspects of her life. The episodes of her exclusion started with the university's new language policy adopted in 2012 through which Arabic was enforced as the medium of instruction in 'non-technical' courses, which, according to decision-makers, included M2's ESL courses. This led her to develop feelings of employment insecurity. She eventually reconciled her ambivalent feelings by giving 'different' and 'unthreatened' meanings to her academic identity. Although she found it both problematic and strenuous, she started to teach her ESL courses in Arabic and published in general education rather than in her own area of specialty, since it 'lost its importance'.

M1 and X reported a sense of self-exclusion. It has been argued that when feelings of exclusion persist over extended periods, chronic detachment may result (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002). Individuals who develop such chronic detachment eventually lack the motivation to seek out new social relationships. Ultimately, self-exclusion becomes a choice. M1's passiveness is both a cause and a product of his linguistic exclusion. Although the supportive 'others' offer M1 a sense of 'presence' through translation, feelings of being the outsider do not fade, by choice and force. Likewise, X is living between 'adaption', changing her professional practices for a new linguistic situation, and 'adoption', accepting the intent of the new language policy that allegedly aims to empower the Arabic language. For her, this is what people face in many academic organizations in a global era. She had similar experiences in Denmark and China. She believes that 'developing resilience and flexibility is the value of working as an international scholar'. Still, equally problematic for X is her gender identity, working in a predominantly masculine institution where 73% of the faculty are men.<sup>2</sup> Cultural presumptions about working women further disadvantage X. From a feminist linguistic perspective, X's academic identity operates within a deficit model (Cameron, 2005) through which women are framed as disadvantaged communicators in professional settings. Although this also implies H and M2, being Arab women they are more able to negotiate and challenge the dominant masculinity ideology. Being aware of how

her language and gender identities are perceived, X locks her self in a ‘silent respect’ and carries her academic roles with a feeling of disconnection.

In sum, we all inundated with feelings of either being outsiders or unworthy. In effect, our experiences of exclusions and self-exclusions made of us, at best, ‘governable objects’ (Foucault, 1982) and, at worst, ‘good zombies’ (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009) working in a Third Space, as the next section further demonstrates.

### **Working in a Third Space**

The concept of Third Space has been utilized in social theory to examine dualisms – for instance, East and West or state and market. Whitchurch (2013) applied the concept in the higher education context to examine the binary view of academic and non-academic activities, roles, and identities. She paid close attention to the new roles that have arisen in academic spheres in contemporary universities, through which faculty has become involved in broadly based projects arising from both public service and market agendas. For her, ‘*Third Space* represents an activity that may not fall explicitly within formal organizational structures, in environments that are more complex and dynamic than organization charts and job descriptions might suggest’ (2013, p. 43; original emphasis). Although the concept of Third Space has only been explored concerning public service and market agendas, the following excerpts from our narratives show how our roles have moved from fixed conceptualizations of who we are to a Third Space due to language policy agenda:

H: In 2016, the Qatari cabinet approved a law requiring ministries, official organizations, state-run schools, and universities to enforce Arabic as the language in all official communications. The legislation has ramifications for education and by de facto for my own career. Everything, in the college, from the course syllabi to the website, needed to be translated into Arabic. And how is it better to do the many translation tasks than a Qatari faculty who graduated from the U.K.? I kept receiving requests for translation [Working in a Third Space]. This has consumed my time and efforts in tasks that do not relate to my work. Each time I finished a forced translation task, I would question the number of books that I would have read or the number of studies that I would have conducted instead [Frustration].

M1: As the native English speaker, you become an English expert. My role as a faculty member is rather complicated and is extended beyond the typical role of professors such as teaching, service, and research and defined somewhat to the degree of how much I *help* others with their English. Let me make this clear, I have welcomed this role, and it can be argued that being a native speaker who *assists* others is of added value. I am sent C.V.s to edit or write, minutes from meetings if in English to edit, personal notes that someone wants to send to a relative and emails that will be sent to others, and asked to work on a proposal (in English) for a new program, not in my field of expertise. These are just a few that I recall [Working in a Third Space]. I have often sensed the thought by my colleagues that since I am an English native speaker – I would also say American that I possess a great deal of knowledge. Being a native speaker/American provides me with some magical tool that I know all academic fields. I am asked to *assist* and get involved in research about motivation, early childhood education, TESOL [teaching English to speakers of other languages] – I am still unsure what TESOL stands for [Frustration].

However, there is a sense of accomplishment and value in my *helping*. For example, a Qatari professor told me that they have a nickname for me – Al Fazza. That is Arabic for the police in Qatar. Al Fazza drives a black and white Toyota Land Cruisers, and when there is a situation or crisis, Al Fazza arrives, and they assure everyone will be fine and solve the situation. Al Fazza is the ultimate *helper*. (Original emphases)

M2: . . . I started feeling that I was redundant, I accepted an administrative position as an accreditation coordinator, a position that nobody else in the college would accept [Working in a Third Space]. At first, I accept it to secure my job. I must admit I feared the workload. Also, I had little background for such work. As I moved into this position, I become very excited about accreditation [Resilience]. This is because the work matches my personality. I am a very organized person and pay attention to minute details, and that what accreditation requires.

These excerpts show that our roles as academic faculty are no longer containable within stable boundaries and that we have been involved in new portfolios of activity. Eventually, we inhabited a Third Space. For H, her academic roles merged into extended activities such as translation. She experiences frustration with such activities. In effect, a sense of resistance and struggle became an integral part of her working practices. She mentioned during our discussion that she started to refuse translation tasks. This has led to her being labelled as an ‘unproductive’ and ‘uncooperative’ faculty member.

For M1, the extended activities that he has been involved in were capable of merging, coalescing, splitting, and forming new sorts of activities. His new roles include editing academic and non-academic English pieces, transcribing meeting minutes, writing CVs, preparing reports that do not relate to his field, and functioning as the English ‘bank of knowledge’. Although M1 shows little frustration, he adopts a more permissive attitude for such extended activities than H and seems to be more tolerant. This shows in two intriguing words that M1 used in his narrative: ‘help’ and ‘assist’. Gronemeyer (1992) theorized the ideology of helping in relation to the West’s cultural and economic superiority. For her, the helping ideology centres on the rationale that the ‘West as a helper’ assists the ‘Rest as helpees’ to find the way towards cultural and economic developments, and eventually to modernization, not virtuously but to achieve economic, political, and cultural agendas. To produce a worldwide homogeneity, the West has to undertake the eradication of all that is foreign, to secure the standards of normality. This includes language(s). Help, in this sense, is no longer about assisting someone in need; rather, it is for overcoming a presumed ‘deficit’ (Gronemeyer, 1992). It took many centuries of colonization and hegemonic practices until the ‘West’ managed to convert the ‘Rest’ to the ideology of helping. This ideology of helping has not only crept into M1’s belief system as an American but has also been endorsed by Arabs at QU who would turn to M1, asking for ‘help’. This is a result of language policy, through which, as H puts it in her narrative, ‘policymakers in the college and university hold great pride for the Arabic language. Yet, they frequently seem to doubt its instrumental value.’ In sum, M2 has inhabited a Third Place as a ‘helper’.

M2 gave a narrative of resilience. Her academic identity is no longer defined via conceptualizations driven from her habitual space (teaching and research), but via the creation of a Third Space (working as accreditation administrator). Although, in the beginning, inhabiting a Third Space was not comfortable for her, it nevertheless offered a relatively safe arena.

Over time, she has been showing an active contribution to the formation of the new space she inhabits. Yet the very aspects that M2 tends to be stimulating in her Third Space (employment security and personality matching) could also be perceived as dysfunctional. As Whitchurch (2013) argues, the key paradox of a Third Space is the conjunction of both safe and risky space. It is a safe space as it offers some opportunities to experiment and to form new relationships. The process of working through various agendas (in the case of M2 working in academic and administrative spheres) is likely to involve a degree of struggle. M2 could find herself working via a process of 'splitting' in a way that enables her to deal with two different things at the same time, thereby living on the 'cusp'. Such a Third Space could lead to the lack of a clear place that conferred a sense of belonging and to a 'dark side' that others might avoid, as M2 pointed in her narrative. Whitchurch (2013) reports that many Third Space inhabitants in contemporary higher education consider their new roles as 'trade' or 'dirty' that no other academic faculty would freely choose to do.

As shown from the previous discussion, inhabiting a Third Space means that we are carrying our academic roles with a series of paradoxes and dilemmas that are likely to remain. Not at least because of conflicting language policy, which by default, not design, facilitated the development of a Third Space.

## Final remarks

In this article, we attempted to develop a textured understanding of how language policy reconstructs academic identities under the premise of internationalization in higher education. In our cases, language policy exerts influence over our academic roles and activities, limiting them to its conflicting agenda. This has been creating experiences of 'role-loss', which invited academic identity confusions. The upshot of our confusions resonates with Gill's (2003) views that 'language policy [at many times] twists and damages cultural evolution and that the resulting linguistic change depersonalizes entire populations by forcing them against their will into an alien mind-set or into a cultural no man's land' (p. 123). It is worth noting here that the consequences of the interplay between language policy and academic identity, as presented in this article, are not peculiar to QU. There is a conviction that university staff in contemporary higher education is inadequately served by the linguistic status quo (Jenkins, 2018). Universities have often shown little interest in the linguistic consequences of internationalization (Liddicoat, 2016), which does not in itself guarantee interculturality (Bash, 2009).

The question then becomes how a language policy in higher education can respond to an academic culture that is becoming more globalized, and to the needs of faculty (and students) with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. A possible answer could be found in Liddicoat's (2013) treatment of language policies as Discourses (with uppercase D), rather than as discourses (with lowercase d). The former case involves the combination of linguistic and extra-linguistic meanings, while the latter is limited to exclusive yet ideologically embedded linguistic acts. Language policies as 'Discourses' need to be brought into line with, to reflect better, the sociolinguistic realities of university life in a global era. The challenges are enormous in this regard in a period of mass higher education. Nevertheless, as we attempted to demonstrate in this article, the stakes have never been higher.



## Notes

1. See the *Times Higher Education* website: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/how-qatar-university-became-most-international-institution-world>.
2. It should be noted here that at QU what makes male domination is not just the percentage, but also the hierarchy. Few women are in leadership positions, hence participating little in decision-making.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## ORCID

Hadeel ALKhatib  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7744-0328>  
 Michael H. Romanowski  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2454-3571>  
 Xiangyn Du  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9527-6795>  
 Maha Cherif  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9380-6203>

## References

- Anchimbe, E. (2007). *Linguistic identity in postcolonial multilingual spaces*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Anderson, S., & Anderson, B. (2012). Preparation and socialization of the education professoriate: Narratives of doctoral student-instructors. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 24(2), 239–251.
- Barnett, R. (2000). *Realizing the university in an age of supercomplexity*. Buckingham, UK: SRHE/Open University Press.
- Bash, L. (2009). Engaging with cross-cultural communication barriers in globalized higher education: The case of research-degree students. *Intercultural Education*, 20(5), 475–483.
- Berg, L. (2009). *Qualitative research methods for the social science*. Boston, MA: Pearson Publications.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo academicus* (Trans: Collier, P.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Cameron, D. (2005). Language, gender, and sexuality: Current issues and new directions. *Applied Linguistic*, 26(4), 482–502.
- Clegg, S. (2008). Academic identities under threat? *British Educational Research Journal*, 34(3), 329–345.
- Cohen, L. (2006). Remembrance of things past: Cultural process and practice in analysis of career stories. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 69(2), 189–201.
- Demont-Heinrich, C. (2007). The Ideological Construction of the Juggernaut of English: A critical analysis of American prestige press coverage of the globalisation of language. *Studies in Language and Capitalism* 2, 107–44. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.232.9934&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Evans, L., & Nixon, J. (2015). *Academic identities in higher education: The changing european landscape*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Ferguson, G. (2006). *Language planning and education*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1982). Two Lectures. In C. Gordon, M. Leo, M. John, & S. Kate (Eds.), *Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977*, (pp. 241–244). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gill, H. (2003). Language choice, language policy and the tradition modernity debate in culturally mixed postcolonial communities: France and the ‘francophone’ Maghreb as a case study. In Suleiman, Y. (ed.). *Language and society in the Middle East and North Africa*, (pp. 122–136). Routledge Curzon: London and New York.

- Gronemeyer, M. (1992). Helping. In W. Sachs (Ed.), *The development dictionary: A guide to knowledge as power* (pp. 55–73). London: Zed Books.
- Hamel, R. (2007). The dominance of English in the international scientific publication literature. *AILA Review*, 20, 53–71.
- Henkel, M. (2010). Change and continuity in academic and professional identities. In G. Gordon & C. Whitchurch (Eds.), *Academic and professional indefinites in higher education*. (pp. 7–17). Routledge.
- Jenkins, J. (2018). The internationalization of higher education: But what about its lingua franca? In K. Murata (Ed.), *English-medium instruction from an English as a lingua franca perspective: Exploring the higher education context* (pp. 15–31). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Keller, G. (1998). Does higher education research need revisions? *The Review of Higher Education*, 21(3), 267–278.
- Leisyte, L., & Wilkesmann, U. (2016). *Organizing academic work in higher education: Teaching, learning and identities*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Liddicoat, A. (2013). *Language-in-education policies: The discursive construction of intercultural relations*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Liddicoat, A. (2016). Language planning in universities: Teaching, research and administration. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 17(3–4), 231–241.
- McMahon, S., & Dyer, M. (2014, August 27–29). A narrative approach to professional identity. In *EARLI SIG 14 Conference – Learning and Professional Development*. Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo.
- Mendoza-Denton, R., Downey, G., Purdie, V., Davis, A., & Pietrzak, J. (2002). Sensitivity to status-based rejection: Implications for African-American students' college experiences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(4), 896–918.
- Phillipson, R. (2018). Forward. In R. Barnard & Z. Hasim (Eds.), *English medium instruction programmes: Perspectives from South East Asian Universities* (pp. xiii–xv). New York: Routledge.
- Piller, I. (2016). *Linguistic diversity and social justice: An introduction to applied sociolinguistic*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Piller, I., & Cho, J. (2013). Neoliberalism as language policy. *Language in Society*, 42(1), 23–44.
- Qatar National Development Strategy 2011–2016. (2011). Doha, Qatar: Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning. Retrieved from [http://www.gsdp.gov.qa/gsdp\\_vision/docs/NDS\\_EN.pdf](http://www.gsdp.gov.qa/gsdp_vision/docs/NDS_EN.pdf)
- Qatar University. (2012). *University fact book: Faculty and staff 2012–2013*. Office of Institutional Planning and Development (OIPD), Qatar University: Doha, Qatar.
- Qatar University. (2016). *Strategic plan 2017–20: The white paper*. Doha, Qatar: Author.
- Qatar's Third Human Development Report. (2012). *Expanding the capacities of Qatari youth: Mainstreaming young people in development*. Retrieved from [http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/2012\\_Qatar\\_Human\\_Development\\_Report\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/2012_Qatar_Human_Development_Report_Eng.pdf)
- Rehg, K., & Campbell, L. (2018). *The Oxford handbook of endangered languages*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Ricento, T. (2006). *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method*. London: Blackwell.
- Said, E. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London: SAGE Publication Ltd.
- Shenton, A. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63–75.
- Skuttnab-Kangas, T. (2003). Linguistic diversity and biodiversity: The threat from killer languages. In C. Mair (Ed.), *The politics of English as a world language [ASNEL papers 7]* (pp. 31–52). Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Tlostanova, M., & Mignolo, W. (2009). Global coloniality and the decolonial option. *Kult*, 6, 130–147.
- Wazen, C. (2016). *How Qatar University became the most international institution in the world*. The World Rankings. Retrieved from <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/how-qatar-university-became-most-international-institution-world>
- Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Whitchurch, C. (2013). *Reconstructing identities in higher education*. London: Routledge.