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A Qualitative Study of Omani Muslim Women's Perceived Experiences as Writers in English as a Second Language

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF OMANI MUSLIM WOMEN'S PERCEIVED

EXPERIENCES AS WRITERS IN ENGLISH AS A

SECOND LANGUAGE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Zainab Mohamed Jabur

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2008

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
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ABSTRACT

Title: A Qualitative Study of Omani Muslim Women's Perceived Experiences as Writers
            in English as a Second Language

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This dissertation explores the extent and the ways Omani Muslim women's identity is affected when writing in English as a second language. This study seeks to gain insight into the relationship between these women's current lives and views and writing in ESL.

The participants were Omani women with advanced levels of education. I used the qualitative research design as a method of collecting the data using an open-ended questionnaire and individual interviews. In sum, the results confirm the hypothesis of the study, which is that the Omani women's identity/s and experiences are affected by learning English and writing in English as a second language, though some were reluctant to express this directly. These variations ranged from some participants' view that they had been forced to develop a second identity for the English world, to the view that their experience with English had only modified and changed aspects of their identity. Still, no matter which position they took, all participants acknowledged the existence of two worlds, the Arabic and the English.

It is safe to assume that English provides the participants with the means to feel free and confident, and to believe in themselves; at the very least this gives them hope to be independent in their opinions. The English language may help these Omani women in

developing their identity and exploring certain issues and topics, but it does not erase the borders and constraints associated with their culture and language. These women all cited changes they hope to see in their society, especially with respect to women's position and status.

The dissertation concludes with suggestions and recommendations for Omani women and other English learners. It complements what is known about second language writing and identity. This study has also introduced previously silenced Omani women and their experiences to the outside world and assisted them in exploring larger issues about their own experiences and identities, as it provided a platform for these women to present their experiences and beliefs to the world outside their community. Also, the results informed educators who teach English or writing skills in Oman and elsewhere.

DEDICATION

To the apples of my eye who taught me the meaning of life…

My father, Mohamed & my mother, Naeema

To my joy, happiness, & protectors …

My brothers, Zaid and Noor

To my best friend Samer & niece Savana

I love you all for what you have done for me …

For the love and support you have given me to finish another chapter of my life …

My doctorate

To Sarah, Hanna, Sophia, Zeena,

Linda, Nada, Fatam,

& Lama

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My completion of this dissertation involved more than my desire to learn and to earn a valued degree; it involved the help and assistance of many people. I would like to thank my dissertation committee members who have provided very valuable assistance and guidance during the completion of this work. Beginning with my advisor, Dr. Jeannine Fontaine, who has been supportive throughout all of my course work, my dissertation, and best of all when I had doubts in myself and just needed a whisper of inspiration and encouragement. Words cannot describe my gratitude and appreciation for both the personal and professional assistance she has provided. I would like to thank her for her guidance, insight, effort, time, support, and kind words. She has helped me in developing my research abilities and improving my critical thinking and writing skills in more ways than I can mention. She has been a great teacher, a supportive friend, and a model to be followed.

My sincere gratitude is to my dissertation committee members, my readers, Dr. Lynne Alvine and Dr. Abbas Ali, for their guidance, suggestions, and time. They have encouraged and challenged me to deliver my best work and effort through writing this dissertation.

I would like to thank the women who participated in this study for their courage, their time, their effort, and the information they provided. They represent good models of hardworking women who live with many different struggles each and every day of their lives while still making the best out of their journeys. They are great examples of people who want to help in making the world a better place. They have helped in understanding the extent and ways Omani women's identity/s and experiences are affected when writing

in English in specific, and understanding women's identity and second language in general.

Sincere gratitude is due to my family and friends for their patience, support, and assistance. Without my father's encouragement, my mother's persistence, and my brothers' humor, I would not have made it this far and would not have had the motives to finish what I have started. I am grateful to all of those whom I have had the pleasure to know and work with by conducting this study. My appreciation is due to all of those who generously contributed to this work; without their help, this study would have never been possible.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Arab women share a common fate: they live with the innocent 'sin' of being

female in a hyper-male focused society, where the needs and desires of men determine

and shape the women. Arab women in the Middle East in general, and in Oman in

particular, are controlled not only in their attitudes and behaviors, but also in the ways

that they think and express their ideas, whether in oral or written form. There are many

reasons behind such control, including religion, culture, and social norms. These control

mechanisms can initiate both internal conflict and confusion for the women, which may

in turn affect the formation of their identity. In the Middle East, women, relative to men,

have few avenues to express their ideas, and their voices are typically not heard. When

Arab women generally, and Omani women specifically, start writing, they have to

consider the power of control in its different forms as they choose each idea they cover

and each expression they use. This dissertation is concerned with the dynamics of this

relationship between social position, identity, and writing, in the case of women who

acquire literacy in a second language, English, in addition to their native Arabic.

In Oman, the Personal Status Laws (PSL) technically guarantee equal rights to

Omani women in all aspects of life, including education and employment. Still, in some

areas, women are treated unequally, and they must struggle with the restrictions imposed

by religious figures and conservative fathers and brothers, who insist that women should

subordinate their rights to that of men in specific fields. To date, a large proportion of the

male population in small cities or villages in Oman still believe that women's main

responsibilities and priorities are to take care of their families and serve them. Instead of

contributing to the society and becoming an integral part of their cultural world, these women are forced to become mainly housewives. When women are allowed to work, they are presented with limited opportunities and restricted to particular positions in comparison to their male counterparts. Due to the double standards mentioned above, many Omani females have been restricted to employment as teachers in girls' schools, as nurses, or in positions where they communicate with women only. In contrast, Omani men can choose careers from virtually every sector of the economy.

Recently, the situation in Oman has been changing though opportunities for men and women are still not equal. In the decades since 1970, like most of the non-English speaking countries of the world, the Omani government and Omani people have been increasingly supporting women and offering them more freedom to express themselves and to choose their workplace.

The Omani government and people are also paying much more attention to learning the English language, for the purpose of modernization, improved communication, and participation in the Internet, all factors that enable Oman to open up to the outside world. For example, in 1970, there were only 1,000 Omani students studying the English language or using English to study other fields abroad; but by 2001-2002, the number had increased to more than six hundred thousand students, which reflects the increased demand for learning the English language in Oman (Oman Cultural Office, 2006).

In this context, much needs to be studied regarding the changing self-image of Omani women. One factor influencing the way Omani women view themselves today is the study of English and the possibilities opened up by this study. Of course, a person's

identity is clearly affected, transformed, or changed by real life experiences and/or learned knowledge (Peirce, 1995). New insights or learning may automatically be reflected in a person's behavior or attitude, whether in written, oral, or any other form of communication. On a simple level, the study of psychology may lead to a person's viewing her relationships in a new light; medical information often leads to people's changing their life style habits. Nevertheless, the learning of a new language can have more profound and far-reaching effects than the acquiring of other kinds of knowledge, as language is known to affect a person's identity in deep ways. In this light, some people who learn English may use it as a way to build, and then express, a new, modified, or changed side to their personality. Some may also try to use the new language as a neutral means that has no effect on their personality, which has been formed in the context of their mother tongue. There are many possibilities, in fact, and not just two. It is this range of possibilities that the present study wishes to tease out and focus on in the lives of a small group of professional Omani women. More specifically, the study focuses on how and to what extent the facets that form and shape identity are affected in both L1 and L2 for professional Omani women when they write in English as their second language.

In recent years, much attention has been given to and research has been conducted on the relationship that exists between identity and second language writing. As the social context plays a very important role in learning a second language (Peirce, 1995), relationships between identity, social context, and second language learning are potentially closely intertwined. An extensive review of the literature reveals that many studies address second language learning and identity. For instance Mckay & Wong

(1996), Pierce (1995), and Lantolf & Pavlenko (1995); these studies claim that second language learning and identity are interrelated and linked in various ways.

The term 'identity' here is defined as it develops naturally and is affected by many surrounding factors, such as social context and life experience, which change, reshape, recreate, or replace the individual's existing identity, or form additional new identities for the individual. Identity is the factor that describes an individual as a unique person. Peirce (1995) defines social identity as "multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change" (p. 9). This view is broad, but it provides a good base upon which to build the present study. Identity consists of at least two levels; the first one is the self-identity, which is related to the individual's personal characteristics, and the second is the collective identity, which is related to the individual's relationship with the outside world. With its focus on qualitative methodology, using open-ended questionnaires and interviews as its main data collection instruments, the present study focuses on both of these. The first is addressed directly in the interviews and questionnaire; the second is accessed by observation where possible, and through the insights revealed by the participants' interview responses as to how they believe they are perceived by others.

Identity is shaped by a person's worldview, just as a person's worldview is shaped by the language s/he speaks (Humblodt, 1836 as cited in Slobin, 1996). In his neo-classic work, Gumperz (1970, 1982) focused on language and social identity. He stated that "social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language" (Gumperz & Cook Gumperz, 1982, p. 7). He examined the relationship between individuals' choices of language categories and the social situation.

It is fair to suggest that identity is both formed and constructed by the language we speak. One's identity is related to one's language; both identity and language are constructed socially and linguistically. Thus, it makes sense to hypothesize, as many have, that when a person learns more than one language, s/he might have multiple identities. These identities could be similar or completely different from each other. As for second language learners (SLL), they start to develop a new or alternative identity when they learn the second language. This new identity is affected by the learned language itself, as well as by its culture (Peirce, 1997).

Sometimes, learners are forced to form an identity for the learned language in order to fit in and/or be accepted by the roles, expectations, or the people who claim or speak the language (Peirce, 1997). This issue is applicable to all aspects of the learned language, including writing. From my personal experience, I felt I had to form another identity in order to write and fit in with the English-speaking world, and not use the same voice and identity that I use in Arabic. For instance, to take a well-known difference, English is generally about being explicit and direct, but Arabic favors implicit expression, where being direct and straight to the point is considered unprofessional and rude.

A good example is from my experience. After I came to study in the United States, I wrote my first term paper. I was the only one who did not get it back from my teacher. I was shocked and saddened and could not wait for the next day to come, so that I could talk to my teacher and see what was wrong. The next day, I met with my teacher and the first thing he said was, "I understand your situation, as this is your first paper, but this is not how we write in English in America." I asked him, "what do you mean?" He replied, "I cannot see where your voice is or your main point, although I understand the

circles you are going around making your point." Then he went on and said, "you have to be direct and explicit." After this experience, I realized that it would take another "me" to write in English. These days, every time I write, I put aside my fourteen years of writing in L1 in order to meet the expectations of writing in the English language. I have had to form another identity and change my writing style in order to write, to fit into the English language, and not use the same voice and identity that I use when I write in Arabic. The way Arab people write in Arabic is implicit and circles around the point; if they write directly and straight to the point, they are considered uneducated.

Learning and writing in a second language such as English represents a change in a person's social context. People learn the beliefs, assumptions, and social values associated with the new language they learn. Thus, they add information and knowledge to their beliefs, views, and perceptions of certain things that could change their previous or old ways of thinking and viewing the world. When identity is affected, it automatically affects human behaviors, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes.

Perspective transformation is one way in which learners are affected when they learn a second language. Perspective transformation is the shift of process in which the learners change and modify their self-perceptions and views on different issues (Malone, D. & Jones B., 2002). Mezirow (1978) defines perspective transformation as "the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world" (p. 167). Eyler and Giles (1999) define it as "seeing issues in a new way" (P. 171).

In a less obvious way, the process of 'language transfer' also plays a role here. Although the term 'language transfer' typically refers to the influence of one language on

another in areas such as morphology, phonology and syntax, studies have shown that transfer also applies to the pragmatic area; when accomplishing speech acts such as apologizing or making requests, learners may either 'transfer' patterns from their first language, adopt new ones from the target culture, or develop some other strategy. When they do so, they are building a new way of interacting socially in the new language. These choices, too, however unconsciously made, affect the person's view of herself as well as others' view of her in the new cultural environment.

Of course, we cannot predict the nature of the change that takes place with learning a new language; any kind of learning, including writing in a second language, could have either a negative or a positive impact on identity. Writing in general is a way of expressing a human's beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and identity/ identities. Writing in English as a second language has been said to help in changing the meaning schemas (beliefs, attitudes, extra) of the learners (Al-Salem, 2005). Thus, writing in English as a second language could be a good way to represent any change that has occurred in one's identity through learning a second language. Because of this, writing is an important focus of this study.

This dissertation focuses on how the Omani Women's identities have been formed through and by writing in English as a second language. The study addresses the unique perspective of Omani Women and their struggle with the conflict that arises in their identity between their first language world and second language world. I have been drawn to this context for my research, as I belong to this group of women whose identity becomes potentially mixed or multiple when they acquire and learn English as a second language.

Significance of the Study

This study explores the extent and the ways Omani Muslim women's identity is affected when writing in English as a second language. This study seeks to gain insight into the relationship between these women's identity and writing in ESL, especially as they perceive it through their narratives of their own experiences. Ultimately, the results help educators who serve as guides to women dealing with similar conflicts or identity issues. If Omani women struggle with identity conflict, educators and mentors need to assist them to overcome any problems associated with identity issues and develop as successful second language writers aware of their potentially complex identity. It is hoped that the insights provided by this study help to inform the decisions taken by such guides.

My personal purpose in conducting this study is to pursue my individual interest in gaining insight and a wider perspective on this topic from a specific group of women. I explore this issue from an 'emic' perspective, by being a part of these women's group. For instance, from my personal experience as L2 learner, I have experienced identity conflict; I struggle to find peace and a sense of identity within myself, especially when I write in L2. As a result of my experience with my dual identity, I find there is a wide gulf between my changed/modified perspectives and my meaning schemas on the one hand, and my society's on the other. However, sometimes I feel that writing in English frees me from my own inside walls and constraints; it takes me to another world where I feel like I am a butterfly free to roam from one flower [subject] to another, without any attention and consideration of my culture, societal norms, and restrictions. I feel I can express my true feelings regarding issues I am forbidden to express in Arabic. Forbidden

issues are defined in this context as subjects that are considered taboo, off limits, and prohibited to discuss with members of either sex. Depending on the society in question, these forbidden issues might include sex, abortion, birth control, smoking, dating, pre-marriage pregnancy, the female's monthly period (PMS), bisexuality, homosexuality, and some political issues.

In contrast to writing in English, when I write in Arabic, I feel that I am like a butterfly trapped in a net and controlled by the culture, society, norms, and all the roles associated with my experience of Arabic. However, at the same time, I also feel more knowledgeable, confident, and that I not only belong to Arabic, but I own it, despite the constraints associated with it.

This study aims at finding out how Omani women feel about their experiences with two languages and the cultural connections that come with the languages. I am curious to know if the participants' experiences and views are similar to mine, or whether they view life with two languages in very different ways. Do they feel freer when they write in English, as compared to when they write in Arabic? Do they feel that writing in the L2 allows them to explore forbidden issues in their L1? It is particularly important to keep this issue in mind as I conduct this study, because Muslim women generally in the Middle East, and specifically in Oman, still have some difficulty freely expressing themselves and their ideas.

Although many studies address the issues of identity and second language writing, there has been virtually no research that investigates specifically Omani Muslim women's identity in connection with writing in English as a second language. This study is the first to ask to what extent and in what ways these women feel their identity differs

when writing in their native language or in English. As I explore the issues of women's identity and second language writing, this study raises the unheard voices of Omani women and allows them to speak for themselves, and to raise awareness about the correlation between gender roles, culture norms, literacy, and personal/mental development in their society.

The dissertation complements what is known about second language writing and identity. More specifically, this study introduces previously silenced Omani Muslim women and their experiences to the outside world. Also, the results inform educators who teach English or writing skills to this audience of learners. Lastly, my work assists the Omani women in exploring larger issues about their own experiences and identity/identities, as it provides a platform for these women to present their experiences and beliefs to the world outside of their community and country.

Research Questions

In this study, I address the following research questions:

1. How is Omani Muslims women's experience affected and formed in writing in English as a second language, judging from the narratives these women tell about their learning of English, and in particular with writing? In what ways have they used, or do they now use English, and especially written English, in their everyday life, either socially or professionally?

2. Do Omani women feel that they have two identities, one in the English world and one in the Arabic world? If so, how do they feel that the separate identities arose? How are the two resulting worlds related to each other (judging from their own perspectives)? What conflicts arise between the cultural values associated with

these two worlds as perceived by the women themselves? In what ways do the
two cultural worlds complement and relate to each other?

3. In what ways do they express their ideas in writing in the second language, and
   how does this compare with their writing in their first language? For instance, do
   these Omani women feel that writing in the second language frees them and
   allows them to explore issues that are considered taboo or forbidden in Arabic?
   How does this factor interact with others in their views, for instance with the
   problems of fluency, or difficulties with finding an audience for their writing?

4. What specific strategies, if any, have these women adopted in order to integrate
   English and English writing into their lives?

5. Do these women refer to English, and especially English writing, as playing a role
   in their future life and plans?   If so, how do they characterize that role?

In covering the core issues mentioned above, a wide range of issues are raised and
addressed in the context of the study; issues such as religion and ethical issues related to
women, issues of power as related to written expression, likewise, more routine topics,
such as the role of mental translation in the participants' writing experience.

This study is undertaken to explore the research questions and issues mentioned
above, to discuss and determine possible answers, and document the findings. I used
open-ended questionnaires, individual and focus group interviews, document analysis,
and observation to a limited extent where possible as methods to collect the data. I also
kept extensive field notes and a regular research journal. This is a qualitative study; the
results were analyzed using qualitative and descriptive methods, and conclusions were

drawn from the participants' answers and perceptions. The research design is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

<center>Organization of the Present Study</center>

The first chapter of the study has presented the problem that is researched, the questions examined, the background and the importance of the study, and definitions of the concepts and terms used throughout the study.

The second chapter reviews the theoretical, empirical, and narrative literature relevant as background for the present study. This includes research on identity, transformation, translation, and writing in English as a second language, as well as the key factors and issues regarding Omani society that may play a role in the issues being explored. In particular, a summary and explanation of previous research related to identity and second language writing among ESL learners in TESOL and Composition is included in this chapter.

The third Chapter is a description and explanation of the methodology that is used for the present study. It discusses the research design of the study, including the participants and their characteristics, the setting, data collection instruments, the choice of documents, the data analysis methods, and issues regarding the validity of the study.

The fourth chapter is a presentation of the participants' voices and personal experience. It displays and clarifies the findings of the research. It comments on the results from the data collected. It explores and summarizes the participants' views and perceptions of their writing in English as second language and its impact on their identity including their freedom of writing and personal beliefs.

The fifth and final chapter is a more in-depth discussion of the results and findings. This chapter provides the analysis, offers interpretation of the findings, and concludes the study by presenting implications, suggestions, and recommendations for assisting Omani female English writers in specific, and English learners in general, to develop as second language writers. Importance of the study, limitations of the study, and future research on this subject are presented and found in the final chapter.

Definition of Terms

1. Identity: it is "the set of characteristics that somebody recognizes as belonging uniquely to himself or herself and constituting his or her individual personality for life" (Grayson, 2002, p. 2). It is what makes a person unique as his/her own entity (Grayson, 2002). It is connected with self-image and relates to how a person views him/herself as a person inside or in relation to other people (Peirce, 1995). Identity develops naturally, as it is affected by many surrounding factors that might change, reshape, recreate, or replace the individual's existing identity or form other new identities.

2. Identity formation: the process by which an individual's identity goes through stages of developing, and by which a person becomes able to define himself for himself and others. It is "the process of the fabrication of the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity" (Porter, 1913). Erikson (1980) relates identity formation to a normative developmental process affected by personal and social factors. Factors that might affect identity formation include social context and life experience (Isajiw, 1990; Harris, 1996).

3. Transformed Identity: changed identity after it has been affected by certain factor(s). The individual views her/his identity in a different, modified, or an edited form, after experiencing some event or incorporating new learning.

4. Meaning schemas: the beliefs, views, perspectives, and attitudes that learners might change in critical reflection from their life and learning experiences (Mezirow, 1991).

5. Personal Status Laws (PSL) in Oman: the system of a set of rules that shape, affect, and organize daily life and society in Oman in a variety of ways. These are based on the Islamic religion and its holy book, the *Quran*. The laws' basis is derived from the principles of the *Quran* and the *Sharia* (Islamic) law. The PSL in Oman reflect Omani society, culture, and beliefs (Oman, 2002).

6. Language transfer: the influence of the first or learned language on another. "All language learning is culture learning" (Heath, 1983, p.5); therefore, sometimes, the learners learn new beliefs and assumptions other than their old ones. Thus, they transform this new learned knowledge from L2 to L1. This phenomenon may be either positive (helping a learner) or negative (inhibiting proper acquisition of the target language). This might affect one or various aspects of the languages involved. Language transfer can occur to individuals consciously, though its workings are generally unconscious.

7. Perspective transformation: the process that occurs when learners change and modify their self-perceptions and views on different issues. In the course of perspective transformation, learners develop new meaning schemas from their life and learning experience (Malone & Jones, 2002; Mezirow, 1978).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter discusses the main issues and topics related to *Omani Muslim Women's Identity and Second Language Writing*. It reviews the relevant specific terms, empirical, and narrative literature as background for the present dissertation. In particular, it provides a summary and explanation of previous research related to identity and second language writing among ESL learners. I start with providing a general overview of the Middle East and Oman, discussing Muslim women's voices and status in Arab society and including the following areas of study: women in Oman, the educational system in Oman, and women's status in Oman's society and educational system.

Subsequently, I examine the use of the English language in the Middle East and the associations between Middle Eastern women and English. I also define theoretical terms that are relevant to the present study such as language, contrastive rhetoric, identity, and social identity, and I discuss issues such as multiple identities, advantages and disadvantages of having multiple identities, translation and transformation from first language to second language, and perspective transformation. Finally, I include research on the relationship between language and identity in L1 and L2. In particular, I expand my discussion of this last area to cover ethical and religious issues that pertain to Omani Muslim women's identity and second language writing.

The Middle East and Oman

The geographic area of the Middle Eastern region is situated to the south and east of the Mediterranean and extends to the Arabian Gulf. The area is considered to be the

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cradle of ancient civilizations, the cradle of humanity, and the cradle of three major religions-- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Of these, Islam is the most prominent religion in the majority of Middle Eastern countries. In most Muslim countries, Islam represents and serves as the basis for society's rules and laws. The political entities in the Middle East consist of eighteen countries: Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. However, there is still a lively debate about whether certain other countries should be included in the Middle East. These include Afghanistan, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia; these are Islamic and Arabic-speaking countries that share the same history, culture, language, and civilization as most of the countries recognized as Middle Eastern (Douglass, 2001).

The Arabic language in its diverse varieties is the mother tongue and first language of the Middle Eastern countries mentioned above except for Armenia, Cyprus, Iran, and Turkey (Jones, 2002; Comrie, 1987; Class et al., 1991). English is spoken as a second language in the majority of these countries, notably among the middle and upper classes. However, in some Arab countries, specifically Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia, French is spoken as a second language.

The Sultanate of Oman is a Middle Eastern country located in southwest Asia. It "[o]ccupies an area of 120,000 square miles on the southern littoral of Arabia" (Osborne, 1977, p. 130). It borders the United Arab Emirates from the north, Saudi Arabia from the east, Yemen from the west, and Arabian Gulf from the south. The capital of Oman is Muscat; the estimated population is 1.5 million (Osborne, 1977). Oman is considered to be a modern country and its people view themselves as free in all aspects of life; their

patterns of expression and behavior are enforced by social norms and expectations, not controlled by law. Still, individuals are restricted by their cultural traditions and values; in particular, traditional norms and values enforce the behavior of women and the attitude toward women inside the home. In comparison to other Middle Eastern countries, Oman can be said to represents a 'middle' ground regarding the interaction between religious beliefs, the rule of law, and societal norms. Oman is not as modern and liberal as Lebanon and Egypt, but it is not as conservative as Saudi Arabia and Yemen. This is one of many reasons for choosing Oman as my place of study. Al-Riymi, the cofounder of Darran Tours, describes Oman as a "beautiful, untouched, unspoiled country" that "has a preserved heritage that can be appreciated by all" (Ahmed, 2000, para. 7).

Gordesman (1997), in his book *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE: Challenges of security*, has described the development process in Oman and the progress its people have achieved, and he summarized it as follows:

> In the years that have followed, Oman has become one of the success stories of the developing world. It has created a modern educational system, developed a modern infrastructure, become an oil exporter, developed its country-side, and turned Muscat into a large, modern city. Much of Oman's new wealth has also reached its poorer citizens (p. 126).

Islam is the religion of the Omani people as well as the medium by which government laws and regulations are encoded. In Oman, 83 percent of the population is Muslim (Gordesman, 1997). Gordesman (1997) has stated that "[O]man shows considerably greater religious tolerance than most Gulf States, but has taken steps to limit Islamic extremism and unrest. Islam is the state religion and most Omanis are Ibadhi or

Sunni Muslims, although there is a minority of Shi'ite Muslims" (p. 200). The language of the *Quran*, the Arabic language, is the country's official language. English is taught in schools as a second language and used along with Arabic in most aspects of life (Al-Issa, 2005; Phillips, 1966). Over the past decades, Oman has been progressing and going through many changes, such as improvements in education, employment opportunities, health care, and technology. Since 1970, the governor of Oman, Sultan Qaboos, has worked to create an educated, strong, unified, and developed nation with the support of the Omani people (Ministry of Information, 2002).

Women's Rights, their Status, and Voice in Arab Society

Many books and studies have examined Muslim women and their status in Middle Eastern countries. One of these, Kaniyoti's *Women, Islam, and the State,* explores women and Islam in the Middle East by studying the lives of many women from different Arab nationalities, such as Lebanon, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq. Kanyoti concludes that people cannot understand these women's roles and status by only studying the texts and laws of their countries, since the legal and socially relevant factors in Islam are not standardized among these Muslim countries.

Like other women around the world, Arab women have been struggling for their rights and equality with men. Still, in the Middle East as in some other areas, women are treated as second-class citizens; they suffer from gender disparity, illiteracy, and unequal opportunities in education and in the labor force. All these factors have resulted in the reduction of women's status, thus increasing and strengthening social obstacles for women's achievement whether in education or the work place (Moghadam, 2003).

However, women's status differs from one country to another in the Middle East. For example, in some liberal countries like Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq (before the war), women have enjoyed more freedom and rights than in other countries like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Qatar, where women have fewer rights and their voices are not typically heard. In a third group of countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates women have full legal rights. Still, despite their official legal status as equals, women are controlled by their society's culture and traditions.

In the Middle East, the low social status of women is linked with low literacy and labor force participation (Moghadam, 2003). In the eyes of Western societies, the status of Middle Eastern women is often linked to the strict rules and norms of Islam. However, opponents of this view point out that Islam, in fact, provides Muslim women with a number of rights that Western women did not enjoy until the 19th century--for example the ability to specify conditions in marriage contracts and the right to keep their own last name after marriage (WGBH Educational Foundation global connections, 2002). Moreover, Islam gives women an honorable status and insists that women are equal to men and should thus be treated the same (Basha, 2006). In addition, work, education, and the pursuit of knowledge are duties required in Islam of both males and females (El Fattah, 2000). Some prominent Muslim leaders insist that women must have their full rights and should be encouraged in their pursuit of knowledge and education (Engineer, 1996). However, still some other Muslim leaders insist that women are not equal with men, thus, women should not be treated and have rights the same as men.

According to Wikan (1982), "[I]slam perceives the male and female as different kinds of human beings, with complementary, not competing, roles in society" (p. 55);

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both genders complete each other's roles. Though Islam officially encourages women's equality with men, several of the primary reasons for women's low social status in Arab society are rooted in entrenched cultural traditions and values that date to the pre-Islamic period. El Fattah (2000) maintains that "[t]he corruptions that we have embraced are from the pre-Islamic ignorance of Arabia, coupled with the ignorance that previously prevailed in countries that subsequently accepted Islam" (para. 5). Yahya (2007) believes that "[t]he mentality that despises women, excludes them from society and regards them as second class citizens is a wicked pagan attitude which has no place in Islam" (para. 1). According to El Fattah (2000), many Arab Muslims practice a "distorted" version of Islam that has been contaminated by their culture and traditions and which, according to progressive scholars like El Fattah, has no Islamic basis. For example, Phillips (1966) discussed the status of women in the pre-Islamic times and some of the pagan practices that do not exist anymore, stating that "[f]emale infanticide was common, and the method particularly cruel, for the infant girls were buried alive. 'The parents look after the son, and God looks after the daughter'" (p. 129). He has asserted that prophet "[M]ohamed set his face firmly against this practice, whatever its cause, and especially against the burying of the children alive" (p. 130).

Phillips (1966) also mentioned some of the rooted traditions that date to the pre-Islamic period and still exist in some places in Oman today. For example, "[w]e have said that not the girl but her parents, in actual fact her father, chooses her husband." "[f]or a girl, whether she likes it or not, always belongs to the son of her father's brother, her *bin 'amm*; and this is so much the case that he, her first cousin, must give his permission before the girl can be married to anyone else" (p. 130). However, these old traditions are

in the midst of change by the younger generation. Osborne (1977) adds that "other customs, like arranged marriages, are increasingly being rejected by the younger generation" (p. 186).

In some countries such as Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, women are becoming stronger, fighting for their rights, and demanding equal treatments. In these countries, women are allowed to take their place as natural mates and companions, entitled to freedom of expression and speech. However, strains arise for these Arab women due to the society's cultural traditions, norms, and values. For example, women in Arab society are raised not to discuss certain issues and topics that are considered taboo and forbidden as mentioned earlier in chapter one.

In some Arab countries, these cultural traditions prevent women from becoming successful individuals in their academic and work life. For example, in countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen, women cannot leave their countries to study abroad without a companion. The companion must be a person who has a close legal relationship with the woman, such as a husband, brother, or father. Even where legal regulations allow these women to travel abroad for study, their families often still object to their going alone (Momsen, 1991). These restrictions and boundaries push women to create worlds within their minds where they can act and think of anything without restraints. Wikan (1982) asserts that the segregation between men and women "[i]s one that creates for men and women truly distinctive worlds" (p. 53). This leads to both internal conflicts and confusion for these women and affects the formation of their identity.

In terms of personality, of economics, of politics and of civics, there are no

women in Oman; women exist in number always greater than men, but their

existence is domestic and servile only. The unequal position of women in Oman is

common throughout the Arabian Peninsula (Phillips, 1966, p. 128).

This is a classic description of Omani women by a historical scholar, Wendell

Phillips (1966) in his book *Unknown Oman*. He described the status of Omani women by

stating that "there is no future but marriage…Arab women are the downtrodden, mindless

slaves of their fathers, brothers and husbands…by 28 the majority are old and worn-out

grandmothers sorrowfully facing an early death" (p. 129). He connected the Omani

women's status with the country's development believing that "[O]man and all Arabia

will certainly remain among the backward areas of the world just as long as its women

are kept ignorant, intellectually starved, secluded and degraded under a permanent seal of

subjection" (p. 142). However, this old picture of Omani women has changed with the

progress of the country itself. Oman did not remain among the backward areas of the

world; one of the main reasons behind Oman's development is the attention paid to

women and their status.

One result of the urbanization in Oman is the increased support given to Omani

women by both the Omani government and its citizens. In recent decades, women have

been offered more freedom in all aspects of life. Consequently, Omani women are

playing important roles in Omani society and have become key factors in their country's

development. Ahmed (2000) has described them as "filling many roles as well as

maintaining their commitments to family. Most of them are educated and some are in

business for themselves, hold political positions, and volunteer toward the well-being of their community" (para.1). Ahmed (2000) claims that Omani women have been impressive in bettering their lives and adding to the growth of their country. In his view, these women have gained rights by proving they deserve these rights, and they are equipped to handle anything that comes their way.

Omani men and women are freeing themselves from restrictions and constraints associated with certain cultural traditions while opening themselves up to new beliefs with respect to culture and religion. However, while Omani women enjoy liberation, they still embrace their traditions. For example, the percentage of working women has increased rapidly not to mention the rise in opportunities for women to work as well as the hours that women may work. In 1995 the estimated number of working women was 72,816, in 2005 it increased to 135,444, and in 2025 the estimated number will reach 268,861 (Mohammed, 2003). However, these working women seem to be committed to the traditional way of life as they wear the traditional Omani *abaya*[1](cloak) and scarf according to their custom (Osborne, 1977).

The Omani government is supporting women by providing them with important equal opportunities in key areas such as education, employment, and other aspects of life. Gordesman (1997) has discussed the Sultan's effort and Oman's progress on human rights and women's status. He has stated that "[S]ultan Qabus has stressed the importance of human rights in his speeches, as well as the need to expand the role of women in Omani society" (p. 201). For example, in 1999, His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos stated:

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[1]The *abaya* is the Islamic Omani traditional costume for females; it is usually a black piece of cloth that is worn over the clothes and covers the whole body except for the head (Osborne, 1977).

Many years ago, I said that if the energy, capability and enthusiasm of women were excluded from a country's active life, then that country would be depriving itself of 50 percent of its genius. I have taken very good care that this should not happen to Oman, and I look forward to the further progress of women in my country with the greatest pleasure and confidence [sic]. (In Ahmed, para. 2, 2000)

To this end, the government has passed several laws especially designed and designated to support women. For instance, Royal Decree Law number 101/96 dictates that women should be provided with full equal rights and any restrictions on women should be lifted. Royal Decree Law number 35/2003 guarantees equal rights to Omani women in education and work (Omanet, 2003). In addition, the Sultan of Oman, His Majesty Qaboos Ben Said, has insisted on strengthening the role of women in Omani society, ensuring their equality with men, and honoring their involvement in the service of their country as stated in the following statement transcribed from a speech by Sultan Qaboos:

> We call the Omani women everywhere in the village and the city, in urban and desert [sic], in the valleys and mountain[s], to pull the sleeves [sic] and contribute to the economic and social development, all according to their ability and capacity, and experience and talent, and their roles in society…We advocate [sic] Omani women from this rostrum to play their vital role in society and we are fully confident that they will meet the appeal. (Speech on the occasion of the opening of the second period of the Shura Council 12/26/1994, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008)

Osborne (1977), in her book *The Gulf state and Oman,* discussed the emerging women of the Gulf and the status of Omani women. She interviewed a group of Omani women and asked them about their perceived status and women's liberation. In one of the interviews, an Omani woman responded:

It depends what you mean by 'women's liberation'. If you mean having the same rights as men, we do. Sexual equality exists in every sense, except a domestic one. We have the same job for equal pay and we are also more liberated than other Gulf girls (Osborne, 1977, p. 196).

Omani women have made progress in a range of professional fields, including politics, education, the economy, banking, management leadership, and medicine. They have penetrated both public and private businesses and sectors and established projects that have helped in making valuable contributions to the country. These women are considered to be at the forefront of other Gulf countries in achieving their full rights concerning equality and employment.

The progress in the status of Omani women is reflected in their participation and the role they have in the country's growth. Female education has dramatically increased in the past few decades, which has led to a reduction in illiteracy. In 1970, the adult female literacy rate was zero percent. In 1984, only 16 percent of adult females were educated out of the total female population. However, in 2003, the percentage increased to 65.4 and in 2004, the percentage increased even more to 73.5 (United Nations Development Programme, 2007).

Gordesman (1997) has stated that "[t]he government increased the number of seats on the Consultative Council and allowed women to take part in nominations for

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Council members" (p. 202). Today in Oman, 13 percent of governmental leadership positions are occupied by women, a stark contrast to 1980 when no women held governmental power, and six women represent Oman in high positions as ministers and ambassadors such as Khadeija bint Hassan (ambassador for the Royal Netherland), Rajiha bint Abdulamir (minister of tourism), and Sharifa bint Khalfan (minister of social development) (Wiedeman, 2007; Riphenburg, 1998). In addition, women occupy other places and positions of importance. Official government sources are quick to point out that women are prominent attorneys and heads of ministries; that Omani women have been the first in the Arab world to be appointed as ambassadors overseas; and that Oman also has the highest percentage of employed local women among the Gulf Cooperation Council [2](GCC) countries (Ministry of Information, 2002).

However, in spite of all the support and encouragement provided to women and the recent improvements in their status, Omani women sometimes feel that they need much more than legal equality in employment, education, and other aspects of public life; they need equality at home and in their personal lives with their families as well. For example, women have a very strong influence on the new generation, as they are responsible for taking care of and raising their children. Nevertheless, the husband, and often the husband's family, typically makes the important decisions regarding such issues as the children's education, travel, and marriage. While women may not want to make all the decisions, many want to share at least some of the responsibility in making important choices that affect their children.

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[2] The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as a synonym for all the Southern Gulf states, is an organization that was established in 1981; it consists of six countries that share many economic and social objectives facing the Persian Gulf. These countries are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab of Emirates (Gordesman, 1997).

A social anthropologist, Wikan (1982), in his book *Behind the Veil in Arabia*, discusses Omani women, their world, and their role in the Omani society. She refers to the Omani women by the word 'serene' as it best describes them. She asserts that there are many constraints which influence the women's personal and social life, and "[m]any women are not aware of their legal rights and, for this or other reasons, do not benefit from them" (p. 53). She believes that there are two worlds in Oman stating that: "there is the multitude of small women's world in which men also do figure, but only marginally and in partial capacities (as husbands, brothers, sons);" and "there is the large world of the men, which also embraces women, but does so only in their partial, male-relevant capacities (as wives, sisters, daughters). Both worlds contain standards for both men and women, but one as embraced by men, the other by women" (p. 160).

Wikan claims that there are differences in priorities between these two worlds, and that in the men's world, "females are interesting mainly in terms of their sexual trustworthiness, because this is where they so strongly affect the lives of men" (p. 160). However, in the women's world, "hospitality and a number of other qualities are highly relevant and consequently have priority" (p. 160). These two worlds represent and form the Omani society as a whole.

Unfortunately, a large proportion of the Omani male population still believe that women's major responsibilities should be restricted to personal life inside the home. They believe that women's responsibility is to take care of their families, rather than to involve themselves in community life and contribute to the society in general (Osborne, 1977; Phillips, 1966). Phillips (1966) described the Omani men by stating, "the Omanis, like the men of most Arab lands, have shackled and degraded their own women, and by

denying them the chance to live in the world, even the narrow world of an Omani community, they have denied them self-respect as we, in the West, understand it" (p. 146). He continued that "the Arabs believe that 'a woman without a husband is like a bird with one wing' and that 'a woman's lot is a husband or else the grave'" (p. 129). Therefore, women are expected to carry out all their domestic duties before any other public ones. Wikan (1982) has supported this view by asserting that: "[w]omen are charged with full responsibility for house-work and child-rearing, duties that entail the potentialities of a considerable measure of influence, and even of power, in the life of the family." He continues, " [t]hey have no economic responsibilities, however, and are entitled to be fed, housed, and clothed by their male guardian" (p. 56).

In fact, Riphenburg (1998) professes doubts about the official status of women as a whole, stating that "[d]espite their important contributions, women in Oman continue to face formidable social, economic, and political barriers. Their roles and status are structurally determined by state ideology (regime orientation and judicial system), level and type of economic development, and class location" (p. 144). All these factors shape the status of Omani women. While Omani men do allow the women to work and participate in the community, it is under the condition that they continue fulfilling their full range of traditional duties at home, which becomes a considerable challenge for these women and places a huge burden on their shoulders.

Education in Oman

Before 1970, Oman's educational system was in its worst condition. People who sought education and knowledge had to travel to other countries. Osborne (1977), a classic scholar, explained that "[e]ducation was firmly restricted and until 1970, those

Omanis who sought to better themselves escaped and educated their children abroad" (p. 196).

However, since 1970, the educational system in Oman has improved and expanded rapidly. Allen & Rigsbee (2000) have stated that "[a]ccordingly, government programs focused on education and health care. In addition, the establishment of an Omani identity became an important function of government policy" and "[e]ducational development has been the primary responsibility of the ministry of education since it was one of the first of four ministries established in 1970" (p. 166). One of the main reasons behind the improvement and the development of the educational system is the officially published goal of providing free education to Omani people of all ages up to the end of high school (Allen & Rigsbee, 2000; Ministry of Information, 2002). As the overall development of the country is the Omani government's stated long-range goal, the government, as well as the people, have paid a great deal of attention to education and have held it up as one of the key factors to achieving that end. As Rassekh (2004) has stated, many authorities realize that one of the key factors for the development and prosperity of Oman in the long run is not oil or gas, as these will become exhausted in the coming years, but education and training. She explains, "[t]he realization of this fact has led the authorities in Oman to attach particular value to education and to embark on reforming the entire education system during the last decade" (p. 7).

As a result of the increased interest devoted to the development of education and the quality of education, the government has worked hard to change and improve the methods, books, school buildings, teacher training, curricula, and systems of teaching under the guidance of professional experts (Rassekh, 2004; Allen & Rigsbee, 2000). The

government has also provided all the needed materials and books for the students at no cost, "[t]uition and textbooks were free" (Allen & Rigsbee 2000, p. 168). As education in Oman has become a primary factor of life, many schools have been built, highly qualified teachers and experts from other countries have been hired, and new and improved methods and materials adopted. In 1970, in all of Oman, there were only three schools for boys with 909 students (Rassekh, 2004). However, according to the Ministry of Education (2002), in the year 2000, the higher educational system in Oman comprised 132 public schools. These schools held 316,889 students that were enrolled at the primary school level and 254,496 students that were enrolled at the secondary school level, of which half were females. 30,000 teachers were hired to work at these governmental schools (Ministry of Education, 2002). In 2004, the number of schools increased to 14 private colleges of higher education, 20 institutes and colleges of further education, one public university, six public colleges, three private universities, 1,022 public and private schools with more than 1,051 administrative staff in colleges with 100 percent Omani enrollment (*Education in Oman*, 2006).

This educational development has included providing extensive programs for teaching adult literacy. Allen & Rigsbee (2000) believe, "[t]he initial thrust of education development was to emphasize primary instruction and adult literacy" (p. 166). As a result, in 2004 the adult literacy rate increased to 77.1 percent of the total Omani population. Development in higher education is still progressing. At present, there is only one public university in Oman; the Sultan Qaboos University built in 1986. However, there are many higher institutes and colleges run by government or private institutions (Allen & Rigsbee, 2000).

Despite the on-going development of the Omani educational system, it has been criticized by many scholars and governmental and non-governmental institutes and organizations. Although Oman is one of the few Arab countries that is making improvements and the people have access to education, the critics feel that there are limitations and boundaries Omanis are prohibited to cross. Gordesman (1997) believes that "[a]cademic freedom is restricted, particularly regarding controversial matters, including politics. Professors may be dismissed for going beyond acceptable boundaries" (p. 199). Gordesman claims that with all the attention given to the educational system and its progress, nevertheless, the academic freedom is limited; there are always forbidden issues and topics the public are not allowed to discuss in Oman. This view supports the US State Department reports, which asserts that "[t]he Omani government restricts freedom of expression and association, and does not guarantee full rights for workers and women. The law prohibits any criticism of the Sultan in any form or medium" (In Gordesman, 1997, p. 198). All materials that are regarded as politically, culturally, or sexually offensive are censored and prohibited by the Ministry of Information (Gordesman, 1997).

The condition of women has formed a primary focus in the country's growing emphasis on educational development. As stated earlier, Omani women, in general, have a respectable status in most aspects of life except for some issues related to cultural traditions. Omani women are aware that there are certain cultural traditions preventing them from success; an Omani woman in an interview explained, "[s]till in Oman there are timeless traditions surrounding social life and marriage" (Osborne, 1977, p. 196). Wikan (1982) has defined 'custom' and provided examples of some of these cultural

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customs and norms in Oman; she referred to 'custom' by "an established and general

mood of action, which obtains in a community" (p. 67). She has provided a few examples

of these cultural customs such as, brides must be virgins, married women must be faithful

to their husbands, women should not go to the market, women should wear the abayaa

and cover their hair once they leave their house, women should not leave the house

without their guardians' permission, women should not make any physical or verbal

contact with any male strangers, women should be quiet and shy in the presence of any

men other than their fathers, brothers, and husbands, women should not make any

decision without their husbands, women are never to question persons older than

themselves, and women should not socialize with female companions and neighbors

without the guardian's agreement. These, among many other norms and customs, Omani

women have to face in their daily life; their struggles with issues that affect women's

identity and feelings are paralleled by the experience of women in most of the Arab

world.

The Status of Women in Omani Education

The legal status of women in Omani Education is equal to that of men and

education is required for women as it is for men. Public schools, from kindergarten to

high school, have separate schools for men and women; in the schools for girls, the

teachers are females, while the boys' schools have male teachers. However, there are a

large number of private schools enrolling mixed genders (Allen & Rigsbee, 2000). For

instance, in the year 2004 there were 301 private schools that included both genders, as

compared to 355 public schools for girls and 366 for boys (*Education in Oman*, 2006).

The Omani people are opening to the world and accepting new ideas and methods that contribute to the development of their country. They are willing to cooperate and to give up some of the old restrictions and constraints of society to achieve a better education for themselves and for their children of both genders (Riphenburg, 1998). For example, families are allowing their daughters to travel overseas to pursue their education, which was unacceptable a few years ago and still is in a few other Arab countries. In 2002, there were over 10,000 female Omani students studying in forty-five different universities throughout the world in different countries, such as Australia, Canada, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates (*Education in Oman*, 2006).

In the last decade, women have topped the academic lists at most levels in schools and colleges (Wiedeman, 2007; Oman Cultural Office, 2006). Upon graduating from high school, the opportunity for women to be accepted at the sole public university, the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), is equal to that of males, regardless of the differences in their achievements. For example, SQU accepts around 2,500 students yearly; 50 percent of these are females and the other 50 percent are males, despite women's higher grades in comparison to men. In particular, requirements in certain fields, for instance medicine and some specialties in engineering, are more rigorous for women than for men (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2007).

English in the Middle East and in Oman

The English language, which belongs to the Indo-European language family, has become a global language and, as a lingua franca, is one of the most popular languages (Crystal, 2003). English is spoken by 750 million people in the world as either the official

language of a nation, a second language, or as a mixture with other languages. It is estimated that over four hundred million people around the world speak English in their everyday life (Graddol, 1999). As Bloomfield (1994) states, "[E]nglish is the most wide spread of languages" (p. 57). According to Weber (1997), the English language has become one of the most influential languages in the world. In this era of globalization, people speak and use English constantly as the language plays various important roles.

In recent years, there has been an ever-greater demand to learn English among non-native speakers as most countries, including those in the Middle East, are leaning toward English for a variety of different purposes. It is used as either a second language or a foreign language in all Middle Eastern countries, and the number of people learning English as a second or a foreign language has increased significantly. Graddol (1999) used demographic projections to show the balance between native and non-native speakers of English and how it will shift drastically in the next 50 years. He concluded that:

> Based solely on expected population changes, the number of people using English as their second language will grow from 235 million to around 462 million during the next 50 years. This indicates that the balance between L1 and L2 speakers will critically change, with L2 speakers eventually overtaking L1 speakers. (Graddol, p. 62)

There are many reasons behind the spread of English, especially in recent decades. Mckay (2002) summarized them as being the result of English speakers' migration, new technologies developed in English speaking countries, and colonialism by English speaking countries. In addition, 85 percent of international organizations make

official use of English, 85 to 99 percent of popular music and motion pictures are in English, and the largest numbers of published books are in English. English also plays an important role in higher education in many countries; 80 percent of electronically stored information in the world is in English, and most tourism dollars are earned from English speaking countries like the United States. Crystal (2003) also attributes geographical-historical and socio-cultural reasons to the spread of English as a global language. He states, "[t]he language has penetrated deeply into the international domains of political life, business, safety, communication, entertainment, the media and education" (p. 30).

The Middle East is no exception to these general global trends. The Arab countries are paying ever-increasing attention to facilitating the English learning process for individuals in their countries. The people in the Middle East need to keep moving forward and keep up to date with the world, and the most useful mechanism for doing this is English. They need to learn English in order to communicate with others from different nationalities and to access and contribute to printed and electronic information. It does not matter which accent or dialect non-native speakers learn or whether English is learned as a second or a foreign language, as long as they can communicate in English and achieve their purposes and goals as individuals and as members of the public in their community/country.

As in other countries, English is taught in Oman as a second language and is one of the requirements of educational programs at all levels of education – elementary, secondary, high school, undergraduate, and graduate. After high school, English is not only taught as a language and literature subject, but also functions as a medium of instruction in specific fields at the university level such as medicine, engineering,

sciences, agriculture, economics, and even some courses in arts and education. Thus, most students who graduate from college are considered second language speakers of English who can read and write in English. In governmental schools, students start learning English at the age of eleven and in private schools at the age of seven. Allen & Rigsbee (2000) have stated that "[p]rimary education emphasized Arabic and English, which was compulsory beginning in the fourth grade" (p. 168). Parents, who want their children to succeed academically, work hard to educate their children and teach them English so that when their children attend college, they can use the language successfully as a medium of instruction.

The Omani government and people have focused on learning the English language and making it one of the priorities in the development of Omani education. The 2020 Oman vision document from the Ministry of Development (1997) has designated the improvement of teaching/learning English in basic education as one of the nine elements for Oman's development (Rassekh, 2004). English is also used alongside Arabic in Oman. For example, all street signs, instructions on groceries, and restaurant menus are written in both English and Arabic. In addition, a large number of international employees work in Oman — in fact, these make up one-third of the population of Oman. These employees tend to use English to communicate with Omani people, whether it is their mother tongue or not. Typically, they do not learn Arabic or use their mother tongue to communicate; instead, they learn and use English in all aspects of life whether in public or private life.

English and Omani Women

As mentioned earlier, there are several reasons why people learn English. The most common are for purposes of modernization, communication, technology, publication, entertainment, and as a means to enable them to access information and to open up to the outside world. The enormous wealth enjoyed by many Arabian Gulf countries has led to a change in lifestyles and other patterns. In education, one of the ways to show high status and wealth is by using English for communication in everyday life. The ability to speak English in the Middle East often represents enhanced social class or status.

As this suggests, the English language is associated with many stereotypes and issues. Social status and levels are also associated with learning English. Wealthy people take advantage of their high status in most aspects of life whether in employment or education. Many wealthy people may have lower score on their national exams, but may still get access to higher educational opportunities and in turn develop better English skills by virtue of their class standing. Moreover, most wealthy families send their children to private schools where English is the language of interaction and communication from age seven and sometimes even younger. These children develop higher fluency and better English because they have access to extra resources for learning the language. As most wealthy people attend private schools, private institutes, travel to foreign countries, and are taught English at a very young age, by age fifteen they have become fluent in English and have become very successful ESL speakers. Whether they succeed in their academic professional life or not, they are still considered to be successful English language learners.

However, the situation is different in poor areas and among people where students depend completely on learning English at school beginning at age twelve and in less intensive contexts. Lower middle class and poor people often gain higher scores and levels in education, but have lower English fluency and less English education. Even if they succeed academically, the English level of these students is typically not as good or as successful as that of students from the wealthy classes.

Women from wealthy and high status families are highly educated and speak not only English, but often other languages as well. Sometimes, their society's traditions and expectations are not strictly enforced for these women, due to the power their high status provides them, and this in turn allows them to fully participate in all aspects of life. These women may have access to positions that were once restricted even to men (Global Connections the Middle East, 2002). However, they are still restricted in their clothing and their freedom in public, even if they have the freedom of choosing their work place and their major field of study. In contrast, poor women have fewer opportunities and they have to work harder than wealthier women in order to achieve their goals. These women sometimes have more freedom in clothing and movement, as they are less closely watched in some cases. Nevertheless, they have few choices and opportunities in the work place or in their choice of majors in higher education (Global Connections the Middle East, 2002). This contradiction pushes women of both high and low status to create a world of their own, away from society, social status, education level, and men. Both groups suffer from limitations, albeit of quite different kinds, that they feel the need to overcome. The participants for this study will be from both of these groups, some with

relatively privileged backgrounds, and others from more modest circumstances or poor families.

<div align="center">Language and Identity</div>

Language

  Language has a strong relationship with identity. Both terms, language and identity, need to be defined in this context. The term 'language' is defined as a medium of communication that a human being uses to express and communicate with the world. It consists of a set of symbols and rules that govern the forms used in this communication. People's views of the world are embedded in their language structure and language use. Sterling (2000) defined language as being "used to express role relationships between individuals" (p.1). She goes on to observe that an individual "uses language not only to express but to create a representation of himself/herself in relation to others with whom he/she is interacting" (p. 2). Language is a very important tool that represents the culture, heritage, ethnicity, values, and identity of a group and does not just serve as a means of communication (Crystal, 1997; Fishman, 1989; Hatoss, 2003; Spolsky, 1999). Crystal (2000) stated that "language is the primary index or symbol or register of identity" (p. 39). For this study, I compare two types of language: the mother/first language and the second learned language, with a focus on the written form of the second language and its affect on the learner's identity.

  There are disagreements about L1 and L2; for this study, the first or mother language (L1) is defined as the language that people learn from their parents or caretakers from the time they are born. It is the language that they have spoken and used to communicate since they were able to comprehend and communicate with the world.

Bloomfield (1933) defined L1 as the first language an individual begins to learn and speak; it is called the native language and the speaker of this first learned language is called a native speaker. The L1 is the first lens through which a person views the world to build her/his assumptions and beliefs. In this context, the Arabic language is the first language of the participants, the Omani women.

As for the second language (L2), in this study, it is defined as a language that people learn after the mother language or L1 has been largely acquired. It can be learned from school, society, or the work place, earlier or later in life. The L2 is the second lens that a person uses to view the world. In addition to alternative forms, it can provide a wider perspective and a variety of assumptions about life. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2001) defined L2 learners/users as individuals who "have both physically and symbolically crossed [a] border" (p. 74) to explore a new culture and language in which they build and/or modify their meaning schemas. This L2 can also affect how a person views her/his own L1 world. For this study, the second language of the Omani women is English. Although there are other populations where this straightforward definition of L1 and L2 would be too simplistic, that is not the case for the participants in the present study.

A concept of interest here is language transfer. As mentioned in the first chapter, the influence of one language on another was originally studied in areas such as morphology, phonology, and syntax. However, it is now widely recognized that this influence also applies to the pragmatic area. For example, when learners perform a speech act such as an apology or a request, they may 'transfer' patterns from their L1, adopt new patterns from the target culture, or develop other strategies quite distinct from either language. In doing this, the learners are building new ways for interacting socially.

Moreover, the field of contrastive rhetoric has grown up to examine the patterns that exist, and thus can be 'transferred' in each culture's (largely written) written narrative and expository practices. Since writing is a focus of the present study, this field will be covered separately in the next section.

Contrastive Rhetoric

In the 1960s, the applied linguist Kaplan (1966) developed a theory of contrastive rhetoric, which has had an important impact on teaching writing in English as a second language. Kaplan's theory explains how people's first language and culture affect their second language writing. Kaplan (1966) used text analysis to examine written essays by Chinese people from different communities. Kaplan focused on analyzing the written texts to understand how meaning was constructed, rather than focusing on the meaning of the text in order to observe language patterns that exist in specific cultures or communities. The field has developed considerably in the decades since Kaplan's original work. Connor (2002) states that contrastive rhetoric "has been influenced by new approaches. While adhering to its now well-tested premises and continuing to rely on text analysis, and while retaining its traditional pedagogical applications, contrastive rhetoric is becoming more responsive to new currents in literacy and research." (p. 506) He goes further to explain that "It [contrastive rhetoric] is embracing research situated reflexivity and is becoming more sensitive to the social context and the local situatedness and particularity of writing activity." (p. 506)

Contrastive rhetoric focuses on writing across cultures by examining similarities and differences in the structures found in texts (Connor, 2002). The underlying hypothesis for this work is that certain cultural discourse patterns are revealed though

written text. These patterns might be indicators of "reflections of different thought

patterns caused by the internal logic of a particular culture, but also by different writing

conventions learnt in a particular culture" (Ilic, B., 2004, p. 9). The field of contrastive

rhetoric has widened to focus on the social situation of writing as it is socially situated.

Scholars in this field focus on two main factors to extend, develop, and adjust their

research. These two factors are the knowledge of genres with textual requirements, and

increased writing social context awareness. Using contrastive rhetoric analyses' findings,

"researchers have suggested ways in which second language writers need to adjust to

write in English" (Panetta, 2001, p. 1). Contrastive rhetoric can be used as a valuable

resource in composition in order to help raise awareness of different writing styles and

expectations for ESL learners and their understanding of ESL students, cultural

differences, styles of writing in different cultures and languages, and resistance of writing

(Connor, 2004).

Identity

The term 'identity' is defined in this context with respect to the factors that

describe and represent an individual as a unique person. Human beings develop their

identity naturally in a changeable developmental process. Bahbaha (1994) defines

identity as being "never a priori, nor a finished product" (p. 5). This means that some or

all aspects of identity keep changing, modifying, or transforming through time and are

affected by many surrounding factors such as the social context, learned knowledge, and

life experience. These surrounding factors might change, reshape, recreate, or replace

one's established identity or form other new ones, which automatically will be shown in

the individual's behavior, attitude, or any form of communication such as written, oral, or

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sign. This supports Stedman's (1932) view of identity as he denies that identity is concrete. Hansen & Liu (1997) address a similar notion when they state that social identity is dynamic and should be examined by a dynamic methodology as well. They believe that "because the social identity is a dynamic phenomenon, it should be studied with a methodology that is dynamic both in philosophy and in practice" (p. 573).

Many definitions and distinctions have been made in studies on identity. According to the field of social science, identity consists of at least two levels. The first one is self-identity, which is related to the individual's personal characteristics, and the second one is collective identity, which is related to the individual's relationship with the outside world. Identity is defined in philosophy as the set of characteristics and qualities that make an entity different and are recognizable and definable by other entities. In social science, identity is used as a person's comprehension of one's self as a discrete and separate entity. (Identity, 2007).

Davis (1991) comments on this broad interest in the concept across disciplinary boundaries. According to Davis, identity is:

a concept that neither imprisons (as does much in psychology) nor detaches (as does much in philosophy and psychology) persons from their social and symbolic universities, [so] it has over the last years retained a generic force that few concepts in our field have. (p.105)

Grayson (2002) uses the Microsoft Word dictionary to define identity as "the set of characteristics that somebody recognizes as belonging uniquely to himself or herself and constituting his or her individual personality for life" (p. 2). He defines the verb "identify" as "to recognize somebody or something and to be able to say who or what he,

she, or it is" (p. 2). For this reason, he considers uniqueness as a crucial feature that plays an important role in developing a person's identity. He explains that "uniqueness results from combinations of various specifically identifying characteristics" (p. 3). He states that a person owns physical characteristics and possesses knowledge or skills. Identity is inherited, socially constructed, and granted by others. All these factors help in developing identity, as one factor by itself does not represent identity. In this context, inherited identity refers to the characteristics a person receives from her/ his family history. Socially constructed identity, in this context, is the identity that is built up in the context of many factors in one's social environment, such as home, school, society, and culture; it is in this category that the learning of a second language belongs. The identity granted by other people is how people view the person and identify her/him. The focus of this study will be on the participants' views of how their experience of writing in English has affected their identity, especially, their socially constructed identity that is reflected in second language writing.

Hogg and Abrams (1998) define social identity, in their Social Identity Theory, as an individual's knowledge that s/he belongs to a social group or category. A social group here is defined as "a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). Tajfel (1974) defines social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 69). He believes that identity is developed through group membership and that individuals can choose to change memberships in groups and/or belong to more than one group. Gumperz (1970,

1982) also focuses on language and social identity. He states that "social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language" (Gumperz & Cook Gumperz, 1982, p. 7). He examines the relationship between learners and their choices of linguistic categories such as syntax, morphology, and lexis, in the context of diverse social situations. Learners choose the social category in which they wish to belong and then adapt the linguistic forms appropriate to that group, keeping in mind the different varieties of language appropriate to different situations. The social identity in this context is "multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change" (Peirce, 1995, p. 9) and this change in the social identity, which is learning a second language, creates a conflict between the assumptions and cultural knowledge of L1 and L2; this conflict is reflected and shown in L2 writing.

Goffman (1963) states that the self is constructed through discourse. He focuses on personal identity as defined by the ways that people identify and view us, and not how we view ourselves. Stets and Burke (2000) agree with Goffman and believe that "one's identity is composed of the self-views that emerge from the reflective activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular groups or roles" (p. 226). This supports Hall's (1996) view that identities are constructed within discourse. Hall's phrasing of the contents of identity crucially depends on interaction, as he speaks of "what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (p. 4). He also states that identity is constructed through difference "in the process of change and transformations" (p. 4).

Goffman (1959) defines the self as " not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic

effect arising diffusely from a sense that is presented" (p. 253). Gibson (2004) elaborates on Goffman's idea, emphasizing that this view "mak[es] our language choices of paramount importance to our identity construction" (p. 4). He explains that sometimes people construct an identity extremely different from the individual's desired one due to the choices they make in communication and interaction.

In addition, Identity Theory also connects identity with the self. Stets and Burke (2000) summarize it in these words: "the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance" (p. 225). The influential philosopher John Locke (1854) defined the self as "that conscious thinking thing, (whatever substance, whether made up of spiritual, or material, simple, or compounded, it matters not) which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends" (p. 474). He felt that the self gradually appears in an aware and reflective consciousness that is presented in the body. He took the now well-known empiricist position that the mind is an "empty cabinet" and that experience by sensations and reflections are the resources that shape its development. He assumed that age plays a very important role as the "associations of ideas" that are made at a younger age form the foundation of the self. This is called identity formation, which is defined as the process of development of the characteristics and set of aspects of the person as a unique entity defined for one's self and others. Although the empiricist ideas championed by Locke have been seriously questioned, his ideas on social development fit into the work of many more recent scholars.

Erikson (1980) relates identity formation to a normative developmental process affected by personal and social factors. Isajiw (1990) emphasizes the importance of the social context and environment and its affect on shaping and forming the individuals' identity. Harris (1996) explains that "personal identities must have a social base, that identities are provided (in various ways), supplemented or negotiated, and reinforced in concrete social setting" (P. 177). Isajiw introduces two main boundaries that define identity, one from within and one from outside the individual. Hatoss (2003) discusses Isajiw's two boundaries. In commenting on the first he says, "[t]he boundary from within directs attention to the complex interaction between cultural heritage, socialization and identity, and to the importance of the past in identity formation." The second one, "the 'boundary from without,' emphasizes the necessity to incorporate in the analysis of identity the constraints imposed on the individual by the attitudinal and structural conditions of the wider society" (p. 71).

Kaspar and Noh (2001) state that Erikson's (1968-1980) theory of identity is one of the most comprehensive, as the growth of identity seen through Erikson's views is:

> [a] critical aspect of adaptive human development and the basis for successful decision making, value formation, goal-setting and coping with stress throughout life. According to Erikson, healthy identity development entails achieving a coherent self-definition, which is stable across time and place, well-regarded by significant others, and a source of purposefulness and direction in defining personal goals and values. (p. 6)

They explain that a conflict might arise between the individual's dominant values and beliefs on the one hand and their race, ethnicity, and culture on the other (Kaspar & Noh,

2001). Howard (2000) emphasizes that the term 'identity' covers the struggle of one's

defining oneself in the face of any conflict that may arise. She believes that "the concept

of identity carries the full weight of the need for a sense of who one is" (p. 367).

Conflicts that present themselves may have negative and/or positive affects on the

person's identity as a whole, on the person's life, her role, and her communication with

others. One apparent aspect of this conflict's affect on the individual is shown through

multiple identities.

Multiple Identities

The term 'multiple identities' as intended here refers neither to a psychological

disease nor an illness. In the present context, it is defined as having more than one

identity, each used for a different purpose at a different time. In the everyday sense,

individuals do participate in many 'identities,' say as mother, teacher, co-worker, or in

other life roles. Berger (2004) states that one way of viewing multiple identities is

through the analogy of the creation of a network across countries which allows learners to

be citizens of two worlds. Berger's view applies in literal form to the current study, in

that the participants in this study have presumably been faced with the need to develop

multiple identities to identify with two worlds, the English language world and the Arabic

language world.

Gibson (2004) states that the way learners perceive themselves changes with their

community or activities, is a process, which, with time, creates multiple identities within

each learner. Sometimes, a person is forced to form an identity for a specific purpose

such as learning a language in order to fit in to the roles defined by the target culture, or

to meet the expectations and be accepted by the people who claim or speak that language

(Peirce, 1997). This issue is applicable to all aspects of the learned language, including writing, whether it is learned as a second or foreign language. Writing in English as a second language may have a negative and/or positive influence on the learner's identity. Some ESL learners use English as a means of showing the other side of their identity (a new, modified, or changed side) or the other identity that was constructed for this purpose. Others cling to their original sense of belonging to their first culture and strive to emphasize their original image of themselves even when using their second language. In conducting this study, it was important for me to look for the particular ways in which my participants relate to this possibility for aligning with dual identities

Collier and Thomas's (1998) Identity Model also describes the dynamic nature of identity. They explain that an individual can have multiple identities that change with time and surrounding factors. Each such identity is used in a specific situation for a specific purpose. These identities may overlap, as there is no clear line between them. Stets and Burke (2000) assert this last point: "[y]et, although the groups, role, and person identities provide different sources of meaning, it is also likely that these different identities overlap. Sometimes they may reinforce who one is; at other times they may constrain the self" (p.234).

Xuemei (2006) supports other researchers' views on multiple identities (Goffman, 1963; Hall, 1996; Gibson, 2004) and connects the self with multiple identities. He states, "[t]here are multiple offers of identities, which contribute to the molding and transformation of self" (p. 24). Sterling (2000) believes that each individual "in a community has several groups with which s/he might want to identify at any given time" (p. 4). Saville-Troike (1989) refers to a person who has multiple identities as having a

"repertoire of social identities," stating that when an individual takes each identity it becomes "associated with a number of approximate verbal and nonverbal forms of expression" (p. 18).

Harris (1996) refers to the multiple identities with the term "cultural supermarket" (p. 207), likening the choices a speaker makes to those made by a consumer and pointing out that these choices increase with experience. I support Harris's point of view and believe that individuals change and/or modify their identity to fit in a culture, language, society, or group. In particular, I believe that when a person learns more than one language, s/he might have multiple identities. From my personal experience, I have had to form another identity in order to write and to fit into the English language community as I have experienced it; I have not continued to use the same voice and identity that I use in my first language, Arabic. Most often, for instance, English speakers value being explicit and direct; but in Arabic speaking culture, the preferred goal is to be implicit, and being direct and straight to the point is considered unprofessional and rude.

When I ask myself who I am, I feel that I cannot find the right words to describe my identity. I feel my identity is lost and/or mixed and multiple. This is related to many reasons, one of which is my experience in learning another language. Other reasons that could also be related are traveling, being exposed to the different Omani and Iraqi cultures, and my experience in the USA as a masters and PhD student. Again, my participants have experienced quite diverse inputs to their current sense of their multiple identities, and this was kept in mind in the course of my study.

As stated above, having multiple identities may have either a negative or a positive impact on individuals. The advantages include being able to identify with

different people, roles, and groups to achieve personal and professional goals, being able to gain insights into different cultures in order to develop wider perspectives, and being able to play and perform different roles to serve different purposes. Sillince, Mueller, Harvey and Howorth (2003) summarize the possible advantages of having multiple identities as enhancing learning capacity, maintaining the potential for future deployment, increasing response flexibility, and meeting exterior stakeholders' multiple expectations.

However, some of the most common disadvantages of having multiple identities include the following: losing the main and most important aspect of identity, which is its uniqueness; the rejection of the old identity; the formation of a new identity that might be unacceptable in a specific society; and confusion between the old beliefs and characteristics and the newly formed ones. Rodriguez (1982) points out that tensions and uneasiness can result from the experience of belonging to two identities more in the context of different cultures.

The Relationship between Language and Identity

Many studies have been conducted on the issue of identity and language and the relationship that exists between them. Many researchers such as Adger (1998), Bucholtz (1999), Fordham (1998), and Toohey (2000) have explored the use of language for constructing identity in education.

In 1836, Humboldt saw identity as being shaped by a person's worldview, and the person's worldview as being shaped by the language s/he speaks (Humboldt, as cited in Slobin, 1996). The language people speak is constructed by their identity and their identity is formed by the language they speak. Identity is personal and social, just as language is both constructed socially and linguistically.

Gibson (2004) believes that "[l]anguage is a central feature of human identity" (Para. 3). People cannot separate their language from their identity or their culture from their society. Language is not only a means of communication, but also a means of expression for human beings (Fishman, 1989; Spolsky, 1999; Crystal, 1997). Language plays an important role in constructing identity. The way people speak represents who they are, their educational level, culture, tradition, gender, and age. Language is the mix, result, and outcome of the internal and external interpretations of identity (Gibson, 2004). Spolsky (1999) explains that identity and language cannot be separated, as language is associated with and represents identity. Norton (1995) summarizes the relationship between identity and language as both being dynamic and not as a fixed notion depending on the time and place.

In addition, environment and social contexts affect people's identities and reform them; in particular, it has been recognized that language learning plays an important role here. Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) claim that second language learning reproduces linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge. In a similar vein, Kanno (2003) believes that communication, interaction, and surrounding context an individual experiences are important factors that shape her/his identity. For her, identity means "our sense of who we are and our relationship to the world. Many aspects of our 'selves' contribute to our understanding of who we are: race, gender, class, occupation, sexual orientation, age, among others" (p. 3). Kim (2003) also believes that the second language learning process is "a complex interplay of many variables in which social roles, relationships, power relations, and identities are constantly reconstituted" (p. 137). This supports Pavlenko's (2002) view that learning occurs through social interactions of individuals in the world.

As social context plays a very important role in learning the second language (Peirce, 1995), the social context and surroundings form individuals' identities and shape them. Therefore, the relationships between identity, social context, and second language learning are interlinked and connected as they affect and reconstruct each other.

Many studies such as those done by Mckay and Wong (1996), Pierce (1995), and Lantolf and Pavlenko (1995) address second language learning and identity. These researchers believe that second language learning and identity are interrelated and linked. Learning English as a second language is considered a change in the social context. When individuals acquire a second language, they learn the cultural knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, and social values associated with the learned language, which is the English language in the context of the present study. This supports Agar's (1994) view that language and culture are intertwined; in fact, Agar invented a specific term called *languaculture* to show that the terms should be joined and should not be isolated.

Many other researchers support the idea of language learning and culture as being interlinked, including Garret and Baquedano-Lopez (2002), Kanno (2003), Schieffelin and Ochs (1986), and Watson (2004). Watson (2004) explains, "[l]anguage learning and enculturation are part of the same process" (p. 339). Kanno (2003) explains that an individual's identity is directly connected to her/his language and culture. She believes by learning a second language individuals become bilingual and bicultural stating, "bilingual individuals position themselves between two languages and two (or more) cultures, and how they incorporate these languages and cultures into their sense of who they are" (p. 3). Hakute (1986) defined Bilingual person as a person who handles with two languages in "a delicate pattern of coexistence, cooperation, and competition" (p. 3). Bicultural

person is a person who relate to two distinct cultures, and recognizes the differences and similarities between them (Pedersen, 1999), in this context the two culture are the English culture and the Arabic culture.

In a similar vein, Garret and Baquedano-Lopez (2002) connect language with social context; they see language as "the primary symbolic medium through which cultural knowledge is communicated and instantiated, negotiated and contested, reproduced and transformed" (p. 339). Thus, second language learners add information and knowledge to their beliefs, views, and perceptions that differ from their previous views. Second language learners start to develop new identities, or aspects to their identity, when they learn the second language. The learned language and its culture affect these new and/or modified identity/identities (Peirce, 1997). Therefore, learning a second language is considered a change in social identity, because the main reason for learning the L2 is to interact or communicate with the outside world for different goals and purposes. This change in social identity in turn affects personal identity and the characteristics of an individual. The main focus of this study is the effect of second language learning on both social and personal identity for Omani female L2 learners, with a focus on writing.

Summarizing the above discussion, a learner when learning an L2 views the world through a new or second lens, which gives her/him a bigger picture of the cultural knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs associated with the L2. Therefore, L2 learners' meaning schemas are affected and/or modified. The learners' meaning schemas are defined in this context as the beliefs, views, perspectives, and attitudes that learners might change in critical reflection from their life and learning experiences (Mezirow, 1991).

ESLW helps in expressing and/or changing the meaning schemas of the learners including beliefs, attitudes, etc. (Salem, 2005).

As pointed out earlier, the changes that result can be disorienting. Gudykunst and Kim, (1997) speak of the resulting conflict as one that can possibly "shake our self-concept and cultural identity and bring the anxiety of temporary rootlessness" (p. 357).

Related Research

Minimal research has been done on the issue of second language writing, identity, and Middle Eastern women in general, and none has been conducted concerning Omani women specifically. However, there are two studies related to the theme of this dissertation. These are *Conversations with Arab Graduate Students of English About Literacy: The Construction of Identity* by Jan (2006) and *The Impact of the Internet on Saudi Arabian EFL Females' Self–Image and Social Attitudes* by Al-Salem.

Jan (2006) in her dissertation, *Conversations with Arab Graduate Students of English about Literacy: The Construction of Identity,* discusses identity and its construction in Arab students through their literacy in Arabic and English. Jan explores the construction of identity using qualitative methods and taking into account the collective aspects that her participants shared such as gender, country, and that of the learner. She defines identity as "multidimensional, including aspects of race, class, gender, nationality, education, profession, beliefs, etc" (p. iv). In her study, she uses the term identity "to signify the participants' selves in the literacy stories that they tell through my interviews with them" (p. 1). She connects identity with the importance of story in defining a self. She states that literacy, to the participants, includes their way of thinking, relating, feeling, and living, not only their skills in reading and writing. She

studied the participants' identities by using oral interviews to collect her data. Her participants were ten Arab graduate students of English from six nationalities: Saudi, Moroccan, Egyptian, Jordanian, Palestinian Jordanian, and Palestinian American. Jan concludes her dissertation by providing suggestions for the development of literate identities in Arab education. Suggestions include studying, applying, and engaging in literacy activities.

Jan's topic is similar to that of the present study; however, this study differs in that it is focused on a relatively homogeneous group with shared gender and culture, and it explores the identity of women after it has already been constructed, rather than while it is in the early stages. Taking these differences into account this study can be seen as a continuation of Jan's work.

The other dissertation that explored identity, ESL Middle Eastern females, and their self-image and social attitudes was conducted by Al-Salem. His study, *The Impact of the Internet on Saudi Arabian EFL Females' Self–Image and Social Attitudes,* discusses the:

> Saudi EFL females' self-image, their developing perception of their environment, and their changing social attitudes as a result of using the Internet, mainly the effect of the online interaction; a second, related goal was to determine whether, and in what ways, the internet facilitated perceptive transformation. (p. iv)

Al-Salem examined how Saudi female college students perceive their identities, prior beliefs, and culture after the change that occurred with the introduction of the Internet in Saudi Arabia. Al-Salem interviewed nine female college students majoring in English who were members of the Online Writing Collaborative Project (OWCP). His interviews

were conducted through asynchronous email and he also analyzed documents from the OWCP written by the participants.

The results of Al-Salem's dissertation reveal that the Internet influenced the women in many different ways. He states that "[t]he participants reported that their Internet experience has broadened their knowledge as well as improved their writing skills" (p. v). Al-Salem concludes:

> The Internet has also provided these students with an easy access to much information that was not available to them before; this rich source of varied information available online has helped them explore the world, see things differently, transcend the limitations of their previous perceptions. (p. v)

Al-Salem's dissertation provides a good picture of how one small group of Middle Eastern women's identities were affected by their online experiences using English as a second language.

<div align="center">Translation and/or Transformation</div>

Transformation and translation are two important issues that should be explored as related to this study. One aim of this study is to examine whether Omani women 'translate' their meaning schemas and perspectives from their L1 to L2 when they write in English by keeping the conservative assumptions associated with their L1, Arabic. On the other hand, do they' transform' some of the meaning schemas (i.e. modify or change them) in ways that show up when they write in English? Translation and transformation are two skills and methods that are used by most second language speakers when they learn a second language and/or use it. Translation is different from transformation.

The term 'translation' assumes that languages have a similar finite collection of meanings, but are expressed through different words and symbols. Translation is the process where the meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, or text in one language is interpreted into another language that carries the same meaning and message. Not all languages or words in a language have the same exact word-to-word translation in another language; therefore, to express meaning in another language is not a direct mechanical process, and the message cannot be mapped directly.

However, many aspects of translation must be taken into consideration such as context, grammars, roles, and idioms. There are two types of translation. The first one is the literary, also called metaphase, in which word-to-word method is used in coding and decoding. The second one is the context translation, also called paraphrase; the message carries exactly the same meaning, but maybe some different words are used.

Fidelity and transparency are two important qualities in translation. Fidelity means honest and faithful. Thus, the translation renders the source into another language without adding or subtracting anything from it. As for transparency, it is the degree that the translation appears to the native speaker of the translated to language, as to have initially been written in that language. When a person focuses on one of these, the other one might be affected as well. D'Ablancourt, a French translator from the 17th century, described translation as being as faithful or beautiful as women (Williams, 1973). He compared translation to women, as it is honest with the literal fidelity or transparency.

In second language learning, Campbell (1998) explains that translation is the product of the language learning process presented in interlanguage frame and translation skills and knowledge should be evaluated by the level of the learners' interlanguage. He

believes that people's specific skills allow them to translate from one language to another and their skills judge the level of their translation. He identifies the main difficulty in translating being the production of a natural sounding text that preserves the cultural context flavor associated with the language.

The term transformation in this context is defined as the carried assumptions, beliefs, culture, and attitudes that were learned with the second language and transferred to L1. As stated above, when learners learn a L2, they learn some of the associated assumptions with the learned language. Heath (1983) explains that "all language learning is culture learning" (p.5). Therefore, sometimes, the learners learn new beliefs and assumptions other than their old ones. Thus, they transform this new learned knowledge from L2 to L1.

Perspective Transformation

The term 'perspective transformation' has been used to describe the changes in L2 learners' behaviors, attitudes, writings, and assumptions when they learn English; they transform the learned knowledge and experience from the learned language L2 to L1. Perspective transfer is the shift of the process by which the learners change and modify their self-perceptions and views on different issues (Malone & Jones, 2002). There are many reasons behind this shift when one is learning a second language and learning the culture, values, and knowledge associated with it. Mezirow (1978) defines perspective transformation as "the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world" (p.167). Eyler and Giles (1999) define it as "seeing issues in a new way" (p.171).

They report that there are three most common essential elements found in perspective transformation: critical reflection, experience, and rational discourse.

In the course of perspective transformation, learners develop new meaning schemas from their lives and learning experiences. Many studies have been conducted and have shown evidence of the occurrence of perspective transformation such as those done by Malone, D. and Jones B. (2002), Mezirow (1978), King (1998), and LaCava (2002). Before they learn a second language, second language learners are used to looking at the world through one lens. However, by learning a second language, they begin to look at the world through two lenses gaining a larger understanding and perception of it. This supports Eyler and Giles's (1999) view that learning a L2 provides the learner with the ability to "[see] issues in a new way" (p. 171). It could be a negative or positive transfer from the learned language L2 to L1. All these affected aspects through learning a second language affect the learners' identity/identities and their formations, which might be shown in L2 writing.

At the end of this chapter, I should mention that ethical and religious issues were taken into consideration while conducting this study. As explained above, language is associated with many cultural norms, constraints, stereotypes, and meaning schemas. Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) state that "social conflict during the last decades has increasingly come to be characterized as ethnic, class or religious conflict" (p.2). Therefore, all these factors play an important role in both the formation of these Omani women's personal and social identities and their writings in L2. In this chapter, I presented an in-depth review of literature and studies related to Omani women, identity/s, English and writing in English as a second language, in addition to other issues related to

this study. In following chapter, I present description and explanation of the methodology that is used for the present study. I discuss the research design of the study, including the participants and their characteristics, the setting, data collection instruments, the choice of documents, the data analysis methods, and issues regarding the validity of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This dissertation explores the extent and the ways Omani Muslim women's identity is affected when writing in English as a second language. It seeks to gain insight into the relationship between these women's identity and writing in ESL, especially as they perceive it through their own experience. This study adheres to a qualitative approach in order to seek answers for the research questions. As noted in previous chapters, this is the first study that investigates specifically Omani Muslim women's identity and writing in English as a second language.

In chapter two, I presented an in-depth review of literature and studies related to Omani women, their status, and their identity/identities and second language writing. In this chapter, I explain the research methodology used to conduct this study, including the overall design and the procedures involved. I first explore the importance of qualitative research and how it is used in this context. I then provide detailed information about the setting and participants involved in the study and the data collection methods. Finally, I describe the methods used for the data analysis. I conclude with exploring the validity of the study and related ethical issues.

Qualitative Research

Denzin & Lincoln (1994) defined qualitative research as "multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers tend to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 2).

They stated that qualitative research is multi-perspective and seeks to describe, interpret, and reconstruct social interactions. Lofland and Lofland (1984) defined qualitative research on a more basic level, as involving methods that are not quantitative.

Anderson (1990) also spoke of qualitative research as a form of inquiry that examines a phenomenon in its natural settings. Cresswell (1994) defined it as a "process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (p.15). Cresswell went on to say, "[t]he researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15).

The unique aspect of qualitative research is its exploratory nature; it focuses on quality and not quantity, on the *why* and *how*; it seeks in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons behind it (Yin 2003). Qualitative research is subjective and descriptive; its goal is to collect, analyze, and interpret data through observation of people's behavior and actions in the environment.

Qualitative research has four important characteristics: the search for meanings from the inside; the direct contact with the objects/participants; the analytic induction process, in which theoretical notions emerge from careful study of cases; and the focus on process more than on outcome or results (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1988; Oka & Shaw, 2000). These properties make this approach ideal for my study. Qualitative research has helped me in developing explanations, identifying unanticipated phenomena, generating results and theories, conducting formative evaluations, and engaging in collaborative research (Maxwell, 2005).

Qualitative research has disadvantages as well. These include the limited scope of a qualitative study, the difficulty of avoiding researcher-induced bias, and the subjectivity that leads to difficulties setting up the validity and reliability thresholds. For this study, I have tried to grasp the advantages, while minimizing the disadvantages and their effect on the study.

Denzin & Lincoln (1994) summarized the process of qualitative research as "the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials case study, personal experience, introspective, life story interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives" (p. 2). For this study, two main methods were used to collect the data: open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews, which will be discussed in details later. Document analysis and observation were also used to a limited extent as further support for the study. I also kept extensive field notes and a research journal. The results were analyzed using qualitative and descriptive methods, and conclusions were drawn from this analysis.

I, the researcher, have played an active role in this study. Erlandson et al (1993) summarized the role of the researcher; they stated that the researcher is involved in a process of "observing, recording, analyzing, reflecting, dialoguing, and rethinking" (p. 4). I have explored the research questions and issues from an 'emic' perspective, as I am a member of this gender group. In my personal experience as a second language speaker of English, I have identity issues and struggles when I write in English. I always feel that I am using my other self or identity, as if I am someone else, when writing in English. I wanted to know if other Omani women feel the same way as I do, while exploring how

they experienced these two ways of being and functioning. In doing so, I determined the following: how and to what extent their experiences were related to mine; and if different, how they felt toward writing in English, how they perceived issues such as freedom when they write in English, as compared with when they write in Arabic. It is important to keep in mind that I share the same language, culture, beliefs, and meaning schemas with these women, as I am originally from the Middle East, and I have lived in Oman since I was nine years old. Naturally, I have approached this topic with feelings and perceptions of my own that helped me in understanding the participants' responses. However, I have been careful not to let my perspective and voice lead me to exclude or distort the participants' views and responses.

The Research Design

As mentioned above, a qualitative design is used for this study. As I see it, the dissertation involves "an ongoing process that involves "tacking" back and forth between the different components of the design, assessing the implications of goals, theories, research questions, methods, and validity threats for one another" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 3). The design of the study is very important, as Maxwell (2005) illustrated with the analogy of the term as used in a clothing catalog:

> It starts with design … we carefully consider every detail, including the cut of the clothing, what style of stitching works best with the fabric, and what kind of closures make the most sense—in short everything that contributes to your comfort (p. 2).

Likewise, the design of a qualitative study is a constant process that develops itself based on the procedure and interaction of the components of the study. In the following

sections, I outline the setting, participants, data collection instruments, and methods of analysis that formed the basic design for the present study.

The Setting

The study has been conducted in Muscat, the Sultanate of Oman, in the Middle East. I have chosen the Sultanate of Oman to conduct my study for three main reasons: first among these is my own personal experience. I was raised and learned English in Oman. This gives me the opportunity to discuss and explore the research questions as an individual who belongs to the community and has common shared perspectives with the participants. I am a part of this society, as I live there and I have had the opportunity to see the Omani culture as an insider. Still, having lived outside the country for a period of time while pursuing my studies, I am able to see Oman in a different way now, as I returned to collect the data. This experience modified my view and allowed me to take an outsider's perspective as well as the insider's perspective. By looking at the subject matter through two lenses, I was able to reach a deeper and richer understanding of the situation.

As explained in Chapter 1, a second reason for my choice involves the nature of Omani society. Oman represents a middle ground regarding the interaction between religious beliefs, the rule of law, and societal norms, as compared to other Middle Eastern countries. The third and final reason is that relatively few female students from Oman go and study abroad in foreign countries such as Canada, United States, and United Kingdom as compared with other Gulf countries.

As I mentioned in chapter two, in Oman, there is only one public university, the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). This institution is considered the best place for

education and employment in Oman. Thus, many people with degrees in higher education and strong qualifications work at SQU. SQU hires the best of the best educators, professors, employees. Therefore, most of the employees in departments such as English, medicine, engineering, and science at SQU speak English fluently. Other employees, for instance, in departments such as the Arabic language department, can understand English. Thus, it was easier to find the required participants in SQU, though not all participants were drawn from this population.

At SQU, women constantly interact and communicate with men in their daily activities and work, but in a manner, that respects the local culture and traditions. Men wear their traditional costume, the *dishdasha* [3] and women wear the *abaya*, a black garment that covers the whole body from the neck down to the feet (Osborne, 1977; Wikan, 1982). Both genders are treated equally in terms of work opportunities at SQU; however, the percentage of male employees is higher than that for female. There are no official figures regarding the percentage of female to male employees at SQU, but it is estimated that the percentage of male employees is 68 in comparison to females' percentage which is 32 (Abdelraheem & Almusawi, 2003).

The Participants

The participants for the study were Omani Muslim women who have earned Master's degrees from English-speaking countries in a variety of disciplines, and who have then returned home after completing their studies to undertake professional jobs in Oman. The women have been in professional life for at least two years. These women have experience abroad interacting with different cultures, as well as trying to make

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[3] Dishdasha: is a white piece of cloth men wear; it covers all their bodies from the neck to the ankle with long sleeves similar to robes (Wikan, 1982; Osborne, 1977).

adjustments to the mainstream Omani culture in their professional lives. I have chosen

this group specifically because these women have traveled and experienced a culture

different from their Omani one, which has presumably affected their identity formation in

connection with their learning and using English. In addition, I have chosen my

participants to share the same country, gender, and similar levels of education. In

combination, these factors have helped me to gain more accurate and significant results

and a clear focus for the study.

The participants, as mentioned above, are non-native speakers of English (NNS). I

have dealt with participants who speak only two languages, Arabic as L1 and English as

L2. By choosing participants who speak only two languages, there is not a third language

with its culture affecting their meaning schemas. All of the participants are able to speak,

comprehend, and communicate in English, and use it in their fields of work, for instance

teaching and publishing in English. Some of the participants have native-like fluency

with English, as they use it at work to communicate with their coworkers and students, as

well as in personal life to communicate with domestic workers in their homes. Others do

not have native-like fluency, but they use English in their work on a regular basis.

The participants have been drawn from a variety of locations such as SQU,

private colleges, and institutes, as teachers, instructors, or educators, and have graduated

with Master's degrees from foreign countries such as Canada, United States and United

Kingdom. The participant's ages ranged from 26 to 50 years, were from various social

classes, have been exposed to different cultures, and have traveled to foreign country/s.

They are regarded as educated women who play important roles in the Omani society and

its development.

It was difficult to find qualified participants. As mentioned above, the percentage of Omani women who study abroad is lower as compared to some other countries. At the beginning of the study, I tried to look for a large group of participants, approximately forty participants to work with a general group. An initial questionnaire was designed for this general group to investigate how their identity is formed and shaped by writing in English as a second language, and what their views are about writing in English as a second language. Based on the analysis and results generated from the answers provided by the general group, a more specific set of open-ended questionnaire and interview questions were supposed to be designed to address the viewpoints of a smaller focus group of participants.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to find a larger group of women who agree to participate in the beginning stage of my study. Therefore, the initial questionnaire for the general group was omitted and I worked only with a focus group of eight participants. A more in depth open-ended questionnaire was designed for the focus group and based on their answers, the individual interview questions were generated, along with the main research questions.

I contacted the participants and explained to them the goals and objectives of the study. I explained that their participation is voluntary and assured them that they may decline, limit, or withdraw their participation at any time, and that their identity and their activities related to the study remain confidential. In addition, I informed them that their participation does not place any risks or have any negative affects on their careers, and that pseudonyms are used in the study in replacement of their names.

Two copies of the informed consent form that contains the details mentioned above were distributed to the participants, one copy to be held by the participant and a signed copy to be returned to me, the researcher. The number of participants who responded was small, but the main goal of this study is to gain a deep understanding of the relationship between these women regarding their writing in the English language, and its affect on their identity. The main concern is not to generalize the results to a larger population, but to gain insight and understand the subject matter.

Data Collection Methods

Two qualitative methods have been used for this study: open-ended questionnaires and individual in-depth interviews.

Open-Ended Questionnaire

The first step used to collect the data was a detailed open-ended questionnaire. Questionnaires are one of the most commonly used methods for both quantitative and qualitative research. For this study, there are many reasons for using the open-ended questionnaire as a first step in the research methodology; the aim of the questionnaire here is not to gather numerical data, as in quantitative research, but to document the participants' answers to open ended questions. Based on their answers, additional focused and follow-up questions for the interviews were formulated in addition to the tentative set of initial interview questions I have prepared.

There were many considerations kept in mind when designing a questionnaire. First, clarity is an important goal that I have focused on while designing the questionnaire for this study. I have tried to make sure the language used is clear with simple and understandable words minus any technical terms, in order to try to avoid double

meanings and wrongful interpretations by the participants regarding the questions involved. The questionnaire is numbered and written in both languages, Arabic and English. It is organized in a logical and sequential format, and written in such a manner that ideally, one answer or question does not influence or affect the other questions or the participants' answers.

Secondly, I have paid attention to explaining: the questions used were explained and translated to Arabic. Explaining the questions means providing a clear meaning for the questions to the participants. Moreover, I have tried to avoid using ambiguous wording. None of the questions was written in such a manner that it might lead the participants toward a particular answer. I have tried to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' opinions without my voice and free of any biased opinions. The participants were asked to provide their own answers and perspectives with no influence provided from me or from the form of the questions, I have prepared.

The questionnaire consists of three sections; the first part concerns background/demographic and basic questions. The second part lists open-ended unstructured and unprompted questions, where the participants were asked to provide their opinions. In the last part, the participants were asked to write a short perspective about their feelings toward writing in general, and writing in English as a second language, including any stories about important experiences they have had with writing.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Questionnaire

There are advantages and disadvantages associated with the questionnaire as a qualitative method for collecting data. Usually, questionnaires are considered as a quantitative method for collecting data; however, open-ended descriptive questionnaires

like the one I have developed for this study can be used in qualitative studies as well. Some of the obvious advantages of using the kind of open-ended questionnaire I have devised for the present study are as follows: (1) it provides varied and true data, as the participants document their opinions in their own words; (2) this type of questionnaire allows the participants to freely express their opinions without feeling embarrassed or pretending to be someone else, and without feeling that they have been burdened with a more extensive involvement in the study.

Some general disadvantages of questionnaires are as follows: it is open to the influence of the researcher's perspective and voice, as s/he is the interpreter of the data; it consumes time, effort, and money for the researcher. Moreover, the researcher cannot perform statistical analysis on all answers because each questionnaire has to be read individually. I will strive to overcome these disadvantages or any other ones that might arise.

Interviews

Interviewing is one of the most common qualitative research methods, and is a major source of data used by researchers to understand the reality of individuals and their actions in particular situations (Fontana & Frey, 1998). Marshall & Rossman, (1995) defined the interview in very basic terms as communication between two people or more on an agreed subject matter. Interviews are the product of the interaction between the interviewees/ participants and the interviewer/ researcher. The interview is an effective method used to gain insight into the participants' opinions and perspectives with thick descriptions (Maxwell, 1996 Patton, 1990).

According to Erlandson et al (1993), the interview provides the researcher with the ability to "understand and put it [interviews] into a larger context - the interpersonal, social, and cultural aspects of the environment" (p. 85). I have used the interview as a method to gain deep and rich data. Through interviews, participants "are encouraged to begin to look at 'reality' differently, that is more critically" (Maguire, 1987, p. 134). In order for the researcher to develop good interview questions, Maxwell (2005) stresses that the researcher must bring "creativity and insight" (p. 92) to the process, rather than simply trying to "translate" her research questions into language for interaction with her participants. Creativity, insight, understanding, and practicality are important aspects that were kept in mind when designing, using and modifying the interview questions for this study.

For this study, the interviews have been conducted in a one-on-one interchange. The interviews were recorded via audio tape, accompanied with note taking. After being recorded by a Radio Shack voice cassette recorder, the interviews were transcribed in order to have the exact record of the participants' words and opinions. The aim of open-ended interviews is to gain a thick description of thought, deep, and rich data from reality that is reflected on the participants' answers.

In the course of the interview, I asked the participants questions that were developed from their answers to the questionnaire about their experience regarding how their identity is formed or affected when writing in L2. In the interview, I encouraged them to elaborate on their experiences and views in much greater depth and detail than was possible in the questionnaire. Each participant was interviewed individually twice to document her perspectives and answers. In the course of the interviews, I observed their,

tone of voice, gestures and posture, hesitations and other non-linguistic features of their responses; I took notes on my impressions of these factors immediately after each interview.

As with the questionnaire, the language used for the interviews was straightforward, and I avoided using technical terms or jargon. I used both L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English) to communicate with the participants, and I asked them to use whichever language they felt more comfortable in expressing their opinions and feelings, and I invited them to switch languages freely whenever they wished. In the course of the interview, I answered any questions the participants had. Also, I communicated with the participants in a friendly and respectful manner.

An important goal in the interviews was to gather bias-free data that holds the participants' opinions. Maguire (1987) believes that in participatory research "the researcher might not 'put ideas' in someone's head, but the researcher certainly encourages people to reflect on parts of their lives that they might not ordinarily question or pay attention to" (p. 134). I was a listener and communicator with the participants, without putting words in their mouths or forcing my beliefs onto them.

Group Interview

At the beginning of my study, I wanted to conduct one final group interview with all of the participants. The group interview is a powerful resource of information to evaluate and/or test new ideas. Kreuger (1988) summarized the purpose of group interview as it "is to obtain information of a qualitative nature from a predetermined and limited number of people" (p.26). The group interview offers the researcher with the opportunity to further investigate, solve problems, and collect data that have not been

gathered by other methods (Cunningham, 1993). I tried to set a time that best work for all

of the participants to meet and discuss the main issues and topics related to the present

study. This depended on many issues such as the participants' availability to assemble,

and the participants' permission to have an open group discussion. Given this, I identified

my major goals of this interview which is to gather additional and in depth data in a

manner to promote validity.

Unfortunately, I could not conduct the group interview because of the

unavailability of the participants' to assemble at one specific time due to summer

vacation. Most of the participants have responsibilities and children, and it was hard for

all of the participants to be available at the same time.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviews

There are advantages and disadvantage of interviews as a data collection tool. The

advantages are as follows: they allow the researcher to gather in-depth, rich, detailed, and

varied data, and any misunderstanding or ambiguity in questions can be cleared up by

negotiation during the interview; therefore, the resulting data are accurate. Interviews

also allow the researcher to observe the participants' gestures, reactions, and voice while

being interviewed, which helps the researcher in analyzing the data and provides her/him

with an in-depth view of the reality.

One disadvantage of interviews involves the difficulty in finding a convenient

time to meet with the participants for both the researcher and the participants. In addition,

it is hard for the researcher to control and eliminate her own reactions to certain issues

and perspectives while conducting the interview.

Personal Journal

In addition to the Questionnaire and interviews, I also have kept a research journal where I documented all my observations and notes while conducting this study. In it, I documented my feelings, perspective, and opinions. I wrote both follow-up questions and issues on which I needed clarification from the participants. In my journal, I also made notes on the relationship between the previous literature and my notes and observations on the accumulated data from this study.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I analyzed the data. Hlatywayo (2006) spoke of this process, saying that "[d]ata analysis is the process of selecting, sorting, sharpening, focusing and discarding" (p. 8). Data analysis is the process of examining the collected data by listening, reading, observing, categorizing, and understanding to identify themes and reach conclusions.

Global description was used as the method of analysis for this study, and applied to both the questionnaire and the interview data. Global description involves producing a broad description to reach behind what the participants say by describing their understanding and what they meant (Hanauer, 2006). This method provides assistance when studying the data in depth, analyzing, and interpreting the participants' answers. I strived to read behind what the participants have said in order to understand how they perceived their identity/identities and how they related these understandings to their writing in their second language. The results and conclusions were drawn from description and interpretation of the data.

Before analyzing the data, I carefully read the data and my journal to capture all the notes and observations contained in it. To analyze the data, I reread my notes, the questionnaires, and the transcribed interviews. I used coding to analyze and sort the data into themes and categories. Coding is presenting the data after gathering it in new ways by breaking it down and conceptualizing it (Strauss and Corbin, 1995). According to Strauss & Corbin (1998), coding is "a dynamic and fluid process" (p. 101). Flick (2006) defined coding as "representing the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways" (p. 296). In qualitative research, coding is used as the main categorizing strategy; it is used not to generate frequency counts, but rather to break down and understand the data "to attach and develop categories and put them into an order in the course of time" (Flick, 2006, p. 300; Strauss, 1987). Maxwell summarized coding in these words: "the goal of coding is not to count things, but to "fracture' the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96).

I started the process of interpreting the data by using open coding, followed by axial coding; I moved further to include selective coding, and ended the interpretations by looking at the data collectively. The aim of open coding is to express the data and phenomena in the form of concepts (Flick, 2006); it is "the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). Axial coding is to "refine and differentiate the categories resulting from open coding" (Flick, 2006, p. 301); it is "the process of relating categories to their subcategories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). In selective coding,

the aim is to continue the axial coding "at a higher level of abstraction" and elaborate on the development and integration in comparison to other groups and categories (Flick, 2006, p. 302); it is "the process of integrating and refining the theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143).

To label the codes, I have used words, phrases, and sentences borrowed form the literature review, the research questions, and the interviewees' expressions. After coding the data, I categorized and grouped the codes around themes and matched the questions with the identified themes. For some of the participants' responses that did not fit in or under the more frequent categories, the responses were organized under a separate category called 'other.' These categories were discussed according to their importance or relevance to the research questions. I interpreted the collected data, which is the main resource for the findings of the study, as emphasized by Flick (2006), "the interpretation of the data is the core of the empirical procedure. The interpretation of texts serves to develop the theory as well as the foundation for collecting additional data and for deciding which case to select next" (p. 295).

After reading, coding, and analyzing the data, I have used global description to find explanations, interpretations, and alternatives for the data. I have looked for meanings, beliefs, voices, and statements in the data. By analyzing the data, I reach conclusions, form a foundation for my findings, and answer the main research questions addressing the extent and the ways Omani Muslim women's identity is affected when writing in English as a second language. By doing so, I gain insight into the relationship between these women's identities and writing in ESL.

For each participant, there is a folder, saved in both hard copy and electronic form and identified by the participant's pseudonym that contains all the data, information, and observation relevant to that participant. The hard copy of this folder is kept in a safe place where only I have access to it; the electronic copy is kept on the hard drive of my laptop computer, which again is kept in a safe place and is available only to me.

Validity

Validity is one of the most important aspects of a study; if the study is not valid then it is not worth conducting. Validity here is defined as "the correctness or credibility of description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (Maxwell, 2005, p.106). Maxwell (2005) believes that validity "does not imply the existence of any 'objective truth' to which an account can be compared" (p. 106). This means objective truth is not essential, particularly with qualitative research. Validity is the level of the accurateness and truthfulness of a study in presenting the results based on the data (Seal, 1998). According to Thakhathi (2001), validity is the agreement between the research, the real experiences, and the world accomplished by using standards.

Fred Hess spoke of validity in qualitative research; for Hess, validity "is not the result of indifference, but of integrity (personal communication)" (cited in Maxwell, 2005, p. 108). There are two essential threats of validity. First, there is a danger that the researcher may select data that fits her own existing ideas or preconceptions. Second, the researcher may favor data that "stand out" to her (Maxwell, 2005; Shweder, 1980). It is very important for the study to be valid to eliminate these two threats and present all the issues raised in the data in as open-minded fashion as possible.

To achieve valid data, I have focused on the process of data collection instead of providing my input, while obtaining as much data as possible from the participants. I have also carefully observed the participants while the data were being collected during the interviews. In my conclusions, I provide all the gathered data with pieces of the participants' responses including unexpected data and/or data that do not conform to my own ideas. Thus, the study is as free of bias as possible. I was looking at this study through both an emic perspective (insider's eye) and an etic perspective (outsider's eye) as well.

Researcher's Bias

I, the researcher, have my own personal experience and perspective about the subject matter of the study. I have my own "experiential data" which Maxwell (2005) defined as "the researcher's technical knowledge, research background, and personal experiences" (p. 38); this is, what I bring to the research, and it defines my own subjectivity. Maxwell (2005) defined bias as "something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than a valuable component of it" (p. 37). However, he goes on to concede that "separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 38). Thus, the researcher's own experiential data can be used as an important resource provided; it is used in a way that does not influence or distort the participants' opinions and perspectives.

I believe that my identity has been affected by learning the English language as an L2. I feel my identity is multiple and mixed, and that different aspects of my identity show up when I write in Arabic and English. For instance, I can express myself openly

and freely on certain controversial cultural issues when I write in L2. Given the strength of my own feelings in this area, it is very hard to completely eliminate my bias and my beliefs in when interpreting the data. However, I was aware of not imposing my bias and strived to put my own opinions aside when working with the data to reach accurate conclusions. My research journal served as one important forum in which I reflected on this process.

Triangulation

To achieve validity and eliminate researcher's bias, triangulation is used. Triangulation is "collection information using a variety of sources and methods" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 93). It is a method used to deal with the threats to validity. Triangulation allows the researcher to gain deep, rich, secure, and broad understanding of the subject matter. It helps reduce the danger that a study's conclusions might only reflect the systematic researcher's biases (Maxwell, 2005), or might be one-sided due to the influence of one particular data collection instrument.

For this study, I used multiple resources for collecting the data to achieve its validity and eliminate my own bias. I used open-ended questionnaires, unstructured and individual interviews, and my personal journal. Finally, I connected the research literature with the data I have collected. By using these many various sources for gathering the data, I achieved validity and reached credible and trustworthy conclusions.

Ethical Issues

In qualitative research, ethical issues are accredited as essential for the study and "ethical concerns should be involved in every aspect of design" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 7). According to Schreuder & Theron (1997), ethical issues are concerned with morality,

values, and the possibility of physical, social, and verbal harm. In this study, I took every precaution to see that no harm of any type was inflicted on the participants. I made sure that the participants were not pressed to share any information or stories that they felt were too personal or too emotional.

Prior to the participants' agreement to be a part of this study, they were informed of their rights and they received a description of the study that outlines the procedures to be followed and their responsibilities. After that, they were asked to sign a consent form that assures them of their right to withdraw at any moment from the research if they do not wish to continue at any point. They were assured that their identity will remain confidential, and their answers will remain anonymous. The participants were informed that their interviews are recorded, and that only I have access to the recordings and the transcriptions made from them.

Given that some topics maybe sensitive, cultural and personal sensitivity is respected. For instance, when the participants feel embarrassed of honestly answering a certain question, I made it clear to them that they do not have to discuss that question; or they were given the option of writing their answers to a particular question and e-mail them to me confidentially at a later time, they may feel more comfortable elaborating on a given question later. Also, I have explicitly invited the participants to identify any portion of their interviews' transcript that they want me to omit or do not wish me to report in my results.

Administration of the Study

Here, I present and summarize the general steps of how the study has been conducted. These steps were followed as they were discussed in detail earlier; after I

received the research topic approval, the questionnaire and the consent form were emailed to the participants after informing them of the study procedures and their rights. All of the participants responded within one to two days. I e-mailed 15 questionnaires to 15 participants, and received only13 responses. None of them had any questions about the questionnaire's format or language, as all the points were easy to understand and comprehend; in addition, they were translated to Arabic. After responding to the open-ended questionnaire, each participant was asked for her availability to conduct the first interview, and times were scheduled according to the participants' availability. Only eight participants responded to scheduling the interviews, so I proceeded with only eight participants. I conducted two individual interviews with all eight of the participants. The total time of these individual interviews varied between forty-five minutes to one hour. There was a week to ten days time period between one interview and the other.

The interviews were transcribed after they were recorded using a Radio Shack voice cassette recorder. Recording the interviews and transcribing them helped me in focusing on the interview itself, the interaction, the observation with note taking, and providing the exact words of the participants. I was able to focus on the process rather than only documenting it. After I transcribed the interviews, I emailed each participant a copy of their interviews' transcription, so they could check what they have said and verify the information they provided for the validity of the study. The participants were asked if they were interested in attending a final group interview and writing a final reflection on the study. Unfortunately, some of them had to leave for their summer vacation with their families, so I could not schedule a time that worked best for all of the participants.

As for the reflection, the participants felt that they expressed all that they wanted to say and what they thought was valuable information to the study in the questionnaire and the individual interviews; they felt that they had nothing important to add in the writing reflection. Therefore, I did not want to force the participants and ask them to write the reflection. The next step was analyzing the generated data from both the questionnaire and the individual interviews, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, chapter four.

In this chapter, I outlined how this study was carried out and conducted. I explained that the qualitative research was used as a method and justified the rationale for using it. I clarified how the open-ended questionnaire and interviews were used as methods for collecting the data. The steps and procedure of collecting the data were also presented. In the following chapter, chapter four, the collected data will be presented, discussed, and analyzed. It will present the participants' views and perspectives based on their beliefs and experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the results from the participants' responses to both the open-ended questionnaire and the individual interviews, and I relate the data to the main research questions. The chapter is organized and divided into sections covering the following topics: 1) the background of the participants; 2) participants' perspectives on their identities; 3) experiences with Arabic and English; 4) identity and writing in English as a second language; 5) cultural issues (traditions, societal constraints, and forbidden issues,) and the relation of these to writing; and 6) Omani women's rights, freedom, and Islam. I conclude with a summary and general discussion of the themes mentioned above.

Background of the Participants

A general pattern emerged early and continued throughout the study: that is, there seemed to be a general reluctance to participate. At the beginning, 15 women agreed to participate in the study; however, after the prospective participants received the consent form and the open-ended questionnaire, two women dropped out of the study. Of the remaining 13 women, five responded only to the questionnaire and declined to participate further in the study. Only eight women fully participated by responding to all the data collection procedures. Among these, several were willing to share detailed information and stories with me, and they were at least sometimes willing to have me report what they had said. However, they did not want these detailed stories associated with their pseudonyms as individual participants. I have respected their wishes in what follows,

and so I have at times included a response without identifying which of the participants offered it.

The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 50 years of age; however, most were in their twenties and thirties. Six of the eight full participants were married with children. The participants had earned masters' degrees in a range of fields: applied linguistics, English literature, library and information science, biotechnology, medical librarianship, computer science, and business administration. They perceive themselves as having an advanced level of English fluency and they all have family members who speak English with them at least sometimes, and in some cases often. They started learning English at a young age, with the youngest starting at the age of one and the oldest starting at the age of thirteen. Table 1 gives a detailed summary of the participants' demographic information, including their educational level and their self-report on both their level of English fluency and their practice of English in their family.

Table 1.

Background of the Participants

Name	Age	Social status	Level of educa-tion	Specialization	Perceived level of English fluency	Age started to learn English	Family speak English & communi-cate with them in English
Sarah	35	Married	MA	Applied linguistics	Fluent	1	Yes, all the time
Hanna	25	Married	MA	Bio-resources engineer	V. good	12	Yes, but only sometimes
Sophia	45	Married	MA	English literature and language	Fluent	8	Yes, with sisters and brothers
Zeena	26	Single	MA	Biotechnology	Fluent	13	Yes, with sisters and brothers
Linda	29	Married	MA	Medical librarianship	Fluent	5	Yes, rarely
Nada	50	Married	MA	Library science	V. good	3	Yes, most of the times
Fatma	38	Married	MA	Computer science	V. good	5	Yes, but do not use English for communic-ation
Lama	28	Single	MA	Business administration	V. good	6	Yes, sometimes

Uses of English by the Participants

Most of the participants reported that they use both oral and written English

socially and professionally in many aspects of their everyday lives, except for Hanna and

Fatma, who use English mainly professionally. They all use English writing

professionally at work, in teaching, discussion forums, workshops, seminars and

conferences, emails, and formal letters. The majority also use English writing socially for a range of purposes: communicating with domestic workers, interacting with foreign and Arab friends, writing in a diary, writing plans, traveling, chatting, for shopping lists, and for studying.

Some of the issues and/or topics the participants explored through writing in English were related to their field of work and/or personal purposes. The participants specifically mentioned these areas: "women issues, literature, and humanitarian issues" (Sarah), "science, notes, and diaries" (Hanna), "socio-political-economical issues on women in industrial England, reading skills in second language learning, and Arab-American immigrant literature in America" (Sophia), "extracting perfumes from citric fruit, the petroleum pollution on the land, the current situation of medical libraries all over Oman, and at work" (Linda), "universities, education, and libraries" (Nada), "topics related to my field of work and inspirational topics" (Zeena), "formal letters at work" (Fatma), and "work and field related topics and issues" (Lama).

Some participants also mentioned exploring the following topics in Arabic: "certain things about what is going on in Iraq" (Sarah), "diaries and stories" (Hanna), "inspirational topics and poetry" (Zeena), "stories, novels, and the Muslim Medical scientists and their discoveries in the early days" (Linda), and "letters at work" (Fatma).

More than half of the participants said they perceive themselves as active writers, which means that they write regularly in their professional and personal lives. The majority write more in English than in Arabic; only Linda and Fatma report that they write equally in both languages. Six of the participants do not have a personal journal, but

Sarah and Linda reported using English to document their ideas in such a journal. Table 2

contains the participants' responses regarding English usage, language, and writing.

Table 2.

English Usage, Language, and Writing

Name	Are you an active writer?	In which language do you write more?	Do you have a personal Journal?	English, and written English usage in everyday life	Do you think all people in Oman should learn English?
Sarah	Yes	English	Yes, English	Socially and professionally	Strongly agree
Hanna	No	English	No	Professionally only	Strongly agree
Sophia	No	English	No	Socially and professionally	Strongly agree
Zeena	Yes	English	No	Socially and professionally	Strongly agree
Linda	Yes	Both	Yes, English	Socially and professionally	Strongly agree
Nada	Yes	English	No	Socially and professionally	Agree
Fatma	No	Both	No	Professionally only	Agree
Lama	Yes	English	No	Socially and professionally	Strongly agree

Generally, participants believe that all people in Oman, and especially women,

need to learn English. They believe that learning and being able to use a second language

gives them more power and opportunity to have their voices heard, and will help them

find solutions for their concerns. They believe that learning another language and being

exposed to other cultures will allow them to recognize what they have and make them

open to ways of improving their lives. The majority believe English enables them to open

their eyes to how other women live and to other cultures more generally, as well as

giving them access to knowledge and education, thus helping them to improve their lives and choose what fits with their needs, beliefs, and culture.

Role of English in the Participants' Lives

The majority of the participants believe that the English language and English writing play a very essential role in their lives. Seven of the eight women, (with only Fatma being the exception), refer to the English language and English writing as playing a role in their future life and plans. They associate that role with the goals of their professional lives, such as to pursue a higher education, communicate at work, improve their careers, and seek better opportunities for jobs. As for their social and personal lives, they also speak of English and English writing in connection with traveling abroad, individual satisfaction, and opportunities for interaction with a broad range of people.

They also adopt and use various methods and strategies to integrate and preserve English and English writing in their lives and stay connected with the English world. Table 3 gives a detailed description of the strategies the participants use to integrate English and preserve their English writing; the list of course overlaps with the list of their daily activities involving English; however, these activities were also cited specifically as ways in which the participants cultivate and maintain their relationship with English.

Table 3.

Strategies to Integrate English and Preserve English Writing

Name	Strategies that have been adopted in order to keep in touch with the English world and preserve English and English writing in daily life
Sarah	Teaching, writing, communicating in English as a part of job, e-shopping to order books, writing to professors and friends abroad, and helping her children in preparing their assignments in English
Hanna	Watching movies, reading newspapers, listening to news, and communicating in English, among many other daily tasks
Sophia	Traveling to English speaking countries yearly, watching TV, reading novels and magazines, communicating in English, and entertainment
Zeena	Listening to the news, reading, and communicating with people in English
Linda	Having best friends that are foreigners, reading, working, learning, and teaching in English, communicating with people, watching TV, listening to music, watching movies in English
Nada	Reading books, communicating with people, providing help to her children in their English homework
Fatma	Watching TV and movies, reading news, communicating with people, and reading novels in English
Lama	Using English 99% every day socially, professional, and personally

Participants' Perspectives on their Identities

Identity has many more definitions than could be presented as background for a study such as this, and people use many methods and techniques to relate to and define their identity. The participants in this study were no exception, and they responded to questions about identity in several different ways. Some defined themselves in association with their culture, country, religion, even their name, or political association, using labels such as 'Muslim,' 'Arab,' or 'conservative.' Nada responded "I belong as an Arab and as an Omani," Fatma referred to herself as a "Muslim girl," and Lama stated "I am Omani, I am Muslim."

But the participants also used more general characteristics to describe their identities. It is notable that the terms the participants used to describe their identity

seemed to cluster around positive personality traits: none of the participants used negative terms such as 'selfish' 'jealous' or 'rude'; moreover, and more interestingly, none used relational terms such as 'mother.' The participants generally described themselves in a confident and strong manner, in language normally associated with male leadership positions in Omani society. This allowed me to surmise that at least when speaking in English, they viewed themselves as equals to their male counterparts and were able to overcome the expected views of their gender, in contrast to the society's assumed perspectives regarding females. The participants described their identities in various ways, but the most common included personality traits, identity markers, and professional position and expected role in both community and society.

Response patterns differed for the different respondents when they were asked to define themselves. Sarah, Hanna, Zeena, Sophia, and Linda used individual traits to define their identity including: psychological and physical characteristics, terms associated with their relationship to the world and gender, nouns and adjectives referring to what they love to be, and characteristics they value. For example, Sarah used only psychological characteristics; she views herself as "devoted, sensitive, helpful, blissful, committed, and joyful." Hanna used the fewest terms to describe her identity. She only used her name, one psychological term associated with her work, and labels for her gender and age. She states, "I am Hanna, a hard worker, female, 25, and Bio-resources engineer."

Zeena and Sophia used both psychological and physical characteristics, terms associated with their relationship to the world and gender. Sophia defined her identity as "educator, disciplinarian, wife, administrator, approachable, tolerant, nonjudgmental,

very organized, professional, and very disciplined." Zeena views herself as a "shy, ambitious, honest, kind-hearted, sensitive, Omani, and female," and also mentions her field of bio technology.

Linda used a combination of psychological characteristics, a range of nouns and adjectives referring to what she loves to be, and the personal characteristics she values. She states, "I am a leader, hard-worker, cooperative, practical, enthusiastic, punctual, dreamer, romantic person, guide, and sociable."

The rest of the participants, Lama, Fatma, and Nada, used a greater combination of individual traits in addition to three 'identity markers' (Omoniyi & White, 2006) indicating affiliation by religion, nationality and ethnicity. Lama defined her identity as "honest, single face, hard-worker, optimistic, friendly, smiley, Muslim, Arab, and Omani." Fatma defined her identity as "cheerful, loyal, hardworking, generous, outspoken, a bit shy, and Omani Muslim Girl." Nada defined her identity as "I work in the Sultan Qaboos University, very reserved, serious, quiet person, Omani, Muslim, and Arab."

Identities in Relation to Arabic and English

In conducting my interviews, I asked the participants directly about their different identities and worlds, and if each world was associated with a distinct identity; if there was a connection, I sought out to find how these identities and worlds are similar and/or different form each other. Two participants, Sophia and Lama, reported that they had created two identities; one associated with their original Arabic world, and an alternate identity, associated with their assumed English world. They feel that these two identities are similar and different from each other. They seemed to feel that both identities share

the same culture, beliefs, religion, and values. But their Arabic and English identities and worlds are different in regards to mannerisms, behaviors, and the methods of expression.

Sophia feels freer to express herself in English and more restricted when communicating in Arabic. She explains, "I do have two identities, when I am in the West, I am completely a different person. I think my personality, my individuality, and whatever creative [*sic*] that I have comes in [from] the West." In the Arab world, she feels "more reserved" and says, "I am more an introvert." She explains, "definitely, with the Western, it is very different perspective and my speech, my mannerism, my language, my jokes, perhaps my style of conversation change to become much more relaxed. With the East, it is much more restrained and constrained." Lama also feels similar to Sophia. She states, "[i]n English, I am tough, I am straight forward, I am stronger in English, and right to the point. In Arabic, if I will sit with Arab people or read in Arabic, I have to soften my personality." By "soften," Lama presumably means becoming more flexible.

Interestingly, the rest of the participants did not feel that they have two different identities; however, they did feel that their current identity is based on their past experiences, and that these crucially include years of learning English. For example, Sarah states, "it is my personality that I have struggled for 35 years to build it, but I think my identity has changed, because I learned English. I feel a different person now but, still, the same person just changed like, upgraded my identity." Hanna commented, "my identity now is different than before, few years ago. It is changing and I think becoming better every day." Fatma states, "I do not have [two identities], but you know, people who speak English or learn English they change..." Nada thinks that she has "one personality, thank God. I remain to be an Omani an Arab a Muslim and a woman."

However, she goes on to suggest that learning English has "changed [her] identity little bit." Both Zeena and Linda provided answers that suggest ongoing development. Zeena believes that her identity is "only one," but continues to characterize it as "a flexible one." Linda speaks of an identity that "took [her] forever to develop" and that she is "still improving."

To summarize, it is fair to conclude that the majority of these women feel they have changed as they learned English. In other words, their learning a new language and interacting with a new culture has allowed them to adjust their identity, thus causing them to create new meanings for themselves and the world, whether they see these new meanings in terms of a second identity, or in terms of personal growth. The two respondents who felt they have two quite different identities offered quite detailed and consistent descriptions of their two 'selves,' identifying the more outgoing personality traits with their personality in English, while they associated more traditional female roles with their use of Arabic.

As mentioned in chapter 2, an individual's identity is directly connected to her/his language/s and culture/s. By learning a second language, English, and living abroad interacting with a different culture, whether individuals developed a second identity or only modified their original one, they develop to become bilingual and bicultural (Kanno, 2003). Based on the participants' responses, it can be concluded that they are considered bilingual individuals as they handle two languages, Arabic and English (Hakute, 1986). They are also considered bicultural individuals who relate to two distinct cultures, and recognize the differences and similarities between them, the English culture and the Arabic culture (Pedersen, 1999).

Stories and Experiences Related to Identity and English

Some participants shared their experiences and stories about how English has affected their identities. Sarah's story is about how her identity was affected by her studying experiences and learning English. She tried to change aspects of her identity in order to fit in and achieve her dream. During her studies abroad, she dreamed of being like an American woman writer, so this experience pushed her to explore and develop her identity and feelings just to achieve her goal, which was to become "one of those who [have] dedicated themselves to their readers and conveyed their feelings, thinking, and understanding to other women and social commitments" (Sarah). She started reading about American women writers' lives, writings, and beliefs, such as Anna Quindlen, Emily Dickinson, Judy Blum, and Laura Ingalls Wilder. She shared two of her favorite quotes; one by Quindlen, "[t]he thing that is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself," and the other by Hellen Keller, "[w]hen one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us." Sarah tried to adopt some of their beliefs and values and learn from them how to become a writer herself. She explains that by wanting to be like American women writers, she had to adjust her identity to fit into her perceived concept of the American woman writer. To her, American women writers shared certain values and beliefs that she admired and made her work hard to be like them.

Sophia's story expressed her understanding of her own identity and beliefs and how she felt toward her behaviors. She believes that learning, reading, and writing in English has provided her the opportunity to deeply know herself and her real identity.

Thus, it has made her change in some ways, and has helped her to realize what she believed in and valued in others. She shared an experience that first made her come to an understanding about covering her hair as is customary among Muslim women:

> I wore a scarf in Oman, but when I went to study abroad, I did not wear a scarf. First time, when I took my scarf off I thought because I did not want people to look at me as strange or different, but after I really thought about it, I found out that when I first wore the scarf, it was because I was forced to wear it because of my society, and I did not wear it because I was convinced or believed in wearing it.

She explains that, after finishing her study and coming back to Oman, she wore the scarf again; but this time she wore it because she was making a conscious choice to wear it. She thinks that this experience made her realize that she had worn the scarf earlier just to satisfy people; however, now she wears it because she wants to wear it. This experience also made her change in a deep way when she thinks of other aspects of her behavior, in that what she does now is based on her own beliefs, and is not dictated by others or by societal norms that she simply accepts in a reflexive or unthinking way.

Nada believes that English has not only modified her identity, but has also changed her into a better person. She shared a very interesting story that affected her life, behaviors, attitudes, and identity:

> I remember, I was with my American friend and she was driving. On the traffic stop sign, she saw a young girl with a can and a sign in her hand that said cancer donations. So, she opened her wallet and gave all the money she had. By the way, she was poor and she had only 10 dollars. So, I asked her how do you

believe this girl will give the money to real cancer center? She said, you go with your own goodwill and hope it will help. I was so amazed and this experience made me change.

She reports that this experience enabled her to develop a very important aspect of her identity – one that allowed her to blindly give to a cause or concern that is deep to her heart by listening to her emotions rather than judging the girl by her superficial appearance. This aspect of her identity made her become a better person in terms of trusting, assisting, and doing all she can to help others, and breaking the superficial barriers that may have prevented her from giving. This experience had a very deep effect on her identity and made her implement new good behaviors and attitudes toward her society. She developed a desire to help others and be a good model herself for her children, friends, and community. She says that she had learned many great and positive values from her friend and she has adopted and followed these values thus far in her life.

Lama addresses a different influence of English language and culture when she claims that the English language and English writing have affected and formed her identity in making her part of a fast-moving world of ideas and discoveries: "I feel nowadays, if I would like to improve my experience and self, I have to learn English as a first language. I do believe most of the updated things and updated knowledge are in English, and not in Arabic." We can conclude that Lama feels that her identity has evolved as she aims for greater competency, comparable to what she sees as the abilities of L1 speakers.

New Meanings, New Ideas

As noted above, even the six participants who feel that they have only one identity do feel that this identity has been modified and built upon by their learning of English and/or the experience of traveling abroad to pursue their education. To interpret their phrasing, they talk of their experience with English as affecting their personal identity in a subtle way. Despite their reluctance to speak specifically in terms of two identities, all of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that they have learned new beliefs, meanings, and ideas about other cultures while learning English. Seven of the participants, except for Lama, strongly agreed or agreed that learning English has affected the way they think. They believe that learning English widened their perspectives and made them view things in a bigger scope. English also introduces new horizons and opens their mind to the differences between their own culture and that of others, leading them to view their own culture in new ways. As for Lama, she strongly disagreed that learning English has affected the way she thinks, although she strongly agreed that she has changed in her thoughts since she traveled to a foreign country. She thinks she changed her thoughts, widened her perspective, and encountered new meaning schemas because of traveling abroad. She believes that English taught her new beliefs, meanings, and ideas, but did not change or affect her original thoughts or the way she thinks.

Seven of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that their views have changed specifically during their experience in pursuing higher education abroad; only one participant, Zeena, disagreed. However, although she did not see her own ideas as changing, even Zeena seems to agree that she has acquired new perspectives, agreeing

with the statement, "I believe learning new culture and language helps me learn new ideas and beliefs." She may recognize new ideas and beliefs as being different from hers, even though she does not feel that exposure to these new ideas has changed her own views or values. Table 4 illustrates a summary of the participants' responses to the three related statements on this topic.

Table 4.

Meaning Schemas and Learning English

Name	You have learned new beliefs, meanings, and ideas about other cultures while learning English	You have changed in your thoughts since you traveled to a foreign country	Learning English has affected the way you think
Sarah	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree
Hanna	Agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Sophia	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Zeena	Strongly agree	Disagree	Agree
Linda	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Nada	Agree	Agree	Agree
Fatma	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree
Lama	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree

Stories and Experiences Related to New Meaning Schemas and Identity

There seemed to be general agreement that experience with English has opened new vistas for these participants. Some expressed these in general terms, or in terms of expanded opportunity. For instance, Linda believes that the English language and English writing have not only affected and formed her identity and experiences, but have also opened her up to more opportunities. She stated:

By having English language as a second language, and being able to write in English, it opened a wide horizon for me. Now, I can read literature different than the Arabic literature, and use it in my writing, which I learned from my area. So

now, I am open to another horizon of different knowledge, different culture, and

this is great.

Linda also spoke in general terms about how her experience with English speakers has

changed her meaning schemas. She said:

I was teaching Arabic for a while for the non Arabic speakers, and I met people

from different cultures. They were Americans and from UK. All of them speak

English and I was speaking with them in English to teach them Arabic. I learned a

lot about my culture, about my language, while I was teaching them. At the same

time, I learned a lot from them, their history, their culture, and the similarities

between me and them. That was very interesting.

For Linda, by interacting and communicating with English speakers, she was introduced

to a new picture of her own culture and language. This experience also taught her new

knowledge, meanings, ideas, and information about other's (the British and American)

culture, history, norms, and language. At the same time, she recognized the differences

and similarities between them and her.

Sarah strongly agreed that learning English and writing in English has taught her

many new meaning schemas and made her change in her thoughts, which in turn have

affected her identity. She states, "I honestly cannot count how many meanings were new

to me while I was in UK." She reported a story from her personal experience involving

politeness norms during her study abroad in London:

Ok, I remember one day I had exam and I was studying all night, the other day

when I went to the exam, I saw all of my classmates carrying coffee cups in their

hands like [literally] all of them, even the professor. But, in here [Oman] we

cannot eat or drink in front of our teachers, it is kind of disrespectful. But, I really

liked the idea, so, the other day I bought my cup of coffee and took to class and

since that day I became a coffee addict.

She comments that she now allows her students to drink and eat if they are hungry and her students really like the idea. For Sarah, such a simple incident has introduced to her a new norm that a student can drink and eat in front of her/his teacher. When she came to accept this new way of judging this particular behavior, she adopted her new viewpoint into her work life and made it a habit.

Linda reports in some detail about her learning that conservative Catholic Americans share similar beliefs and follow similar rules as those imposed on Muslims, such as that girls are not allowed to have sex till they are married. In a similar vein, she reports having learned that the Ten Commandments are similar to the Islamic values. She believes that her experience of learning English and interacting with native English-speakers has introduced her to new meaning schemas and has affected her identity. It has helped her learn about her own culture and that of others, which she feels has widened her perspective.

Fatma connected her story with her childhood, and she speaks of how she learned new meaning schemas associated with English during her visit to an English speaking country early in her life. One particular story has stuck in her mind since she was twelve years old:

I remember when I was a child, I went to the UK for the first time. I was 12 years

old and I was about to stay with an English family, friends of my father and he

had four daughters. Actually, my father was telling me, was giving me

instructions on etiquettes and attitudes. For example, you have to change your

pajamas; you are not coming to the breakfast table without changing your clothes;

how to use different things, and how to speak differently; what to do, and what

not to do.

Fatma's father made her understand that they were in a different culture, and that, to be

accepted, they had to act in a certain way that would be accepted in the new culture.

Fatma had to get dressed in regular day clothes before breakfast, which is different from

what happens in her Omani culture; she had been used to eating her breakfast first, then

getting dressed, even if there were visitors at her home. Fatma believes that this

experience has affected and changed her identity and introduced her to new meaning

schemas from childhood.

Some participants shared some stories and experiences that were very interesting,

but they did not want me to associate their stories with them by pseudonym, as these

anecdotes tended to raise intimate or taboo subjects, and the participants seemed united in

their desire to steer clear of such topics. These stories and experiences resulted from

certain situations or experiences during learning, communicating, and/or writing in

English, and studying abroad in an English speaking country. These experiences either

changed some particular viewpoints of a participant or caused some new realizations that

might lead to a more global change. One of the stories shared by a participant is as

follows:

One day, in my linguistic class, my professor asked us to give her sentences on

how we felt at the moment. So, one of my classmates said, 'I want to eat a bagel,'

and the other one said, 'I need a pillow,' and so on… So when it was my turn, I

said, I need to take a cold shower and before I even finished my sentence

everyone was laughing. I did not know what happened are they laughing at me?

Or at someone else? Then, my face turned red and my teacher said, 'ok, well here

is what is wrong, here you take a cold shower when your body it hot.' I said,

yeah, that is what I mean, it is hot in the classroom. Then she said, 'no, not the

weather hot, but sexually.' At that moment, I wanted to shoot myself I was so

embarrassed.

This experience affected the participant's identity on a higher level and introduced a new

realization to her. She had not realized that the simple words that she used could carry

socially powerful cultural meanings that went beyond the basic literal meaning.

One of the participants told a story that touched a sensitive issue for her. She

explains how her attitude has changed toward discussing certain sexual topics. She stated,

"before, I felt very shy to talk about sex or even period [PMS]. But now, I can talk about

these issues, especially in English. I feel comfortable to discuss them with women, but,

still not with male." She shared her first experience discussing such issues:

I still remember the first time I talked about sex. It was with one of my girlfriends

[American] when we were walking at a grocery store and she bought tampon. I

looked at the box, but I did not know what was it. So, I asked my friend and she

said, it is tampon do not you use it when you get your period? My friend opened

one tampon and said, 'ok come here.' While she was talking, I was thinking

inside myself and said, what? Put something inside, but I cannot, I am virgin, why

I have never seen tampons in here [in Oman]?

She explains that now she is married with three kids, but still does not use tampons and is afraid of using them. The concept of tampons was new to her; she did not know it existed before this experience. She explains that using tampons is one of many concepts she has learned while she was abroad interacting with English people. She believes that without her experience abroad, she would never be exposed to such concepts in her own society. This experience made her realize that each culture has its own concepts and meanings that could be either different from or similar to hers. This experience widened her horizon of the new concept and meanings that she has learned. She realized that using a tampon is a culturally related concept because some American women do not have to worry about their virginity before marriage, unlike Muslim girls who might get killed in some cases if they are not virgins before marriage; that is why she believes tampons are not popular in the Middle East.

One of the participants mentioned an interesting experience that also widened her horizon and introduced new concepts to her such as the idea of sexual diseases, which she was not exposed to before. She stated:

> One of the things that I have learned were diseases associated with sexual acts such as herpes, which I never knew existed before. Maybe, because women are not allowed to have sex before marriage, and these diseases do not exist as much in our society.

On another quite different sexual topic, she continued:

> I think now my perspective on homosexuality is different after I read many articles about it, and also wrote a few in English. Before that, I did not know much and I was very against it, but now I do not feel as much offended or

disrespect people who are homosexual. Now, I feel that it is their business as long

as they are respecting the people around them. Funny to say that I am very open-

minded now, maybe education also was the reason to it. The more you are

educated the more you are open-minded and respect different ideas and beliefs.

The concept of homosexuality was not new for this participant as she held and associated

a conservative perspective towards it. This meaning itself was not new, but understanding

the nature, aspects, and the deep picture of it were new to her. After deeply exploring

and learning new meanings associated with such topics in English, her previous

perspective changed to become more open, and understanding and accepting such issues.

Therefore, her view towards them changed, thus, modifying her identity, previous beliefs,

and perspectives on such issues to fit with her new perspective and understanding. She

believes that English has helped her in viewing related issues from a larger scope and

deeper level. She used English as tool to gain insight and educate herself.

Differences and Conflicting or Complementary Relationships

Even most do not seem to address this contrast using the term 'identity.' All of the

participants readily accepted the idea of there being two 'worlds,' an English world and

an Arabic world. Some of the participants believe that there is a conflict between these

two worlds; others do not perceive the relationship as conflicting, but instead as

complementary.

Half of the participants (Sophia, Zeena, Fatma, and Lama) definitely believe there

is a conflict between these two worlds. They feel that this conflict emerges for many

reasons. One of the reasons the participants mentioned was differences in cultural

traditions and/or religious norms. These cultural traditions include differences in

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behaviors, attitudes, values, and thoughts between genders, social status, among others. These religious norms include religious practices and the standards that must be followed and practiced, among others. For example, Sophia, who experiences two identities, believes that "there are differences in behaviors and culture [between the two worlds]." Fatma believes that "a conflict [between the English world and the Arabic world] emerges in behaviors and in religion." She holds a view of this conflict stating: "what Arab people believe in and the way they behave is different than the Westerns, but both could be right or wrong, only different."   Zeena states, "this conflict [between the English world and the Arabic world] emerged because of the differences in culture, religion." Lama, who experiences two identities, also related that differences exist in terms of cultural traditions, behaviors, and religious beliefs.

Another reason the participants mentioned that causes the conflict between both worlds to exist was the differences in terms of sociolinguistic features. Sophia, Lama, Fatma, and Zeena shared similar views on the differences between the English language and the Arabic language. They believe that Arabic speakers tend to expect indirect and formal forms of expression, while English speakers express their meanings directly, but informally. For example, Sophia states, "I think Arabic is indirect [in writing]. You need to use many introductory sentences then state your point. But with English, you just go ahead and say what you have to say. It is very direct and you do not have to worry about using formal or many introductory sentences."

In a similar vein, Lama states, "I think both languages are very different." Her explanation, like Sophia's, centers on the relative directness of the two language communities: "[i]n Arabic, you use many words like 'please,' 'if you can,' like that, very

polite and introduction and conclusion. You cannot say what you want right away. In English, you just use few words and say right to the point what you wana say." On a less specific note, Lama speaks of a generally incommensurate value to words and phrases in the two languages: "sometimes, I feel that when I write anything in English and I am trying to translate it in Arabic, I feel I bring a totally different meaning to it." Fatma also believes that English and Arabic are different. She suggests that, in English, spoken and written styles are quite close, as compared to the situation in Arabic, where "[w]riting is very hard and very different than speaking and very formal and wordy." Zeena also agrees with language difference stating that "I think this conflict emerged because of differences in language too." She believes that English and Arabic are different in the style of writing and delivering the message, as English is direct and Arabic is indirect.

These participants, who stressed the cultural and linguistic differences between their two worlds, noted that they have to be careful when they communicate with other Arab people in the Arab world, because their identity has been influenced by their experience with English. They feel their behaviors are determined by their society. However, they try to find a balance and compromise between both worlds in terms of culture and interaction, and believe that these two worlds are still related because they complement each other.

Sarah, Hanna, Linda, and Nada saw the two worlds as related rather than conflicting, for many reasons. They still believe that there are differences between the two worlds, but these differences do not create a conflict. They stressed that Arab people are becoming more accepting of Westerners, other cultures, and beliefs. They also spoke of the trend toward English as a global language; they felt that diverse people are

becoming more used to each other and are more flexible, due to the internet, the television, the other media, the frequency of international travel, and educational trends. They believe that these factors are diminishing conflict between cultures, and are making it possible for people to know and eccept each other.

To confirm the participants' feelings toward both worlds, they were asked how they would communicate and interact with two people each from a different world, one from the Arabic world and the other from the English world, at the same time. Sarah, Hanna, Linda, Nada, and Zeena claimed that they would experience no conflict in interacting with both people at the same time, except for the obvious need to choose one or the other language. Even on this last issue, they pointed out that most Arab people at least understand English today. They felt they could facilitate communication by trying to find a balance, translating to their two interlocutors, and creating a communicative environment through body language.

In contrast, Sophia, Fatma, and Lama, feel that there are more decisions to be made than the choice of language when interacting with both people. These would involve the topic(s) of discussion, the way they would behave, their comfort level and their conversation style.

Stories and Experiences Related to Differences in Language/s

As pointed out in Chapter two, the area of rhetorical expectations provides one possible dimension of the "different worlds" associated with different languages. The reader may recall my own story, which I shared there and which I will elaborate on briefly here. When I wrote my first term paper after coming to the USA, my teacher reacted quite negatively to my writing; he found it non-academic, and said that it had too

many circles and digressions. When I met with him, he commented, "this is not how we write in English in America…I cannot see where your voice is or your main point; although I understand the circles you are going around making your point." This experience was enough to confuse me even more. I realized that if I needed to satisfy my audience, then I would have to write like them and use the same method and style in order to get their attention. This also affected my identity and the way I think and write.

Although Sarah views the two worlds as related rather than conflicting, she still believes that there are differences not only between the two worlds, but also within each world itself. She provided an example of the difference within the English world. She shared a story dealing with everyday life, which might happen to many non-English speaking people living in an English speaking country. Her story exemplifies the struggle a second language learner faces when confronting different varieties within a language, and the confusion these differences create. In Sarah's case, this surfaces in the form of her need to develop an awareness of the differences between British and American pronunciation:

> When I reached the States for the first time, I felt being lost because people there swallow some letters. They do not pronounce all the letters or somehow different than you write them, which confuses my understanding, for example instead of the word "butter", they say "barare". I spent much time and efforts to talk and listen to people until I got used to the American accent. When I returned back home, my flight had to stop in London airport, and when I was talking to a British women, at the age of over sixty, she looked at me through her eyeglasses and said: 'don't chew your words.'

Sarah's example of the pronunciation of the word 'butter' focuses on the American tendency to 'flap' the middle consonant in such words as 'butter,' 'ladder,' and 'writer,' with medial t or d. A speaker acquiring English naturally encounters this and other differences between these varieties—as well as the prejudices and judgments of speakers who will tend to 'correct' the learner when she uses what they see as the 'wrong' form.

She explains that this experience affected her and made her think of the English speaking world within a larger scope. She comments that English, like Arabic, contains a wide range of varieties, and differs or changes from one place or culture to another. She seems to have realized that the task of learning the language and becoming a part of the English speaking world would mean developing some sensitivity to these nuances.

As mentioned earlier, Lama also believes English and Arabic differ in the style of writing, which makes translation hard. She provided a good example from her personal experience with the differences in writing the same text in both English and Arabic. She shared a frustrating experience from her work place:

I [was] preparing some guide for the users. I first wrote the page in English then they told me I have to translate it, because so many students, in their foundation year do not read English, so, I [had] to translate it. I translated it then I kept it for a while, when I came back again to read it, I felt I brought so many things, which are opposite, I could not explain it the same way I wrote it in English. I have explained some of the words verbally not toward the meaning so that was the problem. This is the way, translation is very hard sometimes. You know, you

choose if you want to focus on the meaning of the translation or you want to use

the dictionary word-to-word translation.

This experience strongly suggested to Lama that English writing and Arabic writing are

different from each other, and that she has to be cautious when she writes, or more

specifically when she tries to translate from one language to the other. She realized that

the style of writing is different and she had to choose either broad translation or literal

word-to-word translation, in order to convey her meaning through writing. This

experience also caused her to view things in a bigger scope, as it helped her become

aware that language is not just a neutral code, but that the use of either Arabic or English

involves much more than access to a lexicon and knowledge of basic sentence structures.

Cultural Conflicts

Half of the participants believe that there are differences between the ways they

express their ideas in their two worlds, the Arabic world and the English world. Sarah

used metaphors for her language use in the two worlds. When Sarah expresses her ideas

in the English world, she feels like "a bird flying away with no limits;" in contrast, when

expressing her ideas in the Arabic world, she feels more constrained, referring to herself

as "a part of the big Arab fabric and part of the Arab world's problems." In the English

world, Hanna feels more "liberal," but in the Arabic world, though she is an effective

communicator, she feels more "conservative." Sophia offers a comment on expressing

emotion, saying that she feels as though she can express her "anxieties and fears" more

easily in the English world, while in the Arabic world she feels the need to be more

"cautious" about expressing such concerns. In an unexpected reversal of the claims that

one might expect, Lama says she expresses her ideas in the English world as if it was her

'mother tongue' and 'first language', while in the Arabic world, she feels as if Arabic is her second tongue, and she is not as "comfortable" nor "confident" in expressing her personal feelings openly.

As with related questions, the participants split into two groups on this issue. Linda, Fatma, Zeena, and Nada claimed that they feel the same about their interactions and expression in both worlds. Although they recognize that both worlds are completely different, they do not feel that their own interactions are directly affected by the differences.

Omani Society's Views toward Western/ English Influence

Some of the participants who stressed the cultural and linguistic differences between the English world and the Arabic world mentioned that they have to be careful when they communicate with other Arab people in the Arab world, because their identity has been influenced by their experience with English. They do not want to be viewed as outsiders in their own culture, or to be judged as strangers because that may offend their Arab relations. They do not want Arab people to judge them as they are speaking English, then they are against religion, norms, the first language, or the Arabic culture.

However, most of the participants feel that Arab people accept the new ways of thinking and acting that stem from their experiences with learning English and traveling abroad. They feel that their family, friends, and acquaintances respect other people's ideas and beliefs, they try to create a balance between other people and themselves, while at the same time these family and friends respect the Omani culture and norms.

Lama shared a story from her personal experience. Her story involved her experience with speaking English and acting like an English speaker in her Arab community. She narrated:

Once upon a time, I have gone to an interview when I applied for a job. They have asked me the first question, I answered in English, and then the second question and I answered in English. I was looking at the peoples' faces and they were shocked and did not understand anything of what I have said, then, I was just looking at their faces and I did not ask them, do you want me to talk in Arabic or in English? I thought talking in English would impress them. At the end of the interview, one of them, he was the head of the interview, asked me that would you please talk in Arabic. That really shocked me, because I was explaining everything and I spent thirty minutes talking in English and nobody told me, but I was seeing they were shocked and the question marks on their faces. For another thirty minutes, I talked in Arabic, I tried to talk in Arabic, so I spent one hour in the interview. At the end, I did not get the job, because they wanted someone who talks in Arabic.

The English language played an important role in her not getting the job and not achieving her personal goal behind using English, which contradicted her idea or perspective on using English. This experience has affected the way Lama thinks and the ways she communicates with her own community. She was introduced to a new realization that using English is not always positive, especially when she interacts with certain people at certain places. She came to recognize that there is a negative side to the global presence of English that she had not seen before. She also realized that, although

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she did not get the job, her society still respected her and listened to her until she finished her conversation even though her interviewers did not understand English. She did not feel offended or the people who interviewed her did not respect her new ways of thinking and acting. People still respected her communicating in English and her new ways of thinking and acting. The society did not reject her speaking in English and that was the reason for them being quiet even though they did not understand English and waiting until she finished talking.

Unlike Lama, Linda feels that sometimes, some of her "acts and thinking are not accepted" by her community; she feels that she is criticized and perceived as an outsider or foreigner, but she tries to adjust to and take the best out of both worlds. Linda thinks that people perceive her as a foreigner because they recognize that her thinking, beliefs, and acts are western; she is straightforward, expresses her opinions freely when she communicates with people of both genders, she is very open-minded as compared to her society, and she communicates in English frequently in her personal everyday life.

This suggests a subtle contradiction between the way the majority of the participants view their own feelings toward expressing themselves in English and how they feel that they will be perceived in their Arab community. Some of the participants feel uncomfortable when expressing themselves in Arabic, but also think their society is prepared to accept their new ways of thinking.   This may suggest that their discomfort in Arab surroundings has to do with ambivalence in their own view of Arab culture, rather than any feeling that they will be perceived as outsiders.

Impressions Associated with English

The participants mentioned a few impressions that they think are associated with native English speakers and English. Their impressions were based on their interaction with a limited number of people during the time of study, and they do not mean to generalize these to all native speakers. From their experience, some of the participants used a range of terms to describe native English speakers: 'tough,' 'simple,' 'informal,' 'leaders,' and 'overweight.' They associate English with terrorism and colonialism. A few of the participants also perceive some English speakers as lacking education about their own states, other countries, and other places, thus, not all Americans are educated as perceived by Middle Eastern people, although Arab people believe that Americans have a greater opportunity to be educated and achieve their American dream and a good level of living. Most of the participants perceive English speakers as open-minded and as holding positive and strong values.

In regard to language, the participants feel that native English speakers only speak English and are not fluent in any second language, that they underestimate those who speak English as a second language, and that they look at themselves as superior even though they cannot speak or pronounce many words in Arabic. The participants' mixed, and often quite negative, impressions and views of native English speakers seem to contrast quite starkly at times with their positive views on their own use of English. As mentioned earlier, all of the participants use English in their daily life socially, professionally, or in both, and English has affected their identity, widened their perspectives, and introduced new beliefs, ideas, and concepts to their lives.

The participants recognize that there are negative feelings about having English in Oman and the Middle East, and they relate these to the fact that some people think the West is imposing its culture through the English language. For many people, the spread of English is considered a form of colonization, the sociological selling of English, and many feel that the West is trying to mold the minds of the young generation in other cultures towards western values and norms. They believe that the spread of English language may lead to the introduction of different beliefs, values, and concepts that might contradict their original Omani values. This creates confusion for the new young generation.

Belonging to the English Community

The participants generally seem to see English as more than just a neutral tool. They feel that they are not distant from the English world, but are deeply related to it. They like watching English movies and videos, listening to English news, and six of eight participants use blogs. All of the participants feel that they belong to the English speaking community in many different ways: speaking English; studying English abroad (in a native speaking country); living with native English speakers; sharing certain thoughts, values, and beliefs; career positions and jobs; having native English speaking friends; communicating in English in their daily lives; and enjoying various forms of entertainment.

Sarah feels related to English and the English speaking community because she uses English in her "[d]aily speaking, teaching, writing, and communicating in English as a part of my job. Also, I do e-shopping to order some books or write to my professors and friends abroad, and helping my kids in preparing their assignments." Sarah keeps in

touch with the English world by belonging to an academic English community and a social English community. She lists the groups in which she holds membership: "[t]he academic community, as I spend more than 7 hours five days a week. Also social community, we share great hours with many families British and American during the weekends and social parties, formal or informal." She elaborates, "also, since I have studied in UK and in America, I feel that I picked a few habits and attitudes like drinking coffee in the morning instead of tea and hug instead of a kiss on the cheek to greet people that of course I liked. So, I feel that I belong to them somehow."

Similar to Sarah, Fatma and Zeena also feel that they belong to the English community and are related to the English world because they use English daily and their activities are in English. Fatma likes "entertainment in general" and "watching TV, reading; I do read a lot of English [romance] novels." Zeena listens to and reads "the news and I keep reading and I communicate with people [in English]." Also, she keeps herself updated with "the career related topics mainly."

Hanna says that she belongs to the English community because English allows her to accomplish her daily activities and communicate with others to achieve her goals. She states, "I do belong. I belong because I finished studying in English speaking country and I speak English and that help me in communicating with doctors when I go to the clinic when I go to shop for example. It is very helpful to me more than others that are not speaking English." She continues her relationship to English "by watching English movies [especially horror], reading a newspaper in English, and listening to the news in English."

Sophia feels that she belongs to the English speaking community because she shares certain thoughts and beliefs with English speakers, and identifies herself in English. She states, "I feel totally comfortable in an English speaking community, it is because of who I am and where I grew up." She associates with the English community by sharing the idea of being open-minded, and she feels that the influence of English speaking culture has led her to treat men and women equally in interaction. She states, "[e]verything that I do is practically is English oriented whether it is watching TV, reading novels, magazines." She also emphasizes her ongoing direct contact with Western culture: "I attempt to go to Europe at least once a year. So, it is constant contact, whether it is for information, for culture, for entertainment, for anything, it just to keep me attached with that kind of world."

Nada thinks that she belongs to the English speaking community through her ability to speak English. She states, "I studied in English so maybe that can make me belong to the English speaking." She explains:

> I read a lot, I read a lot about library, books in the library about innovations, how
> we can develop the library [in English]. Now, we are moving to a new building, it
> requires me to know a lot about to read a lot about systems. For example, the
> radio frequency education, so, it keeps me alert and knowledgeable.

Linda and Lama feel that they belong to English and the English community more than to their own Arab community. Linda feels that she belongs to English and the English community for many reasons, she lists:

> with my work, my studies because I started my study in English for my first
> degree [college] to my second degree [MA], and all my work is related to English

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language, so this is the majority of me being in the English speaking community. And also, being involved in this language make [puts] me in a good relation with many foreigners either English or other countries that speaking English.

She elaborates:

I am so related to the English world that I do not have an idea how I will go out of it. Actually, my husband keeps telling me that you are so related to foreigners more than [related to] Arabs. I have my very best friends that they are not Arab, they are foreigners. They are my very best friends and I know them now for more than 12 years.

She explains, "I am reading in English, I am working in English, I am learning in English, I am teaching in English. Also, I watch TV and most of things that I am watching if it is music or movies, it will be most of the times in English." Judging from the whole of her statements on this, not only does English play an essential role in Linda's life; her life and identity seems to be formed around her membership in the English speaking world.

Lama, who experiences two identities, shares similar feelings with Linda. She feels that she belongs to the English speaking community more than her Arab community. She states, "I feel I am belonging to them [the English speaking community] more than the Arabic talking or speaking communities, because I am reading a lot in English and I understand English more than Arabic." She provides an example:

If I read the same thing the same books one in English and one in Arabic, I understand the one in English more [than the one in] Arabic. So, I feel I really am belonging to the people who are speaking in English, but I am trying and training

myself to read more in Arabic because I do believe I have to [be] expert [in] both

languages.

She explains, "I am in the English world. I use it [English] 99% every day. I will say

because in most of my time is at work, so at work, I am using English most of the time."

For Lama and Linda, they feel that English has become an important element of their

lives and they feel so attached to it that it is replacing their first language, Arabic.

Working in English Speaking Countries

The majority of the participants say that they would feel comfortable working in

an English speaking country. Only Zeena said that she would not feel comfortable in an

English-speaking country, a statement that seems to conflict with her earlier comment

that she would feel comfortable interacting equally in the two worlds. Zeena feels so

attached to her society and country that she is not considering working in any country

other than Oman, whether she feels fully comfortable there or not.

All of the participants think that there are differences between working in their

country and working abroad. These include issues having to do with dealing with

different people and cultures, exposure to new experiences, and being forced to improve

English fluency. Hanna commented, "I see an environment where all of them speaking

English, I will be forced to speak in English. It will increase my speaking skill." Sarah

also expressed concern for feeling the separation from her family and being homesick

when she said, "I remember when I first come to America to work on my Master's, I used

to talk to my family every other day and I used to get very upset when I know my mom

cooked my favorite dish or my dad took my family to my favorite restaurant." To

summarize, most of the participants have no communication or interaction problems

when working in English speaking countries, but they might experience personal, emotional, or cultural problems such as missing their families and friends, society, or even food if they were to settle in an English speaking country.

<center>Identity and Writing in English as a Second Language</center>

Preferred Language for Writing

As mentioned earlier, all six participants feel that their identity was modified and affected by learning English and writing in English, despite the fact that only Sophia and Lama feel that this process has resulted in their developing two identities, one in English and one in Arabic. Interestingly, the majority of the participants said that they feel very comfortable when they write in English; only Hanna claims that she feels more comfortable when she writes in Arabic.

When the participants were asked how they feel toward writing in English as a second language and how they view themselves, they responded with varied and interesting answers, many of which relate back to issues of identity. Sarah feels that her 'English' self is "unstoppable, invincible, more passionate"; she feels that it is "easier to express her inside feelings as a woman" and that she "can write about everything in English." To extend the rather poetic quote cited earlier, she says she feels like "a bird flying away with no limits in a blue quiet and clear sky" when she writes in English. In a similar vein, Sophia feels that she is "more confident," "more expressive," and suggests that she defines herself more in English writing; she says, "I identify myself in English, actually, my thoughts and dreams are in English." Nada, too, feels that she is "herself," and feels very confident when she writes in English ,whether she makes mistakes or not. Lama expresses similar views: she feels like "herself" when writing in English, and she

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feels that she can express herself, her ideas, and her feelings "more smoothly" when writing in English. Zeena, Linda, and Fatma state that they feel "relaxed," and can express themselves in English.

It is particularly striking that many of these statements seem to suggest greater ease of writing in English, quite the opposite of what one might expect in relation to a second language. The sole negative response related to this question, by Hanna, did in fact address language ability, and not the content of writing. Although Hanna said that she feels comfortable when writing in English, she also said that she feels afraid sometimes, because she lacks vocabulary, thus, she cannot find all the words to express her ideas and feelings. She comments that "I miss the vocabulary sometimes, I cannot write all the words that I want, I write [the unknown words] in Arabic not in English."

When asked to compare their experience writing in the two languages, Zeena, Hanna, Fatma, and Linda claimed that they feel the same way toward writing in Arabic. However, Nada, Sophia, and Lama said that they do not feel very confident, and cannot express their feelings and ideas when writing in Arabic. As for Sarah, she feels restricted by her culture, society, and norms when she writes in Arabic. When writing in Arabic, she feels in touch with and constrained by the daily problems of Arabic-speaking culture such as political, social, economic or daily survival problems. All these problems prevent her from comfortably expressing her thoughts when writing in Arabic.

The majority of the participants said that they feel more confident and freer to express their opinions when writing in English. Only Hanna, who expressed doubts about her linguistic abilities, said that she feels more confident to express her opinion when writing in Arabic because she more fluent in her first language. Table 5 has a summary of

the ways the participants express their ideas in English and the differences between

writing in English and Arabic.

Table 5.

Ways to Express Ideas and Differences between Writing in English and Arabic

Name	Writing in English	Writing in Arabic
Sarah	Feels English is more relaxed and straightforward, informal, and direct	Sees Arabic as indirect and formal. Worries about issues associated with the Arabic world such as society, culture, and readers
Hanna	Lacks the necessary vocabulary and syntax	Owns the language and knowledgeable of the vocabulary and syntax
Sophia	Believes it is the main method for her writing. Frees and allows her to explore issues that are considered forbidden in Arabic	Feels careful and does not approach any forbidden issue
Zeena	Finds difficulty in vocabulary and syntax, however, learns new things every time she writes	Feels it is easier to express the ideas in an understandable and rhythmic language
Linda	Feels it is easier to deeply explain and deliver a message, can be used for formal and direct writing. Feels fluency is an ignored problem	Feels it is a rich language and can go very far when writing
Nada	Feels it is similar to Arabic	Feels it is similar to English, but does not approach any forbidden issue
Fatma	Feels English is more direct and straight to the point	Sees Arabic as indirect; feels that more words are expected and needed to convey meanings in Arabic
Lama	Feels writing in English is different from writing in Arabic. Feels English is more in depth to deliver a message. Frees her from so many limitations	Feels cannot describe a message in details

Most of the participants prefer to write in English for personal reasons. Sarah

feels that there are "no limits" to what she can write, say, or think about, but she does not

feel the same toward writing in Arabic. In Arabic, she does not find herself as

"expressive" as she is in English because of worries associated with her culture, society and Arab readers. Zeena prefers writing in English because it makes her feel "confident and happy." She raises another issue about writing in Arabic when she says that she thinks people will not read her text if she writes in Arabic. She thinks that Arabic text is not read as much as English text, because there is a larger number of English speakers, readers, and literary works in the English world than in the Arabic world. Raising yet another point, Linda prefers to write in English because she finds it more efficient when describing a situation or an opinion; she does not feel that Arabic has the potential for the same level of efficiency. She comments, "I can find many quick words to describe a situation or an opinion with less wording than in Arabic." Fatma expresses a practical goal when she says she prefers writing in English so she can improve her writing skills.

Interestingly, Lama, Sophia, and Nada all offered linguistic reasons for preferring to write in English. Lama prefers to write in English because she has been using it every day since childhood, and she feels she lacks the equivalent skills in Arabic vocabulary and grammar. For a similar reason, Sophia prefers writing in English because she is "more comfortable" with the language, and does not feel the same toward Arabic, because she does not have the necessary syntax to express herself. Nada, too, prefers writing in English because "the words flow easily" from her mind, and she feels that she is not good at writing in Arabic. Only Hanna said she prefers to write in Arabic. For her, it is difficult to express her opinions in English as she lacks the required vocabulary. Table 6 has a summary of the participants' responses regarding the language they use more to write and their preferred language for writing.

Table 6.

Language and Writing

Name	In which language do you write more?	In which language do you prefer writing?
Sarah	English	English
Hanna	does not write	Arabic
Sophia	English	English
Zeena	English	English
Linda	Both	English
Nada	English	English
Fatma	Both	English
Lama	English	English

One reason for the participants' preference of writing in English over Arabic could be due to the diglossic nature of the Arabic language. Spoken Arabic and written Arabic differ quite strikingly in lexicon, morphology and even syntax. Written or Classical Arabic, used in all formal written contexts, is standardized, unlike the localized dialects, which vary greatly from one Arab country to another. However, the classical language involves a highly formal system of cases and morphological forms that are unknown in most of the spoken varieties. The participants might have difficulty writing in classical Arabic because it is different from the Arabic of their daily lives. Zeena showed concern about writing in Arabic for fear that her text would not be read; this could be related to her difficulty in expressing her ideas in Arabic writing because this writing is different and more difficult than the spoken Arabic of her community.

Cultural Issues (Traditions, Societal Constraints, and Forbidden Issues,)

and the Relation of these to Writing

In Oman, women are restricted by their cultural traditions, customs, and norms that enforce their behaviors and attitudes; still, they greatly respect these traditions,

whether they agree with them or not. This introduces ambivalence in some of the participants in their comments on the constraints they have experienced.

Disliked Practices in Oman

When asked about any cultural traditions, norms, or behaviors in Oman that they do not agree with, the participants acknowledged a variety of patterns that they did not approve of. Some of these were focused not on specific cultural practices, but on the participants' perceptions of views or prejudices that they felt were common in the culture. Two examples are "people being judgmental of other people just because they do not adhere to certain social norms" (Sarah); and "evaluating a person after the first impression of his/ her appearance" (Zeena). Sophia also felt troubled by the inconsistency between the society's profession of religion and the indulgence in materialism, and with the conflict between certain people's behaviors and their religion. She is also concerned about the "limitation to discuss certain issues and topics."

Sarah and Linda expressed similar general concerns focused specifically on women's situation. Sarah expressed her disapproval of "certain norms and behaviors that make women dependent completely on men, which kill the personality of women"; Linda echoes a similar theme when she cites "lots of behaviors which make the life of a woman totally depend on the man".

In fact, many of the participants showed concern over cultural behaviors towards women. Of special note were the societal views toward marriage and toward women as they are defined by marital status. Zeena thinks marriage is based on three sequential priorities stating that "[m]arriage customs [are based on priorities], [first] priority is for the race, then [second] the religion, and [finally] ethics [of the groom]," which she does

not support. Linda addresses the inequality between men and women when she states, "not the same [rules] are applied on men in the same situation. This kind of thinking puts lots of pressures on the women." Fatma felt that "boys must [i.e., should] contribute in house work." And Nada disagreed with "separation between male and female in visiting each other even between relatives." Nada provides an example of this gender separation by sharing a story of her own experience. She states:

> When we go to visit my grandmother's house and all my male and female cousins and everyone are there, women sit in one room and males sit in another room. Why they do this, we come to see and talk to each other. Yeah, I feel very annoyed. Believe it or not, some of my friends do not even know how their male cousins look like.

> Sophia expressed, "I do not agree on our culture's idea of ignoring and not respecting a divorced woman or a single woman in her 30 or 40 and not married yet." She shares a story of her family suffering from this specific situation:

> My sister has just become a divorced and… the insurmountable amount of difficulties that she has to face as a widow [single] and trying to keep her children and with the inheritance law. She has been fighting in court for two years now over the custody of her children and her share of the house. But, unfortunately, our culture and laws are very supportive of men even if they were wrong.

She explains that the society treats divorced, widowed, or older single women differently and looks at them through a black and white lens, as if their situation was the women's personal fault.

The participants believe a few of these cultural traditions prevent women from becoming successful individuals in their personal and professional lives. Some of the women said that they wish they could discuss and change some of the cultural patterns that are disturbing to them. However, most of the participants seemed reluctant to challenge the status quo or to be seen as opposing the majority opinion in Oman, especially since they felt that Omani women generally tend to accept their lower status.

The participants did mention actions they could take, as first steps toward changing these patterns they found unsatisfactory. Sarah believes that in order to change these behaviors, she has to start with herself by changing herself first to be a better person, because this will be reflected in her children's behaviors, beliefs, and meaning schemas. Hanna would like to modify certain issues related to marriage. Like Sarah, Hanna seemed to feel that she could begin to make a difference by focusing on her own family situation and personal contacts. She would like Omani women to be able to discuss any marriage issues with their families and society without feeling shamed or embarrassed and to not fear their relatives and society; she also would like women themselves to make the decisions in choosing their life partners, and not their family, relatives, or society as is usually the case now.

Sophia proposes a quite substantial set of changes in the relationships between the genders. She would love to see a different kind of male to female dynamic or interaction, to see the men's perception of Omani women improve and reach the next level, to see women able to contribute scholarly or professionally, and to see a situation where women are able to take control of their own lives. Most importantly, she wants to see women's perception of themselves change and to have women take themselves more

seriously. She would like women not to be submissive, and to realize that they represent a key factor in changing the society for the better.

Zeena phrases one of her wishes in terms of Islam. She would like to change the way certain Arab people differentiate between the treatment of others according to their race, tribe, religion, or nationality. She thinks that some Arab people ignore the holy *Quran's* teachings and commandments that contradict this view of differentiation between people. She believes that this prejudiced way of thinking is not limited to a specific age, but exists in the minds of old and young, educated and uneducated people.

Linda would like to discard the idea that women belong at home; she would like women to be able to share the same set of responsibilities and duties with men, and she would like couples to build their lives together as equals. Fatma is concerned with the practical problem of housework and chores; she would like to see men share and take part in these responsibilities, and not leave them entirely to women.

Lama brings up an important point related to language and to the earlier findings in this study. She says that she would like to change the minds of some Arab people who think that if a person is speaking English, then s/he is against religion, norms, her first language, or Arabic culture. She thinks this issue is very serious and should be taken into consideration, as it hurts the people who are perceived in this way.

Only one dissenting voice was heard in this discussion of ideal changes for Omani society. Nada, unlike the other participants, feels very comfortable with the attitudes and behaviors of Omani people and does not feel the need to change anything.

Perceived Constraints and Limitations

The participants mentioned many constraints and limitations that Omani women are subject to. Some of the examples mentioned by the participants involve their relationship with men, the way they dress and the way they interact with society. However, five of the participants feel that they personally are able to transcend these constraints, and do not feel actively limited or controlled by the cultural traditions and norms. They simply feel that they live with these norms, accept them on a daily basis, and belong to Omani society by virtue of their living within the culture's expectations.

In contrast, Sarah, Sophia, and Lama, do feel that they are limited, controlled, and/or constrained by certain cultural traditions and norms. As they see it, these norms, without even realizing it, become so embedded in life that they become habitual. They feel that sometimes, when people live in a society and share its norms and culture, they feel obligated to accept it the way it is and try to fit what they believe in with it. They explain that some women feel they were raised on these traditions and norms, and do not know of any other way of living, while others either know another way and still agree with the ways things are, perhaps in part out of habit.

Sarah, Sophia, and Lama gave examples of some norms that they feel control and limit them. Sarah states, "I cannot go alone with my male colleagues for lunch outside the University unless as a group of males and females. It is socially unacceptable if not a part of work or family's commitments." Sophia comments, "I feel limited in my way, in my movements in my behavior. The way I dress and the way I behave toward men in a position [in relation with] to women". And Lama contrasts her family's flexible viewpoints with the more narrow positions in the society at large, which she feels do

constrain her: "I am limited. Maybe from my family side I am not limited, but from the whole society, the whole culture, and the whole people around me and surrounding me." She explains, "since I am living between them [her community], I am living in the middle, so, I feel they are surrounding me. I have to follow what they are doing. Yet, I am not following everything, but sometimes I feel if I want to be with them, I have to be like them."

Cultural Traditions, Societal Constraints, and Writing

The participants' feelings of being controlled also extend to their writing in Arabic. As pointed out earlier, five participants state that they are more confident to express their opinions when they write in English. They feel that writing in English frees them from certain cultural traditions and societal constraints. Though Linda and Fatma both reported that they feel equally confident and free in both languages, they had also stated earlier that they prefer to write in English. As noted earlier, only one participant, Hanna, is confident and feels freer to express her opinion when writing in Arabic. She does not view English writing as a path to liberation; however, her feelings about English seem to be at least partly formed by her lack of confidence in her linguistic abilities.

Several of the other participants shared concerns regarding how cultural traditions and societal constraints affect their writing in Arabic and in English. Half of the participants expressed similar concerns regarding two issues: delivering the message accurately (claiming that one language delivers the message better than the other), and attention to the different views of their audience.

Half of the participants cited concerns over having their written English texts be made available to Arab readers, since they feared they might be judged by these readers.

In addition, they expressed some concerns over the rhetorical requirements of English, specifically the need to be straight to the point and scholarly.

Sarah, Hanna, Nada, and Fatma answered that they do not worry about any issue when they write in English; these are the same participants who feel that English writing frees them and makes them more confident. Overall, when asked about their concerns when writing in English, few participants expressed worries. This could be related to many reasons, including their sense that English writing frees them, and possibly also that English speakers and readers are seen as more open minded. They may also feel that a larger audience has access to their English writing, which minimizes the risk of being recognized and judged.

As for writing in Arabic, the issues half of the participants worry about, in addition to the two concerns mentioned above, involve either grammar or content. Sophia addresses the first when she speaks of "the handicap of the grammar;" likewise, Zeena says, "I care about readers and I care if they will understand my text or not and what is meant by the issues I am discussing." Two participants addressed the need to be cautious about content in Arabic: "politics is a big issue you cannot write anything you want. I think religion as well" (Fatma); "the culture is the most sensitive issue here in Oman. The government policies, I feel most sensitive issues too since all of the people will understand Arabic. We feel that we should not talk about some of these issues in Arabic, especially in the public" (Lama).

Only two participants, Hanna and Linda, say that they do not worry about any issues when they write in Arabic. As for Sarah and Nada, they reported that they did not think about these issues, simply because they rarely write in Arabic.

Forbidden Issues

The participants cited several 'forbidden' issues they think that people in Oman do not feel comfortable to discuss or write about, such as homosexuality, politics, religion, sexual issues, unemployment rate and the situation in Oman, women's rights, rights of inheritance, circumcision, sexuality, and the relationship between males and females. All of these topics are 'forbidden' not legally, but culturally. There are no legal documents or laws passed by the government to forbid these issues, but these issues are avoided through the culture and norms, which are powerful social 'laws' that control people's behavior.

Forbidden Issues and Writing

The forbidden issues the majority of the participants feel they are not allowed to write about include political issues and women's rights. In addition, there are other issues that the participants feel they are allowed to explore, but still feel hesitant to discuss and write about in public. These include "how women feel about their relationships with their husbands – especially physically" (Sarah); "my personal problems" (Hanna); "how one cannot talk freely about the need to amend certain issues in the *Sharia* Law to benefit the women" (Sophia); "sociological issues related to customs" (Zeena); "personal issues" (Fatma); and "family issues" (Lama).

All of the participants believe that all issues and topics should be discussed and explored in writing, because society needs to know and learn; all topics should be raised for the sake of sparking a national debate, with attention to the method and style of language used to discuss these issues. In addition to the previously mentioned topics that the participants considered to be forbidden, some also listed other issues they have never

discussed before and that they feel need to be explored in writing in the future. The list here includes some quite diverse entries: "how unfairly Arabs are sometimes depicted in American media" (Sarah); "the effect of the Socio- political- economic situations of Omani Women' s Literature" (Sophia); "biotechnological knowledge and continuous professional development" (Zeena); and "business administration at the 21st Century" (Lama).

If asked to discuss or write about a forbidden issue, the participants said they had no problem with using either Arabic or English as the language for discussion; but if given a preference, half of the participants said that they would choose English. They prefer using English because they believe people who speak English are more open-minded. Hanna and Fatma prefer using Arabic because they might lack the needed vocabulary to correctly deliver and express their ideas in English. Only Linda says she would feel equally comfortable using both languages to write about any topic. As for Nada, she said she would prefer not to discuss and/or write about any forbidden issues in either language.

<div align="center">Omani Women's Rights, Freedom, and Islam</div>

Omani Women's Rights and Freedom

All eight female participants believe that the government tries its best to help Omani women gain their rights and to be equal with men. However, half of the participants still believe that in Oman, women are not treated equally with men for different reasons related to the culture, traditions, and norms. As noted earlier, although the participants deeply respect their culture's traditions and norms, some of the participants believe that some of these cultural traditions are affecting their freedom.

The participants defined and viewed freedom differently. All shared one central guiding principle, namely that freedom represents respect and being able to do what a person believes in and wants to do. But of the participants extended this main idea in different ways: Sarah, Zeena, and Linda associated freedom with being able to do what a person wants without limitations, constraints, or borders. Sarah defined freedom as the lack of constraints: "freedom to me means respect, and the condition of being free. It means having the power to act, speak, think, or write without externally compulsory restraints and chains." On a similar note, Zeena defined freedom with emphasis on self-expression without constraints: "freedom is to select your life and to express your opinion." Linda also views freedom as being able to do things without borders and in terms that reflect on the changes she has experienced in her lifetime:

Freedom is to be able to think and to be able to do what I think of without borders. When I [grew] up in a strict family, there were many borders around girls, what is allowed and what is not and yes, it caused lots of problems at the beginning. But, I feel that people are changing. What was a problem for me when I was young is different now. My family started learning with me and my older sisters and they have changed their way of thinking and their way of judging things. So, they became a little bit more open about our culture; it is a religion thing plus a culture.

Hanna views freedom in terms of relationships: "freedom is if you find someone respects you. This is freedom to me, if you find the respect and find people believe in you." Sophia's definition of freedom is more extended, and echoes Hanna's emphasis on relationship, though she suggests that relationships should not involve constraints:

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Freedom to me is the ability to exist in a society, in a community, or in a relationship as in with my husband and still, be able to be me, as myself not as a part of another person or what that person wants me to be or what that society or community wants me to be, but I exist as I am.

Lama defines freedom in association with her religion and beliefs: "freedom is to do everything within the things, which God told us to do." As for Fatma, she offered a simple definition of freedom as an enjoyable experience, with no mention of religious or cultural associations: "freedom to me, it is just so fun sometimes to read, nothing to do with my culture."

Unlike the other participants, Nada defined freedom in association with her own Omani culture and perceptions. She explains, "[w]omen are very lucky that they have freedom. They have freedom to work, they have freedom to drive, and they can go out and dress in the way they like. They can wear an *Abaya,* they can go without an *Abaya*, this is freedom." In contrast to other participants' views, Nada's definition of freedom suggests that Omani women have full legal and cultural freedom and rights allowing them to dress and act as they want. However, some of the participants earlier conformed that Omani women are controlled by their cultural traditions and norms and cannot act as they wish, but there are limits and boundaries they have to respect.

All of the participants believe that Omani women have the legal right to be educated, to go to school and university, to travel abroad without a companion, to work, to drive, to be hired in high positions such as ministers, to get equal pay as men, and to share men's responsibilities in life. However, these legal rights are covered with the cultural laws. Nada and Fatma believe that the Omani women have enough freedom and

need to gain nothing more. However, the rest of the participants believe that there are still issues that concern them in regard to Omani women's status and position in the Omani society. They think that legal equality with men is not enough for the Omani women. Six of the participants cite their family roles in saying that they believe that Omani women can be even more effective than men by realizing and administering the power they have in their lives, which is being able to reshape the norms and thoughts of their children for the next generation.

They think they still need to gain more in areas such as education, educational awareness, health awareness, the freedom to choose their life companion, the freedom to choose their field of study and not be forced into certain fields, and freedom of expression. Issues that concerned some of the participants and still are painful for them are related to divorce, inheritance, inequality in hiring, and lack of a department or place especially concerned with women's rights.

The participants shared some examples of issues that still concern them and they feel the urge to solve. Sarah, Hanna, and Sophia agreed that Omani women enjoy freedom and have rights; however, they are still controlled. Sarah states:

> The full rights are there for all. Those eligible educated women are very much possessing them [full rights]. Others [who are not educated] are controlled by the conservative beliefs of their families, especially in their right to choose their husbands. They are obliged to get [married] to their relatives regardless of the differences in education or thinking. I think the most concerning issue to me is the marriage issue. Sad to say that, hopefully, I want to see women are the ones to choose husbands not being forced by traditional trip values, or such things, giving

them [women] the same opportunity as with males, at least in deciding their future

partner.

Hanna compares Omani women with other Arab women, as Omani women are better off, but are still somehow controlled. She believes:

Women in Oman have many rights better than other countries, Islamic countries. For example, here in Oman, we have the right to drive a car, but in Saudi Arabia, no they are forbidden. They [Omani women] have the freedom to go to school and even if they want to travel outside Oman to study. Still, there are some families, they do not like their daughters to travel outside, and control things that are personal for women, for example the way they dress.

Sophia thinks, "[w]omen do have rights, but still the rights are covered with the Shareat Allah [the laws of God]. I would like to see women's issues about divorce inheritance, keeping the children if you are widows. I would really like to see some of these changes." She explains, "I would like to see that the government supports toward women in providing them with everything, such as awareness, an educational awareness, health awareness, and career awareness."

Linda mentioned many concerns and issues Omani women have to face. She states, "[w]hy we [women] are supposed to be in one place and not in another place. Sometimes, when they look at two people that they are coming to apply for a job they prefer men because they are saying that the women will have her commitments to her house, her kids, and other things." She explains:

When we judge people, people are different from each other. Maybe, there is a man that he has lot of commitments also or he is not really interested in doing his

job and the women, which she is fully committed has lots of commitments with her kids and all of this, but still she is doing a great job in her work so why do not they give both of them the opportunity?

Linda mentioned a very interesting story that concerned her when she was a child. She states:

When I was young, I had a problem with accepting being a woman. I was trying to be a boy and I felt my father was proud of my brothers and proud of whatever they are doing, he is accepting it. I felt the look in my father's eyes was just different when he looked at my brothers and when he looked at us [Linda and her sisters]. And also, as a girl he was not really expecting a lot from us, but after a while, I felt I am proud to be a woman, I am proud to be a girl. Now, I am a mother, I am a wife, and I have my position in my work and I am proud to be a woman with all of this.

As for Zeena, she thinks, "the government did its best, but some people's thinking still did not change. They tie themselves to wrong customs even if they conflict with their religion." She feels that "women here want to prove that they are not just equal to men, but they can be better also." In contrast to Zeena, Lama's concern was that "[in] our country [Oman], they do not give women all the rights, but maybe they have started that like we have women as ministers, but when expressing the ides, I do not think they give the women the freedom or all of the rights, full rights to talk." She continues, "I really want to see all of the Omani women free and select their own future, their own specialty, their own job, and to be given equal chances with males, with the men, especially when we talk about jobs."

A few of the participants mentioned topics that they have encountered and read about related to Middle Eastern women's identity, freedom, rights, and social status in English. Topics the participants mentioned were articles and newspaper columns related to: violence against women in the Middle East and Arab countries (Hanna), business topics [as related to women] (Nada), relationship between women's social status and freedom (Sarah), and equality between men and women (Fatma). The fact that these topics are associated with English sources by the participants might suggest that the Arabic language media rarely covers, or does not pay enough attention to women and women's issues. In any case, this shows that these issues exist in society and are of interest to these women, who read about these topics in English.

Islam and Women

The participants strongly believe that Islam provides women with full rights and equality with men. However, the participants also feel that some Muslims cling to old ways or customs, even if they conflict with their religion. This causes them to suppress many rights for women. Lama pointed out that neither God nor Islam has decreed that the place of women is at home, that women should not work, that women should not be engineers or mechanics, or that they should not mix with men. On the contrary, all of the participants agreed that Islam encourages women to share men's responsibilities and to be educated. On this topic, some participants also mentioned Islamic topics that they would like to discuss and write about in English and that they feel are misunderstood in the broader world. These include the peaceful aspect of Islamic norms and the fact that Islam should not be linked with terrorism in the world's view. They would like to share why they believe in Islam and what they see as the real message behind the religion.

They expressed concern over how the media is delivering a distorted picture of Islam, and over the lack of awareness about the prophet Mohamed, his life, and his morals.

Still, side by side with their passionate defense of Islam and their obvious love of their culture, all participants, except for Nada, felt that some aspects of the current situation for women could be improved. All of the participants agreed that if a female discussion forum were formed where women could meet weekly or monthly to discuss women's issues in English, they would definitely join the group in order to share ideas and perspectives that could help in improving the Omani women's life and situation.

General Discussion and Summary

The participants viewed and defined their identities by using a variety of terms. This response pattern is in keeping with Bahbaha's (1994) statement that identity is "never a priori, nor a finished product" (p. 5), and also with Peirce's (1995) definition of identity as "multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change" (p. 9). Each participant has a unique way of expressing her particular place in this process of identity development. This again is in line with recent research, in particular with Grayson's (2002) view; he considers uniqueness as a crucial feature that plays an important role in developing a person's identity. He explains that "uniqueness results from combinations of various specifically identifying characteristics" (p. 3). Although the participants' responses were quite diverse, it is clear that learning English is one factor that has influenced the development of their identities throughout the years. Sarah, Fatma, Linda, Nada, and Lama learned English at such a very young age that they said they had not even recognized the effect of English on their identity or even their lives until they participated in this study. Some of the participants claimed that they are still so strongly connected

with their Arabic identity and its associated expectations that they did not have to develop

a second identity; for them, this was because they felt that they were able to view English

as a neutral tool for communication. Sophia and Lama were the only two participants

who believe that they have two identities, one in English and one in Arabic. These

identities are different from each other in their perspective, speech, mannerism,

behaviors, and language; they are similar in beliefs, culture, and religion.

My study has revealed that learning English has affected the way the participants

think and perceive certain issues; all of the participants claimed that learning English has

taught them new beliefs, meanings, and ideas about other cultures. The majority believe

that their thoughts have changed as a result of traveling to a foreign country to pursue

their higher education. All of the participants believe that people should learn about and

be exposed to other cultures, religions, and languages. They perceived their identities as

influenced by their experiences, which included learning English and traveling abroad.

All of the participants believe that learning about a new culture and language helps them

learn new ideas and beliefs, which in turn affects their identity and its formation.

Whether the participants have one or more identities, they believe the two

languages have their own worlds, the Arabic world and the English world. They believe

that these two worlds differ in terms of culture, religion, style of writing, mannerisms,

beliefs, and norms. However, the participants also think that the two worlds share some

similarities and complement each other in terms of education, commerce, economy,

technology, shopping, investment, protection of women, and information.

Some of the participants experience a conflict between these two worlds in terms

of the differences between cultural values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors. Others view the

relationship between two worlds as more complementary than conflicting. The first of these views recalls Kaspar and Noh (2001), who explain that a conflict might arise between the individuals' dominant values and beliefs, which have been built based on their life experience, on the one hand and their race, ethnicity, and culture on the other. This generated conflict can in turn affect the individuals' identity and force them to find a balance in order to be accepted in both worlds.

Based on the participants' responses, it is safe to assume that English and English writing have affected their identities; this could be related to the new meaning schemas the participants were exposed to when learning English, traveling abroad, and using English in their daily lives and working experiences. These meaning schemas were associated with the English language and everything related to it. Learning a second language and being exposed to or learning about other cultures widened their horizons and opened their eyes to new and/or different beliefs, which in turn affect the way they think and write.

As for the rhetorical differences between Arabic and English, interestingly, for most of the participants it was not a main concern and it did not seem to appear as much as I expected in their responses. The participants did not seem to be very focused on or consciously aware of the rhetorical differences between English and Arabic when they write in English, although this is a very important issue that has been discussed by many scholars such as Kaplan (1966), Connor (2002), Ilic (2004), Panetta (2001), among many others. This could be related to many reasons; for instance, the participants could be so focused on the content that they ignore other issues; or alternatively, since they focused on their ability to address a larger audience, this again may have outweighed concerns

about rhetorical form. Yet another possibly relevant observation is that these participants are from varied disciplines, and that only two are in fields that directly focus on language.

All of the participants agreed that in their Omani society there are certain issues that are considered forbidden culturally. The majority of the participants reported that they prefer using English to discuss these forbidden issues. They cite a variety of reasons: that English readers are more open-minded, that the English-speaking audience is broader, that these issues have already been explored by foreigners in English and are thus familiar to English readers. The participants often referred quite directly to the notion of audience, saying that when they write in English, they feel that what they write is not directly intended for Arabic speakers, and thus, will not be monitored within the constraints of their home culture.

Among the topics that the participants feel they are not allowed to discuss and write about are political issues and women's rights. This recalls both Gordesman's (1997) views and the US State Department's reports. In writing about Oman, Gordesman claims that "[a]cademic freedom is restricted, particularly regarding controversial matters, including politics" (p. 199). The US State Department reported that "[t]he Omani government restricts freedom of expression" (In Gordesman, 1997, p. 198). Since there are no legal documents that prohibit freedom of expression or list any issues as forbidden, the constraints are assumed to be cultural. Given Gordesman's view, and the US State Department's reports, it is surprising that some of the participants stressed that they have legal freedom and full rights, that they are allowed to discuss most topics and academic freedom is not restricted. However, this statement about the personal situation of several

participants is counterbalanced by the admission by all respondents that Omani people, especially women, are constrained by their culture, norms, and society.

The Omani society, with its culture and norms, represents a kind of law. For these women, the participants wish they could modify a few of these cultural traditions and norms to overcome societal constraints. They believe that nowadays, the world, including Oman, is changing in communication, interaction, technology and many other avenues of life; therefore, some of the old traditions and norms need to be modified to fit with the change and the progress Oman is going through.

In this chapter, I have presented and analyzed the participants' views and perspectives on their experiences when writing in English as a second language. In the next chapter, the major findings, summary, implications, recommendations, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and ideas for future research will be presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary and an overview of the study's major findings as well as sections covering implications, suggestions, and recommendations for assisting the Omani women, English learners, and educators. After these sections, I offer comments on both the importance and the limitations of the study, and I note topics for further research, before finally ending the chapter with concluding remarks.

Summary, Major Findings, and Results of the Study

The purpose of this study has been to investigate and gain insight into the relationship between Omani women's identities and writing in English as a second language. The study has explored the extent to which, and some of the ways in which, the lives of Omani Muslim women have been affected when writing in English as a second language.

The results confirm the hypothesis of the study, which is that the Omani women's lives are affected by learning English and writing in English as a second language. However, the effect of English was perceived differently for these women. Only two participants felt that the learning of English had forced them to develop a second identity just for the English world; other positions varied, though all of the participants agreed that they had experienced change in their views and beliefs. Some of the participants failed to realize the fine line between their two worlds until they were interviewed and this subject was brought to their attention. However, a few were acutely aware of a separation between their English and Arabic worlds, and were aware of ways in which

they had learned to compromise and maximize the benefits of these two worlds. Still, others felt that English did not strongly influence their identities, but could be used as a neutral tool within the Arabic culture and norms.

Though the responses were mixed and sometimes ambivalent, the participants seemed overall to see more of a complementary relationship, instead of a contradictory one, between their two cultural worlds. In other words, these women seem to have adapted to what fits them best in regards to both worlds, while rejecting or questioning factors in each, including some of their own society's cultural traditions. In one point of strong agreement, these women connect English with broad communicative possibilities, with freedom of expression, and with the chance to better their lives.

The set of questions that the study examined were generated from my personal experience dealing with these issues on a day to day basis, seeing that the women around me also shared similar concerns, and my wanting to learn more about these issues. I had a personal interest in this topic, and this dissertation has given me the opportunity to address the following questions and find the answers for each:

1. *How is Omani Muslims women's experience affected and formed in writing in English as a second language, as judged from the narratives these women tell about their learning of English, and in particular with writing? In what ways have they used, or do they now use English, and especially written English, in their everyday lives, socially and/or professionally?*

The participants' perspectives and definitions on their own experience varied. The effect of learning English on the participants' experiences and identity has varied. All of

the participants' experiences, meaning schemas, and beliefs were developed and widened by learning English and/or traveling abroad to pursue their higher education.

Most of the participants reported that they use both oral and written English socially and professionally in many aspects of their everyday lives, except for Hanna and Fatma, who use English mainly professionally. The participants use English and written English in different environments and aspects of their everyday lives. They all use English writing professionally at work, in teaching, discussion forums, workshops, seminars and conferences, emails, and formal letters. The majority also use English writing socially for a range of purposes: communicating with people, communicating with domestic workers, interacting with foreign and Arab friends, writing in a diary, writing plans, traveling, chatting, for shopping lists, and for studying.

2. *Do Omani women feel that they have two identities, one in the English world and one in the Arabic world? If so, how do they feel the separate identities arose? How are the two resulting worlds related to each other (judging from their own perspectives)? What conflicts arise between the cultural values associated with these two worlds as perceived by the women themselves? In what ways do the two cultural worlds complement, conflict, and/or relate to each other?*

When asked to define themselves, the most common terms the participants used referred to personality traits, professional position, and their expected role in both community and society. Two participants, Sophia and Lama, said that they had developed a second identity to fit in with the English world. The other six participants felt that they modified and adapted their identities to fit with both worlds, the English world and the

Arabic world. Thus, they saw the dichotomy as basically in the 'worlds' associated with the two languages, and not in some kind of inner contradiction in their own personalities.

However, there were hints of ambivalence in this discussion of the two 'worlds;' the participants insisted that the two worlds complement more than conflict with each other. But at other points in their interviews, half of the participants were equally insistent on their view that a conflict exists between the two worlds in terms of culture, traditions, values, religion, and norms. They felt that the worlds share similarities in terms of education, ecommerce, economy, technology, shopping, investment, legal protection of women, and information. They cited differences in regard to culture and religion, in terms of conservativeness in thoughts, certain cultural values and norms, the languages themselves, the style of writing, mannerisms, and behaviors. As I will discuss in more detail in a section below on 'reflections,' the participants were generally reluctant to offer specifics during the formal study interviews, though they were often enthusiastic in giving specifics when the tape recorder was turned off and the official interviews were over. Naturally, these areas of conflict between the two worlds were especially subject to this contrast. That is, during the interviews, the participants tended to keep to general statements about 'culture' and/or 'traditions,' while in conversations that they regarded as private, they were more forthcoming. While this in itself represented an important learning experience for me, it has prevented me from being able to define the participants' views on these two 'worlds' in more specific terms in reporting my results.

3. *In what ways do they express their ideas in writing in the second language, and how does this compare with their writing in their first language? For instance, do these Omani women feel that writing in the second language frees them and*

allows them to explore issues that are considered taboo or forbidden in Arabic?

In their views, how does this factor interact with others, for instance with the

problems of fluency, or difficulties with finding an audience for their writing?

The majority of the participants reported that they feel very confident and comfortable when they write and express their ideas in English, in spite of its being their second language. Only one participant, Hanna, expressed doubts about her linguistic abilities. All of the participants, including Hanna, said that they prefer to write in English, and that they believe English allows them to explore issues forbidden in their first language and world. Some feel that English frees them from the norms, attitudes, or constraints associated with their first language and world.

However, here again, ambivalence arises in the participants' statements at different times. In spite of their emphatic statements about preferring to write in English, when asked to compare their experience writing in the two languages, half of the participants claimed that they feel the same way toward writing in Arabic and English. At this point, only half provided responses consistent with their statements about English; these said that they do not feel very confident, and cannot express their feelings and ideas when writing in Arabic. One of the participants, Sarah, stated quite definitely that she feels restricted by her culture, society, and norms when she writes in Arabic.

Interestingly, fluency is an aspect that the participants seemed to ignore. Seven of the eight final participants felt that linguistic problems have no affect on their English writing, nor is it a factor that concerns them when they write.

They do not perceive any problems in finding an audience for their English writing. In fact, they believe it is easier to find a larger and more understanding audience

when they write in English. They were confident that their writing could be read by a broad audience when they write in English; and consistent with their statements about feeling more free in English. Some expressed a kind of relief that their English writing should not be subject to as strict censure by Arabic readers, since it was not aimed specifically at them as an audience.

4. *What specific strategies, if any, have these women adopted in order to integrate English and English writing into their lives?*

The participants have adopted and used many strategies and techniques to integrate English and English writing into their lives by using English daily in their professional and personal lives in the following ways: reading, writing, listening to news and music, watching movies, teaching, communicating with other Arabs and foreigners, shopping and e-shopping, traveling to English speaking countries, and/or helping their children with their English homework. While they do not seem aware of strategies that specifically 'bridge' between their two cultures, most of the participants actively sought out experiences that maintained their contact with English and their experience in using the language, beyond their professional need to use the language.

5. *Do these women refer to English, and especially English writing, as playing a role in their future life and plans? If so, how do they characterize that role?*

Most of the participants refer to English, and especially English writing, as playing a role in their future life and plans. They feel this role helps them in their personal and professional life to perform tasks and achieve their goals. In fact, since these participants are all well established in their professional fields, in positions where English is central to them, they are in a position to view continuing involvement with

English as simply taken for granted, and not as a tool they think of in terms of future plans. The entrenched position of English, both in their professions and even in their family lives, ensures that the language is a continuing part of their expected experience.

<div align="center">Reflection on the Research</div>

As I presented the participants' answers to the main research questions, at several points I was obliged to note that the results revealed some contradictory responses, and ambivalence or reluctance with respect to some topics. I would like to comment a little here further on what I have come to think of as the need to 'read between the lines' in looking at my study's results.

Conflicting Interpretations

When analyzing and interpreting the data, I felt that the participants' responses did not completely reflect their observed behaviors. At times, the participants' answers provided hints rather than conclusive results; thus, I had to piece together the puzzle by reading between the lines in order to reach interpretations, answers, and findings regarding certain issues. As a result of my experience with interviews in this study, I realized that it is important to connect the participants' responses with their behaviors, tone of voice, and gestures.

To cite one example, some of the participants seemed to react negatively to the suggestion of two identities. For example, some of them laughed when they were asked this question, a few of them changed their facial expressions, others used phrases such as "thank God, I have only one identity," "fortunately, I have one identity," and "I have only one, it is my personality that I struggled for 35 years to build it."They seemed to take my question about having 'two identities' not as referring to a natural state for a bicultural

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person, but as an accusation, something they associated with deviance, or psychological disease and sickness, although the term was explained to them. They were perfectly comfortable reporting that their identity was changed or modified; but they tended to strongly reject the idea of having two identities, surely more because of the negative ideas they might associate with this term than because of my intention in using the phrase. I was then left to infer that their responses constitute at least a partial positive response to my question, even though six of the eight responses technically took a negative form.

Contradictions and their Possible Meanings

More important, something like real inner contradiction and uncertainty appeared in the participants' responses to some questions. For example, the majority of the participants responded that they feel more comfortable and prefer to write in English in comparison to writing in Arabic; however, later, several of the participants reported that they are entirely comfortable with Arabic. There was a general consensus that Arabic-speaking culture forbade discussion of certain issues; yet at some point, several of the participants who had recognized these constraints insisted that they could use both languages to discuss all issues. Likewise, several of the participants stated that they are free and are not constrained in any way in their society; however, in a following question, the same participants provided a list of constraints and barriers that surround them, and a list of issues they want to change and do not agree with within their society. In all of these patterns, the participants seem to have been adopting an ambivalent position. On the one hand, they seemed critical of problems with using Arabic, with the Arabic-speaking audience, or of problems with women's status in their home culture. But, they

seemed to prefer to nurture the view that these constraints and problems had no effect on their own lives personally. Although this does not emerge as a conscious 'strategy,' and no participant seemed even aware of these contradictions, it could be that this pattern represents an unconsciously adopted strategy, allowing the participants to feel empowered, for instance in their professional lives, even while they realize that women are generally not empowered in the society.

Reluctance and Confidentiality

Another observed pattern was the participants' behaviors toward the subject of confidentiality; although confidentiality in the study was ensured, the participants still were not entirely comfortable and were both hesitant and reluctant in responding throughout the interviews.

If given a choice, the participants said they would prefer not to be recorded during the interviews. In addition, several participants did not want to associate their pseudonyms with the information and stories they shared; they stated that they felt confident, but in fact, their demeanor suggested hesitancy. As I noted at one earlier point, the participants consistently gave short or abbreviated answers during their recorded conversation, and they could not be persuaded to provide detailed information or share personal stories while being recorded.

However, as soon as the recording machine was turned off, the participants' behavior underwent a striking change. At once, they were willing to share specifics about their personal experiences and stories; they were more comfortable, outspoken, and sincere; they seemed friendlier, relaxed, and more responsive; and they spoke with a free and an open tone of voice. This showed a deep contrast among the participants' attitudes,

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behaviors, gestures, and language when they were being formally recorded and when they were informally interviewed. Of course, I cannot report the content of these later conversations. However, I believe it is important to note the occurrence of these freer, more open conversations, as this affects the interpretation any reader might bring to my reported results from the recorded interviews.

In fact, a pattern involving loss of participants may support the same issue of reluctance. Originally, 22 women demonstrated an interest in participating; of those, 15 women agreed to fully participate. Yet at the stage of collecting the data and signing the consent form, seven prospective participants declined to follow through with the study. Ultimately, only eight participants remained that fulfilled all requirements. The loss of participants could be related to many reasons: their fear of their society's reaction toward their responses, being judged by their peers in a negative image or even being ostracized by their society. On reflection, those who withdrew may have felt unable to portray their society's expected image, or may have been uncomfortable with the prospect of potentially being invited to question their culture's norms of behavior or its systematic flow of traditions, among other personal reasons. It is important to mention that the goal of my study did not/does not aim or intend to invite the participants to criticize their culture or religion; still, they might have feared that the study might touch on such issues.

Interpretation and Comments

The Omani culture is a collectivistic culture that emphasizes group work and the term 'we'. This may account for the participants not wanting to be recognized as individuals, and especially as individuals who challenge the status quo. One Omani saying refers to such people as "nails that stick out and get hammered down." The

participants did not want to associate their names (even as pseudonyms) with some of the detailed information and stories, even though the information they provided was not closely associated with politics, culture, or religion. Still, for them, these stories were personal experiences that might make them stand out negatively; so they feared the reaction of their society, families, and friends.

A related source of reluctance may stem from the Middle Eastern version of 'saving face,' which involves protecting the reputations and maintaining the respect of others (Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms, 2008). The participants seemed to want to 'save face' by reflecting a positive image as a unified people, so that their society would continue to respect them. Thus, it was very hard for me to break through that public image to understand their true feelings and grasp the actual picture, at any point where that picture might be seen as reflecting negatively on the broader culture.

However, of course, these patterns (the loss of participants, the hesitation and generality of responses when being recorded, the ambivalence of their responses, and the fear of associating their pseudonyms with their stories) all add up to a 'result' of sorts for the study, which I feel obligated to include in closing my remarks. These can all be seen as representing evidence of constraints and barriers still existing in Omani society, no matter which language the participants use to communicate and deliver their message. This even contradicts the participants' perceived perspective on English, it frees them and allows them to discuss certain topics and forbidden issues; our interviews were in fact conducted in English, and yet the use of that language does not seem to have freed the participants from hesitation and concern over being judged for sharing their ideas and stories. Their observed attitudes, behaviors, gestures, and language when they were/ were

not being recorded allowed me to conclude that, while English might help them in exploring certain issues and forbidden topics to a degree, it does not completely free them.

English helped the participants in delivering their perspectives and becoming more liberal and outspoken, but it did not erase the fear from the culture, the fear from the hidden perceived power, and the fear from being different. A part of each participant wants to be comfortable with her own Arabic speaking culture, the Omani culture; but another part of them also wants to be a part of the free world. In 'reflection on the research,' I am led to the idea that the participants have not resolved the tension and conflict in regards to what they really want to be and accomplish, and what they should be and do in the eyes of their society. To summarize, it is safe to assume that English provides the participants with the means to feel free, confident, and believe in themselves; at the very least, this gives them hope to be independent in their opinions. Thus, their selective integration of the English world into their lives represents an important step forward—though it is only one step, and does not represent a finished journey.

As a final note to this section, a word of praise and appreciation for the participants is in order. These participants represent strong and outspoken Omani women who have faced and still face many challenges in their daily lives, while finishing their education and becoming successful in their society. They play very important roles in their community on both personal and professional levels. In spite of all the ambivalence, contradictions, and confidentiality, the participants still seemed very honest with their

responses, and they were eager to be part of a study where their answers could make a difference and could help represent Omani women.

Additional Findings

In addition to the primary research questions, other issues were raised and addressed that appeared while conducting the study. Issues such as women's rights, freedom, Islam, cultural traditions, societal constraints, and forbidden issues in relation to writing. In this section, I summarize additional findings related to these issues and topics that appeared during the study:

- The participants feel that they have learned new beliefs, ideas, and meaning schemas and also some of their original ones have changed since they have learned a second language and traveled to a foreign country. Most of them believe that learning English has affected the way they think. English has widened their minds and introduced new horizons to them. Only Lama and Zeena shared different views; Lama agreed that she has learned new beliefs and meaning schemas, but she did not feel that they affect the way she thinks. As for Zeena, she believes traveling abroad opened her mind to other perspectives, but she does not think it changed her original thoughts.

- The majority of the participants feel that there are certain cultural traditions and norms they do not agree with and would like to change in their Arabic world. They believe that certain cultural traditions and norms can be contradictory to their religion, Islam, and are blindly followed and passed through generations. They provided examples of these disliked practices: people being judgmental of others, evaluating a person after first impression,

the limitation to discuss certain issues and topics, behaviors that make the women dependent on men, families choosing husbands, limitation in dress and interaction, separation between men and women, society's view of divorced or single older women, and men not contributing to house work.

- All of the participants respect their culture and their language. However, they have focused on learning English and developing their English skills at the expense of improving their first language. In turn, the Arabic language is taken for granted. Therefore, some of them, Sophia, Lama, and Nada, acknowledge that they feel they are losing their Arabic language knowledge and the required syntax, and English is becoming their dominant point of focus and interest as it pertains to personal development.

- Many Omani people are not only using English as a communicative tool or in their professional lives, but English is also taking precedence over the Arabic language and is used in situations and environments where Arabic was once the dominant means of communication.

- The participants think that women's issues need to be explored on a larger scale and in depth in order to educate others and raise awareness.

Implications, Suggestions, and Recommendations

In this section, I will offer suggestions that might help Omani women especially, and English learners generally, in exploring larger issues about their own experiences and identity/identities. These suggestions aim to aid learners in developing as competent L2 learners without negatively influencing the lives that may have been modified in the course of their acquiring a new language and adjusting to its culture.

Before moving on to list specific recommendations, I listed here a group of assumptions that I have as a basis for these recommendations:

- Women should have the option of determining their identity and what they want to be and believe in; in this way, they will be able to determine who they want to be, which will be reflected in their identity development as they incorporate any new experience, including the learning of a new language.

- If women are more open to other people, cultures, and meaning schemas, they will be more aware of the existence of a larger world and bigger issues; thus, they will be more tolerant, less likely to judge others.

- By being able to explore one's own issues, a person will be able to understand and work on how they can improve.

- By opening one's mind to other worlds, cultures, languages, and meaning schemas, and learning what would be most beneficial or helpful for that person, a woman can develop her identity and feel more confident in nurturing a more educated generation.

- By keeping and using their first language, Arab people do not have to feel that they are abandoning Arabic when they learn English. By learning a second language, they are not giving up their first, but adding another resource of knowledge and another lens with which to view their world, and different worlds.

The following recommendations, some of them general and some specific, grow from the above assumptions and are intimately rooted in them:

- If women start exploring their own issues, they can begin achieving their rights and freeing themselves from old cultural traditions and norms that they do not agree with, they cannot expect change to just happen. Women as a whole need to stop relying on other women and men to change the norm and start acting themselves.

- If women feel that second language writing frees them and allows them to explore forbidden or sensitive issues, then they should be encouraged to use English writing to benefit them and to help them in expressing their ideas and opinions on any issue that they feel constrained to discuss in their first language.

- Women can try to understand the expectations of their own religion and its beliefs to create their own meaning schemas and values; they need not rely on outside (here Western or Anglo) values. The respondents in this study showed a strong desire to identify themselves from within their own culture. If encouraged to do so at the same time as forging new pathways in that culture, they will not be blindly following old norms and traditions that they do not agree with, and will be ultimately be able to find a set of values that they believe in and agree with.

- Opening and providing options of discussion such as female discussion forums or organizations will help the women in exploring their own issues and matters. In these forums, women could meet weekly or monthly to discuss women's issues in English, communicate thoughts, and find possible solutions. This will also offer women a support system that might make them

feel less alone in facing these issues. Since the Omani society is a traditional one, it is better to make slow changes than fast ones. Women's groups that focus around family issues and concerns will help Omani women slowly transform, share ideas, and find possible solutions for their concerns.

- Publication is a very important tool that could help Omani women. Publications such as newspapers and magazines need to be made available to women. These represent forums where they have the option to discuss their problems, needs, and goals, and which can help them in finding solutions as well as having their voices heard.

- The government could help by providing a department for women, their problems, concerns, and needs. Such a department, which would be concerned with and supportive of women, especially those who are divorced, abused, widowed, single, or elderly, could help these women to identify their problems and discuss their options, as well as boosting their status in the society at large by public recognition of their full membership and entitlement in the society.

- Teachers could help English learners in finding their own voice and style of writing and expanding their ideas and their knowledge. Teachers need to help learners, and encourage them to open their minds to new ways of thinking and learning. These sensible pedagogical ideas take on a special meaning for those teaching learners from cultures where they may feel constrained in expressing themselves in their first language, or from cultures whose traditional values differ markedly from those of Western Anglo cultures.

- When learning another language or culture, learners will inevitably be exposed to other belief systems and ways of life. A teacher could help a student to be aware of the differences and similarities, and possible affects on their present and future lives.

- A way of exploring issues that are considered forbidden or are a concern or bother for women in the Arab society is by using translation, to open a path for discussion. Through translation, woman may more comfortably open new points of discussion, and also help non-English speaking Arabs to have access to the information, thus, reaching a new audience.

- Providing the Omani women with more opportunities to study abroad could help them develop their identity and recognize more the options out there to improve themselves.

<div align="center">Importance of the Study</div>

As mentioned above, the findings of the study suggest that the way people view themselves and their development is affected by learning English as a second language. English including English writing can change lives such as those of this study's participants. Educators need to understand the effect of a second language on learners' identity and its formation. The present study both illustrates that effect, and also warns that it is not an easy or straightforward task to measure it.

Kaspar & Noh (2001) explain that a conflict may arise between an individual's dominant values, beliefs, race, ethnicity, and culture and a set of recently learned ones. Therefore, educators first need to understand this point, so that they can recognize it themselves when it arises, and also so that they can help learners recognize this conflict

and be more aware about its existence and its nature. Ultimately, this can empower learners to work toward strategies that integrate their two cultural worlds in a conscious manner, as well as to avoid submerged conflicts and ambiguities surrounding the presence of these two worlds.

Many scholars, Bahbaha (1994), Davis (1991), Hansen & Liu (1997), Grayson (2002), Gibson (2004), and Peirce (1997), believe that human beings' identity develops in a natural continuous process, is subject to change, is affected by social surroundings, and is constructed and affected by the languages learned by an individual. As part of this last factor, the learning of English must affect and change the learner's identity; by paying attention to this process, it is possible for educators to understand aspects of their learners' identity formation and adjust their pedagogical decisions accordingly. This study is important as it has opened avenues and introduced Arab Omani women with their experiences and their voices. It has contributed insights that may be valuable to the fields of teaching English to speakers of other languages and second language learning. It also has shown the ambivalence and contradictions that Omani women experience in their life, as they struggle to reflect the image expected of them by their society, and at the same time to value and project what they experience as their own true image.

<center>Limitations of the Study</center>

This dissertation, like any other study, has its limitations. The first limitation was that the number of participants in this study is small, since finding a larger number of participants was difficult for many reasons. First, many of the women contacted feared that their society might develop a negative reaction to their participation; in fact, as noted earlier, even the participants who agreed to take part were hesitant and reluctant to speak

openly when they felt their answers might be included in the study's results. Second, the number of participants who fit the requirements of the inclusion criteria is smaller in Oman in comparison to other Middle Eastern countries; if the study had been conducted somewhere else in the Middle East, then more participants might have fit the inclusion criteria. The participants were required to be Muslim, females, speak English, have a Masters or PhD degree, and have experience living abroad for an extended period of time. Therefore, if any prospective participant lacked one element of the inclusion criteria, she was eliminated.

A related limitation concerns the participants' ages; their ages ranged from 25 to 50, which is a considerable difference between the youngest and the oldest, although, most of them were in their twenties and thirties. I could not find a large number of participants who were at or near the same age. This age difference could affect their beliefs, perspectives, and experiences, which may have changed from one generation to another, because people's views of themselves change dramatically just as society has through time. In fact, during the process of collecting the data, I noted that the older participants seemed to be the most reluctant or hesitant in their responses.

As stated in chapter three, this study does not aim to generalize the results. My goal has been simply to explore possible relationships between the participants' views of their identity, perspectives and beliefs, particularly with reference to writing in English as a second language. My aim was not to judge whether the participants' perspectives reflect a true situation or particular subject matter, instead, it was to present results and true experiences that reflect the participants' perspectives and beliefs.

Other limitations include the observations made above in the results sections and the section entitled 'Reflection on the Research;' these include the ambivalence and hesitancy of participants, the loss of prospective participants, and the lack of details and contradictions in the responses offered.

It is also important to mention that the study depended on interviews, an open-ended questionnaire, and my notes taken during the interviews as main and only resources for collecting the data. I did not have other data, for instance, written narratives (life histories), or observations of their behaviors when interacting and using English, which might have helped the study to flesh out some of what the participants did not actually report in words. This made analyzing and interpreting the data difficult. I had to be careful not to judge or generalize each participant's response to her life style since the full picture of their daily life and interaction was not available.

<center>Call for Further Research</center>

This dissertation attempted to answer a set of predetermined questions; however, while conducting the study and analyzing the findings, more questions were generated from the context and input of the participants, which should be addressed in further research. Some issues and questions that need to be addressed in further research are as follows: will English be an international, dominant, spoken language in the world in general and specifically in Oman; will English writing be used as more than a basic communicative tool in the Middle East; will English have more effects on people's identity in the future, if Arabic usage declines with time in some areas; how will English fit in with the Arab culture, methods of interactions, and people's everyday life; how will

Arabic speakers maintain what makes them special and unique? All these questions and many more are very important and need to be explored and studied.

Therefore, a call for further research is required. Future researchers could consider taking the following steps:

- Follow up with the same participants, examining whether their identity and views have changed after a certain period of time. For example, the participants may be interviewed for a second time using the identical questions in addition, to more in depth questions. It would be interesting to see if changes in the society, for instance, in the next five to ten years, made them more forthcoming about sharing their personal stories.

- Use different methods to collect more data from the same participants. For example, more oblique approach could be used to gather more detailed data by using indirect questions. The same participants might be asked to write narratives using both languages, and their English and Arabic texts could be compared. Also, use an ethnographic method to examine the participants' real actions, if their words and beliefs match their actions.

- Use observations to rate each participant's English use and quality of interaction. The participants might be asked to be more specific about their extent of English use by giving examples.

- Investigate and specify the factors and reasons that cause some people with multicultural lives to view themselves as having two identities, while others resist expressing themselves in those terms.

- Work with a larger number of participants; this will provide a deeper and truer picture of reality that could be easily generalized to a larger group of women and population.

- Work with one or more groups of participants who are closer to each other in age. For example, study a group of participants in their twenties and another group of participants in their forties and compare their views and perspectives. This will provide an even clearer picture of the generations' differences in thoughts and beliefs, and will also help provide a measure of change as happening in the society over time.

- Work with participants with more similar experience, such as similar fields of study, shared educational background or membership in a given religious community.

- Work with female participants from other countries and compare them with Omani women. This will provide insight regarding other female second English language speakers, and whether they share similar views and perspectives with the Omani women; or if they differ, what are the differences?

- Contrast the responses given by participants from different groups. For example, one might study Omani women with different levels of education who have not been exposed to other cultures, and compare their identity and views with other participants who have been exposed to other cultures.

- Work with a group of participants whose second language is not English and examine the same research questions, replacing English with the participants'

second language. For example, if the women's first language is Arabic, and they speak French as a second language, how would they feel about their experience learning French, and about their current use of French? Would they have two worlds or one, the Arabic world and the French world? How would their experiences differ from those women who speak English as a second language? Would they feel more comfortable in using French rather than Arabic, and would French have the same effect on their identity as English has?

- Explore more specific ways and techniques that might especially help ESL/EFL Middle Eastern women and ESL/EFL students in general, to learn a second/ foreign language and writing successfully without negatively affecting their identity and might make them more aware of the possible effect on their identity.

- Explore men's identity and writing in English as a second language. Also, how are men's experiences different from women's? This could help in understanding identity for both genders.

These questions might help in gaining more in depth results on issues related to identity and second languages in general, and more specifically on the effect of learning English as a second language.

Concluding Remarks

In general, the English language is playing a very large role and is an important factor in professional, academic, and personal aspects of daily life for the Omani people. The Omani people are becoming passionate about English. I believe if the usage and

demand for learning and integrating English in personal and professional daily life of the Omani people continues to increase, I expect that the English language will be the dominate language in Oman within a few decades. Sadly to say, the Arabic language might lose its users, its elegance, and its influence on the Arabic culture and individuals, but English might help them in overcoming their obstacles and constraints.

On a personal note, I would like to mention that this dissertation has provided me the opportunity to reflect on Omani women's identity and my own identity when writing in English as a second language. It has raised our awareness of certain issues that the participants and I were not conscious of until they were discussed and raised in this study. It also raised awareness and opened eyes and avenues to other important topics and issues that could be explored in future research.

The participants' responses also allowed me to explore the power of the Omani women. Even though these women have helped to replace the picture described by Phillips (1966), in his book *Unknown Oman*, showing that the situation in the society has changed since the mid-twentieth century when he wrote in these terms:

> In terms of personality, of economics, of politics and of civics, there are no women in Oman; women exist in number always greater than men, but their existence is domestic and servile only. The unequal position of women in Oman is common throughout the Arabian Peninsula

Now, Omani women have their own unique personality and are playing very important roles in improving the Omani society. They are taking advantage of learning English and being exposed to new meaning schemas and beliefs to improve themselves and their lives.

As for me, writing this study was very hard, because I had to adjust my writing and choose the right method to express my ideas. Since the study is in English, I had to be straight forward and direct, and avoid the rhetorical patterns (such as frequent repetition) that are valued in Arabic culture. At the same time, the study has widened my knowledge and introduced me to new horizons of information and avenues of thinking. I did not recognize the level of interest in learning English in Oman until I came in touch with the Omani people and worked with them. Learning English nowadays is becoming such an obsession for some Omani people that it is taking over their first language.

I have learned that the word 'woman' in the Middle East represents more than just a gender; it carries certain expectations, limitations, and imposed constraints. Speaking English can help women to erase these associated terms and their harsher implications. Women are more than devices for reproduction and caretakers. They are human beings, and should be treated as more than "domestic and servile." Women have so much strength and power inside them; they are capable of accomplishing everything they want.

I hope this dissertation has helped to open avenues for the Omani women to explore their own identity and give them ideas for empowerment. I hope it provides a good base and beginning for these women to start discussing what they want and how to attain these goals. Also, I hope this study provides a good start for educators or people who are interested in investigating issues related to women's identity and writing in English as a second language.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form for the Participants

Informed Consent Form for the Participants

Project: Omani Muslim Women's Identity and Second Language Writing

Principal Investigator: Zainab Mohamed Jabur

Dissertation Director: Dr. Jeannine Fontaine

Indiana University of Pennsylvania,

English Department

Ph.D. Program in composition and TESOL

The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision, whether or not to participate in this study. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

You are invited to participate in this research study, which I am conducting to fulfill the doctoral degree requirements at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in the United State.

Your participation in this study is very important and it will contribute to the understanding of the Omani Muslim women's identity and their writing in English as a second language. This study seeks to gain insight into the relationship between your (Omani women) identity and writing in English as a second language, by understanding your perspectives and beliefs about writing in English, and the extent your identity/identities are affected, especially, as you perceive it through your narratives of your own experience/s considering the impact of the environment and social context. How your identity has been formed through and by writing in English as a second language. How your identity including your meaning schemas, perspectives, and

assumptions have been affected through learning English as a second language. Do you struggle with the conflict that arises in your identity between your first language world and second language world? These questions and more related questions will be the focus of this study keeping in mind, that this is the first study conducted to investigate specifically Omani Muslim Women's identity and writing in English as a second language. It will introduce you and your experiences to the outside world and find ways and solutions to eliminate any negative impacts on the Omani women's identity when learning English.

The qualitative research is used for the methodology of the study; you will be asked to respond to an open-ended questionnaire as a first step and based on your answers, I will schedule an individual in depth interviews with you after your permission. The interview will take maximum forty-five minutes. You will also be asked to attend one final group interview with other participants.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate in this study, limit your participation, or withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw, all information obtained will be destroyed. Your decision to participate or refrain from participation will have no effect on you at all. There are no known risks associated with the study. Your name will not be used for your protection; instead pseudonyms will be used. Only the researcher involved in this study may have access to the collected data and it will be saved in a secure place. Furthermore, your name will never be used with the presentation or publication of data. Data will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law.

If you choose to participate in this study, all information will be held in strict confidence and will have no bearing on your career. Any use of information you provide in this study will be used only in combination with information provided by other participants in the study. The information obtained in the study may be disseminated in academic publications or presented at conferences, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate in the study, please sign the statement below. Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Researcher: Dissertation Director:
Zainab Mohamed Jabur   Dr. Jeannine Fontaine
PhD Candidate in Composition and TESOL   Associate Professor
Department of English,   Department of English,
Indiana University of Pennsylvania   Indiana University of Pennsylvania
cjbn@iup.edu or zuzuj25@hotmail.com   English Dep. Leonard 110,
001-(812)-322-8368   Indiana, PA, 15705
00968-99320584   USA
                                                         001-(724) - 357-2261/2262

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730).

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM

(Participant's copy)

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer

to be a part of this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and

that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this

informed Consent Form to keep in my possession. By signing below, I give my consent

to participate in this project.

Name (PLEASE PRINT) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Phone number or location where you can be reached _____

Best days and times to reach you _____

E-mail address _____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the

potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study,

have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above

signature.

Researcher's Signature   Date _____

Participant's Additional Contact Information:

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM

(Researcher's copy)

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer

to be a part of this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and

that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this

informed Consent Form to keep in my possession. By signing below, I give my consent

to participate in this project.

Name (PLEASE PRINT) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Phone number or location where you can be reached _____

Best days and times to reach you _____

E-mail address _____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the

potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study,

have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above

signature.

Researcher's Signature   Date _____

Participant's Additional Contact Information:

Open-Ended Questionnaire

استبانة الأسئلة المفتوحة

(The Questions in both English and Arabic)

Directions:

You may please answer all of the questions below. You may be sure that your answers are strictly confidential, and that what you write here will not be revealed to any other person, only the researcher has access to the data.

I would appreciate you provide your honest answers and perspectives.

تعليمات الإجابة:

يرجى الإجابة عن جميع الأسئلة. علما أن الإجابات ستكون في سرية تامة، ولن يطلع عليها أحد غير الباحثة. لذلك أتمنى أن تكون الإجابات صادقة وواقعية.

Part one: Background/ demographic Questions:

الجزء الأول : معلومات عامة يرجى الإجابة عنها بما هو مناسب:

1. Age (العمر):
2. Social status (الحالة الاجتماعية):
3. Level of education (المستوى التعليمي):
4. Specialization (التخصص):
5. Level of English fluency (مستوى إتقان اللغة الانجليزية):
6. Age started learning English (العمر الذي بدأتِ فيه تعلم اللغة الانجليزية):
7. What resources have you used to improve your English skills? Check all that apply (المصادر المستخدمة في تعلم اللغة الانجليزية: يمكن اختيار أكثر من إجابة)
    a. school (المدرسة)
    b. institute (معهد تعليم اللغة)
    c. TV (التليفزيون)
    d. private teachers (مدرس خاص)
    e. books (الكتب)
    f. internet (الانترنت)
    g. CDs (الأقراص المدمجة)

h. movies (الأفلام)

i. other resources (مصادر أخرى):

<u>Part two: The Main Questions:</u>

<div dir="rtl">

<u>الجزء الثاني : أسئلة البحث الرئيسية:</u>

</div>

8. List 3-7 words here that you think tell who you are (أكتبي من 3-7 كلمات بالإنجليزية

تعتقدين بأنها تعبر عنكِ وتبين من أنتِ):

┌──┐
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
└──┘

9. Are you an active writer (هل أنت كاتبة نشطة)? If yes, in which language do you write

more (إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، فما اللغة التي تكتبين بها أكثر)؟

┌──┐
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
└──┘

10. Please complete these two sentences briefly (يرجى إكمال الجملتين التاليتين باختصار):

    a. When I write in Arabic, I (عندما أكتب بالعربية، فأنا) …………………………

    b. When I write in English, I (عندما أكتب بالإنجليزية، فأنا) ………………………

11. Are there any cultural traditions, norms, or behaviors in Oman you do not agree

with (هل هناك تقاليد ثقافية أو أعراف، أو سلوكيات في سلطنة عمان لا تتفقين معها) Briefly, what

are these (باختصار، ما هذه)؟

┌──┐
│   │
│   │
│   │
└──┘

12. Do you think all people in Oman should learn English (هل تعتقدين أن جميع الناس في

سلطنة عمان يجب أن يتعلموا اللغة الانجليزية)؟

        (أوافق بشدة) Strongly agree-

        (أوافق) Agree-

        Disagree (لا أوافق) -

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-Strongly disagree (لا أوافق بشدة)

13. Do you think by learning English you have learned new beliefs, ideas, meanings, and more about other or certain culture/s during the period of learning English (هل تؤمنين بأن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، سيؤدي إلى تعلم معتقدات، وأفكار، ومعاني، عن ثقافة معينة جديدة / ثانية خلال فترة تعلم اللغة الانجليزية)؟

    -Strongly agree (أوافق بشدة)

    -Agree (أوافق)

    - Disagree (لا أوافق)

    -Strongly disagree (لا أوافق بشدة)

14. In which language do you prefer writing, Arabic or English (بأية لغة تفضلين الكتابة، باللغة العربية أم باللغة الانجليزية)؟

15. Please chose two sentences and complete them briefly (يرجى اختيار جملتين وإكمالهما باختصار):
    a. I prefer writing in Arabic because (أفضّل الكتابة بالعربية لأن)
    …………………………………………………………………………..
    b. I prefer writing in English because (أفضّل الكتابة بالانجليزية لأن)
    …………………………………………………………………………..
    c. I do not prefer writing in Arabic because (لا أفضّل الكتابة بالعربية لأن)
    …………………………………………………………………………..
    d. I do not prefer writing in English because (لا أفضّل الكتابة بالانجليزية لأن)
    …………………………………………………………………………..

16. Could you please identify three topics you have written about in English (هل يمكن تحديد ثلاثة مواضيع أكثر شيوعا لديك تكتبين عنها باللغة الانجليزية)؟
    a.
    b.

c.

17. Could you please identify three topics you have written about in Arabic هل يمكن
تحديد ثلاثة مواضيع أكثر شيوعا لديكِ تكتبين عنها باللغة العربية؟

    a.

    b.

    c.

18. Are there any topics you have never talked about before and would like to discuss
and explore in the future? If yes, can you please mention an example (هل لديك
مواضيع لم تتحدثين عنها أبدا من قبل، وتودين مناقشتها واستكشافها بالمستقبل؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم،
يرجى ذكر مثال)؟

19. Are there any issues you feel constrained to discuss in public or with people you
do not know? If yes, can you please mention an example of these topics (هل لديك
مواضيع تشعرين بأنك مقيدة لمناقشتها علناً أو مع أفراد لا تعرفينهم؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، يرجى ذكر مثال

20. Are there any other issues or topics that you feel you are not allowed to write
about in public, but that you would like to be able to do? If yes, can you please
mention an example of these topics (هل هناك قضايا أخرى، أو مواضيع تظنين أنها لا يسمح لك
بالكتابة عنها علنا، ولكن تريدين أن تكوني قادرة على مناقشتها بالمستقبل؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، يرجى
ذكر مثال)؟

21. Do you think certain topics should not be discussed? If yes, can you please
mention an example of these topics (هل تعتقدين أن هناك بعض المواضيع يجب أن تبقى بدون
مناقشة؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، يرجى ذكر مثال؟)

22. Do you think learning and/or using English has affected the way you think and
perceive certain issues (هل تعتقدين أن تعلم و/ أو استخدام الانجليزية له أثر على طريقة تفكيركِ،
ومعتقداتكِ، وإدراكك لبعض القضايا؟)

       -Strongly agree (أوافق بشدة)

       -Agree (أوافق)

       - Disagree (لا أوافق)

       -Strongly disagree (لا أوافق بشدة)

23. Please complete these two sentences briefly (يرجى إكمال الجملتين التاليتين باختصار):
- I feel toward expressing my ideas in English as (عندما أعبر عن أفكاري باللغة الانجليزية
فأنني أشعر بــ) ………………………………………………………………………..……
- I feel toward expressing my ideas in Arabic as (عندما أعبر عن أفكاري باللغة العربية
فأنني أشعر بــ) ………………………………………………………………………...

24. Are you more confident or do you feel much free to express your opinion when
writing in English (عند الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية، هل تعتقدين أنكِ أصبحتِ أكثر ثقة أو تشعرين بحرية
أكثر في التعبير عن رأيكِ؟)

25. Are you more confident or do you feel much free to express your opinion when writing in Arabic (عند الكتابة باللغة العربية، هل تعتقدين أنكِ أصبحتِ أكثر ثقة أو تشعرين بحرية أكثر في التعبير عن رأيكِ؟)

26. Do you think you have changed in your thoughts or your way of expressing yourself since you traveled to a foreign country to peruse your higher education (هل تعتقدين أن تغييرا قد حصل لأفكاركِ أو لطريقة تعبيركِ عن نفسكِ منذ سفرك للدراسات العليا في بلد أجنبي؟)

       (أوافق بشدة) Strongly agree-

       (أوافق) Agree-

       (لا أوافق) Disagree -

       (لا أوافق بشدة) Strongly disagree-

27. Have you encountered or read on any the topics that discuss Middle Eastern women's identity or social status? If yes, can mention an example (هل صادفتِ أو قرأتِ موضوع يناقش وضع المرأة في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وهويتها أو وضعها الاجتماعي؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، يرجى ذكر مثال؟)

28. Do you think of your society, culture, and/or readers before you write about any issue in English (هل تفكرين بمجتمعك، وثقافتك، و/ أو القراء قبل الكتابة عن أي موضوع باللغة الانجليزية؟)

       (أوافق بشدة) Strongly agree-

       (أوافق) Agree-

       (لا أوافق) Disagree -

       (لا أوافق بشدة) Strongly disagree-

29. Do you think of your society, culture, and/or readers before you write about any issue in Arabic (هل تفكرين بمجتمعك، وثقافتك، و/ أو القراء قبل الكتابة عن أي موضوع باللغة العربية)؟

        -Strongly agree (أوافق بشدة)

        -Agree (أوافق)

        - Disagree (لا أوافق)

        -Strongly disagree (لا أوافق بشدة)

30. Do you think women and men are treated equally in Oman (هل تعتقدين أن المرأة في سلطنة عمان تعامل على قدم المساواة مع الرجل)؟

        -Strongly agree (أوافق بشدة)

        -Agree (أوافق)

        - Disagree (لا أوافق)

        -Strongly disagree (لا أوافق بشدة)

31. Do you think your government tries to help women gain their rights and be treated equally as men (هي تحاول سلطنة عمان جاهده مساعدة المرأة على اكتساب حقوقها وان تكون على قدم المساواة مع الرجل)؟

        -Strongly agree (أوافق بشدة)

        -Agree (أوافق)

        - Disagree (لا أوافق)

        -Strongly disagree (لا أوافق بشدة)

32. In what ways do you use English, and especially written English, in your everyday life? Chose one (ما الطرق التي تستخدمين بها الإنجليزية في حياتك اليومية، وبخاصة الكتابة بالانكليزية):

        - Socially (اجتماعيا)

        - Professionally (مهنيا)

        - Both (كلاهما)

33. Do you have a personal journal? If yes, which language do you use to write (هل
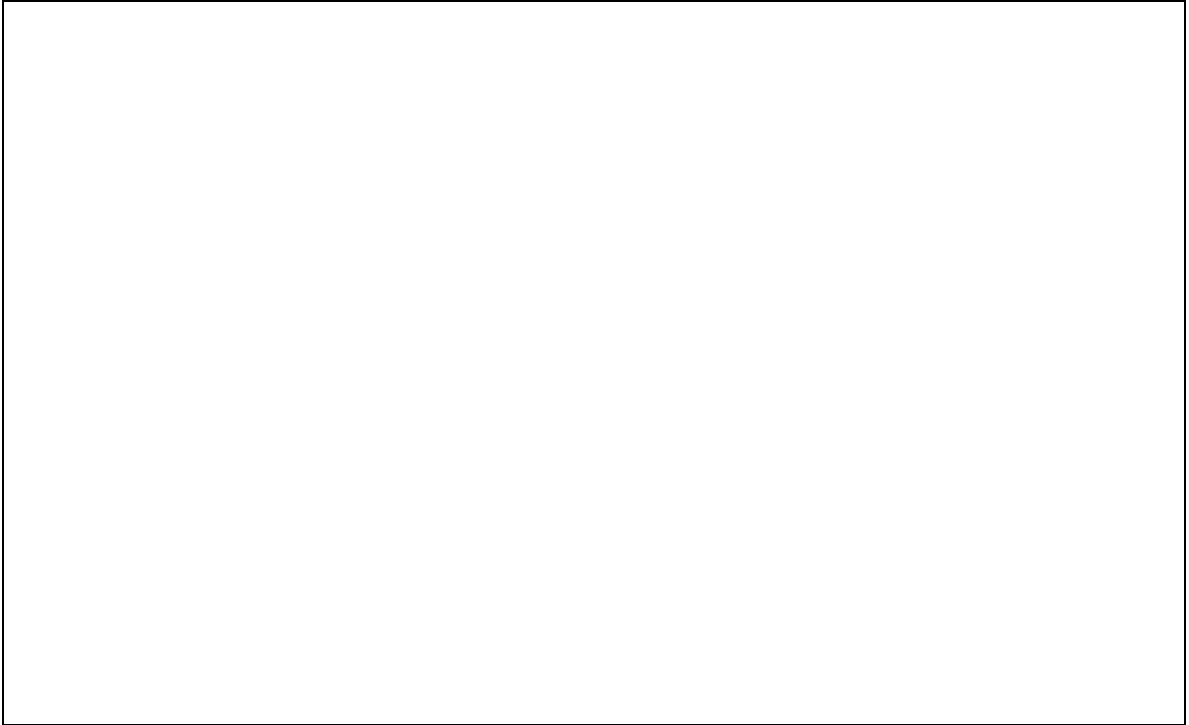لديك مذكرة شخصية؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، بأية لغة تكتبين المذكرات لديك؟)

34. Do you think you can do, would want to do, or agree with any of the following? If
so, please check-√-with any statement that applies to you (هل تعتقدين أنك تستطيعين أن
تفعلين، أو تريدين أن تفعلين، أو توافقين على العبارات التالية. يرجى وضع إشارة √ أمام العبارة المناسبة:)

    a. I wish I could change some of the cultural traditions and norms in my
country (أتمنى لو أستطيع تغيير بعض التقاليد الثقافية وقواعدها في مجتمعي)

    b. I wish I could discuss some issues that are bothering me about my society
(أتمنى لو أستطيع مناقشة بعض القضايا التي تضايقني في مجتمعي)

    c. I like my culture the way it is (أحب عاداتي و ثقافتي كما هي)

    d. I love my first language, the Arabic language (أحب لغتي، اللغة العربية)

    e. I like English more than Arabic (أحب اللغة الانجليزية أكثر من العربية)

    f. I feel very comfortable when writing in Arabic (أشعر بمزيد من الراحة عند الكتابة
باللغة العربية)

    g. I feel very comfortable when writing in English (أشعر بمزيد من الراحة عند
الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية)

    h. I believe that people need to learn English (أعتقد أن الناس بحاجة إلى تعلم اللغة
الانجليزية)

    i. I believe that people should learn about and be exposed to other cultures,
religions, and languages (أعتقد أن الناس يجب أن يتعرفوا ويطلعوا على الثقافات والأديان
واللغات الأخرى)

    j. I believe learning new culture and language helps me learn new ideas and
beliefs (أعتقد أن تعلم ثقافة جديدة ولغة جديدة تدفعني لمعرفة أفكار ومعتقدات جديدة)

Part three: Perspective writing:

<div dir="rtl">

الجزء الثالث: الكتابة:

</div>

Please write a short paragraph about how you feel toward writing in general, and any stories about important experiences you have had with writing that come to mind (يرجى

<div dir="rtl">

كتابة فقرة قصيرة حول ما تشعرين به عندما تكتبين بصفة عامة، وهل هناك مواقف أو قصص مهمة تتذكرينها تتعلق بتجربتكِ في مجال الكتابة).

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Thank you very much…..

<div dir="rtl">

شكرا جزيلا لحسن تعاونكِ في الإجابة عن هذه الاستبانة

</div>

Appendix C: Main Interview Questions for the Participants

Interview Questions

1. Describe yourself in five words that you think best represent your personality?

2. Do your family members speak English? If so, do you communicate with them in English?

3. How do you feel when you write in English, do you feel like yourself?

4. How do you feel when you write in Arabic?

5. Do you write differently in Arabic as compared to English? If so, what is the difference?

6. Do you feel a different person in a way when using English or writing in English?

7. How is your experience affected and formed in writing in English as a second language?

8. Can you list how you use English, and especially written English, in your everyday life? Such as teaching, shopping, with friends ……

9. Do you worry about anything or any issues when you write in Arabic? Please explain.

10. Do you worry about anything or any issues when you write in English? Please explain.

11. Are there any forbidden issues people in Oman do not feel comfortable to discuss? If yes, please mention examples.

12. Which language, English or Arabic, would you rather use to discuss any issues that you have not discussed before or issues that maybe forbidden?

13. Do you feel you are limited, controlled, or constrained by your culture, traditions, or norms? Please explain.

14. Would you like to change some or the attitudes or behaviors associated with your norms and culture that you do not agree with? Please explain.

15. Do you like watching English movies, videos, news? Do you use English blogs?

16. In what ways do you feel that you belong to the English speaking community? Are there any topics you associate with English?

17. Would you discuss or write an essay about religion in English? Please explain.

18. Do you think learning and/or using English has affected the way you think and perceive certain issues? If yes, please mention the issues.

19. Do you feel that people accept your way of thinking and acting? If yes, please comment on any specific experience you may have had with people's reactions to any new ideas you have had.

20. What is freedom to you? Do women have freedom in Oman?

21. Do you think women have full rights? What do you need or still want to gain?

22. Do you feel that there is a conflict between your English world and your Arabic world? If so, how do you feel toward this conflict? How are the two worlds related to each other?

23. Do you think a conflict arises between the cultural values associated with the two worlds (English world and Arabic world) as perceived by you? In what ways do the two cultural worlds complement and relate to each other?

24. Do you feel you have two identities (two personalities) one in English and one in Arabic? If yes, how are these identities similar and/or different from each other?

25. Do you have any suggestions on how to overcome negative impacts on identity that may originate from the conflict between the Arabic world and the English world for the women who experience this conflict?

26. I want you to think of a person you associate with in English and another person you associate with in Arabic→how would you feel if you were having lunch with both of them or around them at the same time? Do you see any conflict? Such as in the way you will act or talk with both of them…

27. In what ways do you express your ideas in writing in English, and how does this compare with your writing in Arabic? For instance, do you feel that writing in English frees you and allows you to explore issues that are considered forbidden in Arabic? How does this factor interact with the problems of fluency, or difficulties with finding an audience for your writing?

28. What do you do to keep in touch with the English world? Do you feel that you are distant from the English world? Are there specific strategies you have adopted in order to keep in touch with the English world and preserve your English writing in your life?

29. Do you refer to English and especially English writing, as playing a role in your future life and plans? If so, how do you characterize (describe) that role?

30. Are there any interesting related stories or personal experiences you would like to share?

31. How do you feel as a woman and what are the issues that concern you the most in Oman?

32. How do you think most Omanis see and view English speakers and does that affect you in any way?

33. Would you be comfortable working in an English speaking country and how do you think it is different from your work right now?

34. Can you think of any stereotypes associated with English and English writing?

35. If a female discussion forum is formed where women would meet weekly or monthly to discuss women's issues in English, would you consider joining the group?

Appendix D: General Questions for the Group Interview

Group Interview Questions

1- How do you feel when you write in English, as compared with when you write in Arabic? Is there anything you would like to add or discuss in a group?

2- a. In the individual interviews, most people said that they are more comfortable writing in English on certain topics. Do you all agree with this statement, and may you comment further on this?

   b. OR (Based on the participants' answers) In the individual interviews, most people said that they are more comfortable writing in Arabic on certain topics. Do you agree with this statement, and can you comment further on this?

3- As a group of Omani women, do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how to overcome any negative impact on identity that may originate from the conflict between the Arabic world and the English world for certain women who experience this conflict?

4- In the open-ended questionnaire, (based on the responses (most people) OR (few people)) responded that they express their ideas differently when writing in English as a second language, why? In a group, may you comment further on this?

5- In the open-ended questionnaire, (most people) OR (Few people) said that there are cultural traditions, norms, and behaviors in Oman they do not agree with? As a group, can you comment more on this; why you do not agree? And what can be done to modify or work on these certain traditions?

6- Some of you agreed that certain issues and topics should not be discussed; however, others agreed that people should be able to discuss all topics and issues that they want to discuss. As a group, what do you think is the middle ground between these two views?

7- As a group, do you agree that learning and/or using English has affected the way you think and perceived certain issues? Can you comment further on this?

8- In the open-ended questionnaire and the individual interviews, we talked about forbidden issues, as a group, do you think these issues should stay forbidden or would you like to explore and discuss them freely?

9- If a female discussion forum is formed where women would meet weekly or monthly to discuss women's issues in English, would you consider joining the group?

10- a. Based on your responses, some of you feel that your identity is affected when writing in English as a second language, would you like to comment on that with others who share the same view?

b. Based on the other participants' responses, you do not feel that your identity is affected when writing in English as a second language, would you like to discuss this with others who share the same view?

11- Are there any additional topics or issues you would like to discuss and address through a group discussion?

12- Are there any interesting stories you would like to share with the rest of the women?