

Bedouin Dialects: Language Use and Identity Perceptions of Bedouin-Speaking University Students in North-Western Saudi Arabia and Implications for Language Vitality

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Abstract : Amid the dynamic use of the Arabic language worldwide, Saudi Arabia employs Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as its formal, official language, whereas other dialects of Arabic are common in informal situations. Such trends not only maintain the powerful, state-supported status of MSA but are liable to also affect the use and status of other varieties, including Bedouin dialects, and prompt code-mixing behaviour among their speakers. Exposure to MSA and English in education in Saudi Arabia may also be liable to reduce the vitality of Bedouin dialects in the country, particularly among current generations of educated Bedouin speakers. Therefore, the proposed research will involve examining the perceived vitality of Bedouin dialects in Saudi language policies prescribing MSA as the official national language of Saudi Arabia and requiring university students to complete English-language coursework in the national education system. It will also entail identifying Bedouin speakers' attitudes towards the use of Bedouin dialects in order to assess the need, if any, to implement policies in Saudi Arabia that can enhance the use of those dialects amid the competing use of MSA and English in the country. Empirical data collected from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews that purport patterns of the everyday use of languages among Bedouin-speaking university students in Tabuk, as well as the content of language policy documents, can clarify whether policy-based pressure to use MSA and English in mainstream educational and social activities in Saudi Arabia has jeopardised the language vitality of Bedouin dialects in north-west Saudi Arabia. The findings of the research can thus ultimately contribute to the development of policies to support and enhance the use of Bedouin dialects and, in turn, their language vitality.

Keywords : attitudes, Bedouin dialects, language policy, vitality

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