
Perceptions of Arab Non-linguists about New Pidgin 'Urdubic'

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Abstract

The print and electronic media of the world remains occupied with political and economic issues in the world. It rarely seems to pay its attention to gradual sociolinguistic developments that take place in the wake of political and economic developments. One of such issues of sociolinguistic importance is the development of a new pidgin 'Urdubic' in the Persian Gulf. Some Arab linguists view this development as a threat to the time-honored purity of Arabic. What do non-linguists among Arabs think on this issue? Do they take Urdubic as threat for their mother tongue when they go about their daily business with the immigrant workers? In order to gauge their opinions about the pidgin, the researchers conducted this preliminary study among Arab non-linguists in KSA and UAE. The findings of the study add to the state of the information on the subject.

Keywords: Pidgins, creoles, South Asian workers in Arab countries, Persian Gulf, Arabic, Urdu

The contours of demography keep changing on the surface of the Earth. Social, political and economic reasons have been pushing and pulling people from one region to another. Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and South Asia have been having long-standing ideological economic and linguistic connections. Situated on the banks of the Silk Road, mighty South Asian rivers were home to ancient civilizations, multiple languages and diverse cultures of the world. Reportedly, through the Silk Road, Buddhism entered China (Bresnan, 2003). Works on Indology, Indomania, orientalism and Classical literature show that the Western and Middle Eastern Indologists, intellectuals, story-tellers and poets regarded South Asia as a place of special interest (Al-Bīrūnī, & Sachau, 1914). Khan (2006) opines that the Mesopotamian practitioners of agriculture were the parents of Urdu / Hindi. The pre-Islamic Arabic literature is punctuated with Indian swords (Sherwani, Joshi & Nayeem, 1975). This 'romantic land' was considered as a land of productivity and hub of trade and knowledge (McGetchin, 2009). They could make a distinction between 'Sindh' (Indus Valley / current Pakistan) and 'India' (Rumi, 2004). Wink (2002) gives a comparative study of trade items exchanged between South Asia and Arab countries. He further explains that the volume of this trade soared and during the Abbasid period, the Indo-Arab relations 'evolved into an integrated trading empire' and the Gulf between the two regions was regarded as *farj al-Hind* or *frontier of India*. Khalidi (1996) explains how Arab warriors served in Hyderabad in large numbers. Holes (2001) explains how the trade relations influenced business registers and jargons in the coastal Arab countries. Thus, with the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, South Asian countries had strong trade, cultural and linguistic relations.

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These relations gained momentum after the discovery of oil in the gulf and caused the emergence of a new pidgin-*Gulf Pidgin Arabic* or *Urdubic*, (Smart 1990, Næss (2008, Monshipouri 2009, Avram, 2014, Bakir 2014, Alghamdi 2014, Alshammari 2018 and Abed 2018) . The new pidgin emerged only in those urban areas where South Asian workers lived and worked. The Arabic dialects spoken in central parts of the remained relatively unaffected, (Jayakar, 1989, Leonard, 2003, Ammon, Dittmar, Mattheier & Trudgill, 2006).

Traditionally, Arabs have strong association with their language. Even in ancient times, Arabs were aware of the fact that pure Arabic exists not in towns and cities but in country side, therefore, they would send their children to give them exposure to pure Arab culture and language. This preference for purity of their Arabic language seems to be a long-standing tradition and practice. Modern Arabs, despite having skyscrapers to live in love to spend time in deserts and tents surrounded with camels. Modernity, globalization, multilingualism and multiculturalism are being perceived as threats by a good number of Arabs who want to maintain purity of their language (Bassiouney & Katz, 2012 and Duri, 2012). Some Arab linguists have concern about national identity of Arabs. They have fears that native speakers of Arabic are changing their linguistic priorities and abandoning Arabic (Suleiman, 2004 and Hellyer, 2008). However, there are other Arabs who are optimistic and believe in the time-honored ability of Arabic to preserve its purity under foreign influences (Altwaijri,1998).

A Survey about Urdubic:

A questionnaire-based survey was conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to study the views of the Arabs in these countries towards the phenomenon of pidginization called Urdubic in this paper. The questionnaire contained close ended and open ended questions. Random and convenient sampling was used. We administered 75 questionnaires among male Arabs in Dubai, Sharjah, Madina tul Munawarah and Riyadh and received 65 questionnaires from these cities. 5 questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete information provided by the respondents. The analysis is based on 60 questionnaires. Our sample consisted of only male Arabs in these cities because we could not get not have female research assistants . Since the respondents in the survey are male Arabs, the findings don't indicate the opinion of female Arabs in these cities towards Urdubic.

In order to maximize the return rate of the questionnaires, we made a short and simple questionnaire. To make it easier for the respondents to respond to the questions, we translated the questionnaire into Arabic before administering it. We did not use the word Urdubic, Gulf Pidgin, Hindi Arabic and Gulf Pidgin Arabic in the questionnaire in order to avoid influencing the views of the respondents about the phenomenon. The questionnaire talked about the pidginization without using these names. The variant used for these names in the questionnaire was 'the kind of Arabic spoken by the expatriates'. We left it to the respondents to name the phenomenon. The questionnaire started with an open ended question which asked the respondents about their view of the kind of Arabic spoken by the expatriates and what name they would give it. The following table shows the names the respondents used for Urdubic. These names not only testify to the existence of the phenomenon of pidginization but they also reflect the attitudes people have about it.

Q.1 What do you think of the kind of Arabic spoken by Indian, Pakistani, Bengali and Afghan

expatriates in your country? What name would you give it?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid mixed language	5	8.3	14.7	14.7
broken language	7	11.7	20.6	35.3
Informal	1	1.7	2.9	38.2
not fine or standard	3	5.0	8.8	47.1
lingua franca	1	1.7	2.9	50.0
lughajmia or non-arabic	1	1.7	2.9	52.9
Pakarabi	2	3.3	5.9	58.8
hindic or hindi arabic or Indianic	4	6.7	11.8	70.6
Ununderstandable language	1	1.7	2.9	73.5
Modern Arabic	2	3.3	5.9	79.4
Unspecified	4	6.7	11.8	91.2
Asian Arabic	1	1.7	2.9	94.1
Arabic	2	3.3	5.9	100.0
Total	34	56.7	100.0	
Missing System	26	43.3		
Total	60	100.0		

Table 1: Respondents' names for *Urubic*

Out of 60 respondents, 26 respondents did not give any name. This may be due to the fact that *Urubic* has not got any established public name yet. The few names for this phenomenon that float in different parts of the Gulf have been given by certain individuals and may be unknown to others. This is why 4 other respondents used the word 'unspecified' for it. However, the various names suggested by the rest of 30 respondents seem to point towards the various aspects of *Urubic* as a pidgin: 'mixed language', 'broken language', 'informal', 'not fine or standard', 'lingua franca'. These names point to one of the features of a pidgin that the speakers of languages involved in a pidgin 'may perceive the pidgin as a debased form of their known language' (Malmkjær, 2000, p. 94). In addition, there are other suggested names which seem to be just synonyms of *Urubic*: 'Asian Arabic', 'Modern Arabic', 'Pakarabi', 'Hindic' or 'Indianic' and *lughajmia*. These names show that a number of common Arabs seem to be aware of the role of Urdu / Hindi is playing as a substrate language in this lingua franca. This is why their names for this phenomenon speak of the Urdu / Hindi element in the pidginization. They seem to be aware of the influence of Urdu / Hindi in their own daily discourse with the expatriates. Their simple Arabic based interaction with the expatriates is punctuated with Urdu / Hindi expressions. The following graph of the second question seems to second this inference.

The second question, asked the respondents about using Urdu / Hindi expressions in their interaction with the immigrant workers from South-Asia. 41 respondents answered in the

affirmative, 16 answered in the negative and 3 responds did not answer this question.

Arabs Using Urdu in 'Urdubic'

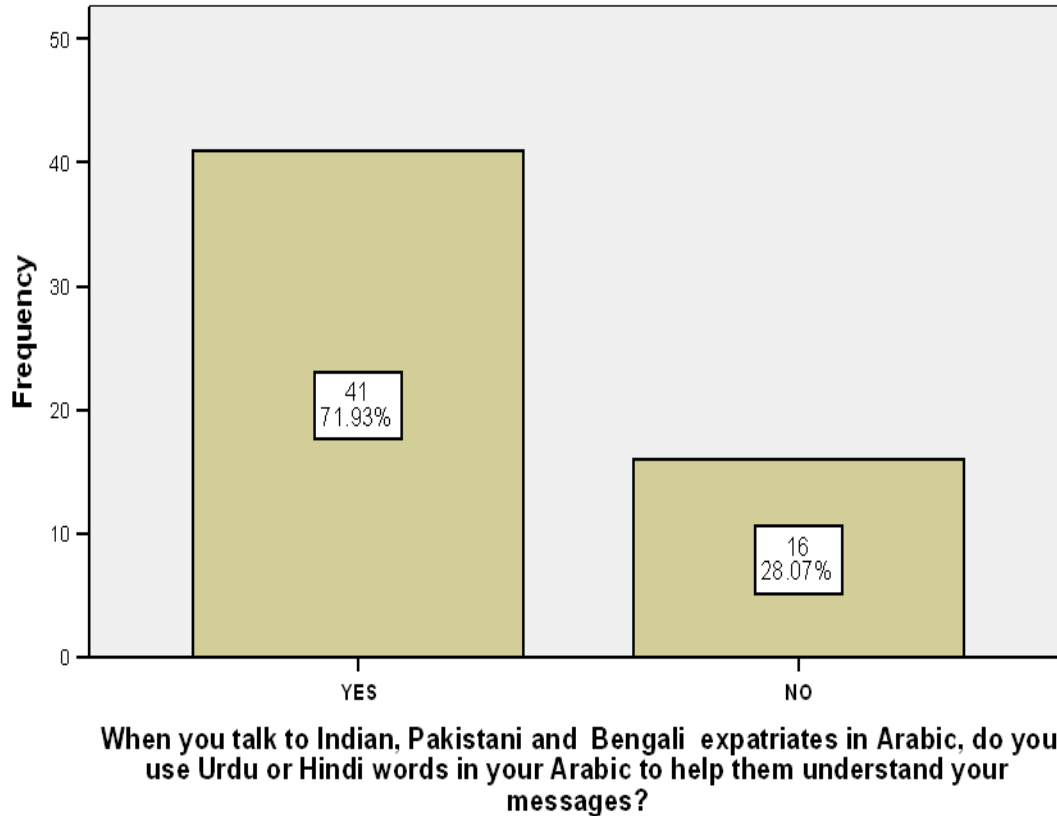


Figure 1: Use of Urdu/Hindi words

Nearly 72% of the respondents used or have used different Urdu / Hindi words and expressions while talking to Indian or Pakistanis. The next question asked them about the sources from where they learnt the Urdu / expressions. 22 respondents said that they had learnt these expressions from friends. 11 respondents said that they had learnt the Urdu / Hindi expressions from Hindi movies. Shopkeepers, drivers, servants, teachers and cooks were the sources of Urdu for the other respondents. Only 6 respondents said that they did not know Urdu expressions. Thus, most of the respondents had learnt Urdu expressions from different sources, as the following graph shows:

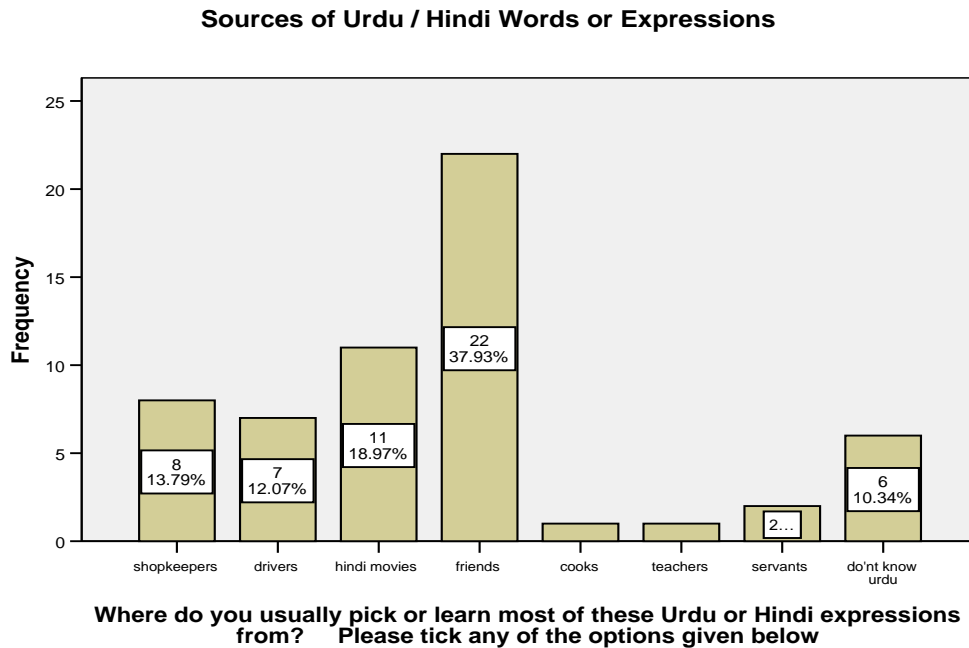


Figure 2: Sources of Urdu/Hindi words

This tendency of learning and using Urdu / Hindi expressions raises a question. Why should speakers of a superstrate language learn expressions of a substrate language? They are under no social and economic pressure to learn expressions of the language. Moreover, Urdu is not a symbol of prestige in the Gulf. This tendency may be due to various reasons such as a need to facilitate intelligibility in the interaction, to show affiliation with the immigrant workers and to have fun and amusement. Of these reasons, the last one seems to be the case with most of the respondents. As is evident from the second graph, more than half of the respondents (33) learnt Urdu expressions from friends and Hindi movies. This shows a keenness on the part of the Arabs to learn Urdu or Hindi. The results of the next question in the following graph show that most of the Arab respondents take Urdubic as a fun:

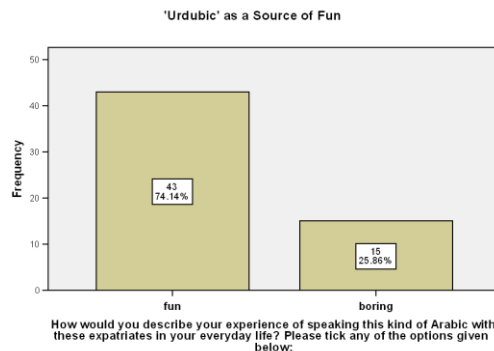


Figure 3: Urdubic as source of fun

Out of 60 respondents, 43 respondents think that speaking Urdubic is a fun for them. It can be observed that the Arabs seem to indulge in code-switching between standard Arabic and Urdubic for fun. The very taste of a foreign language with the flavour of Arabic language seems to be a source of much amusement for them.

Since, Urdubic is a source of fun for them, majority (53%) of the respondents appear to take Urdubic as a mild threat. While those who take Urdubic as a serious threat for Arabic make the lowest bar (only 13%) in the following graph:

'Urdubic' as a Threat

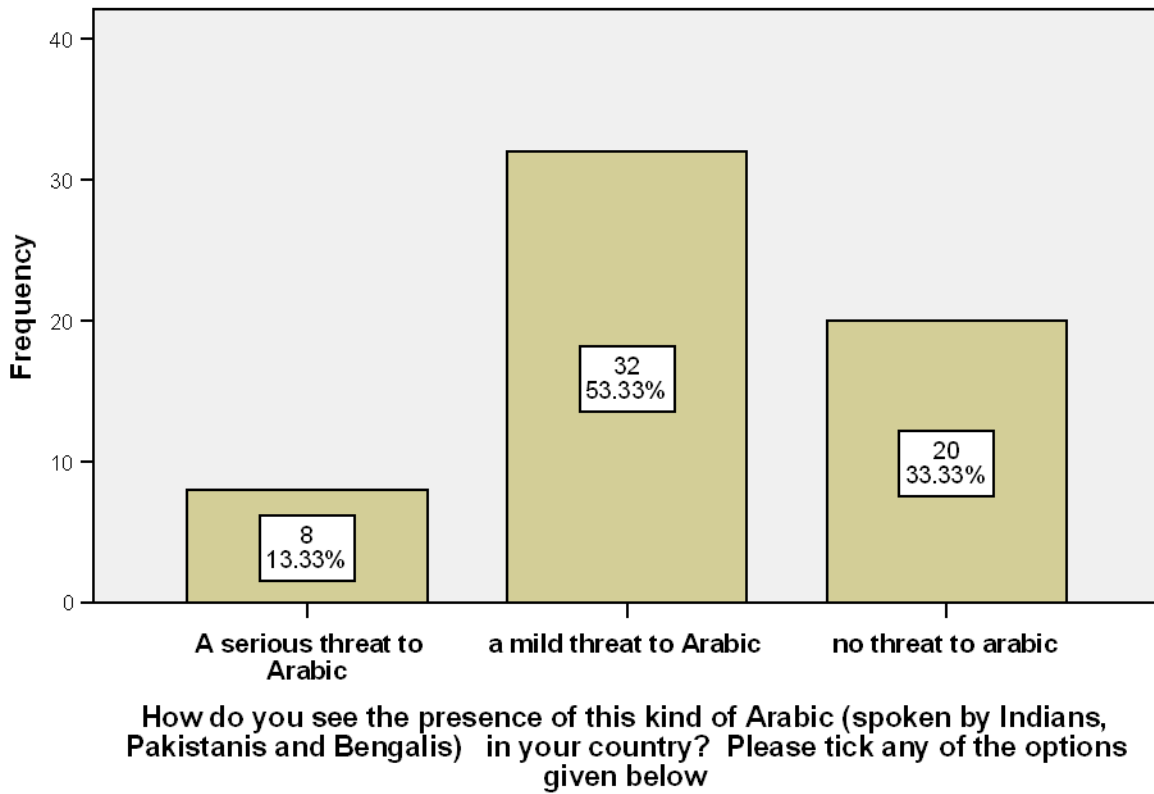


Figure 4: Urdubic as threat to Arabic

Thus, for 52 respondents in the survey, Urdubic is not a serious threat to Arabic language and culture. This opinion may seem at variance with the purism of Yasir Suleiman (2004) and Hellyer (2008) of Urdubic being a serious threat for Arabic culture and identity. There may be a number of reasons behind this attitude towards Urdubic . Having a familial association with Urdu and Urdubic through marriages and maids may be one of the reasons behind this attitude. We got further explanation of this stance of the respondents when we analyzed the last open-ended question.

When we analyzed the last open-ended question which asked the respondents to

contribute if they had any other relevant information or observation regarding the study, there emerged four categories. Out of the eleven respondents who answered the last question, three respondents emphasized that foreigners should learn and speak correct Arabic, 'if they stay in our country, they have to learn Arabic', said one of the respondent. Three other respondents advocated that Arabs should use foreigners' language, they should not speak simplified and reduced Arabic with these foreigners. 'The reason for this linguistic chaos is the Arabs themselves, if they speak correct Arabic with them, they [the expatriates] will learn correct Arabic' said a graduate teacher in Madina tul Munawarrah. Still two other respondents advocated using English in communication with the foreigners. There were two answers which provided us with two reasons for not taking Urdubic as a serious threat for Arabic. The respondents, who gave these answers, took this phenomenon of pidginization not as a threat since Arabs use correct Arabic when talking among themselves. A 50 year old businessman in Dubai said that the phenomenon of language contact is taking place in every language and that it is a healthy sign and that 'Arabic is umm-ul-lughat or mother of all languages. Being a mother of all languages, it can absorb such influences'. This observation seems to explain why a good number of respondents do not take Urdubic as a serious threat to Arabic language and culture.

In addition to this close relationship between Urdu and Arabic, this concept of Arabic being umm-ul-lughat (Mother of languages) seems to give them a sense of confidence in the resilience and flexibility of their own culture and language. In this plural society, Urdubic seems to be only a workable tool. Ability to speak Urdubic is not a symbol of pride in the Gulf. In addition, we also see glimpses of the expatriates' cultures merging into Arabic culture in case of those Pakistanis, Indians and Afghanis who have been living in the Gulf for nearly thirty years. Moreover, there are other social factors which may check the development of Urdubic into a creole. Let us consider the future of Urdubic with reference to the prospects of social and economic factors which contributed to the emergence of Urdubic.

Conclusion

In order to gauge the common Arabs' views about Urdubic, we conducted a survey. The results revealed that for 74% of the respondents, speaking Urdubic in daily life is a fun. Nearly 72% of the respondents acknowledged that they do use Urdu words while speaking to expatriates from South Asia. 37% of the respondents made it clear that they learnt Urdu words from their friends. Thus respondents seem to take Urdubic as a necessity and enjoy speaking it. Most of the respondents in the survey don't appear to take Urdubic as a serious threat to Arabic. Hence, we may conclude that Non-Linguist Arabic Speakers are fully aware of an emerging variety which is a mixture of Urdu/Hindi and Arabic. The Arabs use this nascent pidgin as tool of communication to their South Asian friends or co-workers.

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