# Norms, Contexts and Functions of Arabic–English Code-Switching in Egyptian Computer-Mediated Communication

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This paper investigates the linguistic characteristics of English in the Instant Messaging (IM) discourse as one of the most common computer-mediated communication modes in Egypt, where English is considerably used. It also aims to explore the reasons for the preference of English to Arabic in certain contexts, types of English errors, contexts of English and Arabic use, age of users, addressees, and purposes/functions of code-switching in English–Arabic discourse. Two sources of data were used: a corpus of 30 IM conversations by 60 interlocutors and responses to a survey by a group of 49 participants (including some of the conversation providers). Findings of both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis indicate that English in Egypt is used as an interactive medium of communication among Egyptian professionals, students, and younger generations in general, regardless of their English proficiency levels, in both formal and informal contexts for various purposes. Moreover, IM English used by Egyptians is generally mixed with Arabic, and this code-switching between English and varieties of the Arabic language occurs in many contexts to fulfill different functions.

*Keywords:* English–Arabic code-switching, online communication in Egypt, Egyptian instant messaging, digital use of English, CMC in Egypt

## 1 Introduction

### *1.1 The Sociolinguistic Situation in Egypt*

Linguistic ideologies in Egypt have cultural and social implications associated with Classical Arabic (CA), Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA), and English in the Cairo area. Commenting on the role these varieties play, Stadlbauer (2010, 1) stated that "the language ideologies of these varieties are a product of both the past and the present; they emerged during British colonialism in the late nineteenth century and are maintained in the postcolonial climate through discourses on the increasing use of English as a symbol of Western capitalism and modernity".

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Generally speaking, there are two dominant varieties of Arabic used in Egypt. On the one hand, the standard, taught variety of official, religious and highly formal use is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and, on the other hand, the vernacular, the informal variety of casual conversation and everyday use. In the case of Egypt, this is Egyptian Arabic, which is predominantly a spoken variety acquired at home. Present-day Egypt is a diglossic environment. Apart from Arabic, English is visibly present in Egypt. The use of English in Egypt is dynamic; a fact that has made changes to the position of English from a mere foreign language to a language of daily use. English is now regarded as "a practical vehicle for educational, economic and [...] social mobility"; a development which "parallels, in many ways, the development of Egypt's identity as a modern nation" (Imhoof 1977, 3; cited in Aboelezz 2012, 54).

### *1.2 English in Egyptian Everyday Life*

The idea of global participation is developed in the National Curriculum Framework for English as a Foreign Language: "The learning of English opens up the world for our children and youth. It gives them the ability to become active participants in the knowledge making society and raises their awareness of the multilingual and multicultural world they live in" (McIlwraith and Fortune 2016, 3). English today serves as the main lingua franca utilised in diverse fields of life including business, science, media, technology, tourism and international diplomacy worldwide. The use of English is evident in numerous aspects of Egyptian life. English today is being introduced to all children in early primary stage or even in pre-school (Dirou, 2016). Educational institutions often offer bilingual or English-medium programmes, or at least have English as an entry requirement (Dirou 2016).

Concerning English in Egyptian media, a considerable number of radio channels are operated by both private-owned and government-owned companies to broadcast news, songs, talk shows and other programmes in English, mainly to the region of Greater Cairo. Regarding television broadcasts, Egyptian ground-broadcast television (Egyptian Radio and Television Union/ERTU) is government-controlled and has two main channels: Channel I that uses mainly Arabic, and Channel II dedicated to non-Arabic speakers and bilingual audiences, broadcasting English and French as well as Arabic content (Media Landscapes, 2024).

The presence of English extends to speaking in everyday life situations. Spoken English is used on the level of phrases, words, and sentences. The younger generations tend to believe that the use of English marks them as more outward-looking and less constrained by the narrow limits of whatever is interpreted as "local", including language, culture and social life. For younger generations, English is usually linked to positive, in-group local values of education, competence in English, and peer group

prestige. Explaining the increasing interest in English, Schaub (2000, 228) notes that "an obvious motivation [...] is the promise of more money or better jobs that many Egyptians associate with the 'commodity' of English". Similar to Schaub's conclusions, Haeri (1997, 800) states that "foreign languages have greater commercial and symbolic capital to Egyptians than MSA, the official language in Egypt".

Language and culture, in relation to English in Egypt, is a topic of debate. Although the vast majority of people from different parts of the world believe that English language teaching/learning is dominated by "linguistic imperialism", in their exploration of the sociolinguistic situation in Egypt, McIlwraith and Fortune (2016, 11) assert that English in Egypt is regarded as a tool employed for certain needs and purposes rather than a vehicle for a foreign culture or identity to be absorbed along with the language. Younger generations tend to believe that English will not have any negative impact on their Arab identity. It is rather an opportunity to gain a rich identity and a higher social status.

### *1.3 Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) in Relation to English and Arabic*

The global spread of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has established changes in how languages are used. According to Baron (2004), these changes include "faster composition and reading of texts and diffusion of oral discourse features into written language". Research into these phenomena has focused mainly on the English language as the language of international, and therefore intercultural, communication. Although software support for the world languages is hardly an issue today, English is the actual language of international communication, including CMC, among the majority who are non-native speakers of English. As a result, languages that are typically written in other scripts have undergone a process of Romanisation, as is the case with the Egyptian users of a wide range of CMC modes. In this paper, I examine this phenomenon, where English is used in instant messaging (IM) as one of the most common synchronous CMC modes in Egypt.

One of the most widely used Latinised versions is Latinised Arabic (LA), a written form of Arabic that employs Latin orthography as a substitute for the Arabic script, which the Arabic language uses. The use of LA in CMC has been reported across the Arab world from countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates (Aboelezz 2012, 52) with regional variation influenced by local spoken dialects. These varieties may differ in how they represent Arabic consonants that do not have English equivalents. Those consonants are represented through numeric characters that resemble the Arabic consonants in appearance.

Drawing on all the above, and in light of the presence of English in everyday activities of Egyptian life, it is significant to explore the daily common use of English as in CMC. The current research study was conducted due to the limited number of existing studies on instant messaging (IM) conversations as an aspect of Egyptian life in which English is used as the main language of communication among Egyptians, especially ones that aimed to investigate the linguistic characteristics of both the English and Arabic used in IM conversations by Egyptian young generations. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, no studies have been conducted aiming to touch upon the contexts and functions of CS in English–Egyptian Arabic IM discourse.

## 2 Research Questions

The study addressed the following questions:

How strong is the use of English in Instant Messaging by young Egyptians?
What linguistic features of English are adopted in Instant Messaging by young Egyptians?
Who in Egypt employs English in IM communication, with regard to age, context, and the target addressee(s), and for what purposes?
How and when does code-switching take place?
Why do young Egyptians often prefer English to Arabic in online communication despite some using English imperfectly?

## 3 Methodology and Participants

The study involves two sources of data: a corpus of IM conversations and survey responses. First, the sample studied is a collection of 30 pre-saved short IM conversations of young native speakers of Egyptian Arabic (including both males and females). Young Egyptians are the target sample since English is more extensively used by younger generations in both formal and informal contexts for various purposes, such as personal, work and educational purposes. For the investigation of the characteristics of English used by Egyptians, reasons for the preference of English to Arabic, types of English errors, punctuation conventions, contexts of use, age of users, addressees, purpose of code-switching and code-mixing, convenience sampling is used.

Participants in the current study are the researcher's friends, colleagues and acquaintances (23 male and 37 female participants, ranging in age between 13 to 40 years old. They have been to different schools (state-governed Arabic medium and foreign language medium schools in Egypt), and they all share the same mother-tongue (Egyptian Arabic). They come from a range of backgrounds and professions: 21 teachers, 4 accountants, 3 engineers, 18 university students, 12 postgraduate students and 2 housewives. All participants are literate in both English and Arabic and use instant messaging extensively for academic, work, and social purposes. Participants are referred to with their initials and all information (such as names, phone numbers, places, etc.) by which individuals could be identified have been excluded in the presentation of analysis. All conversations occurred before the participants knew their conversations would be studied to avoid any bias in the results and to enhance validity.

Second, a questionnaire, in which a group of 49 participants (including some of the conversation providers) were involved, was administered. Participants were asked questions on how dominant English in their daily activities was, and on the reasons of preferring English to Arabic (either Modern Standard Arabic, the formal variety Arabs use in writing and learn in schools, or Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, the dialect native speakers of Egyptian Arabic use in speaking and informal writing) in specific situations. Participants were also asked about how they code-switch in different contexts with different addressees. Before publishing the questionnaire, it had been forwarded to a pilot group of five people to test it. Two of them had two comments. The first commented that the question asking if learning English raises one's awareness of the world (Question 19 in the Appendix section) might be vague for some in terms of phrasing. The rest thought it was understandable in the context of the spread of English in Egypt as indicated in the questionnaire instructions. Another member commented that I might get the same answers for the variety and written form of Arabic used with family and friends (supposing they were both likely to be more informal, which was his own case). Other respondents' answers for the question on family were different from those of friends. Hence, the same version of the survey that they answered was kept as they all agreed it was generally clear and well-developed.

The set of data was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The characteristics of English used in IM by young Egyptians and cases of code-switching are highlighted through the quantitative analysis of the corpus of conversations while the quantitative analysis of conversations and qualitative analysis of questionnaire responses contributed to the understanding of how strong the use of English in online communication is, and how and when code-switching occurs. The qualitative analysis of questionnaire answers sheds light on the reasons behind the preference

for English over Arabic in online communication and other contexts as well as on how Egyptians perceive the dominance of English in Egyptian everyday life. Further, quantitative data from the questionnaire helped in specifying the age groups responding, how frequently English is used in the participants' everyday activities (online and other), and how code-switching takes place in relation to Arabic and English in Egyptian everyday life.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

### *4.1 Corpus of Conversations*

As previously mentioned, the text analysed is a corpus of 30 two-way WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger conversations. This is clearly not a large corpus, but it includes contributions from 60 different interlocutors, and seems sufficient for an initial exploration of the phenomenon of the extensive presence of English in Egyptian IM. The setting involved three language varieties: English and two varieties of Arabic: MSA and ECA, typical to the linguistic situation in the everyday life of Egyptians as described earlier by linguists and researchers. The corpus included a total of 6,196 words of English with an amount of Arabic material in the conversational turns (11.5% or 716 Arabic words). The amount of MSA found in the corpus constituted only 5.7% (41 words) of the total number of Arabic words used, as two copied sentences for invitation and greeting purposes. The writing system used was the Standard English Alphabet. In addition, two written forms of both MSA and ECA were found in the corpus: the Arabic script and LA. The register used would be seen as informal English, but with some features of formality (e.g., the standard future modal verb "will" and its contraction "'ll" are more frequent than the vernacular "gonna" that is more common in informal contexts).

Normally, people who know more than one language tend to use the one they master. However, English in the corpus is used as a medium of interactive communication (both formal and informal) among Egyptian professionals, students and younger generations in general for various purposes such as personal, work and educational reasons, who share Arabic as a native language, regardless of their English proficiency levels. Those with lower proficiency levels may prefer using erroneous English to the use of ECA or even MSA, especially in writing.

### *4.1.1 Abbreviations and Short Forms*

The amount of abbreviations (mainly through vowel deletion) in the whole corpus of the current study constitutes less than 2% of the data, mostly done for the sake of speed increase. The most frequent abbreviation was "u" for the pronoun *you*, which constitutes over 40% or 42 out of 101 (the total number of words abbreviated). Other abbreviations, such as "lol" (*laugh out loud*), normally a turn on its own, "r" for *are*, "coz" and "cuz" for *because*, "bro" for *brother,* and "ur" for *your* are also found. The conversations adhere to the generally accepted rules of writing, but with errors. The findings challenge the perception of the IM discourse as the "funky" distorted form where the language is "stripped down" (Palfreyman and Al Khalil 2003, 13). However, in line with previous literature on IM, the data showed that IM is a contemporary trend predominantly utilised by younger generations favouring a more informal style of communication.

### *4.1.2 Code-switching*

Concerning combining Arabic and English, in common with Warschauer et al.'s (2002) and Palfreyman and Al Khalil's (2003) findings, in the present corpus there is a fair amount of code-switching (CS) (changing mid-utterance or mid-sentence from one language to another) and code-mixing (CM) (using words or phrases from one language within sentences in the other language). This mixing of varieties is often correlated with different functions or topics.

Several researchers have studied the functions, characteristics, determining factors and effects of code-switching in a wide range of linguistics domains. Gumperz (1982) specifies six functions of code-switching: Quotation, Addressee Specification, Repetition, Interjection, Message Qualification, and Personification. Based on the data collected for the current study, it was found that English–Arabic CS fulfills the following conversational functions: Quotation, Addressee Specification, Interjection, Message Qualification, and Personification versus Objectification. Many examples of CS in the corpus studied served the Quotation function that relies on a language other than the one spoken to convey a certain message (Gumperz 1982, 76). This can be explained through the notion that "quotations are more effective if cited in the language originally used" (David 2003, 15). CS as a phenomenon allows the speaker to establish and practise his or her identity in diverse discourses (e.g., social, political, cultural, religious, etc.). In the current study, the function Quotation was employed when participants preferred to mention a religious saying, express some cultural content or copied content to perform the speech acts of greeting, inviting, wishing, thanking, advising or sympathising by using ECA expressions.

Participants preferred to switch to Arabic whenever they wanted to express some religious meaning. The most frequently used expression was "in sha Allah" (also spelt: "isa", "isA", "inshalah" in the corpus, meaning 'If God/Allah wills'), to indicate acceptance of God's will when expressing an intention or hope. Such an example of switching to Arabic occurs for establishing a religious identity, even among speakers of other languages. One of the participants, when asked why she preferred to switch to Arabic to use such phrases, replied: "An Islamic phrase does not sound right to my ears/eyes when in English". The interlocutors tended to switch to Arabic to say the exact formulaic phrases used in certain situations/occasions. Some examples of these phrases are:

Allah yekhaleeky ('May Allah bless you'/'Thank you') (female addressee)
matez3alish ('Don't be upset') (female addressee)
Rabena yesahel ('May God make it easy')
od balak mn nfsak ('Take care of yourself') (male addressee)
mish hate5sary 7aga ('You would lose nothing') (female addressee)

The second function of CS that occurred was Addressee Specification. Participants tended to switch to Arabic using the word "ya" (a vocative particle used to call someone) before a person's name. Addressee Specification occurred in the corpus by participants to specify their addressees or to attract their attention and add emphasis on the content (e.g., "Your kind care is everything ya F"; "no ya M. u didnt have to"; "Congrats. ya R").

Gumperz (1982, 77) considers the Interjection function of CS as the one which may be used as a "sentence filler" (e.g. OK, yes/no, please, thank you, already, maybe, hi, bye). Some instances that fulfilled the interjection function in the studied conversations are:

*Asl* I always have the feeling ('I *basically* always have the feeling')
*El mohem* r u ok? ('*Anyway*, are you OK?')
*Yalla* enjoy ('*All right*, enjoy')

The Message Qualification function of CS may occur when the speaker tends to add information or details on a topic in the alternate language (Huerta-Macías and Quintero 1992, 78). In examples such as: "I understand this location is kilometers away from *ma2waf el3acher*, right?", meaning 'I understand this location is kilometers away from *the Tenth District Bus Garage*, right?' and "we are not in *handasa*", meaning 'We are not at *the Faculty of Engineering*', the interlocutors chose to add more details

on directions in ECA, as people will normally be more familiar with places in ECA as known by the local community.

The Personification versus Objectification function of CS in the corpus was used by Egyptians when they wanted to express personal opinions. These opinions are believed to refer to "specific instances or have the authority of generally known fact" (Gumperz 1982, 80). One of the informants switched to Arabic: "*7aram* to take two subjects again", meaning '*It is unfair* to take two subjects again' to express her opinion on a certain situation she mentioned to the other interlocutor earlier in the same conversation.

### *4.1.3 Accuracy*

Errors occurring in the corpus were mainly grammatical/structural, lexical, and common typographical errors. They are categorised into: inserting/omitting a character/word, sentence structure, word/tense choice, and capitalisation (lower case where upper case should be used). Any comprehensive investigation of IM errors has to attain a distinction between errors and online norms. Some types of errors such as the failure of choosing a correct form, tense or word, and those based on L1 transfer, are typical to L2 learners. On the other hand, errors such as omitting punctuation marks (e.g. full stops and commas) as well as using lower case instead of upper case where capitalisation is necessary normally occur in the use of IM even among native speakers of English.

According to Lee (1990), grammatical and structural errors, exemplified in the data in turns like: "please i have been waiting like two weeks now to know at which time my course will be" and "i am sorry did i bothered u be sms you ??", fit into the *mistakes* category rather than in *errors* as they are not major errors that hinder comprehension or communication. Lexical errors of word choice occurred in the corpus in examples such as in archaic words like "ail", literary words like "avail", and adjectives like "bossy" and "masterful" when the interlocutor actually meant *pushy* or *commanding* (due to lower language proficiency level).

Apart from the structural and lexical mistakes, the typos are typical to those one might find in native English messaging. Other spelling errors included "okey" and "okkay" for *okay*, "raffly" for *roughly* and "allot" for *a lot*. However, those did not hinder intelligibility and messages could be well-communicated between the chatters. The only example where the lack of comprehension was evident: "sorry wasn't what ...?" is caused by the lack of knowledge of the meaning of the word "bossy" or the wrong choice of the word "bossy" in the conversation context.

In some instances, errors occurred due to L1 interference; those errors which Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) referred to as *interlingual errors* as opposed to *intralingual*

*errors*, in "from 15/9", for instance, the word *since* should be used in place of *from* to indicate a period of time from the past until a moment in the present. *From*, in time indication, is often used along with *to*. The use of "from" here is an influence of ECA.

Furthermore, the most frequent error found was omission. Inserting unneeded spaces, separating words and punctuation marks, is a common typographical error. Swipos (swiping typos) were also found in examples like: "webistes" (*websites*), "scholar" (*scholar*) and "actuslly" (*actually*). Typographical conventions were adapted to add verbal or attitudinal effects. Duplication of letters (mainly vowels) occurred to express and emphasise emotions (e.g., to show happiness in response to good news, as in "greaaaat", to express gratitude, as in "thank youuuu" and "thxx"), similar to the way punctuation marks such as *!* and *?* behave.

The standard of correctness was found to be generally acceptable, and most of the conversations occurred for work and study purposes. This challenges the findings of Palfreyman and Al Khalil (2003, 13) that instant messaging reflects casual use and intimacy between friends and acquaintances where no background information is provided, and where ellipsis, slang, and interruptions are common.

### *4.2 Questionnaire Results*

The questionnaire consisted of 36 questions (including yes/no, multiple choice, and open-ended questions; see the Appendix section). Questions were designed to investigate issues such as the dominance of English in the everyday life of Egyptians (exemplified in texting, social media networking, online and real life chatting, writing formal and informal emails and writing essays, reports and formal letters, media, cinema, and music), the ease of English use and the amount of effort and time participants devote to communicating in English, the relation between the spread of English in Egypt and the Egyptian identity as perceived by Egyptians, the functional appropriateness or advantages of the preference of English over Arabic with Arabic speakers in certain contexts. Answers also shed light on topics such as code-switching between English and Arabic, the variety of Arabic, the form of written Arabic used in contexts when code-switching occurs, and some reactions and perceptions concerning the learning/teaching of English in Egypt.

In the first group of questions (1–3), respondents were introduced in terms of age and their use of English as a foreign language in learning/teaching. The questionnaire targeted Egyptian younger generations ranging in age between 13 to 40 years old. The dominant age group was the one between 20–34 (65.31%), followed by the teenage group between 13–19 (30.61%), while only two participants (4.08%) were between 35–40. All participants said that they use English, some in their studies, some in teaching English as a foreign language, and some in both.

As indicated in the responses of questions 4–10, English appears to be the dominant language of everyday Egyptian activities. The results show a high frequency of using English between once to more than 20 times a day in texting (91.84%), social media networking sites (97.96%), online chatting (91.84%), writing formal emails (87.76%), writing informal emails (63.27%), writing essays, reports or formal letters (85.42%), and speaking (on the level of words, phrases, or sentences) (85.71%), which emphasises how English is spreading as a language for national and international communication in Egypt.

In comparison with the other activities, the absence of the "more than 20 times a day" group in writing informal emails can be attributed to the fact that there is no need for participants to write informal emails as frequently as other activities. It is also worth noting that a substantial number of people use English in formal contexts: formal emails and essays, reports and formal letters, for more than 20 times a day (16.33% and 16.67%, respectively), a frequency that can be considered high even among members of English-speaking communities. Although it might not have been expected from an Arabic native speaker to use English in his or her home country with other native Arabic speakers extensively in everyday activities, participants stated that they use English in mobile texting (22.45%), on social media sites (28.57%), in online and real-life chatting (20.41%) for more than 20 times a day. In response to Question 11, some participants confirmed that their offline use of English surpasses online use: they use English at home with their families and siblings, in schools with their friends, classmates and teachers, in courses or in foreign facilities in Egypt.

Answers to Questions 12–18 about checking and proofreading shed light on the amount of effort and time participants put into communicating in English. The Egyptian use of English does not seem to be spontaneous. Egyptians do not use English because they can use it more effectively than the different varieties of Arabic. It can also be noted that there is a positive correlation between the frequency of proofreading and the level of formality of the activities themselves. Synchronous activities, such as instant messaging and speaking, and informal activities, such as text messaging, social media, and informal emails, involve less proofreading than more formal activities such as formal emails and academic writing. In addition, English in the synchronous activities (instant messaging and speaking) is the least edited due to time factors.

Drawing on the 93.88% who reported a positive correlation between knowing English and one's awareness of the world, as well as the 97.96% who believe in the importance of English for one's future, it can be said that the functional and cultural utility of English cannot be underestimated in Egypt, or generally, in any country seeking development and progress. As stated by some respondents: English

is nationally and internationally important since "everyone speaks it" and because "you may travel to a foreign country for work". The English language is now argued to belong to everyone who speaks it, and the ability to use English efficiently is an asset in every walk of life.

Based on the responses of Questions 21–23, English is also the language of international news, films, and music. Such high proportions for news, films and music respectively ("yes, usually or always": 36.73%, 81.63% and 69.39% and "sometimes": 55.10%, 18.37% and 26.53%) cannot be underestimated in light of the presence of English in various areas of Egyptian life. Knowing English for the majority means "one no longer has to rely on translations".

Given that English has come to the status of a lingua franca in Egypt, any fair investigation on the impact of this on the Arab Egyptian identity must remain open to both its potential positive and negative impacts. Participants in their responses can be divided into two groups: those who can see a relation between the spread of English in Egypt and the Egyptian identity and others who believe their bilingualism and native identity are two separable entities; their bilingualism should not influence/interfere with their native culture/identity. 57% of respondents believe that language is inseparable from identity and culture. By using the language, individuals tend to "take up a position in a social field in which all positions are moving and defined relative to one another" (Hanks 1996, 201).

The comments of respondents revealed the way they perceive the effect of the English language on the Egyptian and Arab identity. Some responded that the use of English in English-related contexts, or when one wants to use an English word because the equivalent does not exist in Arabic, is generally acceptable. It only means "Arabic as a language is becoming more inclusive of different cultures, which is generally what makes a language thrive". On the other hand, some came to view that the use of English in circumstances where there is no need to (e.g. in speaking to fellow Egyptians) might be a sign of a distorted identity. Sometimes people use English just to imitate "foreign actions" not for self-development. Many Egyptians adhere to the use of English words in their daily lives and they mainly focus on teaching English to their children, which, in turn, lessens their proficiency level in Arabic, and makes them "less attached to their roots". According to these respondents, Arabic is facing a serious threat from the dominance of English in education due to the lack of language planning and the inadequacy of scientific resources available in Arabic (those translated from other languages into Arabic and/or those originally published in Arabic). According to Al-Khatib and Sabbah (2008), such "modern" practices of westernisation get attacked by the conservative generations in the Arab communities. The same perception was expressed by some respondents who criticised those who look up to people who speak multiple languages. Consequently,

this may lead to a gap between the educated and uneducated as well as between the modern and conservative generations, growing wider every day.

42.55% of participants believe knowing English as a foreign language does not have an impact on the Egyptian identity. English for them is not seen as a vehicle for spreading westernisation in their country. For them, it only shows that "Egyptians can learn anything they want if they put their minds into it". English is not more than a tool of self-development and communication with the world. Further, some stated that learning English does not diminish their religiousness; on the contrary, they believe that it can be beneficial as a means of conveying real Islamic values to non-Muslims.

Other respondents believe it is true that knowing other languages imports new ways of thinking and changes the new generations' way of speaking, thinking, and even social traditions. However, to balance between two, three or more languages, by bearing in mind that the native language is the basis of one's culture and identity, it is thought to be the right thing people should prioritise. Arabic is regarded as the mother tongue Egyptians should be proud of, and more importantly, the language of the Holy Book for the vast majority. For these reasons, Arabic must be spoken correctly and should be given priority among other languages available to speakers.

Similar to what the analysis of the conversations showed, questionnaire respondents agreed that both Arabic and English are vital in Egyptian society. Arabic is believed to be an inseparable part of the unique Egyptian culture and identity, and it was found to be more appropriate in the contexts of religion, Arabic history and Arabic literature. On the other hand, English is believed to be more appropriate in the context of English as the language of international communication, and the language of science and technology, world trading, research, and in contexts involving new inventions or scientific terms that are more widely used in English than in Arabic (when the English equivalents of the terms are more frequently used) or when the English terms have no Arabic equivalents. Others believe it is in the field of education that English is particularly necessary, as English proficiency has become one of the entry requirements of study programmes both within Egypt and worldwide, and it is often the medium of instruction. English can be spoken in any foreign institutions and academic contexts such as conferences and business environments (e.g. in meetings and interviews). However, for this group of respondents, the use of English should receive less emphasis in other contexts where it is not required. Some respondents stated that English is more appropriate when it comes to "taboo" topics. Sexual topics or swear words, for example, "sound less offensive and more decent when expressed in a foreign language". English is also used in contexts related to prestige and social class. It is the language some use to "show off" among friends and relatives regardless of how (in)competently they may be using English.

This is viewed as a negative thing though, and there is an implied criticism of those Egyptians who are believed not to value the uniqueness of the native identity.

7 respondents answered that they see no advantages for the use of English over Arabic. They simply do not deliberately decide on whether to use English rather than Arabic in speaking or writing. Some responses came as follows:

> Sometimes my brain can't think of an appropriate word in Arabic that fits. Certain words just pop up in my mind faster in English at those moments.
> To me, it just depends on the mood. Plus, it depends on how fluent the person I am talking to is. I always pick Arabic over English if they're not fluent speakers.

Interestingly, 6 participants answered that English fits better where there is a need to be "direct", "to the point", "specific" and more "understandable" (e.g., when expressing a certain idiom or a figure of speech), especially when they speak to other Egyptians who are more proficient in English than in Arabic.

4 people answered that they use English for the sake of improving their own English skills. For them, English skills would not improve if they did not practise English, either in speaking or writing. A teacher of English also added "English is an asset to myself and my students when I use it with my students to help them improve their language".

Responses to Question 27 supported the findings of the quantitative data analysis, where it was found that the IM English used by Egyptians is generally mixed with Arabic in daily use. 85.41% of respondents answered that they switch from English to Arabic, especially to ECA as the dominant variety. The questionnaire results showed that MSA continues to serve the same function of formality; there is a correlation between the addressee and the variety used. The percentage of MSA use rises as the relationship between interlocutors becomes more formal (12.50% with both friends and family, 16.67% with colleagues and acquaintances, and 35.42% with seniors).

To compare the conversations to the questionnaire responses, the questionnaire responses to Questions 32–35 and the conversation analysis seem contradictory in relation to the form of Arabic used. In the conversations, Arabic constituted 11.55% of the quota (716 out of 6196 words): 551 Arabic words (76.90%) were in LA, while 165 words (23.1%) were in Arabic script, which shows that LA was more frequent than Arabic script. On the other hand, questionnaire respondents seem to all agree that they prefer Arabic script to LA regardless of the addressee (62.50% with friends, 87.50% with family, 68.75% with colleagues and acquaintances, 79.17% with seniors).

It might seem insignificant to ask the participants if they wish to see an expansion in the teaching of English in Egypt after a list of questions about the contexts where participants prefer to use English. However, Question 36 was asked on purpose to elicit more reactions and points of view concerning the learning and teaching of English in Egypt, which could bring to the surface some teaching implications. 47 out of 48 (97.92%) answered yes, but only 15 people provided reasons for learning English.

4 out of 15 respondents (26.6%) believe everybody in the whole world must have a solid knowledge of English as "it is basically a tool to communicate with the entire world and help expand one's horizons". English is believed to "provide a window to the world" and open other countries and cultures to individuals. Others (3 out of 15 respondents, 20%) think that "English is important to qualify students for the global market" and "it helps in finding better jobs when students graduate". Learning English, the language of technical innovation and economic development, opens job prospects, helps in finding more profitable jobs and more prestigious positions and increases one's standard of living.

The rest of the responses happened to critique the approaches used in the teaching and learning of English. The traditional modes of learning and instruction used are incompatible with most modern methods of learning and instruction, which foster the development of communication skills and individual learning skills. At school, students go through heavy and rigid programmes of classroom work in which they are not encouraged to think for themselves or make use of their knowledge. The teaching method the students are used to is one which tends towards habitual memorisation. On this basis, suggestions are made toward better teaching methods. 7 out of the 15 respondents feel that teachers of English take English "for granted" and believe it should be "fun" to learn and teach. They all agree that English lexis and idiomatic expressions of real-life situations as well as the productive skills of speaking (with more focus on pronunciation) and writing (both formal and informal), should be properly taught and learnt in Egypt. In some responses, there was a call for teachers to update their old, traditional, "difficult" and "boring" methods which are no longer used in any effective teaching and learning environment. Classroom techniques would need to create fun and enjoyment in the teaching and learning process.

## 5 Conclusion

English in Egypt is used as an interactive medium of communication among Egyptians, who share Arabic as a native language, regardless of their English proficiency levels. Both formal and informal varieties of English are used (with considerably high

frequency) in various contexts for work, personal, business and educational purposes by Egyptian students, professionals and the young generations in general. As noted by Schaub (2000, 232) English appears to have the greatest appeal among Egyptians who are characterised as young, educated, and middle or upper class. The overarching ideological and symbolic factors underlying the sociolinguistic situation in Egypt are by no means simple. The situation is often associated with globalisation and the status of English as a global language (Warschauer et al. 2002). Both Arabic and English are regarded to be vital for Egyptian society, each for its own purposes and in its own contexts. Code-switching between English and Arabic occurs to fulfill various functions. Knowing English is the key to more life opportunities "regardless of one's ethnicity, color or background", and the world nowadays leans towards the belief that English belongs to "everyone or to no one" (Wardhaugh 1987, 30). The use of the English language as a means of communication among individuals, communities and nations is crucial in the study of human relations.

## 6 Limitations of the Study

Statistically speaking, there is a need to consider the inclusion of a larger sample to obtain more conclusive and generalisable results. Moreover, the current study is restricted to the researcher's acquaintance, which guarantees, in one way or another, a certain social and educational level. Therefore, my suggestion for further research would be to include a larger number of participants belonging to different age groups, educational levels, and social classes.

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**Appendix: Questionnaire**

**Q1 How old are you?**
Answer Choices: 13–19, 20–34, 35–40
**Q2 Are you studying English?**
Answer Choices: Yes - No
**Q3 Do you teach English?**
Answer Choices: Yes - No
**Q4 Do you use English to send text messages on a mobile phone?**
Answer Choices: Never - Once or twice a day - Up to 5 Times a day - Between 5 and 20 times a day - More than 20 times a day
**Q5 Do you use English on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or other social networking sites?**
Answer Choices: Never - Once or twice a day - Up to 5 Times a day - Between 5 and 20 times a day - More than 20 times a day
**Q6 Do you use English when you chat on the web?**
Answer Choices: Never - Once or twice a day - Up to 5 Times a day - Between 5 and 20 times a day - More than 20 times a day
**Q7 Do you use English to send write formal emails?**
Answer Choices: Never - Once or twice a day - Up to 5 Times a day - Between 5 and 20 times a day - More than 20 times a day
**Q8 Do you use English to send write informal emails?**
Answer Choices: Never - Once or twice a day - Up to 5 Times a day - Between 5 and 20 times a day - More than 20 times a day
**Q9 Do you use English to send write essays, reports, formal letters?**
Answer Choices: Never - Once or twice a day - Up to 5 Times a day - Between 5 and 20 times a day - More than 20 times a day
**Q10 Do you use English to speak to Egyptians or Arabic speakers in general (on the level of words, phrases, sentences)?**
Answer Choices: Never - Once or twice a day - Up to 5 Times a day - Between 5 and 20 times a day - More than 20 times a day
**Q11 Please state other contexts when you use English (if there are any).**
**Q12 Do you check and edit your English when you send text messages on a mobile phone?**
Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never - Not applicable

**Q13 Do you check and edit your English when you use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or other social networking sites?**

Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never - Not applicable

**Q14 Do you check and edit your English when you chat on the web?**

Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never - Not applicable

**Q15 Do you check and edit your English when you write formal emails?**

Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never - Not applicable

**Q16 Do you check and edit your English when you write informal emails?**

Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never - Not applicable

**Q17 Do you check and edit your English when you write essays, reports, formal letters?**

Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never - Not applicable

**Q18 Do you check and edit your English when you speak (on the level of words, phrases, sentences)?**

Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never - Not applicable

**Q19 Do you think learning English as a foreign language raises one's awareness of the world?**

Answer Choices: Yes – No

**Q20 Do you think learning English as a foreign language is important for one's future (e.g. developing a career path)?**

Answer Choices: Yes – No

**Q21 Do you watch/listen to any news in English?**

Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never

**Q22 Do you watch films in English?**

Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never

**Q23 Do you listen to any songs in English?**

Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never

**Q24 Do you think that using English in Egypt changes Egyptian identity and Arabic culture in some way? If yes, could you briefly say how?**

**Q25 As an Egyptian, do you think that using English is more appropriate than using Arabic (with its all varieties) in certain situations/contexts? Please give details.**

**Q26 If you sometimes prefer to use English when speaking/writing to Arabic speakers, what are the advantages (if any) of using English rather than Arabic?**
**Q27 When you chat in English, do you switch to Arabic (in any of its different varieties?**

Answer Choices: Yes, usually or always - Sometimes - No, rarely or never - Not applicable

**Q28 When you switch between English and Arabic, which variety of Arabic do you normally use in chatting with your friends?**

Answer Choices: Modern Standard Arabic (formal) - Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (informal) - Not applicable

**Q29 When you switch between English and Arabic, which variety of Arabic do you normally use in chatting with your family?**

Answer Choices: Modern Standard Arabic (formal) - Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (informal) - Not applicable

**Q30 When you switch between English and Arabic, which variety of Arabic do you normally use in chatting with your colleagues/acquaintance?**

Answer Choices: Modern Standard Arabic (formal) - Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (informal) - Not applicable

**Q31 When you switch between English and Arabic, which variety of Arabic do you normally use in chatting with your seniors?**

Answer Choices: Modern Standard Arabic (formal) - Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (informal) - Not applicable

**Q32 When you switch between English and Arabic, which form of written Arabic do you use with your friends?**

Answer Choices: Arabic script - Latinised script (Arabic in Latin script/Franco form) - Not applicable