FIRST THE LAND AND THEN THE LANGUAGE:
LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM IN TRANSJORDAN AND PALESTINE

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Abstract

In Jordan, a state renowned for medical tourism, all physicians are proficient in English because medical classes are taught in English, indicating that English, rather than Jordan’s official language of Arabic, is the prestige language of Jordanian medicine. As a result, Jordanians who have access to English through wealth and education receive more opportunities than those without access. These language ideologies come from Jordan’s history as a British mandate. This paper applies the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis to a set of primary sources, Palestine and Transjordan administrative reports, 1918–1948, in order to determine imperial-era linguistic realities and discourses. Using this method, it is possible to identify one social reality and two discourses that worked in conjunction to construct English as a prestige language: 1) not everyone had equal access to education, 2) English was a language of higher learning, and 3) the British educational system was superior to Ottoman and Arab systems. Neither documented resistance to nor acceptance of English’s prestige status represented the entire population. Globally, current English usage in former British protectorates and colonies depends upon both imperial-era discourses about the subject people and an individual’s socioeconomic position within their society.

Introduction

In the past hundred years, the English language has taken root in the Arabic-speaking world. Modern concepts in transportation and technology are often translated into English cognates, such as takṣī, awtūbīs, faysbūḵ,

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cumbīūtir, al-īntirnit, and tiknūlūjīā rather than Arabic words. English also seems to have a reputation as a more “scientific” language because it is used as the medium of instruction in medical classes in Jordan, formerly a British Mandate. This language usage is particularly intriguing because it indicates that English, not Arabic, is Jordan’s prestige language of medicine. In fact, the Jordanian Rheumatism Society not only held its 2014 International Congress in English, with “no simultaneous translation,” but also in collaboration with the British Society for Rheumatology (Arab League Against Rheumatism 2014). According to Suleiman (2011), so many Arabs prefer English to their native Arabic because English evokes prestige and modernity “by virtue of its connection with power and globalization” (63). But this explanation does not take into account the vestiges of imperialism apparent in Jordanian medicine. Though globalization certainly plays a significant role in English’s status as a prestige language, the imperialization of Arabic began decades before.

After the intellectual developments of the 18th century Enlightenment and the technological advancements of the 19th century Industrial Revolution, the Western world realized that it had reached a new stage of civilization (Adas 1990). Science, and indeed the positivist concept of the scientific method, had heralded a new, golden age of modernity. The West then determined that non-Western peoples were still living with the same “backwards” traditions they had been practicing for centuries. In places with long-gone advanced civilizations—namely India, China, and Egypt—the West believed that it could teach the people about their own glorious pasts, enabling them to regain greatness through education (Adas 1990; Prakash 1999).

Sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand, was supposedly too primitive for any such task, and as a result its colonies were treated with even more disregard for their peoples than other 19th century imperial possessions (Gifford and Weiskel 1971). Thus the West embarked on a civilizing mission of spreading science and modernity through advanced infrastructure and limited education, both of which further facilitated imperialism (Adas 1990). Imperialized peoples resisted both passively and violently, but, as postcolonial sources like Prakash (1999), Said (1994), and most notably Algerian revolutionary Frantz Fanon (2004) have noted, organized resistance was often a vehicle of the Western-educated elite.

After the Allies defeated the Ottoman Empire in WWI, the British gained Transjordan and Palestine.¹ The two were British Mandates from 1918-1946 and 1918-1948, respectively, though Britain retained somewhat of a sphere of influence over Jordan a decade after its independence (Fieldhouse 2006). Using

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¹“Transjordan” and “Palestine” refer to the British Mandates. “Jordan” refers to the post-Mandate Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
the primary source series Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports, 1918-1948, I have investigated how imperial language policies and discourses have influenced present-day language ideologies in Jordan. I have determined one social reality and two general discourses that worked in conjunction to construct English as a prestige language before the age of globalization cemented English’s high status. I will then connect this history to the present with some ethnographic observations collected while studying in Amman in fall 2015.

**Fairclough and Critical Discourse Analysis**

I incorporated concepts from Norman Fairclough’s method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) into a more traditional discourse analysis of my primary sources. Unlike other forms of discourse analysis, CDA enables users to 1) critique discourses, 2) situate the discourses within a broader social context, and 3) challenge these discourses and the social order they support (Fairclough 2015). Fairclough’s use of explanatory critique is crucial here—most analyses of discourse only use normative critique, or “immanent” critique, which solely “identifies internal contradictions within the social reality, including those between what is supposed or said to happen and what actually does happen” (Fairclough 2015, 12). On the other hand, explanatory or “transcendental” critique determines how the discourses found through normative critique are constructed by society and maintain the status quo (Fairclough 2015). In other words, explanatory critique is a crucial but oft-ignored second step of discourse analysis that incorporates social and historical context into the analysis.

Fairclough’s idea that is most fundamental to my research, however, is the mutually reinforcing relationship between social structures and discourse. According to Fairclough,

Social practice does not merely ‘reflect’ a reality which is independent of it; social practice is in an active relationship to reality, and it changes reality. The world that human beings live in is massively a humanly created world, a world created in the course of social practice...As far as the social world is concerned, social structures not only determine social practice, they are also a product of social practice. And more particularly, social structures not only determine discourse, they are also a product of discourse. (Fairclough 2015, 68)

In other words, social structures both create and are created by
discourse. This concept incorporates both the bottom-up direction of change articulated by materialism and the top-down direction of change articulated by idealism, with ideology at the “top” and the means and organization of production at the “bottom.” In this paper, “social realities” are the social structures that are created by discourses and inspire the construction of further discourses. It is important to note that each social reality and discourse section in the paper contains both social realities and discourses; the two are not rigid categories, but rather constantly influence each other in multiple ways.

**Limitations of *Palestine and Transjordan Administration Reports, 1918-1948***

Surveys and censuses provided an excellent method of controlling the British Mandates through knowledge (Richards 1993; see also Anderson 1991). Their findings, along with any problems the administrators encountered, were compiled into official reports to the League of Nations and British government. Curated by Robert Jarman, the *Palestine and Transjordan administration reports, 1918-1948* combine these reports with letters from British civilian and military officials. These documents span the entirety of British rule in Palestine and Transjordan, beginning with the military administration of 1918-1920, surpassing Transjordan’s declaration of independence in 1946, and ending with the British withdrawal from Palestine in May 1948. While the series is an excellent resource, the original documents leave a number of gaps and other limitations.

In fact, some of the reports are missing. In the series’ introduction, Jarman (1995) notes that British Colonial Office minutes indicate that the 1939 report was written; however, he could not locate any copies of the document and presumed that it must have been thrown away (vol. 1). Jarman instead published the individual departmental reports that the 1939 report should have been based on. Likewise, the government in Britain ordered the administrators to stop producing reports in 1942, supposedly due to a wartime “shortage of paper” (Jarman 1995, vol. 14, 683) so Jarman published the individual departmental reports for 1942-1946. Unfortunately, the departmental reports for these years exclude Transjordanian education, and Palestine’s Department of Education report for 1944-1945 seems to have disappeared as well. Another problem is the way the reports were written. Like many administrative documents of the time, the reports are replete with passive verb constructions and non-human subjects. It is impossible to determine agency from sentences like, “Steps are being taken to label in the three official languages exhibits of the Palestine Archaeological Museum” (Jarman 1995, vol. 4, 399). In fact, it is
not even clear who composed each report. Only the most important officials are explicitly named (sometimes) in the reports’ discussions of events; everyone else who participated in these events is reduced to a vague, anonymous “they.”

The most critical issue, however, is the reports’ primary focus on Palestine, for which there are several possible explanations. Sequentially, Palestine is always discussed before Transjordan in the reports, so the writers may have simply wanted to avoid redundancy. A more likely cause is the limited scale of British involvement in Transjordan. Transjordan is also seldom mentioned before 1924 because before that time, some British government officials wanted it to be part of Palestine (Jarman 1995, vol. 1). From the British point of view, Transjordan was also not a pressing imperial concern, whereas Palestine was destined for greatness as the so-called Jewish National Home, which would create much tension and violence between Jews and Arabs in the 1930s and 1940s. Though many Transjordanians opposed the Zionist movement (Salibi 1998; Fieldhouse 2006), the state saw little violent opposition (Jarman 1995, vol. 6; Fischbach 2004; Anderson 2005).

Due to the limited amount of information on Transjordan, I have used both Palestinian and Transjordanian data for my research. While Palestine’s Zionist history presents a key difference between the two countries, the two have much in common. Both were part of the Ottoman Empire during WWI, and therefore both states’ education programs suffered from the same problems. Both states were also under British control; French rule in the Middle East and North Africa was drastically different. The states also had strong political, familial, and economic connections (Jarman 1995, vol. 1) due to their geographic proximity. Moreover, due to a lack of higher education in Transjordan, more advanced students often had to attend Palestinian schools. In Salibi’s (1998) words, Transjordan was “Palestine’s twin” (126).

**Discourse I: English Was a Language of Higher Learning**

When the British took control of Palestine and Transjordan, they found the education system in utter disrepair. American missionaries in the mid- to late-19th century had brought high-quality education to Syria and modern-day Lebanon, but they had little luck in establishing their private schools in Palestine and Transjordan (Elshakry 2013). With the advent of Turkish nationalism at the turn of the century, the medium of instruction in all Ottoman public schools became Turkish. Even Arabic was taught as a second language, through Turkish, and there are several anecdotes of incompetent, non-native-speaking Arabic teachers (Suleiman 1994, 2003). Thus most
students in Palestine and Transjordan would have had to learn through a second language. Education suffered even more during WWI, when the Ottoman Empire requisitioned classroom materials like furniture for the war. Consequently, the British set out to reform and restructure public education, and in 1917 they appointed a Major Williams to lead the efforts (Jarman 1995, vol. 1).

After buying more furniture, Major Williams’ next course of action was to change the language of instruction in schools. Article 15 of the League of Nations Mandate had decreed that members of each community in Palestine should have the right to an education in their own language (Jarman 1995, vol. 1). As a result, the British created a dual system of (Muslim and Christian) Arab and Jewish public schools, with the Government Arab schools teaching through Arabic and the Va’ad Leumi schools through Hebrew. However, the British also deemed it necessary to introduce English as a foreign language in upper-level elementary classes. Teachers continued English instruction through secondary schools and Training Colleges, which were British-created secondary schools with additional upper-level classes for prospective teachers (Jarman 1995, vols. 1, 3). There were no Training Colleges in Transjordan, so Transjordanian students went to Training Colleges in Palestine (Jarman 1995, vol. 2). In the Government Arab College’s early Training classes, students only thoroughly studied Arabic and English literature; all other subjects were merely taught through the framework of elementary education (Jarman 1995, vol. 2).

English proficiency was important because, according to the British, English-language teaching materials were superior to Arabic ones. Thus, not only was English a language of higher education, i.e. taught in upper-level classes, but it was also a language of higher learning, or a prestige academic language. In the 1927 report, the writers included a “Note on the teaching of various subjects.” The Government Arab schools section reads (all emphases added),

Arabic.—*The study of Arabic is greatly hampered in the elementary schools by a complete lack of children’s literature.* The only reading books available are two or three series of graded primers published in Egypt or Syria. No supplementary school readers and no books suitable for home reading exist. [...]

English.—*In English, on the other hand, the supply of books for supplementary and general reading is wide, but no series of readers exists which is scientifically graduated and specially adapted for Arab use.* All Government teachers of English except at the Training Colleges are Arabs, and most of these are still very imperfectly equipped. Partly
for this reason but mainly on general education grounds the syllabus and instructions issued to teachers have laid somewhat greater stress on reading and comprehension than on oral or written composition, in which no very marked progress can be made until the teachers themselves are able to speak and write correct English with some fluency.

[...]

History.—In history, teachers not well acquainted with a European language are unable to find suitable material for the preparation of lessons. The elementary history books available in Arabic are jejune summaries. In secondary classes an Arabic adaptation of Breasted’s “Ancient Times” is used by pupils, but Arabic reference books are few and unsatisfactory. Most teachers now passing out of the Men’s Training College are able to use English books and to base upon them lessons suited to all elementary classes.

In elementary and lower secondary classes the defects of less fully trained teachers are partly compensated by the use of historical readers in English language lessons.

Geography.—[...] All Arabic geographies are inferior in format; maps and diagrams are few, rough and badly reproduced. There is an entire absence of teachers trained in modern geographical methods, and improvement must be slow until an Arabic lecturer educated in Europe can be appointed to the Training College.

(Jarman 1995, vol. 2, 401-402)

This discoursally rich passage reveals a number of key British ideas about Arab education in the Mandates. First, the British considered Arabic textbooks and maps to be useless, if not detrimental to children’s education. The Court of Directors of the East India Company in London had already set a precedent in 1821 for utter disregard for ‘Oriental’ books (Adas 1990), so this sentiment was by no means new. In the Mandates’ case, a number of quality textbooks had been produced by American missionaries in Syria in the mid-19th century (Suleiman 2003; Elshakry 2013), but if any of these books still existed a century later, they were heavily outdated. Late Ottoman education had presented no need to publish new, quality textbooks in Arabic because the
language of instruction was Ottoman Turkish.

Second, there was a relatively simple solution to the Arabic materials problem, again with a precedent in Indian education: use textbooks and maps created by Europeans in European languages. The British recognized in the 1926 report that elementary boys’ schools “show an increasing capacity to profit from works of reference in English” (Jarman 1995, vol. 2, 255). However, the British also believed that English should be offered in moderation. In the “Note on the teaching of various subjects,” the writers explain that foreign Arab schools had superior Western teachers who taught through Western languages, thereby giving students access to superior classroom materials. Yet if the Western language was introduced before students mastered their native language, “The mental development of pupils may thus be retarded, if not permanently checked, by imperfect command of any medium of thought and expression” (Jarman 1995, vol. 2, 402). The British disagreed with these private, Western European-run schools’ method of introducing foreign languages because it did not enable the young students to become truly proficient in any one language. In other words, the British thought that their method of education even surpassed other Western methods.

Third, this European-language solution depended upon teachers’ education and ability, and many teachers were simply not capable. During the Mandates’ first few years, the British found current teachers to be incompetent, so the Government provided scholarships for several high-achieving secondary students to go to Training Colleges in Palestine or even foreign universities in Lebanon, Egypt, and Britain (Jarman 1995, vols. 1, 2). When these students matriculated, the unsavory teachers were dismissed and the students received their teaching positions (Jarman 1995, vols. 2, 5). In the meantime, the Palestinian and Transjordanian Governments took additional steps to improve teachers’ English proficiency. In November 1927, the Transjordanian Government invited Palestine’s Assistant Director of Education to visit schools in two large towns and instruct teachers on how to teach English (Jarman 1995, vol. 2). In 1934, as there were still no Training Colleges in the Mandate, Transjordan’s Government again sought Palestine’s help, this time in holding a class on English language instruction (Jarman 1995, vol. 5). Palestine, in turn, had appointed a “British Inspector of English language teaching” in 1931 (Jarman 1995, vol. 3).

Finally, as a general consequence of all of these ideologies, the British system of education was discursively positioned as superior to both Ottoman and Arab systems. Teachers educated in European schools were not only better because of their access to high-quality European-language materials. They also knew about modern, positivist research methods, which made them more scientific and therefore better teachers. European teachers were also more motivated and
less myopic than their Arab-educated counterparts. In imposing their lofty education standards upon Palestine and Transjordan, the British aimed to modernize and Westernize the Mandates.

Social Reality I: Not Everyone Had Equal Access to Education

A discussion of British education’s supposed superiority first requires a discussion of what the British education system, specifically the Government Arab school system, looked like. The British implemented a literacy campaign to spread education to everyone from Government messenger boys to prisoners to illiterate adults (Jarman 1995, vols. 1, 3, 7, 14). But “widespread” does not necessarily mean “equally accessible,” and the British reproduced, and thereby sanctioned and widened, existing social inequalities (see Fieldhouse 2006) in the education system. In addition to religious segregation, people’s access to education was stratified by their location, gender, physical and mental disabilities, and conformity to the new social order.

In Palestine and Transjordan, elementary schools contained seven classes that were divided into two phases: the lower cycle, which consisted of the first five classes in town schools and the first four classes in village schools (Jarman 1995, vol. 14), and the upper cycle, which contained the remaining two or three. In secondary schools, the first two classes were considered “post-primary,” and the next two classes were preparation for Palestine or Transjordan Matriculation, with pupils divided into “scientific” and “literary” groups according to their academic focuses (Jarman 1995, vols. 13, 14). If the secondary school were a Training School, it would have an additional two years of post-matriculation classes for teaching candidates and university-level students (Jarman 1995, vol. 13). Elementary and secondary schools fell into categories of public/private, Jewish/Muslim/Christian or Jewish/Arab, urban/rural, male/female, and ability/disability. It is important to note that not all elementary or secondary schools contained the full number of classes, meaning that their pupils had to change schools and travel farther if the students were willing and able to receive a full elementary or secondary education.

This problem was particularly pronounced in rural areas. For example, in Palestine, towards the end of the Mandate, 302 of 330 village schools contained the first four classes of the lower elementary cycle; only 10 elementary schools contained all seven classes (Jarman 1995, vol. 9). There were also 10 rural secondary schools, though these only had two classes each (Jarman 1995, vol. 13). And in the largely-rural Transjordan, there was only
one complete secondary public school for boys, as well as three that offered the two “post-primary” classes, but no public secondary schools for girls (Jarman 1995, vol. 7). The paucity of secondary education in Palestine and Transjordan mirrors the post-WWI situation of British colonial Africa, where colonial officials desired to only educate enough people needed to assist in low-level bureaucratic functions (Prosser and Weiskel 1971).

But in Palestine and Transjordan, transferring to urban elementary and secondary schools was not a viable option for most village students, as the British had created different curriculums for the two school systems. The 1929 report writers explained, “The Government Department has sought to avoid giving too literary a bias to village education, and to provide the village boy instead with an attractive education suited to his own and his country’s needs and equipping him to resist the drift to the town where he may become unemployed or unemployable” (Jarman 1995, vol. 3, 65). According to the Survey of Palestine, the primary goal of creating a unique syllabus for rural schools was “to fit the school to the rural environment of the pupil without thereby establishing the rural population as a separate caste from the urban” (Jarman 1995, vol. 13, 121). Village students did not receive much more literary education than was required for basic Arabic literacy, and very few learned English in schools.

Despite official British intentions, village students became somewhat of a “separate caste” when they went to the towns and found themselves “unemployed or unemployable.” In a 1934 article, a writer named Kenneth Stein argued that any member of the agricultural Fellaheen, who would almost certainly have attended a village school in Palestine or Transjordan, “seeks employment but can not [sic] find it; he has not work because the Jews took over all the work; the fellaheen [sic] are driven from the land because the Jews bought it from the rich landlords. The fellaheen are drawn to the towns to seek jobs which they do not get” (qtd. in Anderson 2005, 110). The Fellaheen, who were most if not all of the village students, were unable to compete with former students of town schools who knew English, had more practice at reading and writing Arabic, and had a more in-depth knowledge of history and science. Thus the Fellaheen found themselves jobless and homeless—a group of social and economic outcasts who had been left behind in the push for modernity.

The urban/rural divide was also evident in women’s education, which was even more limited than men’s. Unlike the urban/rural divide, the gender divide in education was more the result of a patriarchal Arab society; the patriarchal British society merely allowed the divide to continue. The 1929 report’s writers stated, “Moslem opinion does not permit of co-education except in the infant or kindergarten stage of elementary day schools. Conservative religious authorities
put the maximum age to which such co-education may continue at five years. Educated Moslems take a more modern view” (Jarman 1995, vol. 3, 221). According to Massad (2001), many colonized peoples saw an increased public role for women as a way to modernize society and attain parity with the West. While women had more rights in Britain at the time than in Transjordan, the Western imperial nations were and continue to be grounded in patriarchy. Thus Transjordan was not attempting to transform its existing patriarchal structure, and women could be made to retain their traditional, inferior status at home.

Maintaining this divide was important for people like Emir Abdullah, who—like many anti-colonialists—compared colonization to rape, which was equal to castration, or the loss of masculinity and move towards femininity. Therefore, in Abdullah’s eyes, freedom was “the condition of stable masculinity and femininity” (Massad 2001, 89). Many Palestinians and Transjordanians agreed that women should be briefly educated, but not to the point where they could transform unequal gender roles. As Ortner (2014) notes, American patriarchy is constructed by series of strict, interrelated dichotomies; people who violate those boundaries, such as women in traditionally masculine professions and gender-queer individuals, are considered impure and therefore are verbally or physically attacked.

This patriarchal construction explains why the Women’s Training College in Jerusalem, a school for prospective urban women teachers, used “a secondary syllabus which has been adapted for women and includes domestic science, child welfare, physiology and hygiene” (Jarman 1995, vol. 7, 591). Students here needed to know English because English teachers, working under an English principal, taught them domestic science and needlework, in addition to English language classes; all other subjects were taught through Arabic (Jarman 1995, vol. 13). It is possible that the British considered needlework part of the civilizing mission, though Arab women certainly knew how to sew and weave. On the other hand, it is also possible that the British wanted to further imperialize the Arabic language by making English the language of the home, or domestic sphere, in addition to the language of academia. But not all students had access to English. The Women Rural Teachers’ Training Centre in Ramallah did not teach English (Jarman 1995, vol. 7), so teachers who graduated from the institution could not teach their female, villager pupils English either.

Students with disabilities also had unequal access to the education system, and they were further stratified according to their particular disabilities. In 1931, the report writers briefly noted, for the first time, that “[t]he only
institution for the education of the mentally defective is at Tel-Aviv, where 24 Jewish children are maintained” (Jarman 1995, vol. 3, 662). Conversely, the next year’s report contained an entire section labelled “Education of Defectives,” which named four institutions for blind pupils—two were orphanages—in Jerusalem. Two, a Muslim and a Christian institution, taught only handwork, but the second Christian institution and a Jewish institution also provided an elementary-level education. The report also described a Jewish-run school specifically for the “deaf and dumb,” in addition to a small, newly created school for the deaf and a Christian school with a class of deaf students. The report finally mentioned the school for the “mentally defective” at the end of the section (Jarman 1995, vol. 4). Curiously absent are those with mobility problems and other physical disabilities. These students were possibly not considered “defective” and were likely educated alongside able-bodied students.

In sharp contrast to blind students’ consignment to handwork, the 1933 report again included this section with the note, “A blind Arab student, who obtained his B.A. degree from the American University of Beirut, was elected to a scholarship of three years tenable for the first year at the Royal Normal College for the Blind in Edinburgh” (Jarman 1995, vol. 4, 438). Future reports mentioned this blind student in the “Scholarships” section, along with the other, (presumably) able-bodied students on scholarships, until the blind student matriculated in 1936 and returned to Palestine (Jarman 1995, vol. 6). In 1938, another blind individual—or perhaps the same one—gained special mention as well: “A school for the blind was opened in Hebron, with 14 pupils. The headmaster, who is himself blind, has had a special three years’ training in England” (Jarman 1995, vol. 7, 589). Subsequent reports also include this verbatim quote, which is more importantly also excluded from the repeating “Education of Defectives” section. By suddenly acknowledging blind people’s accomplishments and, in some cases, grouping them with able-bodied students rather than students with disabilities, the report writers implied that the blind transcended their traditional role. Now, the blind occupied a special position in society, neither wholly people with disabilities nor able-bodied people.

The British also prevented the academically weak from progressing into higher education through a process known as “superannuation.” At various elementary stages, including the application process for secondary schools, students could be removed from the education system entirely if they had repeated too many classes and were generally “not fit for promotion” (Jarman 1995, vol. 3, 68). Even students in secondary schools were subject to removal. In 1928, a Government Arab College student “was expelled for grave insubordination and two were removed for unsatisfactory work or behavior” (Jarman 1995, vol. 2, 536), and the next year, “Three students were dismissed for bad behavior and one
for inefficiency” (Jarman 1995, vol. 3, 67). It is unclear how the Government Arab College administrators deemed the students’ work to be inefficient or unsatisfactory. In any case, the British extolled the process of superannuation, declaring in 1929, “The gradual removal of old and backward pupils is proving very beneficial to the general standard of the classes” (Jarman 1995, vol. 3, 68).

The discourses supporting this weeding out of imperfect pupils are likely the very same discourses that supported Britain’s eugenics movement, which sought to remove physically and mentally “flawed” individuals from society on the grounds that such people threatened social progress (see MacKenzie 1976). While the writers of the 1945-1946 Education Report claimed that the “old and subnormal children have unfortunately to be removed owing to lack of accommodation and qualified staff” (Jarman 1995, vol. 14, 155), and the 1931 writers implied that superannuation helped schools abide by health regulations limiting the amount of pupils (Jarman 1995, vol. 3), the writers of the 1929 report and many other reports made it clear that these imperfect pupils were tainting their classes. Only by removing them could the British make any headway in Palestine’s and Transjordan’s education, thereby fulfilling the civilizing mission.

**Discourse II: The British Education System Was Superior to Ottoman and Arab Systems**

The British very clearly believed that their systems of education in Palestine and Transjordan were better than anything the Ottoman Empire did or the Arabs could have done on their own. The British even looked down upon the private European schools in the area because, in teaching through European languages, the Arabs (according to the British) were unable to gain strong reading proficiency in either their native Arabic or the European language. The British endeavored to educate the ideal student, but in order to determine who was fit and unfit for higher education, the British needed to implement a system of quantification. In accepting British discourses about the superiority of their education, Palestinians and Transjordanians also implicitly accepted the inequality inherent in the system, in addition to the quantification required to support it.

At the beginning of the Mandate, the British primarily used quantification to gauge the situation of elementary education. This method of information gathering provided a means of gaining power over Palestinians and Transjordanians, as the British equated knowledge with power (Richards 1993). In 1924, schools administered “intelligence tests,” which demonstrated
that young Palestinian boys were less mentally developed than their British counterparts, although the gap seemed to diminish in secondary school (Jarman 1995, vol. 1). Tests like this soon overtook the land: in 1931, the Government created standardized literacy tests for students all over Palestine (Jarman 1995, vol. 3). A 1930-1932 survey of Arabic and arithmetic knowledge produced the following results: “Of the examinees educated in the Turkish time 53 per cent. failed in Arabic and 34 per cent. in arithmetic. Of those educated since the occupation 24 per cent. failed in Arabic and 18 per cent. in arithmetic, but if the Gaza and Hebron areas, which are backward, are excluded the failures in Arabic are only 16 per cent” (Jarman 1995, vol. 4, 118). There was certainly some grain of truth in Britain’s imagined superiority over Ottoman education, which after all taught Arabs Arabic through the medium of Turkish. The quote does, however, beg the question of why the writers focused on the failures rather than the successes. The word choice was likely based in Orientalist ideas emphasizing what “Orientals” could not, rather than could, accomplish.

After the Mandate’s early years, the primary method of quantification was the Palestine Matriculation Examination, which was offered in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. While the exam was not the only determinant of matriculation, it served as a major factor (Jarman 1995, vol. 2). It was not until 1935 that Transjordan’s Education Department created a secondary-school matriculation exam, which was based on the Palestinian one. Students who passed were rewarded with automatic admittance to either the American University of Beirut or the Syrian University at Damascus, as they did not need to take the entrance examination like other applicants did (Jarman 1995, vol. 5). By passing the matriculation exam, these students were deemed worthy of higher education and eventual absorption into the Government.

In 1927, the Department of Education held for the first time an examination for post-matriculation students, i.e. those in upper-level Training classes, who wished to become teachers or learn at the university level. Initially, all exams were conducted through English, with the exception of language examinations (Jarman 1995, vol. 2). Yet the testing languages later switched: according to the 1941-1942 Department of Education report,

The candidates offering mathematical subjects chose to be examined through Arabic, while the arts candidates were examined through English. The results of the examination showed that Arabic can be a satisfactory medium for post-matriculation instruction in mathematics and physics. (Jarman 1995, vol. 9, 757)
English, according to the British, was the language of science, and thereby the most suited for positivist tests like the Palestine Intermediate Examination described above. The reversal of languages further indicates that the original language examinations focused on Arabic literature, while the later ones emphasized English literature. The fact that after 1937, literary students began learning Latin in addition to logic, philosophy, Arabic, and English (Jarman 1995, vols. 13, 14) demonstrates the extent of Britain’s language colonization. In fact, students in one school regarded Latin as “unpatriotic” (Jarman 1995, vol. 14, 696), likely on account of its former status as the prestige language of Western intellect during the Renaissance era. These students preferred to honor Arab and Muslim intellect from Islam’s golden age, a time known to Europeans as the Middle or Dark Ages.

The math candidates present still more intrigue. Here, Palestinians’ struggle over language usage mirrors the Indians’ in the 19th century. Historian Gyan Prakash has found that in colonial India, some Indians saw science as a “language of reform” and “superior knowledge” (Prakash 1999, 54, 57) that, with British colonialism, could modernize Indian society and save its people from ignorance and superstition. Yet in order to bring about this change, the Indian intelligentsia had to transform Hindi into a language of science, borrowing enough English words to be scientific but using enough Hindi equivalents to maintain the language’s integrity (Prakash 1999). Indian schools did, however, teach English in addition to Western science, thereby constructing Western education as a symbol of imperial repression. While some members of the educated elite took pride in India’s Westernization, Gandhi (1939) criticized Western education as irrelevant to many Indians and incapable of providing happiness, saying, “To give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them” because regular English use facilitated British rule (79). Although Gandhi heavily romanticized pre-colonial India, he was not alone in his resentment of English. For example, modern Indian poet Vikram Seth (1994) has referred to English as “the conqueror’s/Authoritarian seal” (64).

The Arabic-speaking world had already encountered the challenge of translation in the mid- and late-18th century, as the educated elite sought to synthesize in and eventually translate to Arabic the works of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and other Western scientists. Arab intellectuals, like their Indian counterparts, believed that many Arabs were hopelessly backward in their rejection of science, although it is worth mentioning that Western missionaries in the Arab world often opposed science in the same way (Elshakry 2013). Over half a century later, it appears that
the Government Arab College’s mathematical students wanted to reframe Arabic as a language of science capable of conveying positivism. Rather than wishing to discard Western intellect entirely, these students wanted to adapt their language to fit into Western science, thus creating a uniquely Arab version of modernity (see Sahlins 1998).

But, as Fanon (2004) pointed out, such organized resistance only represents the interests of a small group of elite, who owe their status to the imperial power. With such a vested interest in the imperial status quo, the resistance movement advocates a peaceful evolution and the retention of some ties with the imperial power. According to Fanon, the only way to satisfy the needs of peasants, who made up the majority of Algerian, Palestinian, and Transjordanian societies, was to bypass political parties and unions, violently resisting through guerilla warfare until the imperialized had ridded itself of every vestige of imperialism, including elementary school teachers (2004). While Fanon’s overly simplistic view of peasant unity and calls for mass bloodshed are serious shortcomings, he was correct in saying that organized resistance is traditionally a vehicle for the elite. Resisting linguistic colonization in Palestine and Transjordan was only available to the intellectual elite in the Government Arab College, who could request Arabic-language materials from influential members of the Government. Most Palestinians and Transjordanians would not have had such access to influential Government employees as a result of their lower financial statuses. Indeed, many Palestinians and Transjordanians saw the English language as a means of improving their statuses, and therefore had less incentive to resist.

In the Mandate’s later years, more students simultaneously adopted British positivism and accepted English as a scientific language by voluntarily taking international exams. The 1922 report is the first to mention students taking the University of London’s Matriculation Examination in Jerusalem; both students failed (Jarman 1995, vol. 1). Two years later, the report writers stated that one candidate passed the University of London’s Matriculation Examination and a second one passed the Intermediate Science Examination. In comparison, 24 students took the Palestine Matriculation Examination in 1924, of whom nine passed (Jarman 1995, vol. 1). Not all students who took these exams were Palestinian; some traveled to Jerusalem from Egypt and, in all likelihood, Transjordan. But in 1945, a total of 1,297 candidates took London University exams and 283 took other British exams, such as the Cambridge Proficiency in English, the London Association of Certified Accountants, and Pitman’s Shorthand Institute. Only 398 candidates took the Palestine Matriculation Examination that year (Jarman 1995, vol. 14).

While all of the candidates for the Palestine Matriculation Examination
would have been enrolled at a local college, thus making them part of the educated elite, candidates for exams with entities like Pitman’s Shorthand Institute may only have completed some secondary schooling. These less-educated individuals used British examinations to receive higher-paying jobs. In turn, their increased wealth may have enabled their children to receive college- or university-level education. However, some private schools—typically run by Western missionaries—provided high levels of education through European languages. According to one report, students in these schools often had low proficiencies in written Arabic, and therefore preferred the English School Certificate examination to the Palestine Matriculation. In fact, there were three times as many students at the matriculation level in private schools in comparison to Government schools (Jarman 1995, vol. 13). These private school students would have comprised the bulk of the candidates for British exams.

By voluntarily taking British examinations, sometimes at the expense of Palestinian ones, the majority of Palestinian (and likely Transjordanian) students confirmed English, not Arabic, as the true language of positivism and science. The mathematics students at the Government Arab College had lost. Those who took professional British examinations further demonstrated that positivist thinking enabled financial success—even stenographers needed to nominally quantify themselves as either worthy or unworthy of employment. But as a consequence of adopting British positivism, Palestinians and Transjordanians implicitly accepted the inequality that positivism perpetuated. If some students were more intelligent, or better than others, why should they all receive an equal education? Thus Palestinians and Transjordanians not only accepted that English education was the best and that English was the prestige language of academia, but also that not everyone should have access to English. By sanctioning the unequal access to English, Palestinians and Transjordanians also accepted unequal access to social and economic opportunities.

Conclusion

Britain sought to strengthen control over its imperial possessions by increasing British knowledge of them. But since knowledge was power, these colonies, protectorates, spheres of influence, and mandates could on the other hand potentially improve their own relative power, provided that the British deigned to bestow knowledge upon them. In the event that the British spread technology in the form of railroads and telegraphs, dispelled superstition
and replaced it with science, and created schools and provided scholarships for Western education, the imperial territory might consider itself modernized. Yet these territories were supposedly still far behind the continually advancing West. “Modernity” did not necessarily guarantee “power,” and renegotiations of power seldom yielded significant ground to the imperialized.

If the subaltern spoke in their own language, did they ever speak at all? They could be heard, certainly, but if they were not using a language of science and modernity and enlightenment, were their words worth listening to? Even today in the intellectual realm, some languages are more equal than others—as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987) once put it, “[O]ne might think of the status of a Shakespeare scholar who has read all of his Shakespeare in Bengali and a scholar of Bengali culture who has had a semester’s Bengali in a U.S. graduate school” (126). Globally, the Western scholars studying the Oriental “other” are atop the hierarchy, followed by the Orientals who are scholars, followed by the uneducated Oriental masses.

Educated Palestinians and Transjordanians sought to improve their own statuses by differentiating themselves from uneducated Palestinians and Transjordanians. However, neither this group nor the minority elite who attempted to create an Arabic revival were responsive to the demands of less-educated Fellaheen and Bedouin, who knew little to no English. While the urban elite used English as a vehicle for advancement, this path to success was irrelevant to the rural poor. Instead of shifting the imperial balance of power in all of Palestine’s and Transjordan’s favor, the elite merely allowed the gap between themselves and the poor to widen, improving only the elite’s status relative to Britain.

During their rule in Palestine and Transjordan, the British claimed to want equality by spreading education to “everyone” in the Mandates. Yet the Palestine and Transjordan administration reports seem to indicate that some Orientals were more Oriental than others. The British created a highly stratified and segregated education system based on religion, gender, dis/ability, location, and compliance with the new social order. This system constructed English as a prestige academic language and reinforced Palestinians’ and Transjordanians’ acceptance of the system. Education entailed a greater English proficiency, since English was the language of science and higher learning. And when Palestinians and Transjordanians accepted the British education system’s superiority, they accepted the education system’s language ideologies and social inequalities. Consequently, Palestinians and Transjordanians believed that people should be educated in the English language, through the English system of education, so they could become more scientific and therefore modern.

Despite now having a standardized curriculum that introduces English
in kindergarten, the linguistic divide persists in present-day Jordan. At a souq in Amman, where merchants peddled jewelry, antiques, artwork, and other souvenirs to tourists, most of the male merchants addressed customers with varying degrees of spoken English proficiency. Often, the women who ran stalls spoke in Arabic, possibly a product of being taken out of schools at younger ages than their male counterparts. University-educated individuals, some of whom took courses only in English, speak English to Western tourists whenever possible, even if the tourists respond to them in Arabic. Taxi drivers, on the other hand, are frequently only able to communicate with tourists through Arabic and the occasional English-language phrase. And service industry positions that have a lot of contact with tourists, such as hotel concierges and hostesses at certain restaurants, are frequently staffed by female Asian immigrants who have a stronger command of English than non-university-educated Jordanians. Future research must investigate how social and economic status continue to restrict access to education, and thereby future opportunities for social and economic improvement, in modern-day Jordan.

Perhaps the British desire to educate Palestinians and Transjordanians was less benign than the British implied. In Thomas Babington Macaulay’s infamous 1835 “Minute on Indian Education,” he wrote,

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (qtd. in Spivak 2010, 36).

The British came, the British saw, and the British conquered, waging a clandestine intellectual war against the Oriental. They created a group of educated elite who then sought to widen the gap between the elite and the rest of the population. The civilizing mission was complete.
Bibliography


