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**Discourse and Identity**

**Single paper**

**Proposal Title:**

The Affects of ESL on the Saudi Females' Role and Identity

**Abstract:**

This qualitative study attempts to understand the affects of ESL on the Saudi female's role and identity at an English program in northeast United States in spring 2010. Results indicate that the participants are aware of the impact of English and how it affects their identity and status in society.

**Proposal Text:**

This paper aims at understanding the changes currently taking place in the Saudi females' perspective on her role and identity at home and as a member of the Saudi society. The stories of six Saudi females currently residing in the United States are used in this in-depth qualitative

study. Of primary importance was how these females discussed their identities, viewed their roles in society and the impact of ESL on those changing identities and roles.

When looking at a traditional country like Saudi Arabia, where culture and religion delegate almost every aspect of the personal and social life, the impact of a new language and the new culture it inescapably carries with it is a very important aspect to understand. Specifically, the focus is on the Saudi female who has become a national symbol of this culture. That is because the sex-segregation and the veiling of women are the only truly visible and easily controlled symbols of control and conformity. However, it must be made clear that it is not religion that prescribes these roles to Saudi women; it is culture that draws these boundaries.

In order to achieve such goals, this paper's aim is to allow Saudi females to use their voices and tell their stories as there is a gap in the current literature; to empower those women to take action and be active members in the changing/ understanding of their societal roles; and to highlight the impact of ESL and technology in English on this movement.

This paper addresses the following emergent research question:

1. What role does knowing English have on the identity and the way Saudi females regard themselves?
2. How does the Saudi woman view her role/identity as a member of the Saudi Arabian society?
3. In what ways has technology influenced the role(s) and identity of Saudi women?

The research questions emerged from the stories told. In the light of the research questions; question (1) and (2) came about from the personal narratives of education, job opportunities, travel, their current studies and feelings towards that language in particular. Question (3) was

never discussed directly but was gathered from a combination of stories and observations. These stories were told in relaxed settings usually over food or coffee with friends. The observations were gathered during classroom interactions.

Some of the major emergent themes from the interviews and observations revolved around the importance/role of English, The Saudi woman's role, and Western media and technology. One of the most dominant themes is the importance of English to these females, and the role it plays in their lives. Many spoke about what English means to them personally, they viewed it as a way to expose and better themselves, and many mentioned travel and independence. They gave a sense that English has empowered them in some way by allowing them to be on their own.

While discussing the role of the female, the family remains dominant in their life. When asked to describe "a successful Saudi woman", all participants drew a picture of the perfect wife who can balance work and home. Another interesting aspect that came out of this study is the participants' need to mention that they got their fathers approval; it is as if they felt validated by these male figures.

Only from observations were data on technology gathered. Media and technology plays a major role in their daily life; from searching to connecting with others, technology is always close by. The one issue that the participants did discuss is that of censorship, where all interviewees were supportive of it.