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Distributing the future evenly : English as the Lingua Franca in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector

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Abstract

The dichotomous interpretation of the assumed growth and normalisation of English as the lingua franca (ELF) of the international academy is most often polarised into a marginalisation of non-native speakers by the hegemony of native speakers on the one hand and the empowerment and upward mobility created by its potential to afford access to the international knowledge economy on the other. The dichotomy has resulted in the assumption that any nation or region's decision to use English rather than its indigenous or mainstream language is seen as much as a socio-political decision as it is a pedagogic one. Within the Gulf Countries Council states in general and in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in particular, the move to universalise ELF throughout its academy is seen in some quarters as an unwarranted capitulation to Western economic, social and political expansionism, and consequently the marginalisation of Arabic as a language and a culture. On the other hand, to fulfil its stated ambitions of being recognised as an influential, respected and productive agent in the international knowledge economy, there seems to be little alternative for it but to adopt ELF in its

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higher education institutions. This paper presents an overview of the current perception of communicative competence in English among the academic staff of Saudi Arabian universities. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)