

Linguistic Lessons from Qatar: Preventing the Isolation of Anthropology of Education

Abstract: In conducting my field research in Doha, Qatar on language and education, I was struck by the challenges presented in coming out of a dual degree program in anthropology and education. I was torn between these two sub-disciplines, unable to do justice to either, but not feeling at home. This problem is not dissimilar to the one facing my ethnographic interlocutors in Doha, who have to navigate between English and Arabic, the former providing geographic mobility and the latter connecting them to local power. In this paper, I will compare the challenges my interlocutors face in choosing between languages that have different reach and representation and draw lessons for anthropologists in schools of education. Are we isolated in Schools of Education and is there room for us in Departments of Anthropology? Or are we a lost bi-disciplined subfield that feels unwelcome in either place? The decisions we make about which sub-disciplines to devote ourselves to are often related to how much access, power and range they offer. My Qatari interlocutors, struggling to achieve bilingualism, offer linguistic lessons about the challenges of choosing which language to learn and for what purpose. These lessons offer us ways to think about our location as anthropologists in schools of education and allow us to explore whether we are where we are by choice or by the limitations imposed by the places we inhabit.

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