Agency and Statelessness: The Representation of Bidoon in Twitter Discourse

Authors: Reem Salman, Language Instructor
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Presenter Name: Reem Salman

Abstract:

The Bidoon in Kuwait are a stateless community whose social and legal position continues to be a sensitive and controversial issue. While statelessness has been examined from legal, political and human-rights perspectives, there is still limited research that looks at the Bidoon from a linguistic point of view. This study therefore examines how the Bidoon are represented through public discussions on Twitter, with particular attention to the way language constructs agency, responsibility and reaction.

The study draws on a corpus of 2,810 Arabic tweets collected from twelve public Twitter accounts: six Kuwaiti users and six Bidoon users. The tweets were collected and filtered using FireAnt and were qualitatively analyzed using van Leeuwen's (2008) framework for the representation of social actors and social actions. The analysis addresses three main questions: what is being discussed in relation to the Bidoon, who is represented as responsible for actions affecting them, and how the Bidoon are represented as reacting to their social conditions.

The findings show that discussions are largely centred around the everyday struggles experienced by the Bidoon, including access to official documentation, education, employment and healthcare. More importantly, the analysis reveals a recurring pattern in the allocation of agency. Within the examined discourse, the Bidoon are frequently represented as passive recipients of actions, while governmental authorities are represented as the actors responsible for actions affecting the Bidoon community. The analysis also considers the distinction between actions and reactions, examining how feelings of anger, resentment and exclusion are represented in Bidoon-related discourse. In particular, references to suicide are approached not as evidence of a direct causal relationship, but as instances in which extreme reactions are discursively connected to experiences of denial and exclusion.

The study argues that examining statelessness through language provides another way of understanding how social inequalities are constructed, reproduced and resisted in everyday discourse. By focusing on a relatively under-researched community and Arabic social-media discourse, the study contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis of statelessness and highlights the importance of examining not only what is said about marginalized social groups, but also **who is represented as acting, who is acted upon, and how these roles are linguistically constructed.**