



Money, Convenience, and Language

Startling Common Ground between Ireland, Lebanon, and the UAE

The Problem at Hand

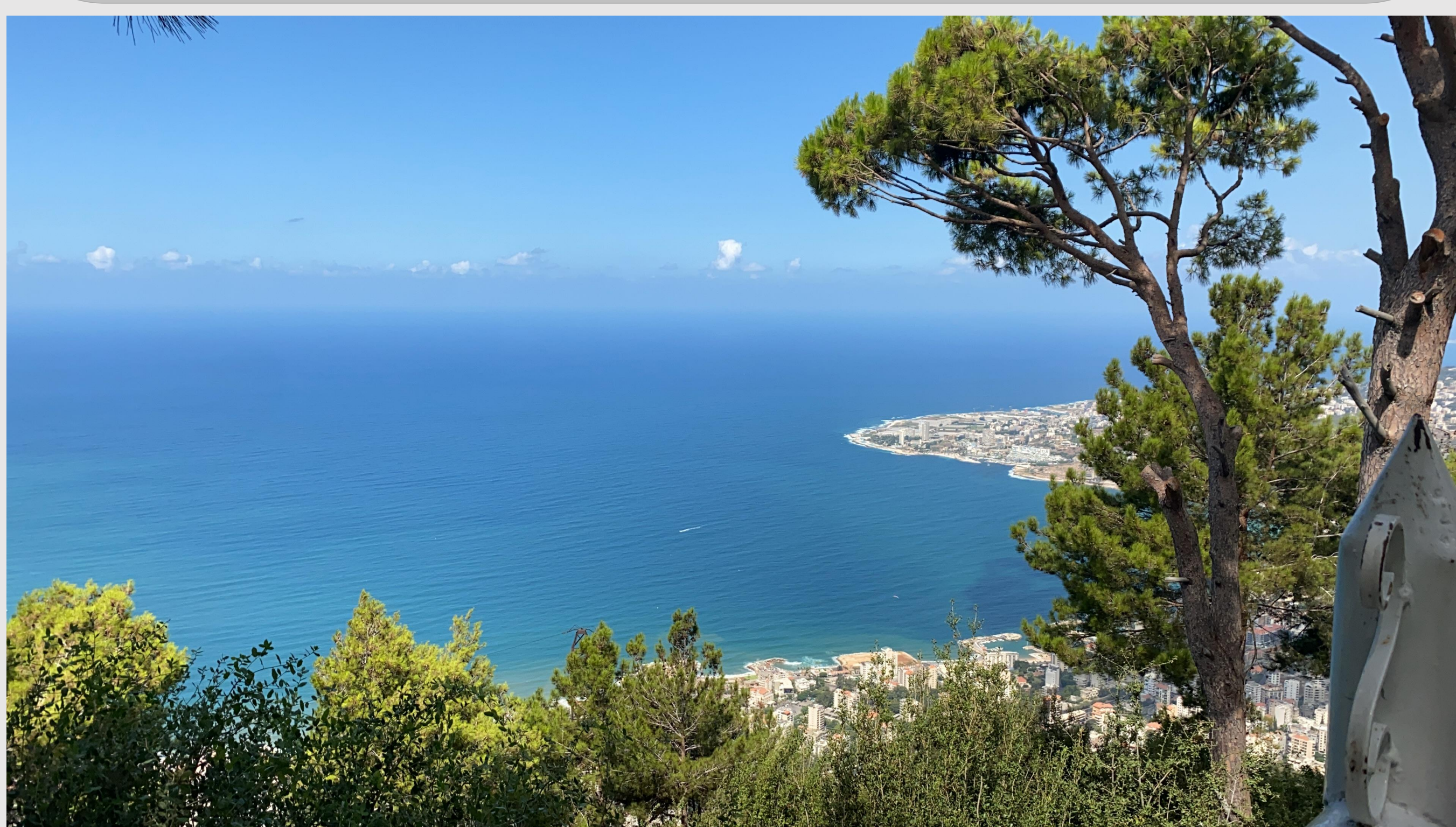
My research manifested in a comparative analysis of the impact that neo-imperialism and the globalized economy have had on the linguistic and cultural development of Ireland, Lebanon, and the former Trucial States (namely, the UAE). What I sought to do was look at three regions with vastly different colonial experiences as a way of illustrating the greater struggle to maintain native tongues in a world that is built around the English language.

Methodology

The bulk of my work in the first couple weeks consisted of engaging with my supervisor and accessing the regions' legal/governmental policies on the preservation of the national language, education, and the economy, along with using the several print and online resources on the regions' politics and histories in Trinity and Columbia's respective libraries. At the outset of this project, I reached out to several experts in the field, but received little to no response. As a result, I spent the remainder of my summer collaborating with Irish-speaking university students based in Dublin to discuss and help direct my daily work in the library. Using this information and the resources they suggested, I compared the existing research (focusing primarily on censuses) on the status and function of Arabic and Irish in the respective regions, taking note of the overlapping topics in which modern English borrow words have infiltrated each languages' vocabularies.

Seemingly in the early stages of the current predicament of employability in Irish, in Lebanon and the UAE, recent educational policies place a heavy emphasis on teaching STEM in English as a means of employability and in hopes of growing a knowledge-based economy, while Arabic is taught for history and as the language of tradition.

Though Ireland's population is ~ 4.9 Million, the 2016 Irish Census shows that only around 70,000 people speak the Irish language daily (outside of the classroom). Will Arabic be doomed to the same fate?



An aerial view of Jounieh, Lebanon (Photo: Saoirse Joy, TCD '23)



Dawson Street, Dublin (Photo: Liam Grugan)

Linguistic Findings

What I found from the start was that each population exhibited a fascinating but dangerous pattern: codeswitching, or switching back and forth between the native and imperial languages in a single conversation, as a way of expressing ideas which do not lend themselves to one or the other. This is tied heavily to the more noteworthy acceleration in linguistic borrowing. Though all languages borrow vocab from each other, Irish and Arabic share the unfortunate habit of simply adapting new, popular English words to look more like traditional Irish and Arabic by putting their own endings on them. In each language, this is most evident in vocabulary pertaining to science, tech, industry, government, and transportation. The danger of this is that, in a more rapid manner than ever before, English vocabulary is making its way into Arabic and Irish. Taken further, though linguistic purism is a topic which has been debated for over a century, neither language will plainly evolve if speakers are encouraged to keep deferring to English for a majority of new vocabulary. I also found that the diglossic nature of Arabic (forcing students to learn both their own dialect and Modern Standard Arabic) in both the UAE and Lebanon is discouraging students from each region to learn either dialect, with many students instead opting to learn foreign languages.

Conclusions and Summation

Through looking at several studies conducted in the UAE and Lebanon, I found a shared link between an increased apathy towards Arabic and a perceived requirement of English to succeed within an Anglocentric global economy. Moreover, what I found early on is that the Irish language's historical struggle with these exact problems, as well as its current purgatory in the Irish educational system, make it an excellent cautionary tale for what will happen if active steps aren't taken to preserve the Arabic language.

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