

The Effect of a Multi-Cultural Environment on the Language Used to Discuss Environmental Sustainability

Edward Hogshire⁵, Labidi Bouabdallah⁶

ABSTRACT

This research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the language dynamics and choices within sustainability discourse in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). By examining the impact of multiple languages, including Arabic, English, and other languages spoken in the UAE, it seeks to understand how sustainability concepts are effectively communicated in this multilingual context. Additionally, the study investigates the influence of cultural nuances on the comprehension and communication of sustainability within the UAE. Furthermore, this research aims to identify and analyse the language choices and communication strategies employed by the UAE government in promoting sustainability. It delves into distinct language choices and communication strategies that aptly reflect the UAE's cultural context and its visionary approach towards sustainability. It also sheds light on the intricate interplay between sustainability, multilingualism, and cultural diversity. The research explores how technological advancements and smart solutions are incorporated into sustainability discourse and considers their role in addressing environmental challenges in the UAE. By examining these aspects, the study highlights the need for effective communication strategies that cater to the linguistic diversity present in the country, ensuring that sustainability messages are accessible to all stakeholders. Strategies currently in use, such as the utilisation of simplified language and visual aids, are showcased as effective measures to overcome linguistic barriers and enhance inclusivity in sustainability communication. Overall, this research contributes to a better understanding of the language dynamics and communication strategies utilised in promoting sustainability in the UAE and similar regions around the world. It provides valuable insights for policymakers, organisations, and communication professionals seeking to enhance sustainability discourse in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Journal: Boston Research Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities

Keywords: Evidence; Sustainability; Multilingualism; UAE; Cultural Diversity.

Accepted: 29 September 2026

Published: 15 October 2026

ISSN: Online ISSN: 2834-4863 | Print ISSN: 2834-4855

Language: English

Research ID: Oedba9ac-5687-4346-bc67-b32907d96e2e

Type: Peer-Reviewed Research Article (Open Access)



The authors declare that no competing interests exist. The authors contributed equally to this work. This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License as an open access article. CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Read Online: <https://rebrand.ly/n3x2rs2>

Author(s): ⑤ – Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities – Abu Dhabi, UAE

⑥ – Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities

I. INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is renowned for its rapid economic progress, modernisation, and multicultural and linguistically varied population. As the UAE continues to develop as a global hub for commerce, trade, and tourism, it faces increasing environmental concerns, making sustainability a crucial issue for its future. However, the UAE's multilingual/multicultural context, in which numerous languages and cultures coexist and interact, complicates sustainability semantics. The country has made considerable strides to achieve sustainability. These efforts have included and continue to include semantic analysis. The UAE's multilingual and multicultural environment makes this analysis of its sustainability efforts necessary. This research aims to examine the language used in sustainability discourse in the UAE, particularly in the context of its multilingual and multicultural environment. By analysing the semantics of sustainability discourse, this study seeks to contribute to the current literature and shed light on the linguistic and cultural features of sustainability communication in the UAE.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the language dynamics and choices in sustainability discourse in the UAE.
- To explore the impact of multiple languages, including Arabic and English, as well as other languages spoken in the UAE, in the communication of sustainability concepts.
- To investigate the influence of cultural nuances on the understanding and communication of sustainability in the UAE.
- To identify the different language choices and communication strategies currently used by the UAE government in promoting sustainability.

- To analyse the incorporation of technological advancements and smart solutions in sustainability discourse in the UAE.
- To highlight the need for the effective use of simplified language and visual aids to overcome linguistic barriers and enhance inclusivity in sustainability communication.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the language dynamics and choices in sustainability discourse in the UAE?
- How do multiple languages, including Arabic, English, and other languages spoken in the UAE, impact the communication of sustainability concepts?
- What are the distinctive language choices and communication strategies employed by the UAE government in promoting sustainability?
- How does the incorporation of technological advancements and smart solutions manifest in sustainability discourse in the UAE?
- How does the use of simplified language and visual aids enhance inclusivity in sustainability communication in the UAE?

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a descriptive approach. Government communications and public discourse with distinct language patterns, cultural references, and communication strategies were analysed.

V. INSTRUMENTS AND MATERIALS

- Sustainability documents and reports
- Government communications and campaigns related to sustainability.

VI. RESULTS

The research aimed to provide insights into the language dynamics and cultural influences on sustainability discourse in the UAE. The findings reveal distinctive language choices, such as the blend of Arabic and English terminology, emphasis on technological advancements, and reflection of social and cultural values in sustainability communication. The analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of sustainability communication in the UAE's multilingual and multicultural context.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR OTHER THESES

Further research can investigate the impact of sustainability discourse on behaviour change and its effectiveness in promoting sustainable practices among different linguistic and cultural groups in the UAE. Comparative studies could also be conducted to analyse sustainability discourse in other multilingual and multicultural contexts to identify common patterns and differences.

Cultural and Linguistic Influences

A comparison of the English used by the United Arab Emirates government to promote sustainability with the English used in other English-speaking countries reveals distinctive language choices and communication strategies that reflect the cultural context of the United Arab Emirates as well as its vision for sustainability. The combination of Arabic and English terminology is a feature that stands out in the language that is used in the United Arab Emirates' communication about sustainability. Because Arabic is the country's official language and is widely spoken by the local population, including Arabic terminology in communications about sustainability is a means to represent the cultural context of the UAE and make the messaging relevant to the local audience (Al-Fallay & Abdul-Haq, 2018). For example, in the UAE, the term "green economy" is frequently used to refer to sustainable economic growth. This term aligns with the UAE's aim of economic diversification and environmental care (UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, 2019). The utilisation of popular phrases like this one helps incorporate regionally specific cultural values and points of view into the language used to promote sustainability in the UAE.

The English that the government of the UAE uses to promote sustainability is characterised by a blend of Arabic and English terminologies, an emphasis on technological advancements, a reflection of social and cultural values, and the use of simplified language (Al Marzooqi & Abdullah, 2016). These characteristics are all intertwined in promoting one course. These idiosyncratic language choices and communication tactics reflect the UAE's culture, its goal for sustainability, and its efforts to promote inclusivity in sustainability communication.

The UAE's emphasis on social and cultural values is another unique English feature of the language employed in its communications about sustainability. For example, the United Arab Emirates strongly focuses on social cohesiveness, family values, and the preservation of legacy and customs. Terms like "community," "family," and "heritage" are widely used to underscore this cultural emphasis (UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, 2019). This demonstrates how important cultural context and societal norms influence sustainability communication in the UAE.

In order to account for the wide range of languages and dialects represented within the population, the UAE's communication regarding sustainability uses a great deal of streamlined vocabulary. This was well seen in Al-Amir & Abu-Hijleh (2013), where they examine the corporate reporting of progress in enhancing sustainability using English. Here, simplified language is commonly utilised to guarantee that a larger audience easily understands messages about sustainability. This language often includes shorter phrases, everyday vocabulary, and visual aids. This strategy is used in an attempt to overcome communication barriers caused by linguistic differences and to increase inclusiveness in sustainability communication (UAE Government, 2021). For instance, using infographics, visuals, and symbols in sustainability campaigns can assist in explaining complicated ideas in a way that is aesthetically appealing and easy to grasp, so making sustainability information accessible to a broader audience.

Because the population in the UAE is so linguistically diverse, using a simplified form of English is required in all sustainability-related communication. Although English is widely used in the UAE for official communication, commercial transactions, and educational purposes, the level of

English varies widely. Therefore, the language used in sustainability communication must be simplified to ensure that a wide variety of audiences can easily understand the messages. This is especially true for those who do not use English as their first language. According to Munir (2020), the UAE government has effectively focused on simple, motivating terms. This language has helped inspire people to start eco-friendly projects, helping to further the UAE's sustainability agenda.

Advertising and marketing materials related to the environment are important in moulding public perception and behaviour toward sustainability. When such materials from the United Arab Emirates and an English-speaking nation are compared linguistically, clear distinctions in language use are revealed (Al Buraiki, 2019). These differences in language use reflect the multilingual and multicultural environment of the United Arab Emirates as well as the cultural nuances that influence sustainability communication.

The UAE and any country whose native language is English have substantial linguistic differences, one of which is the usage of code-switching and transliteration in environmental advertising and marketing materials. In the UAE, it is a widespread practice in sustainability communication to employ code-switching, which refers to moving back and forth between English and Arabic to accommodate the audience's diverse linguistic needs (Siemund et al., 2021). However, code-switching is rare, if not unheard of, in the environmental language used to describe sustainability in countries where English is the native language.

The cultural environment and values expressed in sustainability communication represent yet another linguistic distinction. Messages regarding sustainability in the UAE are frequently expressed from the perspective of the country's Islamic values and cultural beliefs. For example, the concept of "Himma," which translates to "ambition" in Arabic, is frequently used in communication about sustainability to highlight the significance of individual and collective efforts toward sustainable living (Siemund et al., 2021). This aligns well with the Islamic cultural value of personal responsibility and community engagement. In addition, the Arabic word "barakah," which translates to "blessings," is frequently applied in campaigns to encourage responsible resource consumption and waste reduction. These

campaigns draw inspiration from Islamic teachings that emphasise moderation and discourage excess. These cultural allusions are almost wholly exclusive to the UAE and demonstrate the impact of local values and beliefs on communication regarding sustainability (Bsoul et al., 2022).

Environmental advertising and marketing materials in native English-speaking countries and the United Arab Emirates also have distinct tones and styles. The UAE uses a more direct and authoritative tone in sustainability communication. This is a reflection of the focus that is placed on legislation and laws in pushing sustainability activities. For the purpose of invoking a sense of promptness and activity, statements related to sustainability may, for instance, make use of imperative verbs such as "Save Water" or "Reduce Waste." In contrast, environmental advertising and marketing materials in native English-speaking nations may take on a more compelling and emotional tone and use techniques such as emotional appeals, narrative, or humour to engage and motivate consumers. For instance, in order to attract people's attention and encourage them to modify their behaviours, materials could show images of animals or nature that are endearing, create feelings of guilt or responsibility for the destruction of the environment, or employ humour (Haytko & Matulich, 2008). Similarly, the use of green advertising techniques with clichés and catchy semantics is common there, according to Haytko & Matulich (2008).

Technological Terminology

The English that is utilised in the UAE's communication regarding sustainability frequently places emphasis on technological advancements and smart solutions (Al-Fallay & Abdul-Haq, 2018). This is in line with the UAE's goal to become a global leader in smart cities and innovative technologies. Commonly used phrases to indicate the incorporation of cutting-edge technologies into environmentally conscious policies and procedures include "smart city," "smart grid," and "smart mobility" (UAE Government, 2021). These phrases align well with the UAE's objective for the country to become a knowledge-based economy and show the UAE's focus on maximising the benefits of technological advances to achieve sustainable growth (Al-Fallay & Abdul-Haq, 2018).

The UAE and countries whose primary language is English also differ in their employment

of scientific jargon and technical phrases when communicating about sustainability issues. In countries where English is the primary language, environmental advertising and marketing materials make use of scientific terminology, statistics, and arguments based on evidence to bolster claims of sustainability and enhance credibility (Bsoul et al., 2022). For instance, in order to portray the sense of urgency and significance that is associated with sustainability, the materials may make use of phrases such as "carbon footprint," "biodiversity," or "climate change," and they may also quote scientific studies or figures. In contrast, the UAE's environmental advertising and marketing materials rely more on simple and accessible language (UNESCO, 2013).

Effective Strategies

Using plain/everyday language is a good strategy for simplifying English when communicating about sustainability. This strategy entails adopting language that is straightforward and easy to understand while avoiding jargon, technical phrases, and complex sentence structures (Barton, 2010). Using this technique will ensure that messages regarding sustainability are communicated in a manner that is uncomplicated and simple to comprehend. For example, using common words and phrases, such as "reduce," "reuse," and "recycle," rather than technical jargon like "waste management hierarchy," is one way to make information about sustainable practices more approachable and understandable to the general audience (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, n.d.).

Visual aids such as infographics, photos, and symbols are frequently utilised to simplify communication around sustainability. Through visual aids, complicated ideas can be communicated in a way that is both aesthetically pleasing and straightforward, making information regarding sustainability more accessible to a larger audience (National Geographic, n.d.). Even for individuals with a limited command of English, it is possible to convey the information successfully. For example, visual aids are used to better explain ideas, such as alternative forms of energy or methods for reducing water consumption (National Geographic, n.d.).

Another method for simplifying English in sustainability communication is to utilise shorter phrases and more commonly known language. It is

much simpler to comprehend shorter sentences. Shorter sentences also help avoid confusion and incorrect interpretation. To ensure that the language used in communicating about sustainability is understood by as many people as possible, especially those whose command of the English language is poor, it is essential to use everyday vocabulary (Radwan & Khalil, 2021). This everyday vocabulary needs to be used in short, concise sentences that make sense to everyone.

Government Campaigns

The UAE communicates its sustainability language in many different forms, using both English and Arabic through several mediums and across various platforms. These mediums and platforms are constantly changing, and although the words also change, the semantics remain very similar.

Signage is an important tactic in the UAE (Hopkynset al., 2022). Signs with important environmental conservation messages are typically erected in public places such as parks, beaches, and nature reserves. These signs are typically written in both Arabic and English, showing how semantics can be applied to sell an agenda (Hopkyns et al., 2022). These posters use simple language to advise people to reduce their adverse effects on the environment by recycling, limiting their water use, and taking advantage of public transit.

Along with the use of signage, the government of the UAE has also launched educational initiatives to promote sustainable practices. One such example is the initiative "Clean Up UAE," which urges individuals to clean up rubbish and waste accumulated in public areas. Another initiative worth mentioning is the "Green Drive UAE" program, which motivates people to incorporate more environmentally responsible behaviours into their daily routines (Al Marashi, 2023). These campaigns make use of the same bespoke language to educate folks on the need to protect the environment and urge them to take action in this regard.

The government of the United Arab Emirates also uses these same techniques in their social media to promote sustainable practices. The Ministry of Climate Change and Environment uses social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to disseminate information regarding sustainability projects and encourage individuals to

engage in sustainable habits. Social media allows them to engage a younger audience, as well as promote sustainability on a broader scale.

Another place where the UAE's sustainability is noticed is by hosting environmental events. Earth Hour, World Environment Day, and the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week are examples of events that bring attention to environmental concerns and encourage the adoption of environmentally responsible behaviours. These events frequently incorporate activities centred around language, such as speeches, panel discussions, and educational workshops, all of which further highlight the significance of sustainability. Again, the same bespoke, simple everyday language is frequently used.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The necessity of preserving the natural environment and using sustainable practices is also frequently brought up in government-led discourse in the UAE. The United Arab Emirates Vision 2021, which describes the country's goals and aspirations for the future, places a significant emphasis on maintaining a sustainable economy and safeguarding the environment. Again, the language is simple, authoritative, and easy to understand. The United Arab Emirates can instil in the minds of its residents and stakeholders the significance of maintaining a sustainable environment because of the language used to communicate these values (Bsoul et al., 2022). The UAE's multilingual and multicultural environment has a substantial impact on the language used to discuss environmental sustainability. This is seen in the government's communication tactics, the language comparison of environmental advertising/marketing materials, and the simplification of English used in sustainability communication. The use of code-switching and transliteration, the simplification of the English language, and the incorporation of cultural and religious values reflect the unique linguistic diversity and cultural context of the UAE. These have all shaped the language employed in sustainability communication initiatives in the country.

IX. REFERENCES

1. Al-Amir, J., & Abu-Hijleh, B. (2013). Strategies and policies for promoting the use of renewable energy resources in the UAE. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 26, 660–667.
2. Al Mar'ashi, H. (February 05, 2023). EEG celebrates National Environment Day. Clean Up UAE. Retrieved from: <https://www.eeg-uae.org/category/cleanup-uae/>
3. Asif, M. (2016). Growth and sustainability trends in the buildings sector in the GCC region with particular reference to the KSA and UAE. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 55, 1267–1273.
4. Barton, G. A. (2010). Environmentalism, Development and British Policy in the Middle East 1945–65. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 38(4), 619–639.
5. Blanco-Elorrieta, E., & Pykkänen, L. (2017). Bilingual language switching in the laboratory versus in the wild: The spatiotemporal dynamics of adaptive language control. *Journal of Neuroscience*, 37(37), 9022–9036.
6. Bsoul, L., Omer, A., Kucukalic, L., & Archbold, R. H. (2022). Islam's Perspective on Environmental Sustainability: A Conceptual Analysis. *Social Sciences*, 11(6), 228.
7. Haytko, D. L., & Matulich, E. (2008). Green advertising and environmentally responsible consumer behaviours: Linkages examined. *Journal of management and marketing research*, 1, 2.
8. Hopkyns, S., & van den Hoven, M. (2022). Linguistic inclusion and exclusion on Abu Dhabi coronavirus signage. In *Linguistic Identities in the Arab Gulf States*. Taylor & Francis.
9. Munir, S. (2020). Eco-fashion adoption in the UAE: Understanding consumer barriers and motivational factors. *Fashion Practice*, 12(3), 371–393.
10. National Geographic. (n.d.). The Power of Visual Communication: Infographic Design. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/education/professional-development/infographic-design/>
11. Obiegbu, I. (2015). The English language and sustainable development in Nigeria. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 5(02), 82.
12. Radwan, A. F., & Khalil, E. M. A. S. (2021). Knowledge, attitude and practice toward sustainability among university students in UAE. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 22(5), 964–981.
13. Siemund, P., Al-Issa, A., & Leimgruber, J. R. (2021). Multilingualism and the role of English in the United Arab Emirates. *World Englishes*, 40(2), 191–204.

14. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (n.d.). Plain Language: How to Write Clear, Concise, and Compliant Documents. Retrieved from <https://www.epa.gov/web-policies-and-procedures/plain-writing>
15. UAE Government. (2021). UAE National Agenda 2030. Retrieved from <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/environment-and-energy/the-uaes-green-agenda-2030#:~:text=The%20UAE%E2%80%99s%20Green%20Agenda%20-%202030%20is%20a,incl,udes%20various%20programmes%20and%20initiatives%20to%20achieve%20them>.
16. UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment. (2019). UAE Green Agenda 2030. Retrieved from <https://www.moccae.gov.ae/en/our-initiatives/sustainable-development/uae-green-agenda-2030>
17. UNESCO. (2013). Linguistic diversity and multilingualism on the Internet. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001918/191897E.pdf>

This page is intentionally left blank