

May 2019

# Heritage Language Learners of Arabic in Islamic Schools: Opportunities for Attaining Arabic Language Proficiency

Khuloud Labanieh

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Labanieh, Khuloud, "Heritage Language Learners of Arabic in Islamic Schools: Opportunities for Attaining Arabic Language Proficiency" (2019). *Theses and Dissertations*. 2088.  
<https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/2088>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by UWM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UWM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [open-access@uwm.edu](mailto:open-access@uwm.edu).

HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS OF ARABIC IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS:  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ATTAINING ARABIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

by

Khuloud Labanieh

A Dissertation Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Urban Education

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2019

## ABSTRACT

### HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS OF ARABIC IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ATTAINING ARABIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

by

Khuloud Labanieh

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019  
Under the Supervision of Professor Sara Jozwik and Professor Sandra Pucci

This study highlights the experiences of former high school students in learning and using their Heritage Language (HL) in their homes, communities, and community schools. The study also reveals the major challenges in maintaining and promoting Arabic language proficiency as viewed by the study participants. Eight participants from three different full-time community schools in the Midwest participated in this study. Each participant completed three formal interview sessions and one follow-up interview. The interview data provide unique perspectives of the participants themselves, offering a window into their language input, language behavior, and their sociolinguistic experiences including their language attitudes, ethnic, and cultural identities. This study also explores participants' perspectives on language learning and connectedness to the Arab community by examining data from an 8-month phenomenological study. The data highlighted a number of patterns of linguistic profiles of reading, writing, and speaking behaviors of these former high school students that suggest that the participants' experiences are generally more similar than different. The study revealed a sense of general discontent towards the results of learning Arabic at their community schools and the outcomes of their Arabic language proficiency over all. Participants viewed speaking articulately as more important to them than other language skills like formal writing. These results may suggest a

connection between maintaining Arabic language and language ideologies and practices held at home, in the community and in the schools. The study concluded that the sociolinguistic, pedagogical, and ideological factors that are required for the attainment of language competence may not be present for this group of study participants.

© Copyright by Khuloud Labanieh, 2019  
All Rights Reserved

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	Purpose of the Study .....	6
	Research Questions .....	6
	Brief History of Heritage Languages in the United States .....	6
	Current State of Heritage Language Learning .....	7
	Arabic Language in Islamic Schools in the United States .....	9
	Positionality .....	11
II.	LITERATURE REVIEW .....	13
	Who are Heritage Language Learners?.....	14
	What is Arabic Language?.....	16
	Heritage Language: Identity Development.....	17
	Heritage Language Learning: Ethnic and Religious Identity .....	19
	Identity Development as Part of the Curriculum .....	22
	Theoretical Framework.....	26
	Sociocultural Theory.....	26
	Critical Pedagogy.....	30
	Challenges in Attaining Arabic Language Proficiency .....	31
	Arabic as a Diglossic Language.....	32
	The Impact of Diglossia on Learning Arabic .....	34
	Level of Difficulty of Learning Arabic.....	36
	Reading Arabic and Learning Grammar.....	36
	Setting Goals for Studying Arabic.....	37
	Arabic Programs at Islamic Schools.....	37
	Developing a Quality Arabic Program .....	40
	Other Opportunities to Strengthen the Heritage Language.....	42
III.	METHODS .....	46
	Site Selection .....	48
	Three Community Schools: A, B, and C .....	49
	School A.....	49
	School B.....	50
	School C.....	51
	Selection of Participants .....	51
	Recruitment.....	52
	Participants from School A.....	54
	Participants from School B .....	56
	Participants from School C .....	58
	Data Collection and Data Sources .....	60
	Formal Individual Interviews.....	61
	Follow-Up Interviews .....	63
	Documentary Evidence.....	65
	Codes.....	65
	Establishing Trustworthiness and Credibility.....	68
	Reflexivity of the Researcher.....	71
	Reflexivity in the Research Process.....	73

IV.	FINDINGS .....	77
	Participants' Backgrounds .....	77
	Heritage Language Learning: Identity and Language Attitudes.....	78
	Attitudes toward Formal and Informal Arabic.....	82
	Heritage Language Contact at Home and Community .....	88
	Communicating in Arabic.....	89
	Changes in Attitude toward Utilizing Arabic at Home.....	94
	Exposure to Arabic Media .....	98
	Writing in Arabic .....	100
	Reading in Arabic .....	103
	Heritage Language Contact in the Community .....	106
	Weekend Community Schools.....	107
	Community Sponsored Qur'an Classes .....	109
	Heritage Language Contact at Full-Time Community Schools.....	112
	Full-Time Community Schools.....	112
	Advanced Classes.....	114
	Arabic Program Goals.....	117
	Methods of Instruction.....	119
	Learning Grammar at Full-Time Community Schools.....	122
	Learning Qur'anic Arabic at Full-Time Community Schools.....	126
	Designing a Heritage Language Program .....	129
	Standards for Instruction.....	130
	Communication.....	131
	Culture.....	132
	Connection .....	132
	Comparison.....	134
	Communities.....	135
	Unfulfilled Expectations .....	135
	Current and Future Use of the Language.....	136
	Conclusion .....	139
V.	DISCUSSION .....	141
	Challenges of Arabic Language Learning .....	142
	The Perceived Difficulty of Arabic.....	142
	Navigating Formal and Informal Usage .....	145
	Dialects and Communicating with People from Different Dialects ..	148
	Language Ideology.....	154
	Pedagogical Methods of Teaching Arabic .....	159
	Learning and Teaching Arabic as a Communicative Language .....	169
	Conclusion .....	178
	Future Research .....	180
VI.	APPENDIX. Interview Questions .....	182
VII.	REFERENCES .....	183
VIII.	CURRICULUM VITAE.....	198

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Text message sample.....	164
------------------------------------	-----



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participants' Education Profile .....	59
Table 2. Participants' Family Backgrounds.....	60
Table 3. Interview Schedules .....	63
Table 4. Codes Regarding Studying Arabic at the School.....	68
Table 5. Sociolinguistic Profiles of Participants.....	139
Table 6. Dialects of Participants and Parents.....	151

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Colloquial Arabic
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
SA	Standard Arabic
HL	Heritage Language
HLLs	Heritage Language Learners
AHL	Arabic Heritage Language
AHLLs	Arabic Heritage Language Learners
HSs	Heritage Speakers
AHLSs	Arabic Heritage language Speakers
MHLLs	Muslim Heritage Language Learners
LCTL	Less Commonly Taught Languages
AD	Advanced Level
WL	World Language
WLLs	World Language Learners
CS	Codeswitching
QA	Qur'anic Arabic

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair and members for their guidance and support. First and foremost, I would like to present my sincere gratitude to my advisors: Dr. Sara Jozwik, Dr. Sandra Pucci, Dr. Rai Kalyani, and Dr. Hamid Ouali for their valuable feedback. My special thanks go to all the participants who shared their thoughts and experiences with me. Also, I extend my warmest thanks to my husband Fahed Masalkhi, who provided emotional and intellectual support for this research endeavor, and my wonderful kids, Yamin, Adeel and Mohamed who waited very patiently for this study to be completed.

Lastly, I would like to share with my readers the impact of the misfortune, the impossible complication and tragic trajectory of the war in my beloved country Syria. The recent holocaust casts a dark and heavy shadow on my entire journey throughout my graduate study. As a Syrian American, my agony was to put myself into the mood of study. Attending to everyday slaughter of human beings in Syria made me feel guilty steering away. For eight years, the sense of guilt has never gone away. I felt guilty to eat, to sleep, and certainly to study.

Once, my daughter asked my husband how Damascus is the oldest inhabited city on earth. He responded: "It should be a very nice place that people wouldn't want to leave." Here, I am. Finally, fortunate to be done, and everything I am doing and I will do for the rest of my life is for Syria.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

When discussing Arabic heritage language learners<sup>1</sup> (AHLLs) and their experiences with learning their heritage language<sup>2</sup>, it becomes clear that there are those who have unexplored, unique circumstances both within and beyond the classrooms that keep them from becoming proficient. Heritage language (HL), in this context, is defined by the group that speaks it, not only as a method of communication, but also as a source and repository for the identity of the group and its members (He, 2010). For the purpose of this study, AHLLs are defined as children born in the U.S. who have one or both parents who migrated from an Arabic speaking country to the U.S. and who are exposed to the Arabic language at home.

Throughout this study, the stories of my participants sketch a detailed portrait of the factors and circumstances that stood between them and their desired HL proficiency. For example, Amal began her Arabic language studies at the age of 3 through weekend community schools. A community school is an educational institution started and initially run by first generation immigrant parents (in some cases like Al Aqsa School in Chicago, and Salam School in Milwaukee, these grow to full time K-12 schools). In her fifth-grade year, she was transferred from a public school to a full-time community school where she learned Arabic for 50 min each day and Qur'an studies for another 50 min. Her Arabic education continued for another 7 years. The first time I interviewed Amal, she stood out because of her interest in participating in this study. She was eager to talk and showed a particular passion for the Arabic language. In fact, as soon as I

---

<sup>1</sup> Unlike the term HLLs, which has been used to refer to those relearning their HL in an instructed setting, heritage speaker is usually used for unschooled speakers of HL. (Montrul, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> A language other than the dominant language of country, mainly spoken by a person who is a minority in that country.

thanked her for coming to the first interview for this study, she eagerly responded, “No, I want to thank you for giving me the chance to express my point of view.” She continued, “I hope future students of Arabic are luckier than I.”

Amal reported that it is very important that she knows how to speak Arabic fluently. She indicated that as long as her fluency in the language is limited, there will always be a language barrier between her and first-generation Arabic speakers. But accomplishing her desires for speaking Arabic might not be an easy task. Currently, Amal is employed as a secretary at one of the weekend community schools. When she tried to speak to the principal of that school in order to voice her opinion, Amal reported, “I’ll start talking in Arabic and it’ll slowly turn into English just because I feel like I didn’t get what I wanted through to her. Or even to my mom, I’ll start talking and then I’ll go back to English, because I didn’t feel like [they] understood what I wanted to say... You won’t be able to express yourself properly . . . you won’t be taken seriously,” she explained.

The language barrier seems evident in her attempts to communicate in Arabic, mainly with a first-generation grandparent who does not speak English. Amal speaks only Arabic with her monolingual grandmother and noted that “sometimes, I feel that she doesn’t fully understand what I’m trying to say. Like I’ll say it, but I feel like it’s not fully connected. It’s like cut up, and it’s not that, it could be better.”

As a self-identified Palestinian American, Amal expressed an eagerness to read in Arabic anything that has to do with the “resistance” (to the occupation of Palestinian land) or the “Palestinian/Israeli conflict.” Amal explained,

Arabic language has so much depth into it, so when you're listening to it, it doesn't make you feel one thing, it makes you feel so many emotions, and you feel like how they're

feeling. So it's definitely, it's like a whole other life, when you're listening or reading these poems.

Amal expressed that she cannot fully understand material written at the advanced level, such as a novel. She enjoys going to the public library and reading random books; she mostly reads romance novels in English but says that if she were able to fully and easily read in Arabic, she would go for an Arabic book. “Like an Arabic novel that I would be able to read and enjoy. Because there's so much depth, and it would tell a different story, probably more relatable, especially to us.”

In the United States, Arabic is the HL for less than 2% of the public school-age population (McFarland et al., 2017). This sociocultural context of a HL can add layers of challenges to those who attempt to preserve and maintain a HL like Arabic. AHLLs are expected to attain linguistic proficiency in two languages, but they must also learn to function in a complex political, cultural, social, and ideological world (Suleiman, 2011) where they are perceived as alien and a suspect (Bale, 2010). Heritage speakers, particularly in the U.S., have to contend with, negotiate, and juggle a number of inter and intra community factors, such as valuing specific dialects within their speech community. These factors are mixed with other challenges, for example, the lack of opportunity to learn the Arabic language. AHLLs face a number of challenges in their HL education, as a result, many are unable to read and speak fluently. This is due to poorly developed Arabic curriculum and very limited resources, especially compared to more commonly taught languages such as Spanish (Park, 2013; Ricento, 2005; Wright, 2007).

In addition to the lack of resources, most Arabic teachers have no prior training in language teaching methodology and pedagogy (Steven, 2006; Taha-Thomure, 2008). Many Arabic teachers are very traditional in their teaching and often replicate their own school experiences, as most of

other HL teachers, as the best way to educate second-generation learners (Al-Batal, 2007; Moore & Sadegholvad, 2013; Wu & Chang, 2010). In other words, these teachers, who are often first-generation immigrants, teach Arabic in the same manner they learned it as a national language in their country of origin in the Middle East even though the U. S. educational environment and context are much different. Al-Batal (2007) summarizes the challenges: Arabic instructors “instinctively teach Arabic as they were taught it, an approach designed for native-speaking children” (p. 270).

Due to their family background in the heritage language or culture, HLLs’ identities and/or linguistic needs differ from those of world language learners (WLLs) as Carreira (2004) pointed out. One example of the differences between them is related to language acquisition. World language (WL) learning is “one-directional” in nature (Ludanyi, 2013) because WLLs start from the novice level and have rare contact with the real-life language community outside the classroom (Kagan & Dillon, 2001). Language acquisition of HL, on the other hand, is “multidirectional,” since “[HLLs] do not share an easily definable starting point for instruction” (Ludanyi, 2013, p. 16) and they function in the wider world of community interaction. This is one reason why “the process and outcomes of HL acquisition are distinctly different from those of [WL acquisition]” (Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Valdés 1995, as noted in Kondo-Brown, 2003, p. 2).

Another issue with language acquisition is differentiating the needs and respective goals between HLLs and first language (L1) learners in that insufficient exposure to their language and culture may, in general, cause HLLs not to fulfill basic identity and linguistic needs similar to L1 learners. HL learning might be one way for HLLs to fulfill these needs. In fact, the profiles of HLLs are so diverse and varied that it could be argued they differ from most known categories of language learners in ways that we cannot yet completely describe (Carreira, 2004). This might be

more pertinent for AHLLs due to the added complexity of Arabic being a diglossic<sup>3</sup> and religious language. As such, Arabic has its own concerns regarding what should be taught and how it should be taught. The differences between HLLs and monolingually raised L1 speakers are radical in most aspects, particularly linguistically and sociolinguistically (Albirini, 2016; Albirini, 2014b; Albirini & Benmamoun, 2012). Creating opportunities to learn can allow for some attention to HL learning but at the same time it also widens the space for conflicts and debate regarding what to teach and how to teach HLLs.

Researchers argue that understanding the HLLs' sociolinguistic<sup>4</sup> knowledge, such as identity, behaviors, attitudes, and need for their HL, may guide HL instructors in their pedagogical decisions and curriculum design (Alarcón, 2010; Albirini, 2014c; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Carreira & Kagan 2011; Jansen & Llosa, 2007; Kagan, 2005), thereby providing HLLs with an adequate opportunity to truly learn the language and the culture. As such, the purpose of this study is to investigate how a group of AHLLs in advanced Arabic classes in three Islamic high schools experienced their HL development at their community schools as well as in their home/community settings. Furthermore, this study aims to reveal aspects of the AHLLs' biographical, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural information that might help compare and contrast the findings of this study with similar studies in HL research.

---

<sup>3</sup> “Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language, there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation” (Ferguson, 1959, p. 336).

<sup>4</sup> Sociolinguistic profile means “a descriptive summary of a specific group of speakers as the social and cultural factors influencing their linguistic choices, attitudes, and motivations, such as age, education, and ethnic identity” (Alarcón, 2010, p.270).



## **Purpose of the Study**

To date, explicit empirical analyses of HL development among high school AHLLs at Islamic schools have not been attempted, as far as I know, especially in the advanced-level classes. This is why it is crucial that more studies such as this one should be conducted. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the students' perspectives, highlighting their HL learning experiences. Two questions guide this research.

**Research question 1.** What is the experience of HL learning for former high school students who enrolled in full-time community schools?

**Research question 2.** How do these students experience their HL learning in their homes and communities?

In the following sections, I give a brief history of HLs in the U. S., situate Arabic as a HL, and conclude with a brief discussion of the current instruction of Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL). Later, I lay out the linguistic terrain in which Arabic occupies significant real-estate, especially in a diasporic setting like the Arab American communities in the U. S. I end with discussing the centrality of teaching Arabic in Islamic schools.

## **Brief History of Heritage Languages in the United States**

Preservation of heritage language (HL) through the generations is not an easy task to accomplish (Sehlaoui, 2008), as the HL works against the dominant language (Albirini, 2016). Preserving original languages and cultures for immigrants and minority groups in the U. S. is a daunting task; immigrants are pushed to assimilate and therefore communicate predominately with the dominant language, English. For a long time, the dominance of English in the U. S. demanded rapid linguistic assimilation in an attempt to create one prominent linguistic identity (Noddings, 2012) where “all Americans must be taught to read and write and think in one language” (Spring,

2009, p. 80). Teaching English became the responsibility of educational institutions; on the other hand, the responsibility of maintaining the HLs fell mainly to the individual and/or family, this is especially true for the less commonly taught languages like Armenian, Kurdish, Urdu and Arabic (Tse, 2001; Van Deusen, 2003).

The Arabic language has a fairly new history in this country. Attempts to preserve Arabic culture and language were not met with success for the first wave of immigrants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This failure to maintain Arabic language and culture among the first groups of immigrants turned into a strong determination to reconnect with Arabic by subsequent Arab immigrants who came after World War II, most of whom were more educated than the earlier waves of immigrants (Bale, 2010; Shiri, 2010).

In succession, community schools have been the primary venues for teaching Arabic before college (Sehlaoui, 2008). Establishing these community-based schools (as well as weekend community schools) by community members tends to serve as a means of maintaining and showing pride and faith in their culture, religion, and language from the perspective of their founders.

### **Current State of Heritage Language Learning**

Experts in the field assert that for the HL to be maintained, the collective effort of family members, community schools, and formal education is required (Laleko, 2013; Ludanyi, 2013; Suarez, 2007). Currently all HLs, particularly the LCTLs, such as Arabic, do not always receive formal institutional support and/or sponsorship. Many U. S. schools, whether public or private, only offer two or three choices of foreign language instruction, such as French, German, or Spanish. Those concerned with HL education have to devise independent ways to fulfill their goal of teaching and maintaining HLs. This is particularly challenging for LCTLs, such as Arabic,

Armenian, and Kurdish. The venues for teaching LCTLs have relied heavily on the conviction of the family and the community, rather than formal public education.

Offering LCTLs in private settings has many advantages in “retain[ing] institutional freedom to determine their own curricula and pedagogical goals” (Creese, Bhatt, Bhojani & Martin, 2006, p. 25). However, these venues are less effective in the teaching HL due to their minimal resources, which restrict opportunities for teachers to obtain training and licensure (Shin, 2005). Moreover, community-based schools often lack research-based curricula, appropriate pedagogies, and effective methodologies to ensure that HLLs are learning the HL (Douglas, 2005; Kondo-Brown, 2010).

By the mid-1990s, the introduction of federally sponsored programs, such as the voucher and choice programs, provided more opportunities for HL learning. The funding that came with these programs has opened the doors for smaller, community-based private schools to expand their language courses. Some Islamic schools benefit from the extra source of funding these programs are provided, such as the state of Wisconsin choice program for charter schools. For example, three participants in this study are former students of such choice-funded schools. However, despite these recent opportunities to develop charter schools that focus on teaching LCTLs, programs that promote bilingualism for HLLs and non-HLLs are rare.

Nonetheless, these venues should be credited with creating the opportunity to teach some LCTLs where “ethnic groups embraced them as a refuge in which to teach their cultural heritage without deference to a common civic culture” (Ravitch, 2010, pp. 124–125). The primary interest of investigation of such programs has been on students’ standardized test scores in math and English. No focus or investigations have been done regarding HL instruction. Even investigation on two-way immersion programs has been on “its impact on the students’ overall academic

achievement in the mainstream school, not heritage language maintenance per se” (Kondo-Brown, 2010, p. 28). Without the proper data, federally funded HL programs have remained mostly unexplored.

The general reality of HL instruction is that no standards are in place to guide program development, there are no HL teaching methodologies or curriculum materials designed specifically for the HLLs, and very few teachers are trained to properly instruct HLLs (Kondo-Brown, 2010; Potowski & Carreira, 2004). Regrettably, in many educational settings, HLLs end up studying their HL either as world language learners (Ogure & Moloney, 2012) or as first language learners (Ogure & Moloney, 2012; Van Deusen, 2003). However, the more prevalent quantitative and qualitative studies (Albirini, 2014b; Douglas, 2005; Kondo-Brown, 2010; You & Liu, 2011) that investigated the effects of HL instruction at community-based schools were not able to find a positive link between proficiency levels and length of instruction at most community-based HL schools in the U.S. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research studies that explore the effectiveness of community-based instruction from the heritage language learners’ perspective.

### **Arabic Language in Islamic Schools in the United States**

Although interest in Islamic schools throughout the West has grown considerably in recent years, less than 10% of Muslims enroll their children in Islamic schools (Merry, 2005; Niyozov, 2010). In the U. S., Muslim-Americans have succeeded in establishing a considerable number of full-time schools, estimated to be around 400 (Niyozov, 2010). The fundamental impetus of these Islamic schools, in addition to providing an Islamic atmosphere, was pledging to prepare their students for attending American universities by adhering to a standard curriculum (Al-Romi, 2000). American full-time Islamic schools are educational institutions mainly funded and administered by American Muslim communities and are designed to teach their children some

variation of the public school core curriculum along with Arabic language and Islamic studies (Badawi, 2006). Additionally, they are generally structured to facilitate Islamic practices.

Although keen on providing competitive education, the centrality of Arabic language within the faith, coupled with the desire to preserve and propagate their community's religious tradition, resulted in a special status for Arabic language instruction in these schools. The main reason is that Arabic is the language of the Qur'an, the sacred book of Islam. Arabic is the only language in the three major monotheistic religions whose holy text and major rituals (daily prayers for Muslims, Arab or non-Arab, cannot be performed in any language other than Arabic) are tied to the language. The only authenticated version of the Qur'an, the holy book, is the one written in Arabic. All Qur'an renditions in languages other than Arabic are considered mere translations. This accounts for the popularity of learning the Arabic language by Muslims Arabs and non-Arabs.

Within these community-based schools, Arabic language instruction became a central element of their efforts to preserve religion and culture for AHLLs and for Muslim heritage language learners (MHLLs), such as Pakistanis and Indians. For these and other reasons, Arabic is indispensable in any Islamic school. Therefore, from the perspectives of the parents and the school administrators, Arabic language becomes important due to its role in ritual and worship, as well as comprising the medium through which the connection with heritage may be established and maintained.

Although Arabic schools have been established throughout the U. S, the experience of Arabic HL learning for many AHLLs is often linked to unfavorable outcomes. In addition, the research on teaching/learning Arabic as a HL is relatively scant. Further, the perspective of AHLLs who have uninterrupted exposure to their HL, in terms of their HL experiences and needs, is missing in HL research. In this study, I hope to address these gaps in the literature and to contribute

to a practical knowledge base. My goal is to provide an avenue for the voices of the participants to share and express their experiences of being heritage Arabic language speakers and learners. The study has the potential to enrich our knowledge of HL development in general, and present recommendations that might assist Islamic community schools to better reflect on their pedagogical practices and curriculum design.

### **Positionality**

At this point, I would like to briefly introduce myself and my background as well as indicate my personal context in conducting this research. I have been teaching Arabic for 21 years, more than half of which were at weekend and full-time community schools and the rest at the university level. I taught HLLs mostly in mixed classes, which included HLLs and non-HLLs. My teaching experiences offered many examples of how the linguistic needs of AHLLs were not met, particularly, when the students were not placed in their language classes according to their language proficiency level. Many of my former students enrolled in Arabic classes in order to be able to effectively communicate with their Arabic-dominant friends and family. Sadly, I witnessed many of those same students becoming frustrated because their desired goals were not being met. In other words, after years of Arabic classes, they were still unable to communicate effectively in Arabic. This prompted me to conduct this phenomenological study in order to understand from the HL students' perspective and experiences.

As I reflect on my experience in teaching Arabic at community schools, many questions arise: How is it that a student is taught Arabic for many years without attaining advanced (AD<sup>5</sup>) language proficiency in any of the language skills, reading, writing or speaking? How and in which

---

<sup>5</sup> Advanced here refers to American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standards, namely reaching functional ability in the target language; criteria for advanced placement is not based on ACTFL for participants in this study.

ways can HLLs be supported to gain the level of language proficiency they set out to achieve? What do AHLLs want to use their HL for? What has been their experience in learning and using their HL? Is it reasonable to expect HLLs to become proficient in a language that does not have currency in the mainstream societal space? What do AHLLs think about attaining AD proficiency level in their HL? Why is proficiency important? To whom is important? Who gets to determine what constitutes “proficiency”? In the current literature base, all of these questions lack supporting insights from the perspectives of AHLLs. Asking such questions of AHLLs may provide information to better understand the issues of HL learning in U. S. Islamic schools.

Throughout the years I spent at community schools, I did not think of students as one of the sources from which perspectives could be sought. As I recall my dismissive stance toward what the students had to say or add, I am now keen to actively seek the students’ perspectives, especially regarding areas of dispute among practitioners of teaching Arabic. These include setting program goals, the role of dialect or colloquial Arabic (CA) in learning standard Arabic (SA), and the discourses surrounding the proficiency attainment of Arabic. This study strives to contribute new insights into the resolution of some of these challenges. By focusing specifically on the learning of Arabic for learners from the same background in three U.S. private schools, this study hopes to highlight larger issues of language learning that influences AHLLs.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Many studies (Albirini, 2014b; Albirini, 2016; Chinen & Tucker, 2005; Macquire & Curdt-Chistiansen, 2007; Otcu, 2010) have shown that one's heritage language (HL) is thought to be important and deserves to be maintained and preserved through the generations because it is a primary element of ethnic identity and belonging. In addition, HL is an integral aspect of self-concept augmented with feelings of obligation, uniqueness and prestige (Alarcón, 2010; Albirini, 2014b; Comanaru & Noels, 2009). Guardado (2010) declares that "if language is so crucial to human life, fostering the [HL] becomes a critical necessity for linguistic-minority families" (p. 329). Although much research (Szecsi & Szilagy, 2012; Decapua & Wintergerst, 2009) points to the importance of maintaining HLs, the reality sets a different picture. Many heritage language learners (HLLs) do not get the opportunity to develop their HL, but, like my participants, they see value in learning HLs (Albirini, 2014b). This is evident in Comanaru and Noels (2009) study when a participant revealed, "It's embarrassing to be Chinese physically and find yourself in a situation where you can no longer speak the language [...] to other Chinese people" (p. 149). The current study seeks to showcase the experiences of students similar to the participant in Comanaru and Noels' study. The purpose of this study is to investigate how a group of Arabic heritage language learners (AHLLs) in advanced Arabic (AD) classes in three Islamic high schools experienced their HL development at their community schools as well as in their home/community settings.

This chapter introduces literature pertaining to the definition of HLL to clarify who these learners are in general terms and who they are for this study. Next, this definition is used as basis to describe identity development for heritage languages (HLs) to highlight the relationship between identity and HL development. Following this is the theoretical framework that guided



this study. Subsequently an introduction and description of the challenges in attaining Arabic language proficiency is provided. Finally, other opportunities to strengthen the HL are reviewed to better understand the experiences of the participants and better identify their needs.

### **Who are Heritage Language Learners?**

Despite the term's growing popularity, there is yet to be an agreed upon definition of who exactly heritage language learners (HLLs) and speakers are. For now, "who qualifies as a HLL remains unsettled" (Husseinali, 2012, p. 99). According to Carreira (2004), the definition of a HLL is "problematic" and "ill defined" for a number of reasons; primarily because HLLs are not a homogeneous cluster of learners.

In the definitions reviewed, two main criteria are used to classify HLLs: ethnolinguistic affiliation and linguistic proficiency. For example, Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) defines the HLL as someone having some connection to the language. According to the author, HLLs "comprise a heterogeneous group ranging from fluent native speakers to non-speakers who may be generations removed but who may feel culturally connected to language" (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003, p. 221). This definition is both broad and does not reflect consideration of ability or linguistic proficiency. For Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) ability is not important, only ethnolinguistic affiliation.

In other definitions reviewed, ability, or linguistic proficiency is the defining criteria. For Polinsky and Kagan (2007), they noted that "while "heritage motivation" and "family relevance" are important impetuses for learning a language, they are not sufficient to characterize, and do not provide operational criteria for identifying heritage speakers" (pp. 2-3).

Valdés (2000) provides a third definition. She combines both criteria: (a) ability or linguistic proficiency and (b) affiliation or cultural connection. According to Valdés, a heritage speaker is: "a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks

or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (p. 1).

To the above, Lee (2005) added a different variable, namely, self-identification which is according to Lee is generally a self-evaluation of one’s own connection to the language/culture. He studied 530 college-level language learners of the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs). Of the 38 Pakistani students who were mostly Urdu HL speakers, 16 identified themselves as heritage language learners (HLLs) of Arabic. A Pakistani learner said, “Yes, [I am an HLL of Arabic], I learned how to read when I was young but was never taught how to speak or understand” (p. 563). Some Arabic HL participants in the same study declined to self-identify due to their perceived inability to fluently speak their HL. Based on the broad definition and Lee’s findings, the definition of HLLs is extended to include learners who have a cultural affinity to Arabic, then the definition of HLLs includes many more Muslim heritage language learners (MHLLs) studying Arabic to connect to religious texts even if the student does not speak Arabic (Husseinali, 2012).

However, being identified as a HLL may assign an ascribed identity that some HLLs might resist (Leeman, 2015; Lee, 2005). Hornberger and Wang (2008) addressed this issue in their ecological definition of HLLs as “individuals with familial or ancestral ties to a language other than English who exert their agency in determining if they are heritage language learners of that language” (p. 6).

Since this study focuses on AHLLs who are exposed to Arabic in their daily lives. I will be borrowing from Valdés’ (2000) to define an Arabic HLL to be: a person who is raised in a home where Arabic in its mixed form of colloquial Arabic (CA) and modern standard Arabic (MSA) is present, who speaks CA and English, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and Arabic.

## What is Arabic Language?

As a diglossic language, Arabic has three recognizable forms: classical Arabic, MSA, and regional colloquial. The first of these, classical Arabic<sup>6</sup>, is the language of Qur'anic Arabic, old poetry, classical reference books, and works of literature. MSA or fusHa (فصحى) is a modernized form of classical Arabic characterized by adopting modern technological and political terms as well as simplifying the Arabic syntax. MSA is used in formal situations ranging from religious ceremonies to academic lectures and formal TV news. MSA is also represented in all printed materials from textbooks to newspapers and magazines. On the other hand, CA varies regionally, is spoken and mostly not written<sup>7</sup> and has no official status in the Arab world (Albirini & Benmamoun, 2012). It functions as a day-to-day language among people and it is the first language of native Arabic speakers.

Neither classical Arabic nor MSA are the native languages of any Arab, rather they are learned through formal institutions such as schools, colleges and universities. However, the first language that any Arab is exposed to, cannot be described to be of one form. From the beginning all three forms are present in the speech community that the individual grows up in. While all Arab states share one formal language, MSA, each state has its own regional and dialectical varieties. These dialects are mutually intelligible throughout the Arab world. Although the dialects are recognized as mutually intelligible, ordinary native speakers from various parts of the Arab world certainly face difficulties when speaking to each other using their dialects. As a result, one speaker often needs to accommodate the other. For example, a majority of North African countries

---

<sup>6</sup> Although what is called Classical Arabic includes the aspects mentioned here, however, since the aspect most relevant to AHLLs is Qur'anic Arabic, for the purposes of this study I will use Qur'anic Arabic to designate this variety of the Arabic language. So, in this study the forms of Arabic language are: Qur'anic Arabic, MSA, and CA.

<sup>7</sup> With advent of texting through new forms of technological communication CA is increasingly finding its way into becoming a written form. Arabic speakers mimic spoken conversation when texting, which results in higher frequency of using CA in the written form.

make the accommodation towards a more well-known dialect such as Egyptian or Levantine<sup>8</sup> (Albirini, 2016). In order to function as native Muslim Arabs, Muslim AHLLs may need to acquire three distinct, yet related, language forms: Qur'anic Arabic, MSA, and CA. Each one of these language forms fulfills specific facets of their total heritage linguistic and cultural identities. However, in order to function as an educated Muslim Arabic speaker, a person will need to acquire the linguistic competence to manage a mix of the three forms.

For AHLLs, CA is associated with their ethnic identity, understood as their parent's national identity (their parent's country of origin in the Arab region). MSA can be thought of as tied to their ethnicity as Arab and a unifying form among Arabs including non-Muslim Arab, while Qur'anic Arabic is tied to their religious identity.

### **Heritage Language: Identity Development**

Studies (Tse, 1998–1999) have shown that HLLs go through a range of identity development stages linked to HL learning. These four stages are: ethnic unawareness, ethnic ambivalence, ethnic emergence, and ethnic identity incorporation (Tse, 1999, p. 122). Tse (1998) argues that in early childhood, HLLs may lack awareness of the place of their HL as a minority language. She further argues that by the end of early childhood, HLLs may begin to experience a measure of hesitancy toward their HL and may show indifference, or resistance toward the HL perceiving it as a possible obstacle to their desire to integrate into the dominant culture. Resistance to learning the language exhibited by young students may turn in later years into a quest for regaining or relearning the language when they grow older.

---

<sup>8</sup> Egyptian and Levantine dialects have enjoyed far more familiarity when compared to other dialects in particular North African varieties such as Moroccan and Algerian. This is mainly due to the proliferation of media production such as film and TV series which resulting in the dominance of these dialects.

At the time when these learners reach the “ethnic emergence” stage, they may reach what can be described as a moment of realization. It is the realization of the need that only a connection to HL can truly fulfill. From this point of realization on, HL begins to be seen in a new light, where it interact with other layers related to identity and being (Jeon, 2008). Through such realization, HLLs are able to build a real and meaningful personal connection to the language and its speakers, which may result in a stronger embrace and a firmer commitment to learn the language and develop/strengthen their cultural identity (Chinen & Tucker, 2005).

The research (Albirini, 2014b; Engman, 2015) suggests that for AHLLs, as it is for other minorities in U.S., the issue of identity involves deeper attachments that make it a complex and involved matter. For example, for immigrant Arabs and Muslims in the West in general, and in the U.S., in particular, the problem of identity compels the individual to make choices about belonging and about how to construct their relationship within their community as well as to the larger society in which they live. If a society is not hospitable, the HLLs may have a hard time learning and adopting their HL. This is very evident in the U.S. Efforts on the part of HLLs to preserve and maintain their HL are often seen as disruptive to the national sense of identity fostered by the English only/Americanization ideology. Ricento (2005) goes as far as describing HL learning their language and culture as a ‘threat.’ (p.144).

Despite English Only/Americanization ideologies, multiple studies (Albirini 2014b, Rouchdy, 2013) have shown that second-generation Arab-Americans considered Arabic to be an element of primary importance for how they identify and see themselves ethnically as Arabs and religiously as Muslims. Tse (1998) points out that language acquisition is facilitated when individuals have positive attitudes toward the language and feel positively about their ethnic groups. Therefore, it is important to understand the HLL’s attitudes and perceptions towards

learning their HL. Although Tse (1998) notes that not all ethnic minorities go through all four of these stages, Tse predicts that HL acquisition may not occur satisfactorily as long as the learner is in the ethnic ambivalence/evasion stage. However, these stages may not be considered as lock-step stages, sometimes, there is a cycling through depending on other contextual factors such as social factors and personal beliefs (Jeon, 2008; Wu, 2005).

Whether Tse's general findings pertaining to heritage ethnic identity development will be reflected in the experiences of the group of AHLLs in my study is a question that the participants have the potential to provide insight into. This study strives to contribute to our understanding of the actual experiences of AHLLs.

### **Heritage Language Learning: Ethnic and Religious Identity**

A central feature of Arabic for Arab Muslim HLL's is its unique position as a religious language. For an Arab who is not a Muslim, e.g., an Arab Christian heritage language speaker, and who has command of Arabic, it is possible if she wishes, to read the bible in Arabic, and perform her prayers and devotions also in Arabic, like for example reciting the Lord's Prayer. Now if such a person joins a congregation or a Church where there are no Arabic speakers, she is able to perform all her religious ritual in English along with her non-Arab congregation. The same is not possible for an Arabic HL speaker who is Muslim. No matter what mosque they join, the only acceptable form of performing rituals or reading the Qur'an is in Arabic. This should make it clear that for a Muslim, Arab and non-Arab, knowledge of Qur'anic Arabic is indispensable to their religious practice and as a consequence to their religious identity.

There is a dearth of studies (Engman, 2015; Husseinali, 2012) that have addressed the function of Arabic as an ethnic as well as a religious language. A study conducted by Klein (2013) brings to light the role played by ritual languages and communicative languages in the

life of HLLs. Although this study highlights the relationship between Punjabi and rituals, the findings speak to similarities of Qur’anic Arabic and communicative Arabic for Muslim AHELLs in diasporic communities. In this study, the author analyzed two distinct activities that highlight Punjabi proficiency: Gurbani (prayer recitation), which served to “orient students to the use of archaic Punjabi through spiritual practice, and, second, a language proficiency to “discursively construct[ed] the everyday use of modern Punjabi as a moral imperative for the preservation and transmission of Sikh religion and culture in the future” (p. 36). Because the participants had various levels of language proficiency, temple discussions were conducted in English.

One of the things that the Klein (2013) study shows is that the value of the ritual<sup>9</sup> aspect of the language may not be a subject of controversy to the group studied. However, what is a source of controversy is the necessity of learning the HL beyond the religious form, since learning the language for religious purposes is not the same as learning the language for communicative purposes. In other words, one can repeat words and phrases learned for ritual performance, but it would be very difficult for one to converse based only on knowledge of such formulas, and the language abilities these might offer. Klein showed that ritual language, such as archaic Punjabi in Gurbani, is more accessible than Modern Punjabi as a HL. In the same vein, ritual Qur’anic Arabic could be more facile and accessible than any other forms of Arabic language. This may result in the diminishment of the efforts to go beyond religious literacy to learn Arabic for communicative competence in the diaspora (Temples, 2013).

By its nature, ritual may not be totally dependent on language. Non-linguistic elements of ritual like sounds, gestures, and movements may play a role in comprehension and expression.

---

<sup>9</sup> In this study, I will be using Qur’anic Arabic and ritual language interchangeably. Qur’anic language can be considered synonymous with ritual language since Qur’anic language is dominant in ritual practice. It can be said that ritual language is derived from Qur’anic language in its entirety.

Ritual may help the learners in attaining a degree of comprehension regardless of the level of language proficiency they possess. For example, the participants in performing Islamic rituals may be able to fill in gaps meanings and comprehension that are produced by ritual. It seems that religious identity for AHLLs is more likely to be fulfilled with much less knowledge of Arabic language syntax or any of its intricacies, rhetorical styles, and genres (Haeri, 2000) than is required for maintaining the ethnic identity in the assumed “ethnic emergence” stage. This can be easily gleaned from the fact that Qur’anic Arabic and ritual practices can be attained mostly through rote learning that may not be totally dependent on comprehension, which can be separately acquired by the language one is most familiar with.

For Muslim HLLs, Arab and non-Arab, Qur’anic language could be acquired by having phonetic skills while comprehension could be achieved by relying on English skills. For AHLLs, relying on English only to achieve comprehension may exclude their CA and MSA language skills. However, resorting to English could be important to attain full comprehension since English is their stronger language (Jaspal & Coyle, 2010). Therefore, English may play a role, as a complementary resource, in the development of their comprehension capacity. For example in instances where CA and MSA cannot fulfill the need for expression or comprehension, the use of English could be helpful in filling the gaps in expression and comprehension (Jaspal & Coyle, 2010; Nichols & Colon, 2000).

Ethnic identity for AHLLs in comparison necessitates more than can be achieved by rote learning. Ethnic identities may compel AHLLs to combine knowledge of MSA and CA. Klein (2013) concluded that the semiotic link constructed by the teachers may not be as strong for the community as a whole as the use of archaic Punjabi in Gurbani. Klein stated that “the future status of Modern Punjabi as a heritage language may depend on the availability of curricula and contexts



for usage as well as to what degree the second-generation views Punjabi language use as a moral imperative for community maintenance” (pp. 47–48).

Klein’s (2013) conclusions could be made about HLL in general. As such, it can be argued that both of Klein’s conclusions apply to Arabic as a HL. In other words, the future status of Arabic as a HL may depend on the availability of curricula and contexts for usage, and the extent to which the second generation views Arabic language use as a moral imperative for community maintenance. That is, of course, if they desire to learn their HL and if they feel competent using it based on the instruction received (He, 2006). This study, hopes to contribute to our understanding of the second conclusion, while also helping add to the resources for creating the first one.

### **Identity Development as Part of the Curriculum**

The question of how HLs have been taught and received by HLLs has produced one of the few qualitative studies that investigated the teaching of HLs in charter schools (Helmer, 2014). The study, of a small charter high school in the American Southwest, highlighted students’ resistance to Spanish heritage language (SHL) instruction that relied on inauthentic materials. In Helmer’s critical ethnographic study, data were collected from 16 students in the SHL class. Helmer chose five females and one male student as focal participants, all U.S. born except one, and all of whom identified themselves as Mexican.

She also followed the same cohort of students to their English/humanities course. The SHL class was taught by a native Spanish-speaking lawyer. The study examined some causes of “strike-like” behavior observed in students in a SHL class. Central to student resistance was the lack of meaningful activity and the “teacher failure to use appropriate materials that co-constructed students’ Mexican linguistic and sociocultural identities” (p. 187). The Helmer study

recommended that HL courses include activities and discussion of materials that address topics of identity. It also noted that “the use of inauthentic [WL] materials had the effect of discrediting HLL’ cultural and linguistic knowledge, resulting in performance strikes” (p. 190).

Although some educators might argue that HLLs may not know what they need, they know what they did not get. Olivia, one of Helmer’s six focal participants, was asked about her disruptive behavior. She explained, “In Spanish we’re not learning anything. I *try* paying attention in Spanish and I don’t feel like I’m learning anything, so (pause) to that I mean, I might as well screw off, you know? It’s a waste of time. It’s a waste of *my* time so I might as well have a good time” (p. 193). While community, place-based projects played a large part in the same students’ successful learning in science and English-humanities classes, their SHL class presented them with a language removed from their actual experience; therefore, they liked their language class less than the other classes and were less successful in their HL class. Helmer’s study supports the idea that it is not a matter of simply creating SHL courses, but, rather, more data needs to be accumulated from the perspective of the HLLs themselves since they are the main stakeholders in this learning process.

Researchers noted that HL development may contribute to the construction of HLLs’ identity (Chinen & Tucker, 2005; He, 2004; Lee, 2002; Moloney & Oguro, 2012) where strong HL competence may foster a strong sense of ethnic identity (Chinen & Tucker, 2005) while weak HL competence may create instances of anxiety (Wu & Leung, 2014), insecurity (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005), problems for inter-generational communication (Albirini, 2016; Jeon, 2008; Wu, 2005), and in some cases avoidance with speakers of the HL (Cho, 2000). As such, for HLLs who are motivated to develop their HL, limited proficiency in their HL may not fulfill their identity needs and may constrain their social connection with their heritage community (Albirini, 2016).

Heritage language proficiency development and preservation depends on the frequency of HL use and quality of input (Alarcón, 2010; Albirini, 2014b; Albirini, 2016); factors related to identity development (Tse, 1999), such as ethnic identity, attitude, (Almubayei, 2007; Chinen & Tucker, 2005; Oriyama, 2010; Wong & Xiao, 2010) and motivation (Comanaru & Noel, 2009; He, 2006) in addition to formal instruction (Parra, 2013); home language and literacy (Ayari, 1996; Lu & Koda, 2011); parents' attitudes (Jeon, 2008; Rouchdy, 2013; Seymour-Jorn, 2004); peer support (Oriyama, 2010); social networking (Yi, 2008); appropriate pedagogy (Wu & Chang, 2010); and language ideology (Chang, 2011; Guarfathero, 2014). In combination, these factors may help explain why some learners are able to reach high level of linguistic competence or language proficiency while others are not. In this study, language proficiency is defined as the ability of a HLL to communicate in Arabic with self-described confidence.

Research suggests (Moloney & Oguro, 2012) that in order for HLLs to learn/build/maintain HL, programming must address aspects of identity (Helmer, 2014) and everyday social practices. In addition, speaking skills are viewed as an essential component because it gives HLLs an opportunity to connect to other members of their heritage community (He, 2004; He, 2006; Lippi-Green, 2012; Maguire & Curdt-Christiansen, 2007). HLLs who perceive that they cannot fully and effectively communicate with their HL speaking community may feel less adequate as this study will reveal (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Wu, 2005). This feeling of inadequacy may further impact other opportunities for oral/written interactions such as online via social media networks (Szecsi & Szilagyi, 2012).

It is important to note that HL programming may also emphasize the importance of a “holistic view” of teaching language that incorporates notions of identities and social literacies (Nichols & Colon, 2000; Richardson, 2008). For example, HL curriculum may draw on HLLs' knowledge of

their home dialects and culture as this helps validate their hybrid identities (Nichols & Colon, 2000; Wong & Xiao, 2010; Wu & Chang, 2010). In other words, the learning process could utilize the repository of HL that the students bring to class. This may enable the development of scenarios where the students can take initiative and actively self-direct and take charge of certain segments of class learning (Martinez, 2003). The breadth and width of this learning can be increased in duration and intensity as they progress along the learning process.

As for Arabic as a HL, this holistic approach is most effective due the diglossic situation of the language. Recently, experts (Ryding, 1999; Ryding, 2006; Younes, 2006) in the field of teaching Arabic demonstrate the problems with the modern standard Arabic (MSA)-only approach which neither reflects the sociolinguistic reality of the language nor gives students the communicative skills required to fully function in Arabic. For example, a student who is taught only MSA will not be able to integrate with the larger Arabic speaking community. Instead, a “holistic view” may allow HLLs to bring their linguistic familiarity and cultural capital into the HL classroom. The following section highlights the lenses that guided this study in order to understand the participants’ experiences and perspectives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is informed by two perspectives of teaching/learning HLs: sociocultural theories and critical pedagogy. Learning HL as a social language may help AHLLs connect to their heritage community, foster a more intimate sense of belonging and respond to their identity needs, while the critical pedagogy approach highlights the motivation for HL learning.

#### **Sociocultural Theory**

Sociocultural theory which is associated with Vygotskian principles, highlights learning contexts in which students are active participants in their learning process (Norton, 2006). However, the Vygotskian view of language learning does not account for a number of influencing factors that contribute to how HLs are developed and maintained, such as identity attachment. Some HL experts (Carreira, 2004; Guardado, 2010; He, 2004; He, 2006) highlight the social component of HL learning that includes identity construction as part of HL programming. Accordingly, identities of HLLs are constructed through their speech/interaction, making HL an integral component for HLLs to find a socially equitable existence. As such, speaking is important in constructing social identities and relationships (Bakhtin, 1981; Lippi-Green, 2012). As such, researchers (Lo-Philip, 2010; Norton, 2006) on HL acquisition go beyond the sociocultural theory associated with Vygotsky in describing how language is acquired by including the aspect of identity construction. HL learning is considered a social practice where identity, language development, and critical pedagogy converge (Norton, 2006).

To help explain the social and cultural complexities, inside and outside HL classrooms, that play a role in language development and literacy acquisition for HLLs, I utilize the sociocultural theory that draws on (a) James Paul Gee's theory of discourses, (b) Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of voice and heteroglossia, and (c) Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. Through these three lenses of sociocultural theory as well as the critical pedagogy theory, data will be studied and analyzed. Gee's concept of discourses highlights the language development on the individual level; Bakhtin's model of heteroglossia explains language development at the interpersonal level; and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital captures the link between the micro-level of linguistic practices and the macro-level of societal context.

Gee's work (1987) in social linguistics guided his idea of differentiating between two types of discourses. For Gee, *discourses* with a lowercase *d*, refers to language-in-use and focuses purely on linguistic elements; meanwhile, the concept of *Discourse* (with a capital D) describes language as it interacts with and relates to "forms of life", where language engages with social practices that include all aspects of living. Gee sees Discourses as integrally bound up with identity: "A Discourse is a sort of 'identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize" (1987, p. 7). Gee defines Discourses as "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (1987, pp. 6–7).

HLLs, like those highlighted in this study, come to class with a varying degree of exposure to both "D" and "d" that may be different from WLLs. HLLs have the opportunity to use and to be exposed to HL in relation to many aspects and "forms of life", while WLLs' experiences with the language may be confined mostly to the narrow field of classroom learning. Nevertheless, in the social world these two discourses are not separate; the language used in the classroom and at home may reflect this social reality when bringing the two discourses into play. This is especially critical for Arabic, because it may bring into light the limiting nature of learning one form of Arabic such as conducting classroom instruction exclusively in MSA. Gee's theory of discourses highlights the consequences of separating CA from MSA by emphasizing form over meaning. Gee's notion of capital D makes learning more authentic and real.

While Gee's theory helps us better map the space where language connects to and describes the social milieu, Bakhtin's concept of voices serves to better explicate how identities are enacted through and within these discourses. Bakhtin's (1981) concept of voice and heteroglossia makes

it possible to identify the presence of a number of voices in language learning. Language for Bakhtin does not come into existence nor is it sustained in abstractions. It is always situated, and always socially located and linked, as such, speakers create meanings as they are engaged in dialogues with others, not necessarily in one to one conversation, but rather in how these same words were used by others in their utterances. This means that for Bakhtin, the notion of an individual speaker is not real because in the process of speaking and creating their utterances, speakers do so through the interaction with listeners, so language for Bakhtin is “populated-overpopulated- with the intentions of others” (1981, p.294). In this sense for the Arabic language, it should be noted that regardless of the social position or ranking of CA as compared to MSA, speakers of the language populate their utterances most of the time by both. In real social interaction, this diglossic situation of the Arabic language comes to life in the way speakers interchange usage of both varieties to make their meaning within one dialect group. There is another level of heteroglossia that unfolds among speakers of different colloquial dialects. Learning Arabic may provide the AHLLs the skills necessary for them to craft their utterances in a way that reflects the social functions of code-switching between CA and MSA (Albirini, 2011; Albirini & Chakrani, 2016) and to develop a diglossic competence (Wahba, 2006) while at the same time dealing with the rich varieties of Arabic.

It is here that Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of *symbolic capital* helps us understand how to consider the politics of language and the often unequal relationships between speakers and the ever-present power differential that affects the speech of interlocutors. This could be considered at the inter-language between English and Arabic, and the intra-language level between MSA and CA in general, and among the different varieties of CA, which is often perceived as more prestigious. For AHLLs, the struggle is intensified by both the diglossic nature of Arabic and the

pedagogy of teaching/learning Arabic. When the CA spoken at home is not present in HL classroom instruction, an added struggle may ensue; namely, to deal with the confusion generated by a practice that asserts an unnecessary divergence between what the students know (CA) and what they are given to study (MSA).

In some cases, when students slip a few words of their dialects in the class, they are made to feel considerably uncomfortable for using their dialect, especially when it is a dialect that is negatively associated with a specific sociocultural or socioeconomic status. This discomfort might come from the classmates' reactions, but also, in some cases, might come from the teachers who do not speak the same dialect. This specific situation was noted by Amirah, one of the study participants. This same issue was also highlighted by one of the parents in my pilot study: "My kids are conscious of their ability and don't have confidence speaking the language because when they did they were laughed at [for] the informal Arabic [their specific rural dialect] by staff members. That is discouraging to students; therefore, they choose not to speak it."

As for the unequal relationship in the intra-language case between the dominant English and Arabic, there are two kinds of related struggles that are worth mentioning here. One kind of struggle is shared by minority HLLs in Western monolingual societies, such as America. In this society, there is an omnipresent dominance that privileges and values one hegemonic idiom. That is, one language carries with it the litmus test of belonging and feeling part of society. As such, bilingualism especially for some minority speakers is regarded as a problem, and their use of another language, in a certain context, is associated with inferiority (Wardhaugh, 2010).

The other kind of potential struggle is specific to AHLLs. It is suggested that this struggle may come from the stigma associated with Arabic as a result of the recent and current geopolitical conflicts in which the U.S. is involved. In the discourse coming out of these conflicts, Arabic is



associated with the voice of the enemy or “terrorist,” and is seen “to promote Islamic fundamentalism” (Pipes, 2007 as noted by Bale, 2010, p. 125). The current situation and the pressures it brings from events fueled by a relentless geopolitical atmosphere of constant war and conflict, may make the prevailing pedagogy of teaching/learning Arabic to HLLs the source of yet another conflict. It is hard to overestimate the effect of this burden on the perception of AHLLs of the language they are asked to study. It may have negative effects on their perception of being Arab (Allen, 2007). At the same time, this conflict could also encourage a stronger attachment to their heritage culture and language (Albirini, 2016).

### **Critical Pedagogy**

At this point, it becomes important to highlight the crucial role of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy seeks to empower people to challenge oppressive conditions in their lives and encourage them to become involved as instruments of change (Freire, 1972). A central tenet of Freire’s (1972) critical pedagogy is that the most local and immediate experiences should become the material of learning. In relation to language learning, this locality and immediacy is also met by including “language variation as a vital resource” that responds to their surroundings and contributes to AHLLs “negotiation and performance of social identities” (Leeman, Rabin, & Roman-Mendoza, 2011, p. 3). Critical pedagogy recommends “an additive policy of multiple dialect acquisition that allow students to examine the sociopolitical and linguistic environment in which they live” (Correa, 2011, p. 308).

The goal of learning HL may not be solely focused on a linguistic-gains approach. In teaching/learning a target language (other than the dominant language), whatever model is chosen, the curriculum should “encourage the negotiation of meaning for expression of ideas, engaging learners in tasks that are of interest to them and related to real world” (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p.

132). In addition, research into HL supports the view that the communicative approach<sup>10</sup>, in which language learning emphasizes interactive skills as the ultimate goal, is the most effective in heritage language classrooms (Anderson, 2008; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005), “since the nature of acquisition for [HLLs] has been dialogic, discursive and absolutely contextual from the beginning” (Lynch, 2003, p. 7).

Learning Arabic as a communicative/social language is recommended as a method that might be beneficial in guiding pedagogy that would take into consideration the participants’ learning needs of how to learn Arabic and what to teach in Arabic classes. A macro-based framework; meaning-focused at the discourse level (Kagan & Dillon, 2004); “allows for the inclusion of HLLs’ socio-affective needs, the development of positive attitudes toward the HL, stronger connection with students’ ethnolinguistic identity, the development of critical language and cultural awareness” (Parra, Bravo & Polinsky, 2018, p. 206).

### **Challenges in Attaining Arabic Language Proficiency**

The fact that Arabic is a diglossic language, adds more layers of difficulty for HLs. To aim for communicative competence in Arabic means that “the goals are complex in ways unparalleled in other languages” (Ryding, 2006, p.15). Arabic is a “language rich in varieties and registers, a richness that poses significant challenges to teachers and curriculum developers” (Al-Batal & Belnap, 2006, p. 396).

In her work, Ryding (2003) identified three main issues that impact obtaining proficiency in Arabic and, in my view, learning Arabic as a social/communicative language. Diglossia comes first, followed by the level of difficulty of Arabic, and finally setting goals for studying Arabic. The most important quality about the Arabic language is its diglossic form which makes it difficult

---

<sup>10</sup> Communicative language is used interchangeably with social language in this study.

to teach and learn. The following section will focus on the complexities of Arabic as a diglossic language.

### **Arabic as a Diglossic Language**

Diglossia is probably one of the most distinctive features that characterizes the Arabic language (Al-Batal, 1996; Haeri, 2000; Kaye, 2007). Diglossia is quite stable since it has existed through several centuries (Al Batal, 1995; Haeri, 2000). According to Ferguson, diglossia is a different phenomenon in which different dialects exist within a speech community. In a diglossic community there are two levels. The high variety (H) is learned in schools and is not used in everyday conversations; no one speaks it natively. The low (L) variety is acquired as the mother tongue and is used in daily communications. For formal Arabic, high variety consists of MSA, which is the more contemporary language and old classical Arabic, such as Qur'anic and old poetry. Low variety consists of numerous local colloquial varieties as dialects. Abdulaziz (1972) described the situation in terms of using Arabic by native speakers, as a "triglossia" which involves switching between all three forms (as cited in Haeri, 2000, p. 63).

However, MSA differs considerably from CA in terms of its phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. CAs are not totally separate entities completely unrelated to the standard variety. MSA and spoken dialects "share many cognates, and there is significant phonological, morphological, and syntactic overlap" (Benmamoun, 2013, p. 149). Parkinson (1991), in his examination of the educated use of MSA, has pointed out that "most educated native speakers appear to reside in the middle of a diglossic continuum, rather than at either, or both, ends" (as noted in Wahba, 2006, p. 146). As such, neither CA nor MSA alone suffice to meet the linguistic needs of an educated native speaker (Palmer, 2007; Ryding, 2006; Trentman, 2011; Younes, 2006).

Although there are situations where MSA is exclusively used, like in reading, writing and in most formal prepared speeches (Van, 2006), CA is largely used in daily activity and personal communication (Wilmsen, 2006). However, both of them are mixed now more than ever. The recent technological developments allow multimodal communication across distance to create new situations and ways of using languages (Albirini, 2016; Lippi-Green, 2012). For example, which form of the language does a person use when texting in Arabic?

It is important to point to a crucial distinction concerning Arabic: that MSA is not linguistically tied to a social class. For the most part, there is no class distinction identified with the ability to speak MSA. Indeed, MSA crosses all class divisions. A person with a lower-class background will understand MSA as well as a person of from a privileged-class background. Ibrahim (1986) mentions that “[MSA] is socially neutral and unmarked with respect to the speakers’ class” (pp. 124-125). Mainly, this is due to the fact that Arabic is the language of the Qur’an and all the ritual and devotional practices of a Muslim. Mass media as well have greatly helped to spread the familiarity of MSA and specific urban forms of spoken Arabic (Abdulaziz, 1986). Therefore, amidst low levels of educational attainment, a person can still use MSA regularly and produce MSA in conversation and/or quotidian transactions, as he or she is nevertheless in possession of some measure of comprehension and familiarity (Wahba, 2006) that may diminish any suggested social stratification. However, CA can be teased apart from the aforementioned simply because it plays a different linguistic role in societies and is tied to socioeconomic status. Ibrahim (1986) explains that “social status and mobility in any Arab society, however, are insufficient for the acquisition of [MSA] but are required for the acquisition of a locally prestigious [CA]” (p. 119). Prestige might be understood to accompany the dialect of the capital in each Arab country. Region wide, the two most famous dialects are Egyptian and

Levantine, due to pervasive media and art production in these two dialects. In other words, MSA is not a social marker of the elite classes. It has as much currency in daily use as CA. Nevertheless, native speakers who know CA only are considered illiterate and have low status in society (Alshamrani, 2012, p. 59).

### **The Impact of Diglossia on Learning Arabic**

In the discipline of teaching Arabic, the impact of diglossia is evident in relation to the attainment of language skills (Al-Batal, 1992; Alrabaa, 1986; Ayari, 1996; Maamouri, 1998; Ryding, 1991). In Arabic, there is an ideological dominance that privileges MSA to the exclusion of any colloquial content. As a result, the majority of educators of Arabic still shy away from including their dialectic varieties in classroom learning; the only form of proper classroom instruction in their eyes is the formal variety (Al-Batal, 1996; Palmer, 2007). In the Islamic Schools in the West, to suggest the insertion of any colloquial content into the instructional material of language learning might be considered taboo. This ideological stance toward CA is a transplant from the Middle East and may not be adequate or suitable for AHLLs in the diaspora. The fear is that such direction in instruction might interfere with the purity of MSA. In addition to that, the colloquial is generally associated with negative connotations such as: illiteracy, corruption of MSA or the classical Arabic, and social and political fragmentation of speech communities since MSA is seen as a unifying force (Ayari, 1996).

Supporters of teaching only MSA cite many reasons for why this approach is deemed appropriate. Chief among them is that teaching MSA to HLLs who come from various backgrounds, and thus have learned different forms of CA, does away with the problem of which dialect to choose and thus seemingly minimizes that confusion (Tahrawi, 1995). This language ideology may influence both language pedagogy and methodology (Ryding, 2006). The teaching

of only MSA may impact language pedagogy that emphasize learning about the language instead of learning how to utilize the language for communicative purposes. As a consequence of such pedagogy, the learner may be reduced to mostly being a listener and a receiver of knowledge, rather than becoming engaged in dialogues and discussions using what she knows of the language (Ryding, 2006; Younes, 2006).

It can be said that diglossia necessitates code-switching (CS). For native speakers, the navigation of these two and sometimes three forms of intuitive usage was developed and internalized early on. As for AHLLs, there is a lack in this intuitive diglossic competence due to their “removal from the diglossic context” (Albirini, 2016). Unlike first-generation immigrants as well as native Arabic speakers in the Arab world, heritage speakers do not have ample opportunities of constant exposure and use to MSA and CA and lack the ability to utilize both varieties to serve clear functional purposes (Albirini, 2011). HLLs lack the sociolinguistic competence to socially and pragmatically deploy CA and MSA appropriately (Albirini, 2016; Albirini & Chakrani, 2016).

### **Level of Difficulty of Arabic**

The acquisition of a language can be a formidable challenge. The degree of difficulty in acquiring a specific language relates to a number of factors, chief among them is “language distance.” Distance here is measured by how similar or different the new language is from the language the learner already knows. Language distance may be effective in providing a measure of the difficulty Arabic learners may face in their quest to advance in Arabic and attain fluency. For Van (1999), this distance is nearly infinite, as he proclaimed that “the degree of transparency between the Arabic language and most European languages is almost zero” (p. 3). The considerable dimensions of this distance are due to the fact that Arabic differs from Indo-European languages

“syntactically, morphologically and semantically. It is a Semitic language whose main characteristic feature is that most words are built up from roots by following certain fixed patterns and adding infixes, prefixes and suffixes” (Khoja, 2001, p. 1). It is worth noting here that AHLLs face three layers of distance: the first is manifested between their dominant language (English) and HL in general; the second is positioned between MSA and CA in particular (Alrabaa, 1986; Ayari, 1996; Ibrahim, 1983); and the third is marked by differences among CAs (Cote, 2009). One of the major issues in dealing with a diglossic situation is the navigation of different forms in a diglossic language to serve different social functions, an ability otherwise referred to as CS (Albirini, 2014a).

### **Reading Arabic and Learning Grammar**

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) faces several major challenges, including “the development of a more efficient orthography” (Abdelaziz, 1986, p. 18). One of the difficulties that AHLLs might face is the orthographic system. In Arabic, there are 28 letters, three of which double as vowels which always appear on written texts, while short vowels are written with diacritics (harakat). Reading materials in Arabic are represented either with these diacritics, such as in the Qur’an, Hadith (prophet Muhammad sayings), and children’s books. Otherwise, texts are presented without diacritics. When texts are presented without diacritics, readers may need to draw on their grammatical knowledge or on the context clues to be able to read and comprehend. Therefore, reading texts without diacritics may require employing specific strategies. Also, grammar in Arabic has a reputation for being difficult and learning its expansive rules and applying them is notoriously arduous even for students in the Arab World. Many Arabic language specialists call for simplifying approaches to the study of Arabic grammar (Bani-Khaled, 2014).

### **Setting Goals for Studying Arabic**

My interest in proficiency in this study is limited to the manner in which it is perceived by most of the participants as a pronounced goal of studying Arabic, and to the related issues it brings into relief. The development of HL proficiency might be one way for many HLLs, such as Amal, to fulfill not just linguistic but also identity needs and belonging (Carriera, 2004; He, 2006). For example Albirini (2016) declared that as a result of their limited proficiency in their heritage language, heritage speakers may encounter interpersonal, sociocultural, and psychological challenges in terms of relationships with their families, relatives, and heritage communities” (p. 295). This quote from Albirini may further clarify the phenomenological aspects of proficiency I am concerned with here, namely, not as a general concept in language learning, but in what most of the participants say they want out of it and on the impact of limited proficiency on the use of HL in social interaction. For the purpose of this study, language proficiency is defined as the ability of a HLL to communicate in Arabic with competence.

Researchers in the field indicate that reaching HL proficiency may be more feasible for the HLLs than WLLs (Benmamoun & Kagan, 2013; Douglas, 2005; Malone et.al, 2002; Oriyama, 2010; Polinsky, Maria, Kagan, 2007; Ryding, 2006; Yi, 2008). Kagan (2005) contends that “HLLs, because of their long exposure to the language, are good candidates for gaining such [AD or higher] proficiency more quickly if the instruction they are offered meets their needs” (p. 220). However, in the case of Arabic HL students, this is not the case. For many HLLs, including Arabic students are often grouped in classrooms that combine them with WLLs and/or their monolingual counterpart native speakers. Needless to say, this arrangement has failed to accommodate the needs of HLLs. Separate classes for HLLs are preferred by many experts in the field (Albirini, 2014c; Lynch, 2003).



However, the ethnographic study of Doerr and Lee (2009) of a weekend Japanese school in the U.S. illustrated the true complexity of the situation in that the issue was not as simple as devising a separate track for HLLs. In their study there were two tracks for HLLs; advanced and less so. Some of the students chose the class below their linguistic ability, others chose the class based on the desire to achieve a high linguistic proficiency level. Instructors may be sensitive to this issue when placing HLLs in or granting advanced standing in upper level classes

The central goal of HL curriculum may “facilitate ultimate attainment of the language by advanced speakers” (Sekrina, 2013, p. 65). Instructors may teach their students an awareness of HLLs’ status and benefits by introducing personal goal-setting for language learning as a classroom activity (Dressler, 2010). The question is, how may HLLs be supported and motivated to achieve an AD level of proficiency if they desire to? Kagan notes that instructors may see the potential in their HLLs in reaching high proficiency, and she asserts that a high proficiency level can be attainable if goals are set to lead to that level and those goals are defined in clear outcomes (Benmamoun & Kagan, 2013).

### **Arabic Programs at Islamic Schools**

Community-based heritage language (HL) programs in the U.S. seem to differ in terms of curriculum as well as in terms of the resources available (Kondo-Brown, 2010, p. 28). The same can be said about Islamic schools in general (Merry & Driessen, 2005). Most Islamic schools are dependent for their ideas of organizational structure, curriculum design and other aspects of school design and administration on the existing educational institutions in the U.S (Merry & Driessen, 2005). Even in the instances of successful borrowing from the dominant educational system, those borrowed elements only assist in established subjects such as math. Since Arabic programs are rare in mainstream schools, these programs appear to be mostly experimental and ad hoc in nature;

as a result, conferring Arabic language proficiency on learners became an elusive target, even after years of exposure to the language (Ayari, n.d). Part of the problem is that there is no consensus among Islamic schools' administrators over guided goals of teaching and learning Arabic in these schools that take into consideration the needs of AHLLs and MHLLs.

Currently, there is a dearth of information about the status for Arabic language instruction in Islamic schools; however, based on personal observation, contact with many Arabic teachers and the description of participants of this study, the Arabic language, in most Islamic Schools, is not taught as a communicative language. The decision on what to teach usually rests with the Arabic teachers-who in most cases are not certified. In addition, most of these schools lack a thoughtfully designed Arabic curriculum that can provide clarity in this matter (Ayari, 2009). Therefore, "it is not unusual for students learning Arabic to move from one grade level to the next only to find themselves turning in a vicious circle, with limited progress, if any" (Ayari, n.d).

Another issue that affects the design of the program is the religious nature of Arabic instruction which may both hinder and facilitate learning. Teaching languages from a religious point of view might limit its scope and effectiveness because the confessional affirmations have tended to come at the expense of language maintenance and development. For example, only certain "sanitized" contents could be used as teaching materials, thus excluding a wide corpus of humanist productions like songs, poetry and films among others. On the other hand, including elements of religious language (such as Qur'anic Arabic) strengthens exposure to honorifics and formal register and vocabulary expressions (Shin & Lee, 2013).

### **Developing a Quality Arabic Program**

Learning Arabic for HLLs needs to go beyond the knowledge of grammar, phonology, and lexicon "to include the sociolinguistic competence of when and where to use their linguistic

package based on the appropriate context” (Albirini & Chakrani, 2016, p. 17). Thus, the difficulty of achieving fluency is not only found in acquiring proficiency in each form on its own, it is further compounded by the need to know how to maneuver within and across sociolinguistic contexts and intuitively employ different varieties of the HL in the appropriate context.

The ultimate aim of Arabic language learning is "to give the learners the opportunity to develop diglossic competence and functional abilities” (Wahba, 2006, p. 145) to help them reach the “full participation in the world of other speakers” (Van, 2006, p. 309). A question was posed by Al-Batal (1992), “Can we claim that our programs are truly proficiency-based when we continue to emphasize the teaching of only one variety of Arabic, namely, MSA, in contexts that are sometimes unauthentic?” (p. 396). Al-Batal states that a learner must ultimately master at least the three Arabic language variants used by educated Arabs: MSA, at least one CA and a mixture of CA and MSA (Al-Batal, p. 303). Learning one and not the other does not lead to proficiency. As such, the teaching of Arabic may strive to give the AHLLs the skills necessary for them to craft their utterances in a way that reflects the social functions of codeswitching between CA and MSA (Albirini, 2011).

In understanding the importance of teaching Arabic via multiple dialects, it is important to stress the necessity for teachers to understand that reading and formal writing are the standards of MSA-only instruction (Ryding, 1999; Wahba, 2006). MSA is only used in preplanned speech (e.g., formal speeches) (Van, 2006 ); however, verbal discussion of academic subjects may not be the focus in MSA-only instruction. CA, as a component of middle language, is necessary for discussion, especially as a tool for comprehending written forms. In the same vein, researchers suggest that teaching grammar for HLLs may not be the main and only focus but rather “it should be seen as contributing to a broader communicative competence” (Anderson, 2008, p. 84) mainly

in the written form of the language. In this sense grammar is to be used only in supporting roles, not as a goal in itself.

Rodríguez (2007) elaborated on the differences between standard and academic languages. He explained that “academic language and standard language are not synonymous” (p. 174). Standard language can be defined as a “fixed, and correct form of a language against which we can measure a given sample of that language” (Lessow-Hurley, 2005 as quoted in Rodríguez, 2007). MSA is the fixed and correct form of written Arabic while academic speaking Arabic may include both CA and MSA to facilitate discussions of abstract topics. Learning Arabic as a diglossic language may necessitate a shift from the traditional way of teaching Arabic as a classical language akin to Latin and Greek to a communicative-based curriculum (Daugherty, 2011).

A curriculum guided by the ACTFL (2012) standard of *communication, culture, connections, comparison, and community* equals a program that is standards-based and that is inclusive of pedagogy that includes performance tasks such as interpretive, interpersonal and presentational. Standards are useful in clarifying goals and focusing the attention on students’ achievement of reaching functional proficiency level in the target language. Standards may improve instruction by ensuring that high-quality teaching is designed to meet learning expectations. In the absence of standards the risk of using practices akin to those prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa becomes considerable. In such an environment, learning could become teacher-centered, grammar-based, and textbook focused, all of which may diminish the communicative efficacy of teaching Arabic (Taha-Thomure, 2008).

### **Other Opportunities to Strengthen the Heritage Language**

The nuances of home heritage literacy practices on the acquisition of speaking, reading and writing skills have not been examined widely among AHLLs. Home HL has an organic

relationship to HL development. In diasporic situations like those of the participants in this study, home is where HL is primarily found and where it resides (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2009; Szecsi & Szilagyi, 2012). The purpose of this section is to highlight some different facets of this relationship.

In some cases, home HL contributes a limited set of skills that are usually confined to quotidian conversation. In some other situations, HL families invest in developing a wide range of HL skills (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2009; Szecsi & Szilagyi, 2012). There are cases where first-generation parents display more concern with preparing their children for competency in the dominant language, which may result in sidelining HL home practices.

A general concern is attempting to understand if and how home language learning interferes with or supports traditional (in school) language instruction. Jeon's (2008) study of Korean Americans argues that social factors and personal beliefs about HL work together to locate heritage speakers and their families on a "continuum from assimilationist to pluralist [ideologies], and they can shift in response to individual and family life circumstances" (p. 66). In other words, how can ideologies of valuing/devaluing the Arabic language foster the development or loss of a HL. Unfortunately, in mainstream U.S. society, the national assimilationist ideology that fosters an antagonistic view bilingualism sometimes permeates and influences family ideology towards maintaining/strengthening a HL. Families often function under the "common misconception that two languages confuse children, or the belief that studying [HL] will detract resources and energy from learning English, drives many parents to abandon [HL] when their children are still learning English" (Jeon, 2008, p. 67) and as a result, they do not encourage bilingualism in the household.

A number of studies highlight the important role of the home in promoting HLs. In their case study, DeCapua & Wintergerst (2009) illustrate how HL maintenance and development can

be achieved even within a context where they are lacking external language support. For example, a German speaking mother of three children succeeded in this with a supportive yet monolingual American husband. Three strategies were applied: the “one-parent/one-language rule” was a conscious effort to instill not only language skills but also to develop their pride in German culture and develop their sense of identities as German Americans. Second, the family actively exposed the children to cultural materials and environments, and constantly engage with German print and media.

The study of Szecsi and Szilagyi (2012) highlights the same idea. The authors discuss the important role of adult family members in providing language learning materials that can help HL with language acquisition/maintenance. Their role demonstrates the significance of the active involvement in the process as well as the responsibility in selecting and sharing appropriate resources to assist in language learning.

Jensen and Llosa (2007) highlight another way in which families can support language learning via home literacy practices. The authors examine the reading experiences among 128 HLLs enrolled in four different HL programs at UCLA—Korean, Russian, Thai, and Vietnamese. A survey of participants revealed that despite the availability of print materials in many of their homes, less than half of the participants reported that they had been read to in the HL during childhood, with notable differences across the language groups. Half of the participants who reported reading in the HL spent an average of only one hour per week doing so. The study also revealed that about half of the participants assessed themselves as “slow readers,” a perception that the authors indicated that could negatively influence their motivation to read in their HL. These three different studies demonstrate that home HL maintenance by parents and family lies on

a prizm ranging from full commitment (as in the German speaking mother's case) to less commitment, depending on circumstances.

In the case of a diaglosic language like Arabic, HL home language maintenance is foundational to the ability of internalizing Arabic language forms and the proper switching between the various forms of the language. In the home is where children need to be exposed to MSA at an early stage to become familiar with the language of literacy by being read to (Ayari, 1996). In the home is where children begin to experience the language in a mixed form that may resemble the experience of monolingually raised native speakers. In a household, this may happen through the daily exchanges with family and first-generation community members, through the exposure to the sounds and images that come from different ethnic medial sources like TV, internet, Skype, and in everyday family interactions.

Schools, homes, and communities need to collaborate to support HL learning. Schools can enhance home literacy practices; likewise, families can enrich the school curricula. Without such cooperation and collaboration, the loss in language learning competence becomes palpable (Snow, et al., 1991). Coordination between home, school, and community sets an important foundation for language-learning. Parents, teachers, and members of the community need to become aware of the negative social pressures that accompany illiteracy in the HL. Therefore, they need to work together to provide HLLs with opportunities to become literate in English as well as their HLLs (Fillmore, 2000; Jeon, 2008; Moloney & Oguro, 2012).

This phenomenology study of AHLLs' experience questions the taken-for-granted ways of teaching Arabic at Islamic schools and establishes, as a new forum, the voice of a population otherwise left in silence. By using the principles of phenomenological inquiry, this research study attempts to fill a void in the realm of teaching Arabic as a HL at Islamic schools. I want to explore

and understand the process of HL learning for these students and bring their perspectives on this process to light. I want to understand this process in depth, as I believe that the perspectives of the AHLLs themselves are missing from the literature. Moreover, there is a need to better understand their processes and perspectives in order to gain insight into how their language development might be supported across three learning auspices (i.e., home, school, and community).



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

Literature related to heritage languages (HL) masks the nuances and complexity of HL learning, from the perspective of heritage language learners (HLLs), both in homes and in community schools. Yet to my knowledge, explicit empirical analyses of HL learning at the family and community levels regarding high school, second-generation AHLLs in particular, have not been published. The purpose of this study was to understand how eight study participants, who are second-generation, former high school students, raised and taught by first-generation immigrant parents at home and taught by first-generation Arabic teachers at their community schools, have experienced their HL learning. This study inquired into AHLLs' biographical and sociolinguistic contexts in order to understand the participants' needs and experiences with their language learning. Such understanding might offer information that could be beneficial to AHL programs, as they seek to meet the needs and characteristics of this group of learners.

In this chapter, I begin with the selection of the design and methods of analysis in order to understand the participants' experiences and perspectives. Methods and data collection that are based on the chosen theoretical framework will be provided. The procedures for participant recruitment and brief background of the study sites and participants will be mentioned. I end the chapter by outlining data analysis procedures and presenting the reflexivity of the research process.

This study employed qualitative research methods to better understand a phenomenon for which there is a paucity of literature. Through qualitative methods, a researcher attempts to explore and gain more insight on a topic by understanding participants' perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2013) to build to the body of knowledge. Qualitative research can reveal the intimate details of the human experience by delving deeper into the descriptions and

interpretation of lived experiences. The primary goal of this study was to uncover the phenomena of learning experiences and expectations of a group of AHLLs, and how they perceived that their schooling experiences (past and present) helped and/or hindered their Arabic language proficiency. In seeking to understand the learning experiences of AHLLs, this study employed a phenomenological approach that privileged the study participants as the source of the description and definition of the phenomena that emphasized the perspectives of the participants. (Patton, 2002). This paradigm “seeks to uncover multiple realities as they are experienced by individual participants” (Hatch, 2007, p. 225). Considering the perception of second-generation AHLLs, one of my goals of this study was that their views should be highlighted as an area where they contribute in a manner that augments and enhances the HL learning process. Phenomenology, being a subset of qualitative research, allows participants to describe the meaning of their lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Phenomenology emerged initially as a descriptive philosophical method (Sanders, 1982), which is consistent with Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) call to “return to the things themselves” (Crotty, 2013). Sanders declared that the point of phenomenology is “to get straight to the pure and unencumbered vision of what an experience essentially is” (1982, p. 354). This experience may be reached by selection of the data in a way that is applicable to the inquiry of this study. While Heidegger (1889-1976) agrees with Husserl’s declaration, he differs from Husserl in his views of how the lived experience is explored; he advocates for the utilization of hermeneutics as a research method founded on the ontological view that lived experience is an interpretive process (Racher & Robinson, 2003 as noted in Dowling, 2007, p. 133).

In Finlays’ (2009) view, a phenomenological method is “sound” if it can be justifiably linked to literature and methodology historically tied to the subject: “Research is

phenomenological when it involves both rich description of the lived experience, and where the researcher has adopted a special, open phenomenological attitude which, at least initially, refrain from importing external frameworks and set aside judgments about the realness of the phenomenon” (p. 8). In seeking to reveal the essence of the participants’ experiences of learning their HL, their experiences will be “bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essence of the phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 106). In utilizing this methodology, my research was highly descriptive and involved some level of interpretation of the lived experience of the subjects. The following questions guided this research: (1) What is the experience of HL learning for former high school students who enrolled in full-time community schools? (2) How do these students experience their HL learning in their homes and communities?

### **Site Selection**

In this section, I share the process of expanding my research from one site to three sites. My intention at the beginning was to limit my research to one school – the school where I used to work. Then, I recognized that I might end up with a sample of familiar participants, many of whom I had taught previously. This familiarity with the participants and the school setting might have obscured valuable information. As such, I expanded my research sites to include participants from a total of three schools and thereby broadened my sources for data collection. Had I limited my scope to one school, a number of aspects of the learning experience would have been underrepresented. For example, it was only at school B that participants (two in this case) were involved in the Qur’an memorization track; while, in school C the participants came from a program with a dedicated class for HLLs.

Screening for participants was done through established member contacts in two communities. These were different in the size of the ethnic population and the size of the city in

which they were located. The first community was in a smaller urban setting in which only one of the schools was located, which I called school A. The second community was much larger with a substantial Arabic ethnic population thought to be a favorable scenario for HL speakers due to a large immigrant community (Benmamoun, Montrul, Polinsky, 2013). In this community two of the schools, B and C, were located and were in fact across the street from one another. I visited school B and C once in 2007 on a field trip when I was working in school A. All the three schools had large minority student enrollments and a large minority representation among the staff. The reason behind choosing these three schools was the difference in size of the community surroundings as well as the proximity of the schools to the researcher.

### **Three Community Schools: A, B and C**

School A, B, and C catered to grades ranging from pre-kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade and have mostly second-generation, third-generation, and recent-immigrant students from the Middle East. Across the three schools, students from an ethnic minority background comprised 90% of the population. All three schools offered Arabic and Qur'an instruction to all enrolled students, including HLLs and non-HLLs, from kindergarten through twelfth grades. All information about the schools was derived either from the participants themselves or from the schools' websites.

**School A.** School A was a choice school located in a small city in the Midwestern U. S. The school served approximately 600 students, mostly from working and, to a lesser degree, lower middle-class families. School A was the only K–12 Islamic school in the state in which it was located at the time of the study. School A was established in the early 1990s as a community school, and a few years later it became a choice school. I worked at the school for 3 years before it became a choice school and eight years after it changed its status. School A, unlike many Islamic schools, appeared to have plentiful resources, and this was reflected in the expansion: It was the

only school that had two buildings – one for elementary and the other for middle and high school students. High and middle school students in school A shared the same original building with the Islamic center and mosque while the elementary school building was added 10 years ago. School A was coeducational and mixed, with both girls and boys in the same classrooms. Because of their participation in the school choice program, Title 1 services were available in school A but not in schools B and C. Participants from schools B and C reported that the homeroom teachers and English teachers were used to help their students when needed.

Arabic classes in school A were divided into four levels. The first level was for advanced (AD) students, and the fourth level was for the new or novice learners. The second level contained highest in the number of students (approximately 30); and, the first and the third levels each contained about 25 students. The fourth level had a maximum of 10 students. Students had the same teacher for Qur'an and Arabic, but the teacher for Islamic studies was different. From school A, three participants joined the study (i.e., Laila, Amirah and Ahmad).

**School B.** School B was located in a large city in the Midwestern U. S. and served a suburban community of approximately 635 students. It segregated classes by gender within one building. Similar to school A, Arabic classes in school B met for 3 hours per week, and Qur'an classes meet for 2 hours per week. Also, Arabic classes in school B were mixed classes of HLLs and non-HLLs. But, unlike schools A and C, Arabic classes in school B were not divided into four levels; therefore, the participants in school B were not in AD classes. However, Arabic classes in school B had big numbers (i.e., 25–30 students). Unlike school A and C, school B had different teachers for Qur'an, Arabic, and Islamic studies. Three participants joined from school B: Hiba, Latifa and Omar.

**School C.** School C was located in a close proximity to school B, in the same large city in the Midwestern U.S. Both schools C and B served the same suburban community. School C served approximately 600 students. Unlike schools A and B, school C was an all-girl school. Also, similar to school A, Arabic classes in school C were divided into four levels. Unlike schools A and B, Arabic classes at school C met every day. Additionally, students had three Qur'an classes and two Islamic Studies classes weekly. A total of 100 min were dedicated to Arabic, Qur'an and Islamic studies every day. The advanced class in school C had the least number of students ( $n = 7$ ), and the rest of the classes enrolled at least 15 students per level. School C also differed in that AD class was solely for HLLs. Unlike schools A and B, school C had second-generation Arabic teachers for lower-level classes. Two participants joined from school C: Amal and Saleema.

### **Selection of Participants**

Sampling for phenomenological studies must be narrow in the sense that all participants must have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This study consisted of a purposeful criterion sampling of eight participants to describe the subgroup in depth (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Three students were chosen from two schools and two students from one school.

The criteria for choosing the participants were: (1) status as a second-generation immigrant<sup>11</sup> because this group is most often discussed in HL studies that represent the forefront of language shift from the HL to the dominant language (Laleko, 2013); (2) prior enrollment in grade 12 advanced Arabic classes for the 2015, 2014, or 2013 school year (because having multiple

---

<sup>11</sup>According to Silva-Coralan (1994), the children of the first-generation adults are considered second-generation immigrants and may include children born to at least one first-generation parent in the host country or immigrant children who come to host country before the age of 5 years (Montrul, 2013, p. 172).

years to draw from increased the pool of participants and provided an expanded set of experiences); (3) completion of more than 4 years of studying Arabic at the school (as the development of academic literacy typically takes more than four years) (Nichols & Colon, 2000; Rodríguez, 2007); (4) self-reported use of spoken Arabic at home or self-reported status of having been raised in a home where colloquial Arabic was spoken; (5) an age of 18 years or older; (6) self-reports of at least one first-generation immigrant parent who was born in the Middle East and researcher selection of students from different dialectal backgrounds.

### **Recruitment**

Four of the eight participants were recruited by their community members to participate in this study. A second layer of recruitment took place through snowball sampling, a research method in which participants in a study are recruited by other informants (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, four participants were recruited through snowball sampling. When I met the first participant from school A, I asked her if she knew of any other students who might be interested in joining the study. This resulted in two more students joining the study from school A, the smaller community. When I met the first participant from the larger community where the schools B and C were located, I asked her the same question, which led to one of her friends joining the study. Interested participants were instructed to call the researcher via phone to verify their willingness to participate. Later, participants were asked to sign an IRB-approved consent form. I read the consent form to the study participants to ensure understanding before obtaining signatures and provided an opportunity for participants to ask any questions about the form's contents.

Eleven informants volunteered to participate in this study. Eight were female and three were male. Three participants withdrew after the first interview; one participant chose to withdraw and the other two participants were asked to withdraw. The first female participant was very

cooperative during the interview, but she stopped responding to my texts to arrange for the second interview. The second female participant was not in the Arabic advanced class and the third male participant was not deemed “information rich,” due to a pattern of evasive responses. The standard used in choosing participants is whether they were “information rich” (Patton, 1990, as noted in Creswell, 2013, p. 206), and “can give reliable information on the phenomena being researched” (Sanders, 1982, p. 356). In other words, I looked for participants that were capable of articulating their experience with learning a HL and who could express their goals and desires. Status as not information rich determined from community members’ suggestions and from my first formal interview meeting with interested participants.

On August 1, 2015, I started to recruit participants from two communities, the one where I live and where school A is located and the second one almost two hours away where schools B and C are located. I reached out to some community members through email, phone calls or community gatherings, expressing that I was looking for people who were willing to contact potential participants who would be qualified for the study based on the seven criteria stipulated above. Personal contacts were approached and sent an IRB-approved email form along with an IRB-approved recruitment script to distribute to others who might be interested in participating in the study.

The IRB-approved consent form included the following information: study description, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality. The signed consent form was obtained during the first formal interview meeting. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded of their rights as research participants via the interview protocol form that I read which indicates that at any time, participants may withdraw from the study without penalty. Participants were also informed that they had the right not to answer any question if they did



not want to, and they could ask to stop recording at any time. Participants were promised that their true identities would be concealed by assigning them pseudonyms; they were informed that they would not be identified by name in any public papers, and only pseudonyms would be used for the presentation of the findings. The collected data were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Every precaution was applied to safeguard participants' data and information. Communications with participants were handled over texting for the most part, then emails and phone calls. To ensure privacy and security of information, the device I used for texting was password protected, also, the texts were transcribed and deleted from the device afterwards. Participants were not given any compensation for their participation.

Finding participants and carrying out interviews was more manageable at my former school (school A). Within one week of initial contacts, I started the first round of interviews with participants from school A, hoping that more participants would join. I thought I would be able to conduct three rounds of interviews easily, as I was coordinating meeting schedules for all study participants across the three schools. However, there were difficulties in finding participants from school C. I searched vigilantly to find an equal number of participants from the three schools. Ultimately, I interviewed three participants from schools A and B and two participants from school C. I conducted two rounds of formal interviews with participants from schools A and B before I started conducting interviews at school C. From the three schools and eight participants, I gathered a relatively balanced amount of data.

### **Participants from School A**

Laila was the first participant I interviewed in the first week of August. Laila's aunt recruited her. I knew Laila's aunt as a community member. I called her to see if she knew of any former students who might be interested in joining the study. She ended up refereeing her

niece, Laila to me. She spent 12 years at her community school and graduated in 2015. “At 5’9””, Laila has a slim build and long dark hair that hung just above her waist and she always wore jeans and a short-sleeve shirt. She was quiet and spoke in a rather calculated manner, namely by taking her time and choosing her words carefully. Laila was Palestinian American and wanted to study dentistry. She had two sisters and one brother and she was the second child. Her father owned a grocery store and her mother did not work outside the home. Laila was the only female participant without a head scarf.

Participant 2 was Amirah. When I met with Laila, I asked if she knew anybody that would be interested in participating in the study. She reached out to her friends at the university, and two of them, Amirah and Ahmad, called me the same day to arrange for our meetings. Amirah joined her community school in the sixth grade, and graduated in 2014. Amirah stood 5’9” slim and had pale skin and wide, blue eyes and a charming smile. Amirah was also quiet and thought thoroughly about her responses, wanting to be careful and reflective. She wore a white head scarf to every one of our meetings. She had an aura of a princess, one who was elegant, polite and thoughtful. This is why I named her Amirah. The Arabic translation of the word is princess. Amirah was Palestinian American and she wanted to study health care administration and become a hospital manager. Amirah had three younger brothers. Her father was born in the U.S. and then moved to Palestine when he was in fifth grade, returning after he got married. He owned a small business and speaks three languages fluently: Arabic, English and Spanish. Her mother was a stay at home mother.

Participant 3 was Ahmad. Ahmad was recruited by Laila. He joined his community school in the third grade and graduated in 2013. Ahmad was about 5’11” with a heavy-set build. He had short, curly hair and dark brown skin. Despite his large frame, he had very soft features and

a lively and engaging manner. Ahmad spoke fast with vivid details. His family was from Sudan and they arrived to the U. S. when he was 1 year old. He had three brothers, one older than him and two younger. His father owned a small company overseas and his mother worked at a department store. Ahmad was majoring in psychology and was on a pre-med track. For the first interview with Ahmad, and, to a lesser degree, for the second and the third interviews, we spent a few minutes talking before recording. Unlike the other participants who preferred to speak English, Ahmad spoke Arabic; I was using my dialect and Ahmad was using his. For the first few minutes from the moment Ahmad entered my house until the moment I started interviewing him, I felt I was talking to a native speaker of Arabic.

I gave the participants the option to meet at a public space or at my house, they preferred to come to my house. They all chose to come to my house. These participants are somewhat homogenous with respect to parents' educational levels. All of their parents finished high school; however, Ahmad's parents went to a technical college but never finished a degree and Amirah's father finished only one or two years of college. Laila, Amirah, and Ahmad attended the same catholic private university in their state and lived with their parents. Laila and Ahmad had full scholarships while Amirah had an 80% scholarship.

### **Participants from School B**

Participant 1 was Hiba. Hiba was the first participant I interviewed from school B. She was recruited by her mother's friend who was also an acquaintance of mine. Hiba joined her community school in the sixth grade and graduated in 2013. Her family was originally from North-Eastern Syria. Hiba was thin and petite with a very reserved personality. According to Islamic tradition, Hiba wore a long jilbab (coat) and attended a state university where she studied pre-dentistry. She had two sisters and one younger brother and was the third child in

the family. Hiba's father was a physician and her mother had a degree in Islamic Studies. I wanted to interview her because her mother was a Qur'an teacher in her community, and I learned that Hiba was memorizing the Qur'an. Two interviews with Hiba took place at her house and one at a nearby mosque, based upon her request.

Participant 2 was Omar. Omar was recruited by his mother's friend who was herself referred to me by a leader of the Moroccan community (her uncle). I actively sought to have a participant with a North African dialect background in order to gain insight into HL learning experiences from a different part of the Arab world. Omar was an Algerian-American and spent 13 years in his community school before graduating in 2015. At the time of data collection, Omar attended a technical university and he was a biochemistry major. Omar had light brown skin and medium height. He had a stocky frame and short, curly hair. He came to all of our interviews dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. He was the youngest of four, with two brothers and one sister. His father had two master's degrees, one from Algeria and the other from the U.S. but, he worked as a truck driver. Omar's mother had a high school diploma and worked as a teacher aid at his community school. I conducted the first two interviews 20 days apart, after which it was difficult to meet with him for the third interview due to scheduling conflicts. The third interview with Omar was conducted over the phone, while the first two interviews took place at a public location of his choice.

Participant 3 was Latifa. She was recruited by her mother's friend. Latifa spent 13 years in her community school and graduated in 2013. Latifa in Arabic means nice, which describes her perfectly. Our first meeting took place during a snowstorm. I asked her if she could make it despite the weather, and she replied "yes" with an added appreciation for my long travel to meet her. Latifa was also very helpful in her efforts with recruiting others, even though she did not

succeed. Latifa was rather petite and wore a jilbab. She had a knack for connecting the ideas and concepts we talked about in one interview to the next. She attended a public university and was majoring in International Studies. Latifa worked at an Islamic non-profit organization. Her father was from Lebanon and her mother was from Morocco. She had two younger sisters, one younger brother, one older sister and she was the second child in the family. Her father had a doctorate of philosophy in time management and worked as a consultant for various companies. Her mother had an associate's degree and did not work outside the home. Interviews with Latifa took place at a public location. Latifa asked to do two interview sessions in the same day, and then we met four weeks later for the third interview, based on her availability. Latifa and Hiba attended the same university. These participants were homogenous with respect to their fathers' advanced educational levels (i.e., masters or PhD). Latifa and Omar had a partial scholarship, while Hiba had none.

### **Participants from School C**

Amal was the first participant I interviewed from school C. She was recruited by Hiba. She spent 8 years at her community school before graduating in 2014. Amal had fair white skin and a strong presence. She was neither tall nor short, and she asserted herself in a thoughtful way. The first two times we met, she had just finished teaching at her community center and was wearing a black long jilbab, while on our third meeting she sported a casual look. I gave her the name Amal (hope) because of her apparent strength of character. During our first meeting, she expressed her eagerness to participate in the study, with hope that her experience would enrich the study. Originally from Palestine, she was a kinesiology major, studying pre-physical therapy. She also worked at a weekend community school. Her father was an electrical

contractor and her mother taught Qur'an at the community center. Interviews with Amal took place at a public location. Amal had no scholarship.

Participant 2 was Saleema. She was recruited by her mother's relative. She spent 13 years at her community school and graduated in 2013. Saleema had a thin frame and a quiet voice. She was originally from Palestine. She had two brothers and one sister and she was the oldest child in the family. Her father was a physician who was born and raised in the U. S. Her mother had a degree in education from Palestine but did not work outside the home. Saleema was studying Civil Engineering. She lived in university housing, 30 min away from her family. She asked to do the first two interview sessions together, and then we met one week later for the third interview, based on her availability. Interviews with Saleema took place at a public location. Saleema had an 80% scholarship.

Table 1 includes the educational profiles of the participants from the study. Additionally, table 2 includes the participants' family backgrounds.

Table 1

*Participants' Education Profile*

Community Schools	Names	Years of Formal HL Schooling	Year of Graduation	Current Study
School A	Laila	12	2015	Dentistry
	Amirah	7	2014	Healthcare Administration
School B	Ahmad	10	2013	Physician
	Hiba	7	2014	Dentistry
	Latifa	13	2013	English/International studies
School C	Omar	13	2015	Engineering
	Amal	8	2014	Kinesiology
	Saleem	13	2013	Engineering
	-a			

Table 2

*Participants' Family Backgrounds*

Partici- pants	Parents' home country Dad/Mom	Parents' Education Dad/Mom	Parents' Occupation Dad/Mom	Parents' Language spoken
Laila	Palestine	High school	grocery store	Arabic & English
Amirah	Palestine	High school +	Small Business owner	Father Arabic & English & Spanish Mother Arabic & English
Ahmad	Sudan	High school +	Small Business/ department store employee	Father Arabic mother Arabic & English
Latifa	Father Lebanon/ Mother morocco	Father (PhD)/ mother associate degree	Company Consultant	Arabic & English & French
Hiba	Syria	Father MD mother BA	Physician/Q uran teacher	Arabic & English
Omar	Algeria	Father (MS) / mother (high school)	Truck driver/K3 teacher aide	Arabic & English & French
Amal	Palestine	High school	electrical contractor	Arabic & English
Saleema	Palestine	Father (MD)/ mother (BA)	Physician	Arabic & English

**Data Collection and Data Sources**

In line with the phenomenological discipline of inquiry, this study involved detailed and in-depth interviews with AHLLs who had uninterrupted exposure to Arabic. In-depth interviews

of individuals who have experienced a certain phenomenon is considered an appropriate method to gather data about the phenomena within the phenomenological tradition of inquiry (Creswell 2007).

In this study, the interviews were the primary method of collecting data. Interviewing is a technique that allows the researcher to gather in-depth information relating to the participant's perceptions, attitude, past experiences or future views, which may not be gathered from any other research method like direct observation (Patton, 2002). The goal of the interviews was to gain insight into the past and present experiences of using/learning Arabic from the perspective of the participants (Patton, 2002). Although phenomenology may require conducting observations along with interviews (Patton, 2002), some researchers highlighted that phenomenological interviews can be conducted without ever setting foot in a school or home (Hatch, 2007). All interviews in this study were conducted outside of the community school.

The study involved: (1) formal individual interviews; (2) follow-up interviews augmented by data gathered from extensive interview notes; and (3) collection of documents. Participants were asked in the consent letter to volunteer six hours of their time across three formal and follow-up interviews as well as other kinds of communication such as texting, emails, or phone calls.

### **Formal Individual Interviews**

The most appropriate method for gathering data following a phenomenological tradition is to use in-depth interviews which are collected from individuals who have experienced this phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). I conducted three one-on-one, face-to-face, open-ended, semi-structured, formal interviews with each participant (Glesne, 2011; Creswell, 2007). Utilizing semi-predetermined, open-ended questions allowed a space for the flow of conversation to



develop from the interview interaction with each participant (Hatch, 2007). The interpretive researcher “typically seeks to draw the speaker out, much as one would a conversational partner, in order to gain further understanding of the terms being used or the perspective being articulated” (Yanow, 2006, p. 406). The open-ended questions used in these interviews, were thus able to provide a more conversational background from which the participants felt more comfortable to better articulate their point of view. Each interview lasted between 50–60 min. Interviews were conducted over an 8-month period, starting from August 2015 to March 2016.

Insights from the literature, the guiding theoretical frameworks, and the research questions led the way to the interview protocol and provided an interpretive framework for assessing the answers I received. As a result, the general set of questions in each round of interviews was the same for each of the eight participants. In addition, I asked participants to keep journals reflecting upon on the interviews if they wanted to but none of them participated in the exercise.

Creswell (1994) suggests the following guidelines: (1) pose questions that use non-directional wording; (2) use open-ended questions without reference to the literature or theory; (3) use a single focus and ask for concrete details (as noted in Seganti, 2010, p. 973); and (4) withhold judgments and refrain from debating with participants about their views (Creswell, 2013, p. 222). The interview questions were categorized by topic (Patton, 2002). In the first and second interviews, the topics included questions about the participants’ HL background, usage, perception, identity and attitude. In the third interview, I asked specific questions about the participants’ HL learning at their community schools.

The focus of the interviews was not about the participants’ listing their past experiences and events but rather about their opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward their HL learning

experiences in the past, present, and the future. After the first round of interviews, and before conducting subsequent interviews, I read the interview transcription and my notes to consider any modifications. Reviewing the transcription helped me ask follow-up questions derived from the previous interviews in preparation for the next formal interview.

### **Follow-up Interviews**

The purpose of the informal interviews/conversations was to keep a channel of communication open if there was a question or a need to revisit issues or comments that were discussed in formal interviews sessions (Patton, 2002). There were two kinds of follow up interviews; one was used as clarification for statements made during the formal interviews, which took place before or after conducting the formal interviews. Participants were consulted for further elaboration and clarification via texting or email. The other was a follow-up interview that I conducted with each of the participants when I was done with the three rounds of the formal interviews. This interview lasted 50–60 minutes.

This last phase of follow-up interviews took place face to face with participants from school A and over the phone with participants from school B and C based on the participants' availability and preference. One of the participants from school C chose to conduct this interview over email. The formal follow-up interview for each participant was conducted in order to get the participant's opinion on issues that were raised by other interviewees during the interview process and were not included in the interview questions. For all interviews, I asked for permission to audio-record to preserve the originality of the participants' words. Follow-up interviews were documented as they occurred and were included in the data.

In total, nearly 25 hours of audio-recordings of formal interviews were transcribed by hand. Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed with note taking of non-verbal

and paralinguistic communications and forwarded to the participants before conducting the following interview. This process is discussed by Hycner (1985) to capture the natural interaction between interlocutors. I took brief notes on the spot right after conducting interviews. Later, after each interview and before conducting the following interview, I made time to produce expanded accounts of the condensed notes both descriptive (what I observed) and analytic (how I interpret their answers). Interviews were conducted in places the participants felt comfortable and were conducted in the language in which the participants felt comfortable (Glesne, 2011). The participants primarily chose to use English with occasional, brief and quick exchanges in Arabic.

Participants were rather cooperative with scheduling. Each formal interview round lasted for two to three weeks and then I had to wait for almost two months to find the second participant from school C. For participants from school A, I conducted one interview per day of interviewing. As for participants from school B and C, I conducted an average of two interviews per day of interviewing and once three interviews. However, sometimes I traveled to conduct one single interview. I travelled on Saturdays a total of 10 times to collect data from participants in schools B and C.

Table 3

*Interview Schedules*

Participants' Names	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Follow-up Interviews
Laila	8/4/2015	8/17/2015	9/7/2015	1/12/2016
Amirah	8/7/2015	8/14/2015	8/28/2015	1/13/2016
Ahmad	8/10/2015	8/18/2015	9/5/2015	1/14/2016
Hiba	8/19/2015	9/6/2015	9/26/2015	3/13/2016

Omar	9/6/2015	9/26/2015	1/10/2016	3/13/2016
Latifa	11/21/2015	11/21/2015	12/31/2015	3/2/2016
Amal	9/19/2015	9/26/2015	10/24/2015	2/20/2016
Saleema	12/23/2015	12/23/2015	12/31/2015	3/2/2016

---

### **Documentary Evidence**

Documents present valuable information in helping researchers understand central phenomena but need permission to be used (Creswell, 2013, p. 223). Documents may provide both contextual and historical dimensions to the interviews (Glesne, 2011). In this study, documents were limited due to the fact that participants already graduated from their school and had nothing to share. Instead, I utilized participants' schools' website information to gather information on their schools and programming offering. Other documents used included samples of their texts in Arabic, along with my own journals and notes. This study yields different kinds of responses: oral interviews, texting, and emails.

### **Data Analysis**

In this study, careful and patient examination of the collected information was accomplished by reading, re-reading and pondering the data in order to construct a narrative that provides an integrated picture of the experiences of the participants that attempts to bring into view the essence of the lived experience of HL learning for the study participants as a group and as individuals. Doing this analysis by hand rather than using computer software program allowed for a more "real" analysis and an opportunity for me to truly understand my participants' experiences.

Aanalysis of interview data was performed according to Hycner's (1985) guidelines and utilized a phenomenological approach. Hycner's approach provides 15 steps to analyze interview data. These are: (1) transcribing interviews; (2) bracketing, which means listening to and reading the interview transcripts with an openness to whatever meanings emerged; (3) listening to the interview and reading the transcript several times to get a sense of the whole; (4) delineating units of general meaning; (5) delineating units of meaning relevant to the research questions; (6) verifying the units of relevant meaning with independent judges; (7) eliminating redundancies; (8) clustering units of relevant meaning; (9) determining themes from clusters of meaning; (10) writing a summary for each individual interview; (11) returning to the participants with the summary and themes; (12) modifying themes and summary; (13) identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews; (14) contextualizing themes; and (15) composing a summary (pp. 280–292). With the exception of step 11, where I sent the actual interview transcripts not the summary and themes, these steps took place as part of preliminary and formal analysis.

Preliminary analysis began before data collection ended, and the analysis relied on verifying general meaningful units from the interview transcriptions then applying constant comparative methods to verify general meaning units that were relevant to the research questions. Hycner defines a unit of general meaning as “those words, phrases, non-verbal or para-linguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning” (p. 282) First, I recorded the meaning units on the margins of the interview transcriptions. An example of meaningful units that was recorded in one of the interviews are the following: ‘Some dialects are not foreign to me’, ‘some dialects I do not understand’, ‘media helps to make specific dialects familiar’. Second, I identified codes from the relevant meaning units, or what Hycner

called “clusters of relevant meanings,” and then clustered those codes allowing for an early identification of the most salient themes.

I worked with the participants’ own words and descriptions, from all the interview transcription by re-organizing the meaningful units into codes and possible emergent themes. This procedure was repeated with every interview transcript. Once all interviews were completed, transcribed and coded, I listened to them in their entirety several times and I read and re-read the interview transcriptions and codes multiple times and looked for more codes that emerged from or were present in the subsequent readings. Then I tabulated the interview data of each participant to each interview question.

Next, my analytical memos were coded the same way and utilized to capture the emergence of more possible codes. I began the final phase of analysis, starting with formal interviews and moving on to the follow-up interviews. Later, the entire body of coded data from the documents and the analytical and descriptive memos were included. I constantly compared codes and thought about their relationships to each other and to guiding theories, which helped me create a sense of the whole and began the process of identifying the final sets of themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The entire data categories were constantly compared with the categories that were formed initially as a start list based on the conceptual framework of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which were the following: (1) indications of identity; (2) modes of HL use at home and community; (3) modes of HL use at school; (4) indications of perceptions and attitudes towards HL development; and (5) indications of suggestions and future plans towards HL development. The comparative method of identifying categories was used within each individual participant’s data and among the three schools to come up with more specific categories. At this point, “the analyst examines each item of data coded in terms of a particular category, and notes its similarities with

and differences from other data that have been categorized in the same way” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 165). I constantly reviewed the data, searching for cases that challenged these initial categories based on an ongoing analysis of empirical data. Some of the codes, which did not directly address the research questions, were discarded. Wolcott’s (1994) describes this stage as a “painful task” when he explains that the trick “is to discover essences and then to reveal those essences with sufficient context, yet not become mired trying to include everything that might possibly be described” (as cited in Glesne, 2011, p. 226). For example, while reviewing my notes or the participants’ interview transcription, it was indeed difficult to cast aside some specific information or comments even though they did not relate to the research questions.

### **Codes**

Fifty-nine relevant categories were identified and listed under four themes: (1) HLL: identity and language attitude; (2) HL contact at home, in the community, and in the community school; (3) challenges of Arabic language learning; and (4) learning Arabic as a communicative language. Table 4 includes the 22 identified categories.

Table 4

#### *Codes Regarding Studying Arabic at the School*

Codes
1. AD classes
2. Learning goals
3. Methods of instruction
4. Modified instruction
5. Compare learning Arabic/English
6. Instructional materials
7. Appropriate materials
8. Consistency in materials

- 
9. Book-based instruction
  10. Book-based curriculum
  11. Language input/output
  12. Using background knowledge
  13. Distribution of control
  14. Memorable units
  15. Integration
  16. Classroom learning environment
  17. Methods of assessment
  18. Learning Qur'an
  19. Learning grammar
  20. Arabic teacher
  21. Mixed classes
  22. Promoting proficiency at the school
- 

### **Establishing Trustworthiness and Credibility in the Research Process**

According to Creswell (2007, 2013), in order for data analysis in any qualitative study to be considered trustworthy and valid, many strategies need to be utilized. The researcher needs to build trust with participants, use multiple and different sources, methods, techniques, including member checking, reflexivity, and peer review. In accordance with this methodology, I recorded the formal and the follow-up interviews. Recording was useful because it preserved the originality of the participants' words and allowed me to accurately relive the participants' stories by reflecting on what was said during the interviews. To increase the consistency and reliability of the study, I attempted to ask participants the same questions and to keep a journal reflecting on their thoughts and mine regarding the interview questions throughout the study.



Participants were asked to reflect on their learning experience at their former community schools. Taking into consideration the passage of time, nevertheless, the “advantage is that a retrospective viewpoint may actually allow a much fuller verbal description because the participant has had an opportunity to reflect back on the experience and to integrate it consciously and verbally” (Hycner, 1985, p. 296). Hycner also suggested that checking the findings against the current literature may aid in validating the study. Indeed, when I checked the study findings against the literature, I was amazed by the degree of similarity between the literature and what the participants had discussed and suggested.

The transcribed interviews were “member checked” by the participants. Member checking the data involves providing the participants with transcripts of their formal interviews and verifying that the transcribed interviews actually represent what the participants wanted to say. To ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of the translation, I hired a heritage speaker of Arabic who is fluent in Arabic and English to go over the transcribed interviews and to transcribe some interviews when I was short of time.

To further enhance trustworthiness, I asked two willing peer reviewers to go over my study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined the role of the peer reviewer as “an individual who keeps the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Reviewer 1 was a graduate student who teaches in the Arabic program at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and reviewer 2 was a former colleague from the community school where I used to teach. Reviewer 2 received her Master of Arts (M.A.) in Education and is the mother of two AHLLs. They helped me to reorganize the findings and analysis. For example, I considered curricular standards that more closely line up

with a Language Arts curriculum to be used with HLLs, the second reviewer noted that Language Art curriculum revolves heavily on writing skills which was the skill, among the four language skills, that the participants were least concerned with.

### **Reflexivity of the Researcher**

Being self-reflective and self-critical when analyzing and interpreting the data enhanced the potential credibility of the study by presenting an accurate account of what the study revealed or failed to reveal (Walcott, 1994). Glesne (2011) explains that reflexivity requires thought, not just about personal tales of research problems and achievements but also about the researcher's position in the study as this position might open up or restrict the possibility of new understandings.

I view my research through two lenses. First is the personal lens and second is the lens of social justice. To address the personal lens, I drew on my past teaching experience at school A. I developed great affection and concern for all students during my 10 years of teaching which ended in 2007. School A was established as a community effort. A number of families, including my own, were eager to combine education provided in other school settings, with a dose of cultural and religious instruction, in an attempt to relate our heritage and faith to our children.

I also view my research through a social justice lens, connected to the linguistic human rights. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) stated, "One of the basic linguistic human rights of persons belonging to minorities is—or should be—to achieve high levels of bi- or multilingualism through education" (p. 569). The students have the right to become competent learners in their HL if they desire to. Undoubtedly, the lenses I view my research through are derived from the care and emotion I hold towards community school students. I hope this study will contribute to the fostering of a new vision that might lead to positive change.

In this study, I am an insider as a community member and as a former teacher in a community school, although I am not currently part of any full-time community schools in any capacity. Being an insider might carry the risk of being more “ethno-narcissistic” where the researcher focuses as much on the self as on the other (Glesne, 2011, p. 243). For example, although at times, I was tempted to share my own experience teaching HLLs with my participants, I decidedly stayed quiet. Glesne, also notes how a researcher might use “a confessionnal tale” (Van Maanen, 1988) to create a rich narrative rather than an ethno-narcissistic story. Mitigating the risk of being ethno-narcissistic could be achieved by using the participant voice, using different types of data collection, utilizing the data to share the narrative, creating analytic memos and journals, having peer reviewers, engaging in member-checking, and conducting an ethical study and employing self-revelation in offering a clear account of the research. It is a careful balancing act that requires knowing who we are and what we know and, at the same time, stepping out of ourselves to garner a different perspective.

The study was shaped to some extent by my assumption that participants consider competency in Arabic to be their desired goal. Gilgun (2010) states, “Reflexivity is the idea of awareness—that researchers are reflexive when they are aware of the multiple influences they have on research processes and on how research processes affect them” (p. 1). I am aware that my experience as an Arabic instructor, my identity as a native speaker of Arabic, my concerns as a mother of three HLLs and my values considering learning HLs as linguistic human rights may affect the research design. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that my interpretations of the participants are to some degree grounded in my personal and professional experiences and perspectives as a former Arabic teacher in a community school.

Similarly, Patton (2002) highlighted the utility of the researcher's familiarity with the studied phenomenon and viewed it to be advantageous. While considering my approach of this study, my familiarity with the subject matter, both as a former teacher in community schools, and hailing from the same background as the participants to be of utility in the sense suggested by Patton, I hope to employ culturally mindful phenomenological methods when engaging with this study. Phenomenology "treats culture with a good measure of caution and suspicion" (Crotty, 2013, p. 71). The approach in this study is keenly mindful of the fact that culture can be both enabling and limiting at the same time; it can both illuminate and obfuscate simultaneously. As I seek to contextualize and understand, phenomenology demands that we do not "take the notions we have learned for granted, but to question them instead, to question our way of looking at and our way of being in the world" (Wallace & Wolff, 2005, p. 262).

### **Reflexivity in the Research Process**

The study employed criterion-based procedures for the selection of participants. My choice of the participants took into consideration their history and attachment to their community Islamic schools, for example, being in the school for more than four years. Also, my choice rested on the participants' ability to articulate their experiences. My choice of the participants was not based on personal relationship, easy access or mutual perspectives. In order to ensure that, participants were recruited by community members or among themselves. In addition to being familiar with the participants' culture and language, I was nevertheless aware of the age and proficiency differences between us. These differences might provoke shyness in the participants or compel them to say what they think I would like to hear. I was mindful that "reflexivity is situating the researcher as non-exploitative and compassionate toward the research subjects" (Berger, 2015, p. 3). Assuring confidentiality, and giving the participants the right to choose the time and the place to be

interviewed, listening carefully and expressing interest and attention to their words enhanced their level of comfort and reliability of what they had to say and helped to dissolve possible lingering suspicion or shyness and aided in creating a responsible yet comfortable atmosphere throughout the interviews. I attempted to be attentive to the possible sensitive nature of respondents when asking certain questions. For instance, I refrained from asking questions whether the participants know each other or if they were talking about the same teacher.

Although six of the participants I had never met before and time was not available to build rapport prior to the first interviews, providing brief information about the study and being friendly and respectful seemed to provide a relaxed atmosphere during data collection and helped to mitigate the feeling of being a stranger. I felt comfortable with them and they seemed relaxed and willing to share their stories. Most of them were very open from the first interview and two of them were more relaxed in the second interview. Participants already graduated from their former high schools and were therefore not bothered sharing their experiences. Participants seemed to me to be open, honest, and constructively critical yet they were also respectful of their parents, community members and community schools.

The study was heavy on description in keeping with the phenomenological theory and methodology. Nevertheless, the purpose of interpretive research in general is “to increase understanding, not to pass judgment” (Glesne, 2011, p. 236). However, I made every effort to keep my aim of bringing forth the participants’ views and to work at finding ways to relate them with straightforwardness. I diligently isolated interpretive opinions from the actual data collected and the descriptions of the participant’s experiences. Also, I stayed alert for any contradictions in the participants’ responses that became apparent while collecting data. If I came across any doubt, I asked participants for clarification.

Throughout the study, I provided very vivid and detailed descriptions of the participants' HL learning that may enable readers to live the experience. Description is by its very nature, a selective process; this fact alone makes it challenging to guard against researcher's bias. Wolcott (1994) hinted at this problem. In his view accounts produced by researchers "are filtered through their own perceptions" (p. 13). To combat this, Wolcott recommended rich descriptions, including numerous details, to add a degree of credibility to a study, making events more real and more believable.

In reporting conclusions and claims, I attempted not to report findings as an "absolute truth," rather to recognize the unexplored responses to the questions the study asked. Wolcott's (2009) advice is that "we need to guard against the temptation to offer satisfying, simple, single-cause explanations that too facilely appear to solve the problems we pose. Human behavior is complexly motivated. Our interpretations should mirror that complexity rather than suggest that we have the capacity to infer 'real' meanings" (p. 70). Also, I attempted to maintain respect for those who allowed me and later readers to be part of their stories. Rossman and Rallis (2003) remind researchers that: "your political sensitivity shapes your choice of presentation. Just as the entire research process has been conducted, the final report (whatever form it takes) is completed with deep interpersonal and ethical sensitivity. You are careful that your findings do not deliberately hurt anyone" (p. 332). In other words, it was a concern of mine to point out any shortcomings in the schools, home or community; the focus instead was to highlight the experiences of the participants in their HLL settings. In order to maintain an ethical study, I practiced the role of self-reflexivity in all the step of the research process. To maintain fairness, I chose a methodology and methods of collecting data that aided in highlighting the experiences of eight AHLLs. No doubt, such choices have their strength and limitations. One of the

limitation is that the findings might be applied only to the participants from each school. Yet, if this study “illuminate[s] to some significant degree, the “world” of the participants, then that in itself is valuable” (Hycner, 1985, p. 295).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

This study examines the heritage language (HL) experiences of eight American-born, second-generation Arabic heritage language learners (AHLLs) who are the children of first-generation immigrant parents. Through qualitative research, this study seeks to contribute to the field of AHLL by exploring how former high school students of AHL experience and perceive learning their HL in their homes, community, and full-time community (Islamic) schools. Four major themes were found relating to the above study questions: (1) HL learning: identity and language attitude; (2) HL contact at home, in the community, and at the full-time community school; (3) challenges of learning Arabic; and (4) learning Arabic as a communicative language. Theme identification and pattern recognition across data sets that are associated with specific research questions are important to the description of a phenomenon, and constitute one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research. Examination of these four themes may provide a more nuanced understanding of AHLLs' experiences and shed light on issues raised by the research questions.

In this chapter, I review the four descriptive themes to gain adequate information about the participants. My intention is to make the voices of the participants audible through the use of direct quotes, focusing on the participants' experiences and perspectives.

#### **Participants' Backgrounds**

All of the study participants are second-generation students who were born in the U. S. with the exception of Ahmad who came to the U. S. at the age of 1. For every participant, at least one parent was born and raised in an Arabic country. Participants reported having traveled to their heritage country regularly (n = 6) or having visited their heritage country at least once (n = 2). All



had no experience attending school in their heritage country. All were university students ( $M = 20$  years), and lived in their parents' households while attending college. Participants were sequential bilinguals: Arabic was their dominant language until age 4. They received between 7 to 13 years of formal schooling at their full-time community schools. No participants were studying Arabic in any formal setting during data collection.

### **Heritage Language Learning: Identity and Language Attitude**

Heritage language researchers (Chinen & Tucker, 2005; Tse, 1998-1999) highlight the relationship between HL learning, self-identity, language attitude and note that sociological factors such as attachment or rejection to the heritage community may play a role in the motivation to maintain the HL. The interview data provide insights into the participants' attitudes towards Arabic and their opinions on the relationship between language and identity. For example, the Arabic language connects Hiba to her religious and ethnic identity, providing her with a sense of self-fulfillment. Hiba states, "Even though I talk English more than Arabic, Arabic is definitely more important, "I feel like it reminds me of who I am and who I'm supposed to be." Arabic is seen here as the primary means of constructing an Arab cultural identity in the U.S. Participants expressed a positive viewpoint in making the connection between the Arabic language and being Arab. For the study participants, the Arabic language connects them to their roots. Arabic for Amal is "extremely important in the sense that, this is my background, this is my heritage, and this is what makes me different than everybody else."

Other participants saw several other benefits in learning/maintaining the language. For example, Laila thought that Arabic was more universal than English, and the Arabic language helped her gain a greater sense of connection with other cultures. According to her, "I love Arabic and knowing that it's, from like, the Middle East, it's easier for you to learn other languages," she

continues, “like the way Spanish is similar, Turkish is similar, I think even like, like for Serbians, like it’s similar too ... so it’s all the same.” Whether it be for cultural, religious, practical, or aesthetic reasons, this positive attitude toward their heritage language is consistent with other studies that have shown that most second-generation Muslim-Arab Americans consider Arabic to be an element of primary importance for how they identify themselves ethnically as Arabs and religiously as Muslims (Albirini, 2014b; Rouchdy, 2013).

Participants’ positive attitudes toward the Arabic language aligns with their positive attitudes toward their heritage culture. Omar noted, “As a culture that carries a great history even though our name is now tarnished if people were to look into our past they would also begin to appreciate the greatness of our culture.” For Ahmad, Arabs historically contributed to world civilization; they were pioneers in math, medicine, science and much more. It is clear that most of the participants have a positive attitude towards their HL, which, in turn, may motivate them to maintain their HL (Tse, 1998).

Many participants identified themselves as having hyphenated identities. However, participants identified themselves as Muslim-Americans or Arab-Americans first. Most of the study participants tended to privilege their religious identity over identities tied to their ethnic or national background. Amirah reported, “I first identify as a Muslim because um, I identify with my religion first, then as an American because I was born and raised in America and as Palestinian because of my roots.” Although many students hyphenated their identities, Arabic was fervently expressed as “part of who they are,” and as “the language of Qur’an.” For example, Amirah noted that “not only is [Arabic] the language of the Qur’an, ‘cause you have to know Arabic to read the Qur’an, but um... it’s where I’m from, it’s my roots. So, like, if I ever wanna go back home, I’m supposed to know Arabic ... It’s still a very important, um, part of my life.” Amirah expressed an

emotional connection with Arabic. “I always keep it with me even if I graduate college I’ll continue to study it.” Thus, participants value the Arabic language as part of both their religious and ethnic identity.

When asked how they feel when identified as an Arab, participants were comfortable identifying themselves as such. Hiba was the participant who gave the most emphatic response to questions related to identity. She responded, “It’s correct to say that I’m Arab because it’s what I am, it’s where I’m from, so I’m from an Arab country.” From Hiba’s own words and further analysis of her interview data, it becomes evident that she wants to identify more as “Arab” than “American” and these feelings propel her desire to continue learning Arabic in a more proficient level, such as learning to read and understand academic and religious texts.

The study’s participants viewed Arabic as an integral aspect of their self-concept and self-image, augmented with feelings of obligation, uniqueness and prestige (Alarcón, 2010; Comanaru & Noels, 2009). They described the knowledge of Arabic as an ideal self where this self might be a powerful motivator to maintain the HL. This could be due to a “desire to reduce the discrepancy between it and the current self” (Kurata, 2015, p.115).

Amirah valued Arabic not just for its religious and cultural value but also because of its beauty and depth as a language. According to Amirah, Arabic is “one of the most beautiful languages.” She adds, “When you speak in Arabic, like, you can let your emotion out more so than you can do in, like, while speaking English.” Similar to Amirah, Amal noted that Arabic is more expressive than English. According to her, “There is only a certain – you can only get so much out of the English language – and the Arabic language, there's so much deeper meaning to the words, and it's just completely than that, so the Arabic language, I really connect to it and, you feel more with it.”

Several participants noted that Arabic was essential for maintaining and fostering their ethnic identity for themselves as well as future generations. For Omar, “The only worry I have,” he says, “is my kids not being able to teach them as well as I want ‘cause I might not know all the words or I might speak too much English at home.” Similarly, Laila says “It’s on us, if we don’t speak Arabic and we don’t practice it, the language dies off...and we need to have the language and the culture.”

Participants considered bilingualism to be better than monolingualism and to offer additional benefits to the speakers (Jeon, 2008). Bilingualism makes people more open minded. “Like it helps you understand things from different points of view,” Saleema stated. “Being a bilingual is a bonus. You understand things more,” Amirah noted. Latifa thought learning another language expands one’s worldview, “For sure. Because when you learn a language you also learn a culture and you learn like, a history of that language.”

When asked how important HL was compared to English, Omar responded, “that's a tough question, um, I don't know, in- in the- in America I'd put English uh, first, but since, since there's religion, uh, since, since the, I'm Muslim, it's really difficult to say that ... but to get by, yeah English, English is probably the more important one.” Omar, gave an example of a time when he found Arabic more helpful than English. It was when he visited Turkey: “I spoke in Arabic and it was a lot more helpful, because- compared to English. They knew a little bit of Arabic so they could catch on to some words, but when I went to Saudi Arabia I knew how to speak a little bit of Arabic so everyone understood. So, it... it connects, it connects a lot of countries and a lot of people. It makes it very useful.”

When asked the same question, Latifa claimed that English is very important and she is comfortable with her level of proficiency, so she feels she needs to focus more on Arabic. “English

I'll always have because I was raised here and I studied literature, so it's gonna for sure, inshallah I won't lose it, so my focus is more on Arabic because it's something that I feel like is slipping away- I need to hold on to it.”

The positive attitude towards their HL that most participants have today did evolve as they became older. Most participants, in fact, noted a change of attitude towards using their HL from the perception of it being too traditional, and in some instances, feeling “not cool,” specifically in middle school, to later, after high school, feeling good and proud when speaking Arabic (Jeon, 2008). Latifa explained how her use of Arabic changed, “Middle school I would say it was kinda weird, no one ever spoke Arabic to each other, ever, but now that I'm older, like my friends sometimes, we might make comments in Arabic. And it's considered like, you know it's considered cool or good.” The participants acknowledged a correlation between their evolving positive attitude toward Arabic with a greater desire to maintain their heritage language as they got older. On other words, it seems that there is a relationship between attitude toward language learning and level of awareness about one’s own identity for AHLLs. This change in attitude towards their HL is consistent with a previous study of Chinese (He, 2006), Japanese (Chinen & Tucker, 2005) and Korean (Jeon, 2008; Yi, 2008) HLLs. Researchers noted an increased and a more mature sense of ethnic identity among older HLLs (Chinen & Tucker, 2005). This is also consistent with Tse’s (1998) model of ‘ethnic identity development’ stages, HLLs during their late high school years are in an “Ethnic Emergence” stage.

### **Attitudes toward Formal/Informal Arabic**

There seemed to be considerable consistency across the participants in terms of their views on what the Arabic language represents: the spoken form has the marker of an ethnic identity and standard Arabic (both Quranic Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic) has the marker of Arab-

Muslim identity (Albirini, 2014b, Rouchdy, 2013). Participants asserted that both formal (MSA) and informal Arabic (CA) are important and necessary.

Latifa explained; “In general, the people value more who speak Arabic in the first place—that’s like culturally. And then, religiously like it’s, being part of like a lot of organizations, they really stress like knowing Arabic knowing the context of certain religious things within language.” However, it is clear that the HL instruction that the participants experienced did not come up to the level of fulfilling their needs. It is clear from the participants’ statements that they are fully aware of the place of Arabic forms in their social and religious universe, and have developed a sense of language needs based on that.

Omar reported that informal Arabic (CA) “is more important to me because I use it more, but in, like, the bigger picture, the formal dialect’s more important because that’s where the hadith [prophetic traditions] are written and that’s what all religious books are written in; it’s more useful.” Ahmad reported that informal is a bit more useful, because modern standard Arabic (MSA) is used in certain “professional situations, um, you know, like, news, whatever, work. That’s like, but if you’re going to an Arab country, or, like, you’re put there, knowing the formal probably won’t get you around as much, but if you know the informal, you can definitely get around and you can definitely understand a lot better.” What’s clear from both Omar and Ahmad are the conjoining spheres of language use. Omar brings forth the necessity to be familiar with formal Arabic if one is to reference printed material, while Ahmad makes clear that such familiarity, devoid of knowledge of CA, will make it difficult to “get around.”

Amirah felt frustrated that her native dialects were discounted among speakers of other dialects. Amirah reported,

during the beginning I used to speak in English but after that when I start picking up on not fallahi [meaning madani], then I start speaking with my peers and even to the point where some of my peers they never even, like, my new peers, they never knew that I even speak fallahi or come from like a village.

Amirah perceives her own dialect or “fallahi” to be a pivotal aspect of her identity because she “grew up with the dialect that’s gonna be part of me regardless.” Her family wants her to speak fallahi everywhere but she feels that she needs to know both fallahi and madani<sup>12</sup>. She has to speak fallahi for her self-identity and to please her parents because her parents “grew up there in the village, they feel like you should at least respect where you come from, your culture.”

Amirah was also convinced that she should learn to speak madani, “[because] people look down at [fallahi] and a lot of people like laugh at us.” In spite of that, fallahi sounds normal to her, regardless of her awareness that it is generally regarded by some not to be “ladylike.” Although she noted that fallahi is not proper Arabic, she is at ease with its importance and as a result she is more proficient in speaking fallahi than non-fallahi, or formal Arabic. Laila, on the other hand, likes her dialect. She says, “It is soft, nice, and feminine” because, as she noted, she speaks madani and not fallahi. Some language forms or, for our purposes here, dialects<sup>13</sup> are valued and possess “symbolic capital,” while others are stigmatized (Pereira, 2015). Amirah exercises agency in her linguistic choices when she chooses to use madani around non-fallahi speakers, even though it goes against her parents’ wishes.

---

<sup>12</sup> Fallahi and madani are registers for the village and city dialects of Arabic, respectively. The designation is mainly Palestinian; other cultures (Egyptian, Syrian) have similar registers that at times use different markers following the geographic area rather than the general city, village marker. In all situations, fallahi, or village dialect is marked with less prestige due to its distance from the developed cities of the country where madani is used.

<sup>13</sup> Like Fallahi and Madani as above.

Latifa is the only participant who speaks a dialect that is neither her mother's nor her father's native dialect. Her father speaks what she called "universal shami" which is a mix of Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian dialects. Although her father is from northern Lebanon, he speaks his native northern Lebanese dialect only with his Lebanese friends or relatives overseas. Her mother is from Rabbat, the capital of Morocco. When her parents got married, her mother chose to speak shami with her father so they could understand each other, and her mother "finds it easier, like she's very good with language, so she took the dialect right away. So she raised us kind of speaking Shami.<sup>14</sup> "

Latifa explained that because they live among Palestinians and Syrians, her family uses the shami dialect. She reported drawing upon other dialects to avoid standing out. She developed somewhat of a skill of accommodating, speaking different dialects with particular people. She speaks more Lebanese when she is around Lebanese people, more Syrian around Syrians, and more Palestinian around Palestinians. "I don't wanna sit there and have them analyze my accent, I just wanna convey a message." This could be an indicator of ethnic awareness or even responsivity. Latifa, knows that certain dialects and accents presumably carry meaning or ignite assumptions in minds of different listeners. However, to her credit, the ability to switch dialects is something that is difficult to do even for residents of native lands where Arabic is spoken. But in doing this, she fell into a sort of "Identity crisis."

Not speaking a dialect specific to her background has had consequences, "I don't have, like, a language identity in Arabic as much as I do in English." When Latifa talks to Lebanese people, for example, they would know right away that she is not fully Lebanese. The same happens when she is around Moroccans. Latifa attempts to use her "multi-dialectal package" (Albirini,

---

<sup>14</sup> Mostly Syrian dialect



2014a). However, she does not perceive that she knows one dialect better than the other; rather, she knows a little bit of various dialects. Her family in Lebanon expected her to know 100% Lebanese. They thought that she was not “holding well enough” to her roots as a Lebanese. However, for Latifa communicating in her HL was more about self-consciousness or an image of self-inadequacy. This holds true for other participants. It seems that AHLLs who come from specific dialect background experience extra struggles when attempting to communicate within a diasporic speech community.

Some participants have misconceptions of the functional use for both CA and MSA, and displayed contradictory responses indicating misunderstanding of sociolinguistic issues. Hiba noted, “I feel like it's more important to speak fusHa [MSA] because it's the original language of Arabic.” She wants for her parents to speak to her in MSA and prefers it over her native dialect. When I asked if she prefers to use MSA when she talks to people, her response was, “No.”

Laila thought that she should talk formally to people older than her because it shows respect. In her mind, respect is conflated with proper use of the language: “Like I could go to my younger sister and I could speak informal; it's fine. But, then, when it comes to, like, my grandmother or something, I should speak formal; but, I'm obviously going to speak informal because it's my grandma, and it's easier.” She is negotiating between “shoulds” and “cans” – what's expected/respected and what's feasible/manageable. Saleema thought it is important to keep the dialect because it is part of her culture. But it is “more important that we remember that there's a proper way to say things compared to how we speak. Um, but it's just easier I think, I don't know, like a daily basis to speak in dialect.” This confusion could be the result of the incessant exaltation of MSA by native speakers and formal Arabic as the “proper” language, and lack of sociolinguistic awareness on the part of AHLLs. Although most participants acknowledged the value of MSA and

Qur'anic Arabic as part of their religious identity, all understood the impossibility of solely using MSA. Thus, they feel a need to resort to CA for its comfort, ease and familiarity.

However, most participants did not degrade spoken Arabic dialects, nor did they refer to dialects as a threat to MSA or the presence of one at the expense of the other. This attitude may differ markedly from that of most native speakers who may feel that CA is a threat to Modern Standard Arabic (Cott, 2009). Laila noted, "I've realized we don't, we don't use proper, we just use slang just because, it's easier and you could say that's the universal Arab language. The dialect of course, that's the language. The proper I think you just learn it in universities or something." Laila does not object to learning MSA in school but she feels that Arabic is what Arab people use and not only what they are supposed to learn in a formal educational setting. Changing attitudes and increasing awareness to embrace the vibrancy of language is important.

From the discussion above, it becomes clear that the participants feel that both MSA and CA are needed, and that they have acquired proficiency in neither. Amal, like most of the participants, desires to acquire communicative competence in Arabic, "I love Arabic, and I love speaking it." Here again, the desire to speak Arabic was not realized by only learning Qur'anic Arabic or MSA. As this study is arguing, such desire will only be realized by also acquiring the spoken Arabic used on a daily basis.

Most participants seem to recognize the relationship between their dialect and MSA. Saleema, Hiba, and Ahmad thought CA helps because it is not completely separate from MSA; it is still connected to it in some ways. Ahmad commented on the same point, expressing the extent to which he felt it applied. "More than 50% of the Arabic that we speak is like that, it's related. But you know there's only like a few things that might be a bit different."

Unlike the other participants, Omar and Amirah noted that their dialects, Algerian and fallahi, respectively, do not exhibit the aforementioned relationship as much as the other participants' dialects. Omar noted that his dialect negatively affects learning formal Arabic and makes him more confused. It is worth mentioning here that there are dominant CA varieties (like shami and Egyptian), outside which the learner unfamiliar with these dominant varieties might face the difficulty Omar is alluding to here. Two factors might be seen to contribute to such a state. First, "unfavorable attitudes towards certain non-standard native varieties" (Major et al. 2002 as noted in Trentman, 2011, p. 24). Second, what Bagui (2014) saw in the specific case of Algerian that the "Algerian diglossic case is particular since the [CA] variety is not very close to the [MSA] one; illiteracy and colonialism are the main factors that maintain the gap between [CA] and [MSA]" (p. 89).

### **Heritage Language Contact at Home and Community**

Heritage language researchers attribute continual use and input as being the main factor to maintaining HLs. Albirini (2016) attributed the limited input and use of Arabic and consequently the lack of Arabic heritage language (AHL) proficiency to three reasons: First, the absence of a speech community, particularly with respect to their removal from the diglossic context that their monolingual counterparts in the Arab region have. Second, the population of Arab Americans is dispersed widely across the 50 American states. Third, the prevailing negative feelings of dominant societal groups toward Arabs to which they may react differently (Albirini, 2016, p. 303).

For the participants in this study, their language attitudes are influenced by the presence of negative feelings toward Arabs in the general public. I do not mean to suggest that they are not affected by this negativity, but rather to highlight the resilience of their positive and healthy attitudes towards Arabic as a HL. It is true that the absence of a speech community might be one

of the most fundamental factors affecting HL learning and maintenance (Suarez, 2007). However, it should be noted that even when there is less population dispersion, this in itself does not solve the problems stemming from the absence of a speech community. To further clarify this important point, one should consider that most of the participants in this study do reside in a high-concentration Arab population area, and yet they all noted the absence of a speech community for second-generation HLLs. It seems that beyond the first-generation, population concentrations do not necessarily create a speech community.

### **Communicating in Arabic**

Participants of this study, like most second-generation heritage language speakers, prefer English but also wish to maintain their HL and culture (Suarez, 2007). Participants considered speaking Arabic to be of practical value mainly in communicating with parents, grandparents, relatives overseas, and first-generation community members. Speaking in Arabic when socializing, for the study participants, in general, as Hiba noted, depends on the generation they are speaking to. “Like the Auntie generation it'll always be Arabic, always. Sometimes like a little bit English. But with my age always English. Like, 90 percent, like, I was telling you, sometimes a little bit Arabic, but that's it.” Hiba, unlike the other participants, did not report code-switching; she speaks only Arabic with her parents and only English, including some Arabic cultural expressions, with siblings, friends, relatives and neighbors if they grew up in America.

For Ahmad, unlike the other participants, speaking Arabic is not hard because he feels that he has been raised in a more consistent Arabic-speaking environment. “Like at home, we were forced kind of like to never forget it. Um, because, like, even though we start to learn English my mother felt it was always important like you know, not just to learn English and everything else, we always have to like keep on talking in Arabic.” Ahmad recognized that sometimes he makes

slight mistakes when he talks to his relatives overseas and he would not be able to have a concise conversation or debate with monolingually raised native speakers. Omar described how he speaks to his parents: “I usually use a mixture of both, so I would be uh, so I could say in one sentence I can have ten words and five of them will be Arabic and five of them will be English. It's just really what I wanna say, if I can't find the right word, or a word that they might not understand, I'll have to say it in Arabic and I'll, just-just, so probably um, mostly English.” This need to revert back to English when discussing more worldly or complicated topics was a common experience for most of the participants.

Participants reported that as they grow older, their need for more sophisticated and nuanced conversations arises. Thus, they begin to communicate with the language they felt most comfortable as well as more proficient in. Most parents also begin to find it easier to allow their children to just get their point across in English, or a combination of English and Arabic. Therefore, even though the participants stated the benefits and pride of using Arabic to communicate, this need to interject English into their more nuanced conversations may demonstrate the social challenges reported by most of the study participants regarding their HL limited proficiency (Albirini, 2014b; Jeon, 2008). Though they speak well enough not to feel completely insecure, they are often not very confident either. The participants acknowledge that they understand Arabic more when it is spoken to them, but it is more difficult for them to speak it themselves. So even though most of the participants' parents speak Arabic to them, most of them, in return answer questions and/or communicate using both Arabic and English, especially since most of their parents understand English. It may be worth mentioning again here that this pattern is reported by participants who were in AD classes. The picture for the higher numbers of

students in lower level classes can reasonably expected to show perhaps less confidence and lower proficiency in receptive language processing in Arabic.

Participants reported that speaking Arabic is particularly challenging when communicating with first-generation speakers who do not understand English. Such limitations or language barriers in their HL have clear social challenges, especially when they communicate with first-generation speakers. Amirah explained, “It’s hard for me to understand and explain, and for them too.” When talking with their grandparents, Amirah, Amal, and Laila mentioned that it is hard for them to fully communicate beyond the surface-level conversations, and they often feel self-conscious about this struggle. Amirah stated, “I would rather be quiet and not to say it than say it wrong.”

For Hiba, this lack of confidence in her ability to fully communicate in Arabic created a sense of a barrier, since Hiba has to resort to only Arabic when communicate with her parents. In fact, Hiba states she sometimes cuts off the conversation because she cannot express herself as she wants. What follows is a segment of our conversation about this language barrier:

Khuloud: So when you talk to your mother and father, do you feel sometimes that you can’t fully express yourself? Or there is something you can’t say in Arabic, for instance?

Hiba: Yeah, it happens a lot.

Khuloud: What do you do?

Hiba: Um, I end up saying whatever I have to say but it doesn’t come out the way I would want it to.

Khuloud: Do they correct you?

Hiba: No.

Khuloud: No, they let it go.

Hiba: Yeah.

It becomes apparent from the above dialogue that Hiba is then forced to leave many things unsaid due to her lack of proficiency in the Arabic language. More research is needed on applying one-language rule for inter-generational communication. HL studies asserted that living among largely ethnic populations may encourage language maintenance (Benmamoun, Montrul & Polinsky, 2013). Even Hiba, who lives in one of the top five U.S. cities in terms of concentrations of Arab-Americans and speaks only Arabic with her parents is not content with her level of speaking Arabic and her overall HL skills.

Laila faces difficulties similar to Hiba's, but in written social communication. Laila tries to avoid writing in Arabic in her family's WhatsApp messaging group. "I'd read it, like, it'll take me time but I'd read the stuff and I'll understand, I'm like oh, I get it, but then I'd always reply like with something English, 'cause I know I'm not like spelling the word right ... I'm like it's better for me to just stick to English so they don't come laugh at me." Laila indicated instances where communication with her mother had to be put on hold because her mother does not know enough English to text her while Laila is similarly not able to text in Arabic. Laila texts her mother in English and her mother responds in English as well but "it would be bad, like, it won't be like perfect English, like you know, how, we all made a joke, like you know how Arab parents text, so we laugh at that, but I know what she's saying, so I just use English."

Khuloud: So what do you think, why does not your mother text you in Arabic? Like if she wants to ask you, 'where are you Laila?' what's the problem with writing that in Arabic?

Laila: I'd look at it, and then I'd feel like I don't know, like, I just I wouldn't reply if it was in Arabic, 'cause I'm like she could've just told me in English and I would've it's just easier for me to respond.

Khuloud: She could text you in Arabic and you may reply in English.

Laila: She can do that, yeah, but I guess, like, she knows that I wouldn't understand what she's saying, like if she tries saying other things, because mama would know where I am 24/7 because I do tell her like oh, I'm going here and I go to the place, so sometimes she'll just ask me for something and I'm just like, I don't know what you're saying just, like, call me, or she sends like me a text and I'm just like I, there's no way I could understand what you tried sending me, so I'll call home like ok mother what are you saying?

This clearly demonstrates a social problem that could happen when first-generation parent who is not fluent in English and a second-generation children who are not fluent in Arabic. Clearly, texting in Arabic and English between Laila and her mother tends to run into limitations since they cannot effectively say everything they want to say; it may only be continued through another mode of communication that may include both Arabic and English. For Laila, speaking proficiency may compensate for a lack of reading and writing skills; however, proficiency in reading and writing may not fully compensate for a lack of speaking skills. However, untapped texting skills in Arabic may create distance specifically between second-generation and first-generation parents, mainly those who are not proficient in English.

The participants' answer regarding texting in English may relate to "ease" or "feasibility," in comparison to Arabic. This is perhaps an indicator of how difficult for Laila to put into words what is going on with her own perceptions of her willingness to craft a seemingly simple reply to



a text message. One cannot help to note the social cost of this limitation in the participants' ability to communicate with their heritage environment, which impacts the extent to which they are able to exercise identity and agency within their language use (Jeon, 2008).

### **Change of Attitude towards Utilizing Arabic at Home**

Heritage language learning is a journey that starts at home (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2009; Sehlaoui, 2008). In this study, parents play an undeniable role in maintaining Arabic. Participants noted that they got the most support to speak Arabic from their parents and reported that their parents never discouraged them from speaking Arabic and never perceived learning and using Arabic as an obstacle to their mastery of English. Ahmad noticed that his mother always advises first-generation parents around her not to force their children to speak English and to “let them be”; they will eventually learn both. The let-it-be approach may offer a certain freedom from societal stigma of not knowing enough English.

Most participants reported positive attitudes towards being raised by first-generation parents, yet they were critical about several aspects, which were manifested in some of their remarks. In general, most participants seem to be culturally aware and demonstrated a keen desire to hold both cultures (Arabic and Western) in a rather reasonable balance. However, as a consequence [of their multiple identities], they engage in negotiating the ever-present tension between the two cultures. For example, Omar noted that his father dislikes the music he listens to, but understands why: “I learned to respect it.” He said that he found ways “to be accustomed to both side[s]” of his mixed cultural existence in the West. Amal reflected on having first-generation parents: “it feels good because I know there is hope that the generations to come will learn Arabic too.”

Most participants in this study mentioned their mothers more frequently than their fathers. When participants were asked to rate their parents' English proficiency, most of them ranked their fathers at a higher rate than their mothers. It also seemed that their mothers were more involved in their HL education than were their fathers. Even Ahmad's monolingual father was not as involved as his mother in HL learning, in spite of the fact that his father speaks only Arabic. I asked Ahmad why he keeps mentioning his mother much more frequently than his father. Ahmad laughed and said, "You are right, I feel he is just there." In general, mothers had attained lower educational levels and they spend more time with their children which might explain the reason for resorting to Arabic more frequently than the fathers. The question is: What aspects of a language are the parents encouraging and to what degree?

Interviews revealed that most of the participants' parents supported their children's HL acquisition mostly via communication. Helping them do their homework if they needed to, reading to them, exposing them to children's programs and Arabic media, mostly when they were little (for how long and to what extent remained unclear). It is worth noting that most of the children's books, TV, and Internet shows are in modern standard Arabic (MSA) and most of the popular Arabic series are either in Syrian or Egyptian dialects. Talk shows and variety entertainment shows typically use either MSA, or a combination of both MSA and CA. Arabic was their dominant language until age four, after which they would typically start to attend school and become exposed to a world outside of their Arabic-language homes. As the participants have grown older, their exposure to Arabic has lessened. Many of the study participants, to varying degrees, were doing fairly well pre- formal school attendance in learning Arabic, due to the fact that home language exposure addressed, for many of them both formal and informal varieties. As such, home, for most of the study participants resembled an optimal small speech community where all Arabic language

forms were present, and more importantly, the exposure of MSA, Qur'an and CA was present in a manner that helped develop native-like ability to calibrate proper code-switching. The crucial change took place at the point where formal schooling began. Participants noted that once they enrolled in their community school, their use and input of Arabic gradually became less, and the HL instruction was focused on separation rather than integration. In their community school environment, this mix of MSA and CA was no longer present, and actually not even allowed. Consequently, school became an MSA-only sphere. Simultaneously, another change was taking place at home; the gradual takeover of the dominant language of the communicative space and the weakened use of Arabic until it gradually displaced it.

Participants reported that they are still surrounded by the Arabic language. Most of the parents of the participants speak to each other predominantly in Arabic. However, most participants frequently find themselves in Arabic conversation only as listeners; that is, their role with the language is mostly passive in nature (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005). At home, their frequent use of their heritage language is mostly in informal contexts while their shared exposure to formal Arabic, at home and in the community, is significantly through reciting Qur'an.

Most participants detected that Arabic language input and use shifted at some point in their memories. Some participants noticed a change of attitude regarding their families' behavior towards HL use among older and younger siblings. Participants noticed that their younger siblings are being exposed to less and less of the Arabic language. Latifa reported limited exposure to Arabic at home, for instance, and expressed a change of attitude in two aspects. First, between the amount and the quality of HL exposure that Latifa and her older sister received and the amount of exposure that her younger siblings are receiving. Second, her parents used to focus on both language and religious exposure and now focus with her younger siblings primarily on the

religious. Sometimes she asks them to speak Arabic because she wants to be able to practice it more. Latifa's parents now read to their children primarily English stories and their access to Arabic is through memorizing the Qur'an, but for her and her older sister, "it was, like, more cultural" because her parents were "new to here so they were trying to preserve it." As stated earlier, as time passes, and participants become older and most parents become more proficient in English, it becomes easier to communicate with whatever language offers the most convenience in understanding. Furthermore, the older the child, the conversations or topic of communications become more complex, and a more advanced vocabulary is needed, which participants lack in Arabic but possess in English.

Even when there is a consistency in attitude towards using only Arabic, the level of overall knowledge of Arabic decreases with the age rank of siblings. For instance, Hiba noted that her oldest sister is the most well-rounded in Arabic. Despite her parents' policy of zero tolerance of English with their children, her younger brother is receiving the least amount of Arabic since all his older siblings speak English with him. Thus, even though he grew up in the same house with the same parents as his siblings, his exposure to Arabic has decreased and his exposure to English has increased. He also does not go to weekend school as his older siblings did because his mother is not teaching in the school any longer, and he is not watching Arabic media because the entire family no longer does so. In fact, this view of diminishing language focus is consistent with Shin and Johnson's (2002) argument that first-born and later-born children have different experiences with HL.

An interesting notion that Latifa pointed to is the role texting and social media played in the switch to English in her family. "My mother, for example, never even knew how to text, and she always calls. Um, and we didn't 'til we were- like, I didn't get a phone until I was 15, so, it was-

it was something new to us, and I think for, I think that's the mark that, like, marked when we started speaking English more than Arabic. Because when you, like before that, it's mostly um, talking you know, face to face, and that- you know, it's easy to do Arabic, but then when you have a phone with a keyboard, it's so much easier just to write in English. And when you start going on to social media everything's in English.”

### **Exposure to Arabic Media**

Participants further reported a change of language input regarding a change in attitude towards watching Arabic media. When they were little, all participants except for Amirah watched Arabic cartoons to varying degrees (again for how long and to what extent remained unclear). They used to watch children’s shows in Arabic and join their families in watching Arabic shows, but gradually they stopped as their families have their own interests that they no longer share. For example, Omar’s father, like Ahmad’s father, “watches a lot of Al Jazeera and news in Arabic so it's always on.” His mother watches “some soap operas, uh, series, in Turkish; the Turkish ones that are Syrian.” Omar does not watch Arabic media because he “can’t get in to them.” “They speak too fast for me, for, to the point where I might not be able to catch on every word or I might miss something and I just feel like I lost the whole thing. But yeah, I don't enjoy it as much as English.” During Ramadan, the Islamic holy month, Omar watches “[Candid Camera] in Algerian, it's like a prank show.” So, if he is to join his family, it could be for the “Algerian shows, they only speak the Algerian dialect in the shows, that's why, that's why I enjoy them more.” Omar talks about his shift away from watching TV as a family activity. “When I was younger I would just sit down there but now we have uh, since I watch my own shows I usually just watch on my uh, TV downstairs but, yeah I used to just join in and watch and I mean, I was just mostly just doing it to sit next to them not to watch the show, I didn't really understand.”

Many participants reported sometimes attempting to watch Arabic shows with their families. Laila watches for the sake of joining the family but sometimes she will get bored and leave. Laila said “I’ll watch with them, like I’m spending time with them. It’s fine, but sometimes I’ll just get so bored I’ll just like, leave.” Amirah joins for the chance to learn something. She does not like to watch the media in general but she enjoys specific religious and social shows, especially during Ramadan like ‘Khawater’ (reflections), but she would enjoy the show even more if she understood MSA perfectly or if the show includes both MSA and CA, as she noted. Hiba’s family does not watch anything other than the news, which they do using their personal devices. Ahmad joins if he finds it entertaining. Neither Amal nor her family like to watch Arabic media. They usually watch American movies on their Saturday nights. Currently, most participants’ parents are more engulfed with the crises in the Middle East. Participants reported that even the Arabic shows their families used to watch before are more frequently replaced with watching the news using their own personal devices. This may widen the chasm between the participants and the media-watching habits of their families. As the parents’ ability to speak and understand English increases, they begin to be more open to English dominant media and activities.

Most participants reported that they do not watch the news in Arabic because they cannot understand the MSA nor do they like what is going on in the Arab world. At the same time, they feel that American news is “propagandist,” “selective,” and “filtered” when they are covering what is going on in the Arab world. For now, Ahmad prefers to watch CNN and Laila attempts to view the pictures on Arabic news channels and sometimes if something is important, she asks her parents about it. She is longing for the day that she understands Arabic without help and speaks Arabic with ease like the native speakers on Arabic TV. If Latifa wants to tune in to the news in Arabic, she understands the main points of what is being said and sometimes resorts to context so that she

can piece things together as she noted. As the participants get older, they are no longer home as much, and they have begun to prefer English-language TV. They begin to develop their own tastes, likes and dislikes of media around them, which gradually takes them further from the cultural materials they used to share with their parents.

### **Writing in Arabic**

Data revealed that most participants do not use written Arabic as a means of communication. Even when using social medial tools, their written communication needs are mostly done in English. Some of them only rarely text a few words or a sentence or two using Arabic. Even though the participants were taught the basics of writing in MSA, most of the study participants still felt their competency level in MSA was not sufficient enough to adequately communicate in writing. MSA is different than spoken dialectal Arabic and uses more advanced vocabulary and has complex grammatical structures. Most participants use neither MSA nor CA or both to communicate in writing. They find it easier to resort to English when communicating. Currently, written Arabic, like spoken Arabic, may comprise of three modes; only MSA, only CA or a combination of both. As such, colloquial Arabic cannot be ignored in texting. CA does not have standardized scripts (Albirini & Benmamoun, 2012) which may require constant practice.

Amirah, for example, finds texting in Arabic to be very limited. If Amirah needs to text relatives overseas, she says she keeps her messages short and simple. She texts her parents only in English. “If it’s my father, we text primarily in English, and, I guess, because he knows that I feel more comfortable to text in English.” Omar texts in English but sometimes in Arabic, using transliteration. His mother sometimes sends him simple and short sentences in Arabic, but usually resorts back to English if the message is long. For his cousins in Algeria, Omar texts them 50/50 between transliteration and Arabic characters. Participants reply to Arabic texts from their parents

in English as it takes a “really” long time to respond in Arabic. However, no doubt, communicative competence set a threshold here as well.

The following is the story narrated by Amal about her latest use of texting. Amal’s father came to America at an early age and practically grew up in the U.S. Her mother, on the other hand, came to the U.S. when she got married, so she describes her mother’s mindset as more traditional than her father’s. Amal found it more useful to use Arabic in order to connect with her mother and for her mother to understand. I met Amal on a Saturday afternoon for the second interview. It was the second day of Eid, and she enthusiastically shared an exchange text with her mother that took place on the day before Eid when I asked if she texts her parents in Arabic:

أمّل: ماما أديل عزمتني أفطر عندها اليوم، امها بتعمل ورق دوالي، لو سمحت أقدر أروح؟

الأم: لا

أمّل: ماما مش حرام عليك تحرميني أكل طيب و لذيذ و أنا صائمة!

Amal then translated the texts herself: “mother, Adeel (pseudonym) invited me for dinner at her house today, her mother is making 'waraq dawali' (stuffed grape leaves) can I please go? And then she said, then she was like, in the end she said no. So I sent her "mother, isn't it an injustice to deprive me of good food when I'm fasting?" Amal noted that when she talks to her mother in Arabic her mother likes it better, and she may be more willing to say yes to what she wants. Usually Amal calls her mother to ask for permission but this time she was in class so she sent the text message. It seemed that this text message brought joy to Amal, “it was just, not funny, like, like I'm making fun of it, but it was, it was funny that I'm using something like this and being so f- for me that was formal. Like what I sent her was formal, for me. So in that way, sending her something like that was, very, it was funny and I liked it. It was a good feeling in the end.” Amal



seemed to recognize that communicating with her mother in Arabic is not just possible but also personally rewarding and maybe if her mother did say yes then stuffed grape leaves are another layer of reward.

For Amal, texting in Arabic might not be just for communication, it is a source of pleasure and relaxation. She used to see her friends in high school, but now two of her closest friends go to different universities. Amal does not know how it turned out this way, but when they are talking Arabic, she says they find it fun. “It's something that's seen as, like I'm not talking to you seriously, I'm just- I'm, it's serious but I'm not like, just for fun. So when we text we get bored, we start sending text messages in Arabic instead of English, where it was like, sometimes it gets bland, it gets boring, so we start sending text messages in Arabic, and we say some funny stuff ... so let's say nobody's replying to the messages, like we'll send it something in Arabic, and then that'll catch their attention. And then, they'll, then, we'll reply and something like that. So it's more entertainment I guess.” Although Amal rarely (once a month) texts her two Palestinian friends in Arabic, she was nonetheless the only participant who does so.

Only Hiba reported texting her mother solely in Arabic because her mother, unlike her father, only texts in Arabic. Hiba reported texting the way she talks in Arabic. Hiba texts faster in English but she does not mind texting in Arabic. This could be an indicator of communicative competence, if messages are sent, understood, and the conversation continues. This would sufficiently set someone on the path to “native-like” proficiency. Texting could be the only medium for writing in Arabic for the participants once they leave their schools. Participants reported using mainly voice messages, Skype and chatting when communicating with relatives overseas. But texting could not be replaced altogether by voice messages among participants and their families. Indeed, texting may prevail over any other medium of communication at the present.

It would be beneficial for the participants to seize the opportunity to improve their Arabic by getting accustomed to texting their native-speaking parents.

### **Reading in Arabic**

Exposure to HL literacy materials such as books and other print materials was rare if it happened at all. None of the participants reported having reading materials at home that interests them. The reading materials reported at home were deemed too advanced for the study participants and none of them were suitable for self-selected reading. Most of the reading materials that participants claimed they had access to in their homes consisted primarily of religious books, Islamic Centers' magazines, and a few childrens books. Laila and Amirah reported that there were no HL books in their homes. When Laila was asked if she reads the magazine that her father brings home from the mosque, she replied, "I opened it once and I tried reading it and I see the picture and I'm like oh, and then I just closed it [laughs]." The contents of the mosque paper seemed to be in an unfamiliar format or was beyond her reading level.

Most participants' parents read mostly religious texts or online religious articles and news reports. Ahmad said that his parents are "always on Arabic websites and always they have Arabic articles and they're reading." Other types of print mentioned were dream interpretation books (Ahamad's mother), lifestyle magazines (Amal's mother), and some fiction stories (Saleema's mother). Unlike all the other study participants, Latifa reported having a lot of books at home, divided equally between Arabic and English because her father is an Arabic writer. Saleema's mother uses social media regularly and reads a lot of articles, news, and other material in Arabic. Saleema remembers a couple of stories her mother used to always read to them in both Arabic and English.

With the exception of Amirah and Omar, participants recalled being read to in Arabic<sup>15</sup> and/or English when they were little, either by their parents or older siblings. Hiba, for example, read Arabic with her parents and English with her older sisters (but for how long and to what extent remained unclear). Latifa reported, “I was raised with Arabic and English. I got Arabic from my parents, and English from like TV, books, movies and school.” Ahmad’s mother read to him in both English and Arabic. Amirah does not think her parents read to her, neither in English nor in Arabic. With Qur’an, the Islamic holy text, however, Amirah felt it was different. “They used to help us and they used to like make us memorize and recite to them,” Amirah recalls, “I felt like for Qur’an it was different.” Amirah has had several tutors for Arabic and Qur’an during elementary public school, prior to joining her community school.

Most participants said they would rarely access social media and the internet in their HL. Most of the participants did not actively go looking for something to read in Arabic. Omar and other participants reported reading Arabic if it happens to come up on social media. Amirah noted that sometimes she tries to share materials on social media. Amal was also the only participant who reported that she would not Google or search in Arabic for herself; it would be for her mother or for her work to read. If somebody would want her to search something, she would be able to search it in Arabic, and “if it comes up it’ll come up, but it’s not like... I don’t know it’s not exactly the easiest, it’s not like something I would go to first. It’s not my first choice.” This may relate back to their lack of confidence and competency with written Arabic.

Most participants reported that they rarely read non-school-related Arabic material for fun, whether at or outside their schools. Participants were asked what was “difficult” when reading non-school materials in their HL. Responses were absence of [harakat] and difficult/unfamiliar

---

<sup>15</sup> Most children’s books are in MSA.

vocabulary. Latifa and Saleema took the difficulty to another level. In their opinions, the difficulty resides in the structure of the sentences and the difficulty to follow along. Latifa explained “because in English there's a lot of punctuation; commas, dashes. In Arabic usually the sentences are a lot longer and that's why the structure's hard for me, it takes a lot to take it all in,” Saleema in the same vein reported: “I'll read it and I'll understand the words on their own, but um, I have to like read it again to understand what the entire thing is saying, so I think just um, connecting it all together is the hardest part for me.”

Many of the study participants speculated that what made reading non-school materials difficult for them was the unfamiliarity with such materials. This may be due to less frequent engagement with written forms and the absence of familiarity with online material, whether at home or at the school. A lack of applying strategies for reading, such as the transfer of skills from English to the HL (Jensen & Llosa, 2007) and between CA and MSA (Sehlaoui, 2008), could be a factor as well. Callahan noted that the essential problem we faced is the fact that English writing has come to dominate text-based mediums. Without the tools or awareness such as developing reading strategies that may alleviate the difficulties faced by these HLLs, their linguistic capabilities may remain underdeveloped.

Similar to the study of Jensen and Llosa (2007), participants considered themselves slow readers, which led to the question posed by Callahan's (2010) study: “[D]o individuals with fewer skills engage in an activity less often, or does their less frequent engagement lead to their lack of skill?” (p. 15). Latifa noted, “If I made an effort to read more Arabic, eventually it would become more comfortable and easier. Like if I was reading something like this every day eventually it would become so natural, but yeah I don't think it's because I don't know the language, it's just because I don't listen to it or see it as much as I could or would.”

Today's digital age may provide widespread access to authentic HL and cultural materials and shorten the distance between the U.S. and HL-speaking countries (Liu, 2013). Parents of this study's participants have access to news digests on the Internet and most are active on social media, and/or use new ways of communication such as texting. However, this easy access to the materials at home may not necessarily translate into consistent use to reinforce language acquisition for their children. In general, most parents do not seem to be conscious of the importance of utilizing Arabic within these mediums as a tool of communication and raising the familiarity of written Arabic texts.

### **Heritage Language Contact in the Community**

In general, Islamic communities facilitate teaching Arabic through three structured mediums: weekend schools, Qur'an classes, and full-time community schools. In this section, learning Arabic at community centers will be highlighted and the full-time community school will be discussed afterwards. There seemed to be considerable consistency across the participants in terms of their views on the role of their community in maintaining Arabic. The Islamic community facilitates learning Qur'an and gives less or no emphasis on teaching Arabic as a communicative or social language, which the participants declared as one of their desired outcomes. Latifa stated that her community is more active in providing Qur'an classes that mainly focus on the roles of memorization or tajweed, Islamic lectures given in English, and religious camps for different age groups. While providing these types of activities, they do not provide classes or events that promote the development of the Arabic language for Arabic HLLs. For the community, teaching Arabic mainly as a means of memorizing or reciting Qur'an supersedes teaching Arabic as a means of communication.

All the participants reported similar situations in their communities. When asked how her community helps her to maintain her HL, Latifa responded, “for sure, the Qur’an class, for example, that’s a way the community helps you maintain language. Um, also interacting with Arabic speakers and having to actually like speak Arabic with them, that helps, but that’s pretty much it. I don’t think there’s anything else honestly.” Latifa continued, “We don’t have much focus on Arabic as much as like, like, you were saying, like, Arabic poetry, we don’t have things like that. It’s more implied because everyone here is mostly Arab, like, it’s implied that you should know Arabic and if you don’t it’s too bad.” The focus of the community is to teach enough Arabic for the goal of memorizing or reciting Qur’an.

Participants reported varying frequencies of attending community gatherings. These gatherings regularly take religious overtones and might be considered markers of both piety and belonging. Participants who are regularly active in their communities attend social events, lectures, and conventions. However, the mode of communication in these gatherings is largely English peppered with the occasional spattering of religious or cultural phrases, rendering them of limited utility for the maintenance or use of HL.

**Weekend community schools.** Weekend schools offer Islamic studies, Qur’an and Arabic classes. Usually, heritage learners, as noted by the study participants, do not go to weekend and full-time community schools simultaneously. They go to weekend schools once a week, usually on Sundays or Saturdays, and once students enter the full time Islamic schools, they most likely stop going to weekend schools since they find it redundant.

Only three participants attended weekend schools prior to their full-time schools. Laila went to weekend community school for one year before joining her school for first grade. The other two were Hiba and Amal. Participants who attended weekend schools had different

experiences in learning Arabic, ranging from very satisfied like Hiba to very disappointed like in the case of Amal. Hiba attended one weekend school from pre-kindergarten to sixth grade while she was in public school. The school was run and attended mostly by Syrian parents and volunteers. At this school, she was taught Arabic, Qur'an and Islamic Studies. The school day starts at 8 a.m. and lasts until 3 p.m. She learned Qur'an first and then she learned around four hours of Arabic language. Hiba was more satisfied with the style of Arabic instruction, she recalled, "[I] learned more Arabic in weekend school than I learned in school which is where I went for middle school and high school." When Hiba compared her two schools, she concluded that the weekend school "taught us more, and in school [her full-time community school] they focused on the basics and they don't teach us [advanced] Arabic and they don't teach us a lot Qawa'id [grammar] ... they went for the advanced more than the [full-time] school ever did." Hiba recalled her experience at the school: "Each lesson had a theme. So sometimes it would be jobs... and sometimes it would be school. On the last day of weekend school, they would have a huge ceremony and each class would give a performance. The weekend school I went to, they didn't have class for older people, so I stopped at the highest that I could have."

Unlike Hiba, Amal attended different weekend community schools since she was three years old until fifth grade, but her experience was not satisfactory. Amal reported that she learned more Arabic in her full-time community school than her weekend community school. She did not think any of her teachers at her weekend school were experienced language educators and she did not want to give any details about it. Weekend Islamic schools are, like many other HL schools in the U.S., often staffed mostly by first-generation parent volunteers and the quality of the teaching depends mainly on the quality and experience of the parent volunteer. There usually is no teacher

training and/or professional development. Thus it becomes clear that Hiba was fortunate to have a very good teacher while Amal was not as lucky.

**Community sponsored Qur'an classes.** Three of the participants are currently attending Qur'an classes: Amal, Hiba and Latifa. The emphasis on Qur'an recitation and/or memorization is one of the most consistent findings in all the studies of children's language development for Arab-Muslims and Muslims in the diaspora worldwide (Boyle, 2006). Memorization can be for the whole Qur'an, a few chapters of the Qur'an or a few short surahs. Qur'anic memorization/recitation might be the primary objective of Qur'an classes that are supported by the home and community. Qur'an memorization/recitation is "a purposeful pedagogical choice for Qur'anic study in particular" (Boyle, 2006, p. 485).

Of the study participants, both Latifa and Hiba are currently working on memorizing the whole Qur'an. Latifa wants to memorize the Qur'an because of "all the rewards you get for it" and because "it keeps [Qur'an] active... you memorize it so you can continue to be engaged with the Qur'an throughout like all these years. And then like even after you memorize it you have to keep reviewing the rest of your life, so that gives me a reason to like stick with the Qur'an." In Islam, "memorization has a deeper significance in the learning process because it allows children to embody the Qur'an" (Boyle, 2006, p. 491). Clear in the mind of Hiba and Latifa is the fact that memorization of the Qur'an is considered the first step in understanding, not a substitute for it (Boyle, 2006; Moore, 2006).

Prior to Qur'an memorization, they both attended tajweed (rule of Qur'an recitations) classes. Participants such as Hiba and Latifa noted that they memorize at their own pace and the teacher works one-on-one with them. They have both memorized about 11 chapters and hope to continue. They love memorizing Qur'an even though it is hard for them. The Qur'an classes they



attend are mainly for memorization and not for interpretation. Hiba's class consists of a group of second-generation girls aged 16 to 21 gathered to review what they memorized. She goes to Qur'an classes 4 days a week: 2 hours for 2 days and 4 hours for the other 2 days. Hiba devotes 4 hours a day during the summer and one or two hours a day during the school year to Qur'an memorization. Her mother is her teacher in Qur'an class and at home she helps her review her memorization. Hiba claims she understands 45% of what she memorizes, but if she comes across a word that she does not understand, she asks her mother, or if it is an Ayah (verse) she looks it up herself. Hiba wishes that Qur'an class would incorporate more interpretation in addition to memorization. In class, even though all the attendees know Arabic, the teacher gives only about fifty percent of the instruction in Arabic.

Latifa attends Qur'an class once a week. She spends an average of four hours a week memorizing Qur'an, and in the summer, she takes a 6-week break. During Ramadan, memorization routines get intense; they spend 10 hours per week memorizing. Memorizing Qur'an is very hard for Latifa, especially when it comes to the final step of reviewing. Amal is working towards getting a certificate in telawa (recitation). Amal goes to Qur'an class once on Saturdays and started last summer. The students are second generation and there is a mother in the class who is a first generation. The teacher is a native speaker and the class is held entirely in Arabic, unless anyone needs a translation, then the teacher will repeat what she said in English. Although the class is for telawa, if somebody has a question it will not be turned down. To get the certificate, Amal has to memorize the last small surahs of the last chapter and then read the entire Qur'an perfectly. Latifa, Amal and Hiba feel that learning and memorizing Qur'an has improved their overall Arabic in the sense it helps them know an Arabic form that is different of their CA and MSA.

Although Amirah is not currently attending Qur'an classes, she did have previous experience taking Qur'an classes in the community. She attended evening Qur'an classes 4 to 5 days a week from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. for 2 to 3 years prior to attending her full-time community school. Qur'an classes were taught by native speakers and focused on reading, without diving into meaning or interpretation. Most parts of the Qur'an classes were in English because there were other students who were not Arabic speakers. Amirah found Qur'an classes to be helpful for learning Arabic in sixth grade when she joined her community school. She noted, "If it wasn't for Qur'an I wouldn't have got to where I am in Arabic, so yeah, it played like an essential role in my life." Here, Amirah agrees with Amal, Hiba and Latifa on the correlation between learning Qur'an and enhancing their overall Arabic language.

However, Arabic for AHLLs is more than learning Qur'anic Arabic. Ahmad responded in a follow up text message asking about his community's valuing his ability to speak Arabic. He replied, "I feel like my community values Arabic, mostly in the sense that it's the language of the Qur'an which is why it's important to learn, but personally I value it for more reasons than just that. For me it's important to use in my daily life since I have family members who do not speak English (such as my father, and grandma) so it was always important to keep my Arabic language and not forget it like most of my friends who cannot really speak fluently." Laila also responded in a text message to the same question: "My community does not expect us to speak fluent Arabic but does expect us to be able to speak it. When older community members come and ask a question, some ask it in Arabic. This requires us to answer in Arabic."

Most participants demonstrated an understanding of the importance of Arabic language that seems to go beyond what might be expected of them by their communities. The importance of the language for cultural identity, religious affiliations and generational transmission of Arabic

tends to be clear in their minds; however, most of them seem to hope for more than what they need to just get by.

In the beginning of the chapter, the first two themes centered on the participants' HL experiences and attitudes at home and in the community. This section of the chapter highlights the participants' experiences and challenges in learning Arabic through full-time community schools by attempting to answer the following research question: How did the participants experience their heritage language learning while they were enrolled in their full-time community schools?

### **Heritage Language Contact at Full-Time Community Schools**

Participants mostly noted unfulfilled expectations in learning their HL at their community schools even after attending full-time community schools for numerous years. In other words, it appeared to be a substantial investment in studying Arabic without clear marked attainment of their desired goals. Participants noted that the state of Arabic education in their full-time community schools seemed to be affected by the goal-setting process for Arabic programs that mostly do not look at Arabic as a language for daily verbal communication. Their exposure to learning their HL was mainly in MSA through school textbooks at their community schools which were mostly at the elementary level.

### **Full-Time Community Schools**

Participants reported feeling comfortable being with friends who share the same bilingual and bicultural background (Chinen & Tucker, 2005; Maguire & Curdt-Christiansen, 2007; Otcu, 2010; You and Liu, 2011). Participants in this study seemed to feel that they are in a protective setting and largely seemed to be spared from confronting anti-Arabic and anti-Muslim discourses (Engman, 2015). Participants cited that they liked their community schools and felt they were a good fit for them, although not necessarily for their siblings. It is here that some gender

differentiation perceptions were noted by some participants. For Laila, it was a perfect fit- she practically grew up there. Her older sister graduated 3 years ago from the school and her two younger sisters are still there. Only her brother left to public school because “the school just wasn’t for him ... because [my school] is easier on the girls than the boys.” Amirah enjoyed having an Islamic environment and having Muslim friends because she claimed that it was a protective circle. Only one of Amirah’s younger brothers attended the school for five years from grades six to ten. Her other two brothers are in public schools. Ahmad’s older brother graduated from the school when he was in eighth grade, which was the highest grade offered at the time. His youngest brother is still in the school, while another brother left the school because he felt it was not for him.

Hiba and her three older sisters joined the school in sixth grade. As for her younger brother, the matter is still undecided. Latifa’s older and younger sisters graduated from school, but her two younger siblings are at a public school. Omar’s only brother was in and out between school B and the local public school, while his two sisters both graduated from school B. Both Amal and her sister went to community school but her brothers did not. Saleema reported that she grew up with her fellow students and the teachers at her community school. Saleema’s sister and brother go to community school while her other brother attends public school. Sometimes her brothers go back and forth between community and public schools because “they do not get the attention” they need at the community school.

Amal thought that school was a good experience for her and she reported “I learned a lot from it, even though there were some ups and downs, but there was a lot that came out from it, and I wouldn’t- I think it shaped me to who I am today.” Amal liked to be around Muslims, but this had her at somewhat of a disadvantage when she went to college, “everybody was different, it was so diverse that there was multiple- one class would have multiple uh, religions, ethnic

backgrounds, everything. So it was- it was definitely, not hard, but it was definitely a change.”

### **Advanced Classes**

As noted earlier, participants were enrolled in three different full-time community schools belonging to two separate heritage language communities. All three schools taught Arabic language on a daily basis. Participants in schools A and C were assigned to advanced level classes (AD) in their schools. Unlike schools A and C, Arabic classes in school B were not divided into four levels, therefore the participants in school B were not in advanced classes. Based on the participants’ data, one school’s strategy in defining an AD student is based on the students’ ability to read a few sentences from full-vocalized texts in modern standard Arabic (MSA). When Amal from school C joined the school in fifth grade, she was tested in reading and placed into the second level, accordingly.

Assigning students to the various levels, according to the participants, particularly in school A, was not clear. Based on their own experience and observations, it was not based on evaluations. Sometimes a student is placed solely based on self-reporting for HL proficiency or whether the students or their parents speak Arabic at home. This differs from the methods of school B who do not offer classes based on levels in Arabic. Sometimes, if students do well during the class they automatically put them in the higher level or may later be moved if they are not keeping up with the class as it was reported by participants. These strategies and/or requirements have been circulated among Arabic teachers without a governing framework. The absence of an official assessment results in AHLLs and Muslim heritage language learners (MHLLs) with varied Arabic skill levels admitted into the same AD classes. For example, Urdu speakers who can read a text in MSA or from the Qur’an may be considered AD according to these narrow placement measures.

How proficiency is defined and determined, at full-time community schools, is a point that can be addressed with respect to implications for future research and implications for practice.

Amirah and Laila were placed in AD classes since they entered school. Ahmad was placed in the second level but he spent his ten years at the school juggling between AD and second level because he reported that he wanted to take AP classes and he did not want to stay in the AD as it was time consuming. He felt that the second level would be best for him because he was still getting the same benefit out of it and it was not as much work as the first level, "It was by choice," as he noted.

Laila did not want to be in AD classes and asked if she could move down to the second level but was denied since she had been in the first level since she entered the school. Laila's experience in learning Arabic at the school was unique among the participants. She used to ask her mother to do most of her homework, but when things got more difficult even that became less feasible. For example, no one in her family could help her in grammar. She had to wake up very early in the morning to Skype her cousins overseas and ask them for help. Sometimes, she had to stay at the school late to get help from her native speaking friends for exams.

Amal had the same teacher for 4 years. For her, AD class was difficult, and even when she did try her best she still did not do well. "I kind of like left it, I was like um, even if I try I'm not going to do well. So, I didn't do so great, I think the end grade was a C." Amal tried to leave AD class but the school would not permit her to transfer to a lower level. Amal explained that class focus more than subject difficulty was the issue here. She noted that she liked the Qur'an class because she felt it to be more relevant to her aspirations. It was about the Qur'an, a subject very important to her personally, while the Arabic Language class was difficult to fit into her life. It did not for example, enable her to read what she desired to read or to improve her speaking skills.

As for Saleema, AD Arabic class was “pretty easy- not easy, but I could do it. It wasn't anything extremely challenging, like it was uh- maybe because I was used to the way the curriculum was my whole life, but I- I found it pretty easy to get an A.” Saleema had the same teacher for six years, which she thought was good for her because she was a good teacher and it allowed them to grow closer. Although I did not ask, Saleema and Amal likely had the same Arabic teacher since there is only one advanced class in the school.

Participants in school B noted that their school did not help to advance much in learning Arabic. Latifa elaborated: “It didn't help me learn it as much as I could have, I think. But it did at the same time, like, preserve whatever I had, you know,” since her family does not utilize as much Arabic as they did when she was younger. For Latifa, her school helped her to keep in touch with the language. The Arabic classes “were way below level, for a lot of people in the classes ... because there were people that like pro- were naturally proficient with their families, which was kind of like me and my friends, but then there were people that, like, they didn't know- like they were never raised with Arabic at all, they weren't- some people weren't even Arabs.” Hiba further noted: “my level in Arabic actually got lower when I went to [my school].”

Ahmad provided greater insight into the reasons why he did not yet feel proficient in Arabic. Ahmad explained that when he first enrolled in second semester Arabic at his university, he just wanted to boost his GPA since he felt it would be an easy A. But, when he enrolled in the third semester class, it became more challenging. However, Ahmad also noted that he was impressed with the way his American non-heritage classmates were learning. He reported, “if our community school was to kind of take- look at what the Arabic departments are doing at the [local universities], and kind of try to implement what they're doing to their curriculum, it'll benefit them a lot.” Amira also had the same Arabic class in college, she corroborated Ahmad's impressions of

his Arabic class experience. This sheds some light on the actual level of Arabic language competencies of the participants. Designating them as advanced level students back in their community schools did not translate to advanced level when they were compared to their non-HL peers in college.

### **Arabic Program Goals**

When participants were asked about Arabic program goals at their respective schools, answers from participants from school A and B suggested the ad hoc nature of these programs based on the lack of consistency and the absence of clear learning goals. Unlike school A, there was a syllabus for Arabic classes in school B, but it included no learning goals or objectives; it was mostly what they were going to do. When Ahmad was asked about the learning goals, he replied, “We wouldn't get really a syllabus that would like, lay out the objectives, so I honestly don't know, but if I were to assume, I would say to be able to like speak Arabic fluently and to understand it fluently.” The following is a clarification of what he meant by “fluently:”

Khuloud: What do you mean by speaking fluently? Like speaking formal Arabic fluently?

Ahmad: The formal Arabic, yeah.

Khuloud: So did you feel that the goal...

Ahmad: Was met?

Khuloud: Yeah.

Ahmad: No, I don't think that goal was met [both laugh]. I don't know, I don't think it was.

I mean I think they tried, that's why I feel like that goes back to the whole point of, I think that they need to like, revamp the entire department and like start a new like, department I guess in a way.



Unlike schools A and B, students in school C reported a more structured Arabic program at their school. In school C, unlike school A and B, Arabic AD class was exclusively for HLLs and it had the least number of students, and offers a syllabus including learning objectives. Furthermore, in school C, there were some features that were not available in the other two schools, such as journal writing and short essays as a method of instruction. Another feature that does not exist in schools A and B is the availability of “office hours.” Amal noted that extra help was available to her and others if they needed it. “Definitely, the teacher would have went out, and like helped us, no matter what, but I feel like as a student, we didn't really want to do that, we just-school definitely would've pushed it, they didn't really push it, they just, it was available. There was office hours and you could go to the office hours and you ask questions... [but] we didn't utilize it because we didn't want to do more work than we actually had to.” There was consistency in materials, one teacher for all high school years, and Qur’an interpretation and learning activities were available. Unlike school A and B, school C offers a senior graduation ceremony speech in Arabic and English. Both Saleema and Amal could not give a graduation speech because their writing skills were limited. Amal wished that the school helped her to do so but she was not able and confident enough for it. In spite of these advantages, neither Saleema nor Amal were content with the learning outcomes. Saleema thought that her school instruction would have been better if it had more activities to participate in that reinforced what they were learning. Because “most of the time it would be like basic questions...that don't really apply to us. But if it had more interactive things that we could do it would've been better.”

For Amal, the primary goal of teaching Arabic at school C was advancement in reading, writing and mostly grammar. Amal felt that comprehension was easier than applying the grammar and that is the aspect of her Arabic instruction that stood out to her the most. Saleema had the

following to say about Arabic program goals: “maybe it would be better if they- it was more relatable to us, like instead of, maybe if they focused more on speaking too, and like focused more on tying Arabic classes with Qur’an classes, then it would be more applicable to us.”

When asked about their desired goals in regards to learning Arabic, participants in this study shared common language goals of reaching a functional level- particularly in speaking and to a lesser degree in reading. Amirah noted: “I really would like to become more proficient, like speaking with other people in Arabic, because that's where I lack in. Like I can understand some people when they speak Arabic, but like for me to continuously speak Arabic I need to practice on that, so I kinda wish [my school] made it like more interactive.” Amirah did not feel that her school aimed at making her proficient in Arabic. “Their main goal was not for us to be proficient in Arabic ... that wasn't their main goal. I felt like, because [my] school was an Islamic school...they focused more on like the Qur’an more than Arabic, so I don't think proficiency was like their- their priority.”

### **Methods of Instruction**

The three schools in this study, as was reported by participants, spend most of their teaching time on reading simple texts, answering simple questions, spelling and doing grammar drills- an exercise the participants disliked. These linguistic phenomena usually pose a great challenge for HLLs (Kagan & Dillon, 2003). The challenge might be originating from what can be described as the micro-approach nature of these strategies. This is in contrast to what researchers have argued to be macro-approaches to HL teaching that take into account HLLs’ global knowledge, particularly speaking, listening and cultural knowledge, which are effective as they build on students’ initial proficiency of their dialects (Kagan & Dillon, 2004). The participants would have preferred more of an emphasis on speaking and interactive classroom activities. Latifa noted that

reading [simple texts] came second to grammar and spelling. She stated that Arabic class “wasn't more about understanding, from my years there, it was about like structure.” Like many participants, Latifa felt that focusing mainly on learning the rules of grammar at the expense of other language skills such as speaking “doesn't make the language natural anymore,” rather it makes the language more alien and beyond reach.

Participants in this study were rarely given a space where they could use both MSA and their CA in the same linguistic environment. This situation might be unhelpful for the natural use of Arabic as a diglossic language. Most participants were introduced to situations in which native speakers would never use MSA, such as studying simulated dialogues between people using the wrong register. As such, most participants were not exposed to situations where they were encouraged to simultaneously juggle the Arabic forms in their discussions to aid them in developing diglossic competence.

Participants realized the limited scope of using HL in the diaspora, and they believe that the notion of conducting classroom discussions exclusively in MSA may not be practical. Latifa, like the other participants, concluded “yeah you can't express it in fusHa [MSA], I don't think, like unless you know fusHa, it's natural to you, someone like me who just can't speak fusHa really well.” In the diaspora, the Arabic classroom might be the only place in which HLLs could learn to use both registers in the same environment, yet students are met with frustration and discouragement within the current system of teaching methods. Hiba, like the rest of the participants, portrayed the reality of Arabic classrooms, saying, “They used to teach us in formal. We used to talk informal ... they used to teach us like that. But when we used to have a conversation we used to speak in dialects.”

Amirah, Ahmad, and Laila reported that the primary mode of instruction in their school was for the teacher to simply follow the readings and assignment provided by their given textbook. They were not fond of their Arabic book. They used the same book throughout their high school years. Ahmad noted that “there wasn’t really a sequence” to the instruction and it depended heavily on the teacher. They started with “Alkitab<sup>16</sup>” Part Two, learning a few lessons, skipping, repeating and then relearning some of chapters the following year, so they never finished the book. They felt that the book was not a great choice for them, neither in terms of the content nor for the method of instruction. Their experience in using world language learners’ book resembled the experience of the participants in the Helmer study (2014) where the lack of relatable and meaningful engagement with the textbook negatively affected students’ learning. Related to this are the experience of both Ahmad and Amirah, who reported that their university’s Arabic courses used a later edition of the same textbook than they used in their community school. However, they were less critical and more positive about using the book in college. This may indicate that teaching methods can produce different results despite using the same content.

Similar to school A, school B featured mostly book-based instruction. The Arabic textbooks for Hiba, Omar and Latifa were not challenging. For Hiba, they were “really boring. They just wanted to teach us some Arabic.” The books in school B were a collection of lessons from different resources assembled together by the teachers, and included some imported materials from textbooks taught in different Arab countries, as reported by participants. The book she used at school was “about a bank, and then the ball, I didn't like those, I felt it was really boring, because it's something you do every day.” Hiba reported that she wanted to learn about health, the environment, the crises that are going on overseas, and the revolutions.

---

<sup>16</sup> “Alkitab” is the most widely used Arabic textbook at the university level for world language learners.

For Latifa, Arabic class “was very boring, very- it wasn't very challenging either, it was like busy work most of the time. We'd like have homework to just like copy the lesson, to copy the story or whatever it is ... it was all just the language had no context.” Most of the classes she had were “with the same teacher, it was more 'irab' and spelling.” Hiba and Latifa noted that overall, their experiences were the same, although at times there were exceptions. Hiba reported “I had, maybe like a couple of times I had a teacher that took it easier on the students who didn't know as much, she gave them a little less work and she'd give me and like, some other people more work. But for the most part it was all the same.” Hiba felt that a good teaching strategy is when the teacher “does more one-on-one with each student. So that everyone feels like they're part of the class.”

However, unlike Hiba, Latifa noted some inconsistencies in the materials of the textbook; while some lessons were culturally relevant, the others were not. Latifa noted that some classes were more advanced or organized, where “she'd make sure we like, she'd show us like poetry or stuff like that, like Arabic songs. Like it was more um, more like encompassing.” Latifa remembered in her junior year, “it was actual essays, and, and it wasn't just about the material we read, it was about like actual, like they'd ask you about yourself for example, you know, so it was, in that class I learned a lot. That's the class we did the cooking show in too.”

Similar to school A and B, school C used mostly book-based instruction. Saleema thought the Arabic books were the same series and were written in one of the Arab countries. The textbooks provided an elementary level of native speaking. What Saleema and Amal remembered and appreciated the most in their book were poems and stories of Arab culture and history. What Amal resented about the books is that they had to memorize all the poems contained within them. She found memorization challenging, which spoiled her experience of Arabic poetry. Saleema had a

different experience with the poems; if she liked the poem, then she would enjoy memorizing it, while other times it would be an experience to suffer through.

Amal explained that they “usually just stuck with the book.” Sometimes, they did skits and presentations, “only a couple times. It wasn't often, and we'd have to like beg her. So for us it's like oh please let us be, like be a little easier on us, let it be a presentation, let it be a skit.” This occurred mostly during her time in the intermediate level. Once she moved on to the advanced class, it was primarily only paper and pencil and comprehension questions. Amal preferred to delve into more relevant and creative materials. “It was always like 'what's the meaning,' like 'what's the vocab meaning,' it was very straight forward and very boring. It wasn't really lively.” Valenzuela (1999) describes what most participants reveal as subtractive schooling, a term used to indicate situations where students’ families, communities, or experiences is deemed unworthy by the school to the construction of a meaningful educational practice. Teachers need to include student voice and student perspective in their curriculum (p. 31).

### **Learning Grammar at the Community School**

Researchers suggest that teaching grammar for HLLs may not be the main and only focus but rather “it should be seen as contributing to a broader communicative competence” (Anderson, 2008, p. 84) mainly in the written form of the language. In this sense, grammar is to be used only in supporting roles, not as a goal itself (ACTFL, 2012; Kagan & Dillon, 2003).

Participants expressed appreciation of the importance of grammar, based on what they have been told in their schools. Hiba mentioned that Arabic grammar is challenging, but she enjoys learning it because of the benefits. “If I know grammar, I can read without harakat [diacritical marks], I can understand more, I can put together sentences better, it just helps, like the overall language, like to read it, to speak it, to write it.” However, some of the participants, such as in

school B, shared their disappointment at what they felt were the unrealized benefits of learning grammar. There was, according to most, repetitive instruction that did not change from year to year, stressing the same concepts. Latifa thought irab [case ending], which is used mostly to indicate the case ending of the words, helps in understanding the structure and syntax of the Qur'an because it is very similar to tajweed. However, she was critical that the way she was taught it at school made it irrelevant to her. "Like 'fiil mudari,' (present tense) like why is that significant? Because we did it like every year since elementary, so why, there wasn't really much advancing, and there wasn't really much advancing in understanding and speaking, as much as I would've liked more. So I think it's more important than irab."

In school C, Saleema was the only participant expressing the ability to make connections between the rules as taught in grammar class and the learning of the language. Saleema started learning grammar when she was in the sixth grade and she thought it was important to learn grammar even though it was her least preferred part; "it wasn't really something I was interested in, but um, I think it was important to learn it so you could understand." Saleema explained how grammar helped her in understanding the context of certain sentences. "When I was younger, reading Arabic texts and things I wouldn't really understand how things came together. But when I would read something I- like, later, like twelfth grade or something, I would notice oh, this is, I don't know, how the sentence goes together, I would notice it more. So I think it helped me." Unique as it may be among the participants, Saleema's experience with grammar suggests that the issue may not necessarily be that of difficulty of subject matter, but rather of adequacy of methods of instruction. This may include utilizing strategies of building connections between what is learned in grammar class and Qur'an class, which is in line with ACTFL (2012) standards.

Amal expressed that while a mastery of grammar was crucial to mastering the language, even more helpful would have been the development of an instinctual use of the language. “Of course it benefits you in formation of the structure of sentences, but in the end it's- it's based off of like what sounds right, for me when I would write I was like what sounds right, what makes sense when I write this sentence. So I feel like if we learned more conversational skills that would've been better.” Amal reported repeatedly that she loves Arabic, and she loves speaking it, but she does not like knowing the grammar of it, or going into much depth and detail. Unlike Amal, Saleema thought that the level of grammar she learned “was good, if anything it should be more, like higher advanced, um, because we don't really learn the twelfth grade level in the countries back home, like you know it's lower still obviously, but no I think it's important to include that because you're not gonna learn it anywhere else.”

Omar and Amirah did not complain about learning grammar, per se; they were able to manage it as a subject of study, however they could not see how it helped them use the language. Omar puts it in the following way “there's no connection, I just know it, but I don't know what to do with it. Like if I was to read something and people say oh 'irab' helps you out to read, well I don't really know how to uh, utilize it, I don't know how to use it in the right terms.” Amirah was the only participant who came to appreciate grammar in her junior year. Arabic grammar began to make sense after years of learning because, according to her, she began to see it as a “puzzle solving” exercise. However, the technical aspects of the grammar she learned still had no real-world application; she felt it was taught in isolation and did not help her become a better reader or writer. There is a need to know more about effective ways to teach grammar for diglossic languages, however, we can see/hear it directly from my participants.

### **Learning Qur’anic Arabic at the Community School**



The importance of Qur'anic Arabic may transcend ethnic and national boundaries. To know Qur'anic Arabic is important to Muslim Americans no matter their origin or ethnicity. Teaching Qur'anic Arabic may draw on the ubiquity of ritual formulas that may be familiar to most members of the community and may be present in their quotidian practices. This may render Arabic, when taught within the sphere of ritualistic practices, as in the case of teaching Qur'an memorization, much more attainable than the teaching of Arabic as a communicative language. In ritual, what might be important is to know what to say when, rather than what it means. However, the effect on the learner is profound, because this repeated exposure through ritual might achieve three important traits. Firstly, it makes familiar the sounds of letters, words, and style. Secondly, the perceived sacredness of the Qur'an, coupled with the religious devotion to it may help mitigate the difficulty usually experienced with language learning and usage. Thirdly, most of the content that comes from the Qur'an is in the form of stories and narrative.

The manner in which this linguistic knowledge is achieved and the manner in which the Arabic language is used is where the AHLLs are distinct. Participants expressed that their learning needs outgrew the pietistic concerns as they were taught, they expressed growing interest in studying the Qur'an for comprehension and meaning rather than mere ritual piety. For example Amirah enjoys learning about stories from the Qur'an as opposed to entire Surahs (chapters), "cause I think if we understand the story and like the moral and the importance of the story we'll come to like it ... instead of them just giving us like random like, Surah." The Surahs she most enjoyed memorizing were Surah Al-Qusas and Surah Al-Kahf because they contain beautiful stories and deep meaning, "so like when I recite it and memorize it I actually understand what I'm reciting and memorizing."

However, this ritualistic utility of Qur'anic Arabic has its limits due to the nature of the content and the teaching methods employed. Latifa and Hiba did not like the way Qur'an was taught at their school because they did not learn much about the interpretation of the Surahs; it was mostly about memorization and reading. Sometimes, the teacher would delve into interpretation but "it's like a side thing. And it was very dry. Like senior year though we had a really good teacher who like was the first time he actually went into tafseer [interpretation] full."

Latifa liked learning Surah Mariam because "the way it flows is very, it's like a story, so it's very easy to memorize, very um, rhythmic." Also Hiba liked Surah Al-FatiH because she loved the meaning of the Ayahs, and Omar liked Surah al-Jumu3a "the meaning really stuck to me and I find the recitation to be beautiful." Saleema liked Surah al-Rahman because it was descriptive and was easy to visualize the Ayahs and their meanings, while Amal liked Surah Al-Kahf because "it is very applicable. Plus learning the meaning of it, understanding it and why it's recommended to read it every Friday, like I understand it better. And Surah Mariam I really love that story in general."

There seems to be considerable consistency across the participants in terms of their views on what makes reading and comprehending the Qur'an easier than MSA. The views expressed by Ahmad are shared across all the other participants, with the exception of Laila, who found reading the Qur'an more difficult because she did not master the harakat, the diacritical marks, that guide the reader through the reading of the text.

Ahmad: [...] I don't know why but reading Qur'an's like, it's not that difficult. I don't know why, if it's because I grew up, you know, with it...

Khuloud: Or is it because there's harakat?

Ahmad: Yeah, exactly, yeah so I think that makes it a lot easier as well. But also like sometimes, because growing up you know going to prayers and ... I don't memorize it but like... most of the Surahs are familiar, so when I come to read I remember like this being recited, so it's easier to read it and follow along.

Latifa felt that memorizing the Qur'an may aid in establishing a sense of familiarity with the case endings, while the knowledge of CA may help in understanding the general meaning even though the Qur'an has a different style, as she observed. In Latifa's words, "it helps in grammar. Because when you memorize Qur'an like you automatically pick up the grammar, because you have it memorized, so when you read something that might be wrong you recognize it right away." Latifa noted the difference between MSA and Qur'anic Arabic, "it's like two different cultures of speaking, like you know, because Qur'an's very dramatic, like very- the words are um, very deep, like they're not stuff you ever use in stories or something you're gonna read in newspaper."

The experience of Amal and Saleema in school C may corroborate the usefulness and relevance of Qur'anic Arabic more than Arabic class. School C's use of structured content, such as material packets, was not present in the other two schools. Amal explained how they would memorize the whole Surah but it would be split into segments. The teacher would give them a packet with the specific Surah (chapter). They would read them in class and then go over the meaning. The teacher would tell them the story behind the Ayahs. There were questions that went along with it, in addition to the definitions of certain words. For example, in studying one Surah, there may have been 30 questions in English and about 20 vocabulary words in Arabic. Then, when students memorize a certain portion from the Surah, they had to write the assigned portion by producing it from memory.

Ahmad noted that his CA was really useful for learning the Qur'an, "because it was in Arabic as well." He reported that translating in English would not always help; what could have helped more was growing up knowing CA. Ahmad's observation is supported by McLoughlin's (2009) view that "a real understanding and appreciation of [CA] can only expand a student's knowledge of classical Arabic" (p. 3). Thus, excluding the CA from instruction in classrooms compels the students to resort to English when trying to answer a question, engage in discussion or express themselves. This was clear from the experience of Ahmad who reported that when learning Qur'an the material used paired the Arabic text of the Qur'an with an English translation to help comprehension, this invited more dependence on English rather than utilizing their already existing knowledge of CA.

The fact that Qur'an is distinct in its form and its style is well established. However, extracts from Qur'anic verses, poetry excerpts, and ancient proverbs frequently find their way into everyday speech of native speakers' regardless of their educational background (McLoughlin, 2009). This may suggest that learning the three forms of Arabic in isolation may not be beneficial for AHLLs.

### **Designing a Heritage Language Program**

Heritage language programs might benefit from exploring the ways in which students desire to position themselves (Lee, 2002). As such, schools may position students in specific social and academic contexts based on dominant school ideologies and availability of resources or instructors' language abilities. HLLs, however, also may position themselves as they seek to fashion themselves in particular contexts and construct their own social identity (Maguire & Curdt-Christiansen 2007).

When participants were asked how they would go about designing an Arabic program that could be beneficial to them, they mentioned that they would like to learn Arabic that is of utility for their day-to-day life. Participants voted for a program that could be tied to their lived world by making the connection between school, home and community to accomplish worthwhile and meaningful goals. Of importance is making the content of the class activities relevant and meaningful to the students' world and consequently connecting the school curriculum to issues of relevance in the students' lives. It seems that a community-based approach may benefit HL learning pedagogies particularly if they address the ACTFL (2012) standard of communication, culture, connections, comparison and community best suited to the development of a curriculum that specifically targets HLLs such as the participants in this study. Such a curriculum "builds upon learners' intercultural experience and also broadens their linguistic and cultural range" (Kagan, 2012, p. 80). The Arabic curriculum may be built on HLLs' prior familiarity in speaking and listening to their CAs at home, to improve and advance their speaking and reading abilities and validate their hybrid identities as Arab-Americans outside the home.

### **Standards for Instruction**

Participants of this study are similar to the participants of the study of Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) who were beginner-level HLLs of Spanish. They have positive attitudes toward their HL and culture and are highly motivated to pass Arabic onto future generations. Participants reported that they speak primarily English at home with their siblings, and use English as the main language of formal cognitive development and peer socialization, even though they are frequently surrounded by the language at home and have opportunities to engage with the language. They often or always overhear conversations between their grandparents, parents, relatives, and first generation community members in Arabic. Their learning objectives were to improve their

speaking fluency and to learn the standard Arabic. The interview data from this study, similar to that of the Beaudrie and Ducar study, found that participants at this level “both expect and need to learn within an atmosphere that fosters confidence in their use of [HL] and pride in their cultural heritage” (p. 14). Beaudrie and Ducar indicate that HLLs at this level may benefit from HL learning pedagogies that “address the ACTFL standard of communication, culture, connections, comparison and community” (p. 14). It is worth stating here that although the participants seemed not to be familiar with ACTFL (2012) standards, I, nevertheless, could spot in their ideas about program design multiple traces of such guidelines.

**Communication.** One of the most remarkable aspects of the interviews in this study is the forthrightness with which the participants expressed their views regarding the importance of learning Arabic as a communicative language. Most participants conveyed difficulties in expressing themselves either in discussing academic topics or even in interacting within their social sphere. Amal, like most participants, wished that school taught her more conversational skills. She said, “I feel like I didn't come out with that many conversational skills... So I wish they focused on being able to represent ourselves like in a full conversation, either professional or non-professional.” Amirah elaborated: “something that you're gonna use in your daily life, like it's not just like a waste, it's not like something, you just wanted the grade and that's it.” HL learning for Amirah, Amal and other participants is more than simple classwork, it is part of their growing heritage identity which could be achieved through communication and interaction with speakers of the target language (He, 2006; Moloney & Oguro, 2012).

To learn Arabic as a communicative language, the participants demonstrated an awareness of the importance of implementing dialects in HL classrooms. Hiba noted that “it's hard to make [speaking] just formal. Because it's natural that everyone has a dialect, so I feel like it's not hard if

each person speaks in their own dialect. It's understandable.” As such, for Hiba as well as the other participants, dialect-based classrooms are not just possible but necessary for two reasons, as she noted; “Number one, it's not hard to understand. Number two, it's too much pressure to make everyone ‘you have to talk formal, you have to talk fusHa.’ I feel like then that they would like get scared or be like oh this is too much. I feel like, make them comfortable in the language- in the dialect they know, and they'll like Arabic more and they'll have fun.” Hiba, as well as most participants, wanted to experience learning Arabic as a vibrant language that is the medium of expression, rather than only learning it as a medium for reading simple texts or doing grammar drills (ACTFL, 2012)

**Culture.** According to ACTFL standards, culture is in the heart of social interaction that reflect cultural attitudes and values. Latifa and Omar thought some of the lessons were good, particularly the selections of interesting poems or old stories, like folk stories. Latifa observed, “I like those because that's like a dose of culture.” For instance, Latifa remembered there was a poem: “it was about like, um, a- a daughter asking her father what is like, my nation, what is my land? It was by a famous poet I don't know I don't remember, but that I remember we talked about a lot and it stuck in my head, so that like, we were all from like immigrant descent in that class, so it was all we learned from that one.” Latifa responded, “I would connect it a lot, a lot to religious studies and like I was saying like cultural studies... and a lot of cultural stuff. I would want to watch a lot of films, I would want to be able to argue for like abstract ideas in Arabic, I don't know how to do that at all. But I think that would be really cool.”

**Connection.** In a standards-based Arabic program, students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through Arabic (ACTFL, 2012). Most participants expressed an eagerness in breaking out of the confines of the language class, and experiencing it within other

subjects. Most participants preferred integrating Arabic with other subjects as narrated by Amirah. “I like integrating what I learned. And I like connecting it to other classes, it helps me better learn and understand.” Ahmad highlighted the positive side of integration: “If a student is interested in History or whatever and you bring, one day it'll be a history article or something, and it's a topic that student likes, I think it'll keep the students more engaged.” Ahmad added, “Definitely like the science subjects for instance, like I, right now I wouldn't know how to explain anything. Like if it's biology or even anatomy, like I don't know anything in Arabic”

Latifa thought that integration would “make Arabic more practical, and more usable in everyday life. So you'd learn the vocab that you typically use for like a conversation, like about politics or about health, yeah that would be cool.” Amal thought that integration was great because they would be exposed to two different ways of processing the material. “Like in general you have two ways to interpret information. Not interpret per se, but to be able to relay the message, you'd have two ways to know it. And sometimes in Arabic you're able to have more meaning, sometimes, and then, then the English... so we would be able to relate things a little bit more.”

Amirah did not fully explore her connection to the greater Middle East and tie in her identity as an Arab to the relevant issues going on in the Arab world at her community school. “I never recall ever getting into politics in high school. When I started getting in to politics was in college, which is funny because I started learning everything, everything started making more sense to me.” “History was not that strong, so I didn't learn History that much, in [my] school ... I didn't have a very consistent, um, you know, I didn't have a solid background in History at [my school] until I got into college” Amirah continued.

Saleema said “Because it's an Islamic School I mean it has a different sort of approach to things than normal schools, I think it'll be a good idea because right, as of now the only thing we



have is like just Arabic classes and Qur'an classes that are different. But if we have that kind of like, knowledge of Arabic, like classic Arabic literature, I think it'll strengthen us even more when we go out in to the world with our Arabic knowledge.”

When participants were asked their opinions regarding studying translated Arabic literature in their Language Arts class and studying the same materials in Arabic class, all participants were ecstatic about the idea. Latifa commented: “That's such a cool idea. Yeah, I never thought about that. It was always- Language Arts was always um, like typical American curriculum. It wasn't- I don't think it was affected much by the fact that the school was Islamic, or that it involved Arabic.” Saleema preferred studying translated Arabic literature over the simple children's stories they used to be assigned. “If we were to learn the same thing we're learning in English, I think it would help us like first of all understand the story itself more, and then ... it would just strengthen us in our Arabic language because it's at a higher level too, so I think that would actually be a really good idea.”

**Comparison.** Latifa believed that formal and dialect are different but “it helps to be familiar with the words” and knowing CA helps a lot because a language has “an emotion to it.” When she hears a word that she knows, even though it is conjugated differently, it still likely originates from the same root, so she will have some clue as to what it is supposed to refer to versus a completely unfamiliar word. All participants seemed to be aware of this fact. More significantly, Ahmad felt “reassured” of his capacity to learn both when these connections were brought to light. He noticed that some of his CA could be formal and he feels when someone tells him that he is saying the formal Arabic, “it kinda like, it's reassuring and lets you feel like you know, feel a bit better that you don't only know the informal.”

**Communities.** In her best learning experience when she was in her junior year, Latifa had a teacher who tried to relate to the students. Latifa recalled learning about a Palestinian song, “the point is that we'd learn these songs and we'd like have like a pride about Arabic and the lands we came from. So that definitely like inspired us because we'd get, we'd get like in to emotional talks and yeah I remember that for sure, and it was like you wanted to understand the songs better and on a deeper level. So, it gave you a sense of like connection between your identity and your language, and your country of origin and all that stuff.” Latifa also liked it when she was asked to write about what was going on in the Arab world during the Arab Spring; “it was like very dramatic. It was fun to write because that's also when everything was starting, so it was very like, you know it hit home for all of us.”

### **Unfulfilled Expectations**

In general, the participants' experience in learning Arabic at all schools is told with dissatisfaction. Most of this study's participants felt that their educators have failed them in their desire and goal of achieving fundamental communication and reading skills as defined by the study participants. Hiba and Amal were disappointed the most; Hiba did not regard any of her Arabic teachers to have been good educators of language. Amal, on the other hand, like most the study participants, was discontent with the way the Arabic class was structured to mainly emphasize grammar more than anything else. Amal indicated that she regretted missing opportunities to learn how to present herself both socially and professionally using Arabic. Omar and Saleema were less critical with their Arabic learning experience at their schools than any other participants, Omar being the least critical. Saleema's impression of her learning outcomes were that they were not what she desired to achieve. What follows is a script of my conversation with Saleema; she was asked if she speaks, reads and writes Arabic well enough to pass it on to her future kids:

Saleema: I think the main thing that would keep the language alive is speaking it. Um, I think I have like a good amount of that. But I do wish like uh, that for me in school that we, like that I was more, like I- I was able to be more fluent in it than I am now. Like I kind of wish that I was, by the time I graduated that I could like more easily read Arabic paragraphs, so if I could reach higher levels like I think it would be even better. But I think for me right now I think it's good, like I could still pass it on to my kids and talk to people.

Khuloud: Yeah that's good, was it from the school mainly or from your family?

Saleema: I think it- I think it was probably from my family.

Khuloud: From your family?

Saleema: Or maybe even a combination of both, but if I didn't have like an Arabic foundation at home, I don't think it would be, I think I would forget it over time, from what I learned in school.

Saleema, who spent 13 years learning Arabic at the school, thought that what she learned helped her to do well in school but may not serve her outside of school over time without continued family input. At the same time, what she knew from home was also limited because it contained mostly CA.

### **Current and Future Use of the Heritage Language**

Despite considering spoken Arabic as a valuable part of their identity and having a desire to maintain their HL, not all the participants were motivated to continue taking Arabic classes. Laila stated that she has to start to take Arabic next year, Amirah finished all Arabic classes that her university offers but has not reached the advanced level. Latifa and Hiba plan to continue learning Arabic when they graduate from their university studies. Latifa is seeking the opportunity

for full immersion courses overseas. This might demonstrate a disconnect between the schools' Arabic learning goals and that of the AHLLs.

Latifa also attempted to take Arabic classes at her university but, unlike Ahmad, she felt these courses did not suit her well. She described the classes as very easy and boring “because mostly it's for people that don't know Arabic at all, but Arabic, like, even though it's difficult for me, it's more natural.” This might highlight the importance of creating differing classes for HLLs and non heritage learners. Amal did not express any desire to take Arabic classes at her university, nor did she consider taking Arabic classes in the future. Her previous experience of learning Arabic at her community school disappointed her because the emphasis was mainly on prescriptive grammar rather than functional daily conversational use. Amal stated, “I didn't like the grammar, so I didn't wanna go through that again. So I kind of stayed away from it.” Her perceived attitude toward grammar as being too difficult to learn has caused her to discontinue further studies of formal Arabic.

Unlike Alarcón's (2010) study of advanced Spanish heritage language learners, data indicates participants in this study are not fluent speakers of formal Arabic. Again, participants learned and maintained their dialects mainly from their home, while they learn MSA mostly through their community schools. Most participants noted having better receptive proficiency but also reported having difficulties when they talk to native speakers, because they need to fully comprehend to be able to respond as they noted. Participants reported difficulty speaking Arabic when communicating with people from different dialect backgrounds noting the level of difficulty between familiar and unfamiliar dialects. I will expand on this in the next theme.

Spoken Arabic was their top priority, with reading being next and writing last. Unlike the study of Alarcón (2010) and Carreira & Kagan (2011), participants did not cite improving

academic writing to be one of their main learning objectives. In fact, none of the participants, with the exception of Amal, expressed a desire to learn how to write a formal speech while she was at school. Saleema noted: “If I live in America, writing Arabic won’t be as useful for me than like, you know speaking.” Participants mostly lack academic skills in Arabic and are interested in perfecting their spoken Arabic. Their views recognize the presence of dialects to be able to be active agents in their HL learning. These goals are contrary to what their community schools have taught them, which is an emphasis on MSA.

To summarize, a general profile of HLLs for this study is similar to the HLL of the National Heritage Language Survey (2011) in three aspects. An AHLL is a learner who (1) is an early sequential bilingual-who acquired English early in life, after acquiring the HL; (2) has limited exposure to the HL outside of the home; (3) has positive attitudes towards learning their HL.

Participants’ most common linguistic needs were: (1) to speak fluently, which resembles the study of Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) of lower-level Spanish HLLs enrolled in a first-semester HL course at the University of Arizona; and (2) to increase their vocabulary (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). As to their reasons for maintaining Arabic, participants’ top priorities were: (1) ethnic and religious identity and self-fulfillment; (2) passing on the language to their future generation, and (3) better communication with family and the greater community both in the U.S. and relative overseas. Their reasons for maintaining their heritage language are primarily personal (Albirini, 2014b; Husseinali, 2012) rather than academic or professional (Alarcón, 2010; Li & Lo, 2011).

The following is a table containing a summary of the sociolinguistic profile of the study participants. In the last chapter, the study concludes by attempting to present the pedagogical implications of the profile of these HLLs based on the suggestions and discussions made by this present study participants themselves.

Table 5

*Sociolinguistic Profiles of Participants*

---

Profile Information for Second-Generation Participants

---

**Background**  
 Arabic acquisition in early childhood (0-4 years old)  
 Mostly middle low/high socioeconomic background

**Education**  
 First, second and third year of university

**Language Contact**  
 Mostly speak Arabic with parents and first generation  
 Speak English to second generation friends and siblings  
 Limited exposure to Arabic media  
 Lack of exposure to reading non-school materials  
 Limited exposure to online Arabic reading

**Attitudes**  
 Positive attitude toward Arabic language and Arabic culture  
 Feeling they need to be comfortable in speaking Arabic  
 Have difficulty in reading and writing Arabic  
 View Arabic as a complex language

**Identity**  
 Dual identity  
 Proud of their cultural heritage

**Motivation and future use of language**  
 Maintaining a sense of self-identity and self-fulfillment  
 Learning Arabic for religious purpose  
 Communicating with family overseas  
 Having an obligation for intergenerational transmission of Arabic

**Linguistic needs**  
 Language maintenance  
 Presenting themselves well in speaking  
 Improving vocabulary and reading skill

---

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we saw that the participants have both similar and divergent ways of using their HL. For example, Hiba was the only participant that used exclusively Arabic with her parents. She was also the only one who texted her mother only in Arabic, and yet she does not speak Arabic with any of her friends, nor does she use Arabic in searching the internet, or on social media. Amal, on the other hand, attempts to use Arabic on social media and performs simple and different tasks

like internet searching in Arabic when she is asked to do so; however, Amal does not consume visual media in Arabic. She usually does not watch Arabic films or series. Some of the participants speak only Arabic with their parents; some travel more frequently to their heritage countries; some share some Arabic materials on social media; some text their parents in Arabic. Participants in this study reported ample opportunities to be exposed to Arabic media, but their primary barrier to engagement seemed to be mostly due to difficulty and inability to comprehend it rather than the lack of the desire to join. Some of them expressed frustration at their lack of confidence.

In addition, the experience of the participants in this study at schools A and B were mostly the same in many aspects, although school C seemed to provide some features that were not available in the other schools. As for the outcomes, participants largely felt insecure with their HL skills. After years of Arabic exposure and instruction, how can home, community, and community schools bring the study of Arabic to life, or rather, to the lives of the students? How can one help participants to better utilize Arabic in a way that allows students to maintain their HL and provide them with the necessary tools to advance their HL skills? It is critical for Arabic language educators to fully understand these learners' experiences and challenges in order to better offer suggestions for developing more effective curricula and instructional practices that may engage HLLs and enhance HL learning. The following chapter offers a discussion on what makes learning and using Arabic a challenge.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

Participants in this study, like in other studies, reported strong attachment and a profound sense of belonging to their heritage community based on their positive perception/attitude and factors relating to their cultural identity (Albrini, 2014b; Albirini, 2016; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005). It is worth noting that none of the participants reported that their desire to maintain Arabic is related to factors like pleasing their parents, or a way to show appreciation. Arabic for the study participants is more than a tool of communication, it represents who they are and who they are supposed to be (Vang, 2012). Their attachments to Arabic were much more personal, as in the case of the participants in Comanaru and Noels (2009) study of Chinese HLLs, to maintaining their HL “was an integral aspect of their self-concept” (p. 131). Participants placed a high value on their HL transmission. They considered themselves as guardians of their HL. However, as noted above, in spite of the presence of opportunities to learn, outcomes fall short of participants’ identity and linguistic needs, more on this below.

Participants from the three community schools shared their views on the major challenges they face in learning and using Arabic. The five most common challenges the participants noted were: (1) the perceived difficulty with learning Arabic; (2) navigating Arabic formal/informal usage; (3) dialects and communicating with people from different dialect backgrounds; (4) the impact of HL ideology; and (5) the pedagogical methods of teaching Arabic. In this chapter, the challenges of Arabic language-learning will be discussed, the chapter concludes with the last theme and making some recommendations based on the findings of this study.

This study highlights Arabic as a social/communicative language, focusing on its input and output. How this input and output occurs is dictated by language ideology, pedagogy, and



methodology. Ideology involves how one values a form of a target language in reference to another, for example, valuing MSA over CA. Pedagogy involves the preference of learning one language skill over the other, for example focusing only on reading vocalized texts at the expense of learning Arabic as a communicative language. Methodology involves how a teacher comports themselves towards the students and conducts the class, for example using teacher-based instruction or learner-based instruction.

### **Challenges of Arabic Language-Learning**

#### **The Perceived Difficulty of Arabic**

Participants pointed to the difficulty of formal Arabic and to the distance between Arabic and English. Amal noted the “language distance” between Arabic and English. Amal, contrasted English which, of course, was more familiar, and easier for her, with Arabic which required more effort, “‘cause you're speaking a different language, a whole different like, different grammar, different you know it's- it's just everything is different ... I think everything is different about teaching Arabic.” It is clear from Amal’s comment here that the sense of distance between Arabic and English is quite profound. This perception by the participants might point to the lack of attention in HL classes to making the connection between HL and the dominant language. The idea is that regardless of the distance between the HL and the dominant language, effort could be made to make connection based on the ACTFL (2012) standards of comparison in order to facilitate more understanding of both languages. For example, comparing the composition of verbless sentences which is possible in Arabic and not in English. Also creating examples comparing the different possible sentence structures and how they differ between Arabic and English in terms of word order explaining for example that sentences in Arabic could start with Verb+Subject+ Object or Subject+Verb+ Object while in English only Subject+Verb+Object is

possible. These comparisons may provide high explanatory value for the different ways the student can grasp the varieties of linguistic aspects of both languages.

For AHLLs, distance is not only present between Arabic as HL and the dominant language, it is also present within the language due to the diglossic nature of Arabic. This internal distance is manifested between the formal (MSA) and colloquial Arabic (CA). Such discrepancy between students' spoken dialect and their later studied MSA might have an impact on learning their HL. In fact, perceived difficulty is not confined to HLLs. Researchers attributed the low literacy rate to the diglossic situation in the Arab world (Ayari, 1996; Maamouri, 1998; Alrabaa, 1986). Many native speaker students might seek private tutoring in learning MSA because they claim that MSA is difficult, for example when learning the rules of grammar (Bani-Khaled, 2014).

In general, participants pointed out that their sense of these distances was most evident when they were obliged to speak using only MSA, learning MSA grammar, MSA vocabulary and reading non-school materials such as on-line articles. A good way to illustrate the difficulties faced by AHLLs is by considering the study of both grammar and vocabulary. The difficulty with Arabic grammar could be more pedagogical than otherwise. What I mean is that the importance that is given to learning grammar is for its own sake, which may result in a style of teaching and learning grammar that is isolated from the learning of other language skills.

Some participants noticed that their background knowledge in CA would not aid them in grammar. What could have mitigated this shortcoming was offering a comparison between the two varieties, which would have enhanced their understanding of the rules of grammar. Albirini (2014c) explains that errors are expected to happen because of the many similarities and differences between CA and MSA, but negative transfer may be considerably reduced when such comparisons are explicitly brought to HLLs' attention. It is important here to reiterate that one of

the consequences of MSA only instruction is the inflation of the importance of grammar at the expense of other language skills. However, teaching grammar as one aspect of a contrastive approach that brings in CA into the space of HL instruction will put grammar in its proper place as an auxiliary to a complete set of language skills.

Another significant obstacle faced by HLLs is their limited reservoir of vocabulary, since it is usually limited to the vocabulary of quotidian interactions (Oguro & Moloney, 2012) and they have deficiency in register-appropriate vocabulary (Ilieva, 2012). Participants appear to struggle with vocabulary acquisition both in MSA and CA vocabulary. Omar, like other participants, pronounced the difficulty he faces in listening to the Arabic news: “No it's not about the news too much, I follow the news in English, but uh, it's more about them, the uh, like their Arabic it's too, it's too much, like I can't handle it too much, especially with the big words that I don't know.” According to the heritage speakers (HSs) interviewees, in the study of Albirini (2014b), the decline in their HL skills, is manifested in vocabulary loss, especially words that do not belong to the home domain of use (p. 755). Kondo-Brown (2010, 2003) pointed out the need for more research to investigate how to best teach academic vocabulary to HLLs. HLLs, need to be helped to use specific strategies to make the connection between familiar words to figure out unfamiliar words (Jensen & Llosa, 2007). This could easily be brought to their attention using Arabic root system.

In the study of Albirini (2014b) as well as in (Albirini et al., 2011), heritage speakers had revealed notable lexical gaps, in addition to difficulties in lexical selection and sub-categorization requirements. The idea is that regardless of the distance among the three language forms, effort could be made to make connection based on the ACTFL (2012) standards of comparison in order to facilitate more understanding of Arabic language forms. For example, the relative clauses in MSA has eight forms, in CA it all collapses into one word. For AHLLs, vocabulary acquisition

could be one of the main learning goals as was noted by the Carreira and Kagan (2011) study's participants.

As far as the productive skills are concerned, the amount of vocabulary to be acquired is smaller than the vocabulary needed to master the receptive skills (Van, 2006, p. 309). The participants' reflected the fact that vocabulary requirements for receptive skills is wider and more varied in both MSA and CA, while when they speak they by nature attempt to utilize whatever vocabulary they possess. This explains Omar's difficulty in following media or news casts in Arabic. Other participants expressed the same difficulty.

### **Navigating Formal and Informal Usage**

Navigating formal and informal varieties is one of the skills that distinguish first-generation parents, who lived in Arab countries and were adept at dealing with the diglossic nature of Arabic, which is knowing when to say what when using the three forms. Such skill, which can be called 'diglossic competence,' is desired for AHLLs but is one that they, to various degrees, do not have (Albirini, 2016). The extent to which AHLLs may acquire diglossic competence depends on their home environment ages 0-4 years.

Prior to their formal schooling, many participants had previous exposure, through their informal settings, to the three distinct yet related varieties: MSA, CA and Qur'anic Arabic. They had previous exposure to Qur'anic Arabic via Qur'an recitation and memorization at home and at the mosque; to MSA via children's books and watching cartoons on satellite TV or the Internet; and to CA often through communication with their parents and media shows. Thus, MSA is not entirely new to most of them but it is also not familiar enough. AHLLs differs from monolingually raised native speakers in their degree of familiarity and use of Arabic language forms (Albirini, 2016). I repeat, this native like exposure to language forms happens in their preschool years. When

they get to school they begin formal instruction of both MSA and Qur'anic Arabic but not CA. This exclusion of CA, is one of the hallmarks of the language ideology that is prevalent in HL instruction. Furthermore, it may be behind the gradual loss or diminishment of whatever diglossic exposure the participants had before starting formal schooling. In such language ideology CA is considered to be unworthy of being included by schools. One possible consequence of this exclusion that might have lead the teaching of the language into paths that may foster making the language familiar but not utilizing it, since CA is the most used variety when using the language (Ryding, 2006; Younes, 2006).

Most participants reported relearning what they knew and used at home of their dialect at school such as learning texts of fake dialogues between household members using MSA. Participants realized also that learning to converse especially at a very basic social level in MSA has no application in real life. Arabic teaching programs based on MSA are “faced with the choice of constructing artificial conversations” (Wilmsem, 2006).

What makes the situation of teaching diglossic competence in Arabic more complex is the lack of clarity about the role played by MSA among other language varieties. Participants value knowing Qur'anic Arabic for religious affiliation and value knowing CA to communicate with their parents and relatives, yet the purpose of learning MSA, the way it is delivered at their community schools, may not be clear to them.

Participants noted that the discovery of these overlapping spheres of the different diglossic forms, Qur'anic Arabic, MSA, and CA, were realized gradually by them and were never laid out to them in instruction; it was more of a self-discovery. Consider Laila for example, “I didn't know there was a proper and slang 'til we started learning more in deep Arabic. I was like whoa, ok what is this? I thought we all speak the same Arabic.” Omar, on the other hand, did not suffer the same

shock, but the distinction came to him without help. “I didn't realize the differences in dialects until maybe uh, I was 10. Because I remember in fourth grade I used to get really mad that everyone was understanding it, just because in Algeria there's a big thing where if one person do something we put a 'nun' in the front, so we say like, 'ana hanakul.’” Saleema also had the same experience. “It was just kind of something we picked up on, like something we noticed ... but it wasn't something we discussed or talked about.”

Amal, like the other participants, viewed both MSA and CA as equally valid for classroom discussions of academic topics and brought into light the limiting nature of conducting classroom instruction exclusively in MSA. “So let's say we are discussing something in class, I don't believe that it should be in formal [MSA] because you won't be able to get your- what you're trying to say out properly, so I feel like informal [CA] is definitely necessary but as an example, like for our senior year- for our senior graduation they asked somebody if [any student] wanted to do a speech in Arabic, and honestly, I couldn't.” Amal wanted to highlight the missing opportunity for her to speak more fluently, but also what is highlighted here is her missing opportunity to write a formal speech using MSA in spite of being in a more structured Arabic program in this study.

MSA could have been used as a tool for discussing academic topics in conjunction with their CAs rather than reading children's books. Saleema and the other participants reported that it would have been more beneficial if they learned about current events, things going on in Arab countries or health related topics. “Short stories were more like childish, like they're more based for children....but um, if she [the Arabic teacher] added that kind of stuff I think it would've helped us even more, because it would've helped us in our general lives,” Saleema noted. Latifa, for instance, likes to know formal Arabic first hand for poetry and the Qur'an, she prefers romantic and political poetry like colonialist, resistance, and Palestinian poetry. The idea is that regardless

of the role of each Arabic form, effort could be made to create familiarity with dialects, forms, and registers based on the reality of the students and the ACTFL (2012) standards of community in order to facilitate how native speakers utilize Arabic forms. Samaniego and Pino (2000) provide good advice in terms of modeling different HL registers that may reflect and resemble the richness of the heritage the students come from. They suggest that “teachers should provide model registers using video, radio, movies, guest speakers, and the like and then require students to model different registers” (p. 43).

### **Dialects and Communicating with People from Different Dialects**

Based on the data in this study, diglossia can be seen as an origin of the division in attitude toward Arabic language forms between first and second-generation Arab-Americans. In fact, the second-generation might be more capable than the first-generation to shorten the gaps between different dialects. Hiba, like most participants, noticed the differences between the dialects of the first and second-generation. “My friends and I, like among aunts [first generation] they notice that they do have different dialects, it’s obvious but my friends and I feel like there are words, yeah they’re different, but in general, um, it’s pretty similar.” This ability to somewhat transcend dialectical divisions is also found in Ahmad’s experience. “I feel like when we talk together our Arabic is relatively similar, you know, it’s not like we go 100% in our pure dialect, you know.” Albirini (2016) hinted that AHSs are defined more by ethnic and religious identities and less by regional identities. This observation is manifested in this study by most of the study participants’ claim that they speak less “pure dialect” and by being more open to learn and use a dialect other than their own heritage dialect.

Ducar (2008) called Spanish HLLs “complex individuals” and called for the students’ voices to be used as a guide on language use in the Spanish HL classroom. Ducar, in his study of

152 Spanish HLLs enrolled in an extensive Spanish HL program, shows that HLLs prefer to learn specific varieties of Spanish that would be most useful to them in the future. Indeed, while I had expected the participants from different dialect backgrounds to value their own native dialects, I did not expect to hear about what Ducar called the “personally relevant variety,” or what some participants called “beneficial” dialects such as Levantine.

Most participants’ responses showed a preference for shami (Levantine) Arabic. They talked about personally preferred or relevant dialects other than their native dialects. Saleema, Ahmad, Latifa, Amal, Hiba and Amirah prefer shami. Laila prefers her dialect the most and she loves to use what she called “broken Arabic,” like inter-sentential switching between Arabic and English where the switch occurs at sentence and/or clause boundaries (Bagui, 2014). Omar prefers Palestinian madani or shami. Saleema likes the Syrian dialect, “I don't know I like them ... they're cute. Some people look at it and say they're so exaggerated, the way they speak, but I like it ... I think it's uh, nice, it sounds nice, and I understand it the most too.”

Even though Latifa is very interested in learning the Moroccan dialect, she foresaw no possibility and no practicality for presuming it. She noted “some dialects are better, like for example, shami (Levantine) is for sure one that is like best to learn. But like Moroccan would be hard to teach because it also has a lot of other language influences.” However, she emphasized the advantage of recognizing the Moroccan dialect in the classroom. “I think it would be pretty important to have like some exposure to it, so maybe like one random lesson, just exposing the students to it like oh this an interesting other dialects. Um, let's see how they like incorporate other stuff, just so they're aware of the like different dialects and the different ways that um, language forms based on the history and all that. But as a base dialect, I don't think so, it's very difficult. And it's not- it's not very relevant to other.” In such a classroom, Latifa, Omar, Ahmad and Amirah,



might offer opportunities to contrast new identities as experts in their own dialects which might increase their confidence in their own dialects and help them forge their membership in their language classrooms (Pereira, 2015). This means that participants suggested a scenario where one dialect could be chosen as a main dialect for study in classes while the dialect of the students may find its way in class discussion and may not be devalued or completely disregarded.

Amal would prefer that there was a general dialect that everybody would speak. For her, it would be easier to communicate without having to ask so many times what is meant, but “it also gives you a sense that I wouldn't wanna take that away, because it gives them their sense of where they came from. So you know, like when somebody comes to you and they start talking you know like ok, you're Egyptian, or like you're Moroccan, you're Palestinian, you're Syrian, you know. Like that's-that's their identifier.”

For Amal, a good dialect is a personal choice. While she does not like her native dialect, she knows that does not mean that all second-generation female girls do not like fallahi. In fact for Amal, during the three interviews, she stressed that the only reason she prefers madani more is because she liked “a very light effect, like when I'm speaking, I don't, um, I don't want that heaviness, so I like that. Some people, I know they, they love to be, like the Egyptian is very loud-not loud, but very, again, very heavy and they like that- they love it and they wouldn't steer away from it for anything. But, it just depends on per person.” But for many people her age, dialect boils down to the family or maybe the tolerance that the family may display in the case of using other non-native dialects. “It goes back to their family. So if their family spoke more madani, they would speak madani. If their family spoke more fallahi, they would speak fallahi. So it would go back to their family, most of my friends, it definitely would go back to their family.” The following table shows the native and the preference dialects of the participants and their parents.

Table 6

*Dialects of Participants and Parents*

Participants	Parents' Original Dialects	Dialect spoken by parents	Dialects spoken by participants	Personally beneficial dialect
	Dad/Mom	Dad/Mom		
Laila	Madani	Madai	Madai	Madani
Amirah	Fallahi	Fallahi	Fallhi/Madani	Shami
Ahmad	Sudanese (madani)	Sudanese	Sudanese (madani)	Shami
Hiba	Shami & derri	Shami	Shami	Shami
Latifa	Lebanese/Moroccan	Lebanese/Moroccan/Shami	Shami	Shami
Omar	Algerian	Algerian	Algerian (madani)	Shami/madani
Amal	Fallahi/madani	Fallahi/Madani	Madani	Shami
Saleema	Fallahi/madani	Fallahi/Madani	Madani	Shami

Arabic HLLs are not only expected to maneuver among three forms of Arabic: MSA, Qur'anic, and CA, but are also tasked to adapt to different types and forms of dialect that are different types of CA. This adds one more layer of complexity to using Arabic in diaspora societies. As a native speaker of the Syrian dialect, I was never exposed to, for example, the Moroccan or Sudanese dialects when I was in Syria. But here in the diaspora, I regularly meet people from different dialectic backgrounds. The participants, similarly, experience this mixture of dialects in their community, and it becomes more pronounced when they begin formal schooling.

Ahmad differentiated between dialects that are familiar and unfamiliar to him. “The dialects I understand the best definitely like Egyptian, Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian, Saudi, like a good chunk.” There are a few dialects that Ahmad would not understand, for instance Moroccan, Algerian and even Iraqi, depending on how it is spoken. Ahmad also has difficulty understanding what he called “pure dialect,” which he meant the non-urban/Bedouin dialects including Sudanese. Ahmad noted that most of the Arabic speaking people either speak or understand Levantine Arabic. “That's the countries of Sham, so that's usually just similar,” or the Egyptian Arabic because “all the North African countries, they could kinda understand, if they at least understand the basics, the bare minimum of those, they should be fine.” For Omar, MSA is more familiar to him than unfamiliar dialects. “FusHa [MSA] for sure just because it really depends on the speed, how fast they say it, but yeah probably fusHa. Just 'cause the pronunciation I already know. I know more fusHa than any other dialect.”

Saleema thought the hardest part about communicating with people from different dialects is the words. She could get past the accents, but “they have like certain words that mean something for me and something different for them, so they're like expressing something completely different than what I would understand. So just like the different words, different phrases, that's the hardest thing.” However, Saleema thought that speaking Arabic “can kind of get richer with dialects ... but reading and writing probably keep it more like, pure.”

Latifa explained that what makes it difficult to communicate with people from different dialects is not words or pronunciation, but the access to cultural communication. For example, “when you're trying to express something- like you know how in English we say 'oh my god' and like in dialects there's different ways of saying that, so for example in Morocco you'd say like 'Ah weele,' or like in Lebanese you'd say like 'shu.’” It is understandable that a student like Latifa can

perceive this variety as another source of difficulty. However, for an educator this variety can create an opportunity to compare and contrast among the students in the classroom. Such richness can be fun as Ahmad offered.

When participants attempt to communicate with peers from different dialect backgrounds, they noted using different strategies such as to ask the interlocutor to repeat, slow down, clarify, or use English or MSA. Trentman (2012) noted strategies used by NSs not far from the strategies mentioned above; switching towards a more well-known dialect, MSA, a European language, or towards some combination of the three.

Participants value the role of dialects and realize that knowing how to communicate with each other, especially among classmates and friends serves not only communication purposes but also “builds a stronger unity,” as noted by Laila. Participants think it is better to interact with different dialects because they get to see the language varieties represented in each dialect, which helps them understand what something means across all dialects. The risk of alienation that comes with the lack of familiarity with different dialects in the environment of diasporic communities with members from different countries across the Arab world may be manifested by the experience of Omar. Omar who speaks an Algerian dialect noted that speaking a specific dialect such as his “makes you even more of an outsider than what you already were, so once you speak Arabic, that’s one thing, but to be able to speak Arabic in a specific way, with a, uh, a country that doesn’t have that many immigrants coming to Chicago compared to other Arabic countries, or Middle Eastern ... I get to speak [Algerian] completely like I’m talking to my cousin or one of my family friends it’s a lot simpler, yeah.”

There is no doubt that the study participants, like many HLLs, might benefit from a classroom-based dialect awareness model which aims to give HLLs the tools and the confidence

to make their own linguistic choices (Martines, 2003). The specific complexity faced by HLLs in Islamic schools is the presence of a large variety of spoken dialects and stigma associated with certain dialects over others. Proposed by the participants, a solution to this complexity might be the use of a more “beneficial dialect,” as the main focus. However, the goal is to address the issue of CAs around three basic tasks: (a) being particularly sensitive towards minimizing and devaluing the HLLs’ CA (Nieto, 2010; Wu & Leung, 2014); (b) providing critical discussion about the system and the structure of Arabic variants and their uses (Albirini, 2014c Mark, 2011); and (c) helping HLLs understand that “there are many ways of saying the same thing, and that certain contexts suggest particular kinds of linguistic performance” (Delpit, 1998, p. 19). Involving HLLs in these three tasks where they may discover the richness of their heritage can be an empowering experience and may bring unity among HLLs coming from different dialect background as noted by the study participants. Arabic HL teachers, like Mandarin HL, “can take advantage of the rich linguistic resources that ... diaspora communities offer and develop more effective and engaging pedagogies that help students become more competent language users in their own local contexts and beyond” (Wu & Leung, 2014, p. 219).

### **Language Ideology**

For this study, language ideology could be understood as the “behavior toward language, which is in part a social phenomenon and contributes to our understanding of language maintenance and shift” (Chang, 2011, p. 17). Highlighting the implications of the language ideology on identity development of young Arabs in the U.S, explains that language ideology and use might affect the maintenance of HL and distinct ethnic identity (Guarfathero, 2014).

Diglossia is certainly a language policy but it may be thought of as a language ideology as well. Language ideology—as it is manifested by parents, community and community schools—

position religious literacy as an alternative to ‘conversational skills’ (Temples, 2013), Both at school and at home, MSA is placed, by first-generation parents and teachers, in a privileged position of being the main language of religious devotion and learning. CA is regarded as an inferior language form although it is the only form used for day to day communication. This perceived inferiority of CA may not have currency with second-generation HLLs which could explain the resilience of this division between first and second-generation HLLs in terms of attitudes toward language and the development of literacy skills. In this study, ideology is manifested through the practice of teaching only MSA in community schools and the choice of which form of Arabic is used among members of each generation. First, teaching only MSA will be highlighted.

The ideology of using MSA-only instruction resulted in the devaluing of CA in the educational sphere. Some instructors even deferred to English rather than CA in discussions. Younes (1990) noted: “Teachers do not speak Arabic with their students in and out of class because they feel uncomfortable speaking the variety of Arabic they are teaching, i.e., MSA, in ordinary conversational situations, since they themselves never use it this way” (p. 109). Another contributing factor was the imagined ideal characteristics of the optimal Arabic teacher and students. Both of these factors provide insights into the development of the near dogmatic attitude towards the purity of MSA in relation to CA. What follows is a segment of our conversation about the two factors mentioned above:

Khuloud: I understood from you that the teachers either speak formal or speak English.

Not really including the informal.

Hiba: Yeah I don't really remember hearing teachers speaking like, their dialects. Ever.

Khuloud: Did they prefer to speak English over their dialects?

Hiba: Yeah.

Khuloud: What do you think about it?

Hiba: Um, I don't know, it's nice that like we hear all the dialects, and we hear like our Arabic teacher talking Arabic. Like she's an Arabic teacher she's not supposed to be talking English.

The data from interviews showed that using CA in the classroom was equated with speaking incorrectly, an ideology that stood in sharp contrast with community practices. Saleema noted

Maybe it's better for us to, to like be encouraged to speak Arabic in general, even if was in dialect, because I think my teacher, what she was trying to get us to understand was reading and writing better through the way we talk. I think that was her focus, but, um because a lot of um, Arab Americans these days don't really speak Arabic at all, I think it's probably better for us to, to focus on the fact that we're speaking Arabic and it's okay for there to be a dialect. I don't think they should tell us that we're doing something wrong if we're speaking it a different way. I think it should be just um, just speak Arabic to each other.

Saleema wondered if teaching MSA while fostering students' dialects simultaneously can be more beneficial in terms of preparing them to become competent language users in the U.S (Ryding, 2006; Wahba, 2006; Younes, 2006). The limited space within which the HL is experienced plays the main role in the attenuated use of the language. Without opportunities and occasions to require resorting to it, a diasporic language will be confined and restricted in its utility to the language speaker. However, dialects may be used not only to convey meaning, but also to perform identities, reflecting student's linguistic practices, much like the case of teaching Chinese (Wu & Leung, 2014).

Expecting AHLLs to speak only MSA during discussions is something that most native speakers themselves cannot do. Most native speaker school pupils switch to CA during classroom interactions (Bagui, 2014; Al-Huri, 2012; Alrabaa, 1986; Bani-Khaled, 2014). The impossibility of conducting a classroom discussion exclusively in the standard language not only occurs in Arabic but also in many languages such as Spanish.

If the perceived need to pursue MSA-only instruction continues to spread without critical questioning, this dominant language practice might contribute to the eradication of the rich linguistic heritage of Arab-American HLLs who come from different dialect background (Wu & Leung, 2014). Teachers may be aware that to students of diglossic languages, HL learning is complicated by the struggle of learning MSA and at the same time maintaining their HL dialects, where “dialect speakers may easily become a subset within the heritage language learners, encountering unrealistic expectations of teachers and peers, while finding their needs unmet” (Wong & Xiao, 2010, p. 314). HL curriculum that focus exclusively on the standard variety may actually be jeopardizing rather than promoting HL maintenance (Beaudrie, 2015). Next, the use of Arabic among generations will be discussed.

Participants in this study live with their parents, except for Saleema who lives 30 min away from her parents and visits them every weekend. In her first year in college, Saleema lived with her family and then decided to live in the dorms to save time commuting. Arab families are more likely to be and remain married than other American families (United Census Bureau, 2003) and tend to be larger than the average American family. Close relationships among and within families might invite strong cultural unities. However, this does not translate to linguistic aspects of the heritage.



Based on the data of this study, participants speak Arabic only with first-generation relatives and community members who do not speak English. Most participants reported speaking 90% English with their friends and relatives their age. According to Shiri (2010), most Arab-Americans command English well and use it extensively both inside and outside their homes (Albirini & Benmamoun, 2012, p. 3). More research is needed to find out the reasons behind this phenomenon. As for this study, communicating with people from different backgrounds does not explain it because participants speak English with their siblings and friends from the same ethnicity. Ahmad noticed that some second-generation Palestinians speak mostly Arabic among themselves. Even in the case of communicating Arabic exclusively with parents, the division remains in place, English is still the primary and sometimes the only mode of communication among non-first generation Arab/Americans.

Most participants chose English when talking to me knowing I am an Arabic speaking adult. When I used Arabic with them during, before or after the interviews, they always chose to respond in English even when they clearly seemed to understand me in Arabic. I was rarely asked to repeat what I said, although I did not, for most part, resort to Arabic after I sensed a preference for English. This could be attributed to many factors such as not possessing sufficient academic and communicative linguistic repertoire because they might not have significant Arabic language speaking experiences. Arabic for them had not been used as the main language for formal cognitive development and socialization (Lynch, 2008).

The current efforts to maintain Arabic as a HL at home, community, and community schools may not lead to successful maintenance. This might be explained by the continued influence of ideologies that privileged specific practices that might hinder rather than facilitate

proficiency in the HL. In other words, these actual language ideologies and practices might aid to reproduce the dominance of English (Guarfathero, 2008; Youns, 2006).

As we have seen from the findings of this study, the prevailing ideology in teaching Arabic as a heritage language discounts CA as an accepted element in teaching and learning Arabic. A main conclusion of this study is that, learning only MSA is not learning Arabic. A proficient speaker in MSA is not a proficient speaker of Arabic. Part of the recommendations of this study is a call to reconsider and reimagine an educational ideology that incorporates CA into classroom learning and instruction of Arabic to enhance both social and academic skills. The absence of such ideology impacts another aspect that is related to the learning and teaching of Arabic, namely, code-switching. Internal code-switching in Arabic is not possible while CA is absent from the HL learning process. This particular situation could be one of the main contributing factors for frustrating the aspirations of the participants when it comes speaking abilities.

### **The Pedagogical Methods of Teaching Arabic**

The participants of the study demonstrated an awareness of incongruencies between the manner in which their teaching is conducted and their expectations from learning the language. They expressed frustration with their inability to turn to Arabic as a social language or as an academic tool in their repertoire. Like other participants, Latifa felt that focusing mainly on learning the rules of grammar at the expense of other language skills such as speaking “doesn't make the language natural anymore,” rather “it makes the language more alien and beyond reach.” What is more important for Latifa and other participants, as she noted, is the familiarity of Arabic so they would never really forget it. Primarily listening and speaking, as well as reading and vocabulary acquisition, are necessary but grammar may not be the main focus.

Latifa and the other participants think it is important to include more interaction and discussions in classes because speaking Arabic “out loud is very difficult. Because you know, you get nervous or it becomes like- I don't know, speaking Arabic is very difficult, or speaking any- even like French, like one of the most difficult things is speaking.” This is supported by ACTFL standards that all aspects of teaching and instruction should contribute to solidify communication.

Shandler (2008) highlighted Yiddish as a “post-vernacular” language, defined by the following: “in semiotic terms, the language’s primary level of signification-that is, its instrumental value as a vehicle for communicating information, opinions, feelings, ideas - is narrowing in scope. At the same time its secondary, or meta-level of signification-the symbolic value invested in the language apart from the semantic value of any given utterances in it-is expanding” (Avineri, 2015, p. 136). Focusing primarily on receptive skills like grammar and reading elementary level book material that is overly concerned with the past rather than the present and prioritizing these over students’ active use of productive language skills like speaking has the effect of putting the language away from handy use of it as a tool for communication, much like Yiddish HLLs (Avineri, 2014).

Many HL studies reflected on the recognition of HLLs needs, such as instructional materials. The issue of textbooks may become important especially in the absence of a well-designed curriculum and properly trained teachers (Chiu, 2011). Studies on HL textbooks reported that most imported HL textbooks tend to promote and instill orthodox and ideal characterizations of native speakers (Chiu, 2011; Wang, 2003). The result may represent a clear disconnect between the instructional materials and the reality lived by HLLs. Like most participants from schools B and C, Omar noted that “most of the stories were old and morally based, mostly factual things.” This is not to say that the participants were not interested in knowing about the content of the

imported textbooks, but there is no doubt that most participants expressed their desire that it may not constitute the bulk or the main part of the instructional materials. For HLLs, “using one textbook as a steady diet will lead to motivation problems and student dissatisfaction” (England, 2006, p. 427).

The Arabic teaching profession has not yet come up with an agreed upon or systematic methodology on dialect awareness, particularly by textbook writers, to touch on the complexity of teaching Arabic in diasporic societies. Most Arabic textbooks in currency tend to ignore this distinction and do not accommodate the need for AHLLs which may bring into relief the crucial importance of the role of trained teachers and administrators in mitigating this deficiency (Benmamoun & Kagan, 2013).

Relying on materials used for WLL classrooms on the other hand, such as in school A, was deemed unsuitable for the study participants (Helmer; 2014; Lee & Kim, 2008). As such, using these books solely might not only fail to address HLLs linguistic and sociocultural identities which might result in both active and passive resistance, but also may deter instructors to fully access their linguistic and cultural repertoire as native speakers (Helmer, 2014). Laila, like most of the participants, felt that the school should provide materials other than textbooks “because we don’t really focus on news stations or articles, we focus more on the textbook, and the textbook itself is just really boring and that’s what made us hate learning Arabic.” Internet-based interactive technology, especially those utilizing popular social media platforms, could be used to enhance listening, reading, speaking and writing skills.

Data from interviews suggest that such methods pose immediate relevance and bridging to the environment of the HLLs. Class chat groups, for example, may create a space for HLLs to activate and interact with authentic cultural dialogue and content, particularly with first-

generation speakers. Also, HLLs receive daily or near daily input and have the opportunity to respond and engage in such dialogue and content. The content may come in the form of jokes, poetry, music, sayings and expressions, etc. The interesting and promising thing here is that knowledge in the chat groups, Facebook posts and Web-based tools and materials may not come exclusively from the teacher; the role of the HLLs is no longer passive reception. These critical pedagogical spaces, such as class chat groups and facebook posts may enhance life-long learning and connect the content of Arabic language and culture to HLLs' own lived experiences. This also provides additional opportunities for connecting and expanding independent student activities to classroom discussions. Importing such relevant content (e.g., news articles or video clips) around relevant conversations could allow a way for students to develop proficiency (Al-Batal & Benlap, 2006; England, 2006; Ibrahim & Allam, 2006) while addressing the detrimental pattern of viewing HL as a threat (Ricento, 2005).

From my experience in teaching HLLs at one of the weekend community centers "Arabic media" proved to be one of the popular themes. For example, in a show called "المسامح كريم" (He Who Forgives is Better). The anchor of the show is a well known Lebanese TV host. He starts his show with an introduction that includes a variety of MSA and classical Arabic in support of forgiveness in general, and then introduces his guests for that day. Guests come from all around the Arab world. The problems exhibited are very socially intense and personal. The personal is taken to its limit when the parties to the problem are interviewed and the host makes an attempt to reconcile, an effort that is not always successful, which gives the program added authenticity.

In the show mentioned above, there is ample display of all forms of Arabic; classical, MSA, and different CA's based on where the guests of that day come from. This approach begins with a pre-listening activity where HLLs had to read sentences transcribed from the show and predict if

these are false or true, after which they screen the show. There are paused intervals to allow them to predict what happens next. Throughout this class discussion, students are actively encouraged to use any Arabic they can employ to suggest the intended meaning; as such this was meaning focused discussion. Following that, the students engage in a compare and contrast exercise in which what they saw is compared to the social reality they see in the U.S. The prediction the students were asked to make at the outset are then revisited to see how close they were to what transpired. Indeed, available authentic HL materials could be used in community schools to aid HLLs to better connect to their heritage culture and to substitute for the lack of appropriate HL materials.

One viable way to develop HL literacy skills at home, within the English-language context, which could be through social media, texting and digital materials. Below, I have included a text Latifa shared with me. It is a correspondence between two of her family members. The text states the following, “In Lebanon, we are in a better situation than the US [regarding food], especially in the villages because a majority of our food, like eggs, local milk, meat and fish are organic.” Despite the fact that the Arabic writing did not include any punctuation, it may arguably be extremely helpful for HLLs who have limited access to the target language to be exposed to and engage with monolingually raised native speakers in this way. This interaction may be a valuable medium of reading and writing that HLLs use while they are not studying in a formal setting. This exposure would not only be a purely linguistic exercise, it would also be an entry into the native speaker’s social world. They are exposed not only to others’ *ways* of speaking and writing, but they see their interests, their logic, and their way of thinking. Such exposure may provide a good opportunity to experience shared discourses (both D and d) between American Arab HLLs and the Arabic speaking communities (Gee, 1987).



Figure 1. Text message sample.

Pedagogy is no doubt the field where teachers are central players. Most teachers at community schools are not professional language teachers, neither in HL nor in English. HL teachers are heavily textbook-oriented and guided by what they value instead of pedagogical and language-acquisition theories (Chiu, 2011; Wang, 2003). Professionalism might be the greatest skill needed in the field of teaching Arabic and the quality of Arabic language programs is directly related to the quality of the teaching (Al-Batal & Belnap, 2006; England, 2006), where “qualified Arabic teachers are essential to the future of the Arabic language” (England, 2006, p. 419).

In K–12 Arabic programs, as well as university programs, the availability of qualified teachers remains limited. Many of the Arabic language teachers that work at most Islamic schools

are able to occupy the position of an Arabic teacher because it is their mother tongue. For many, teaching Arabic is a transition profession until they are able to secure a position in their real expertise. Many native Arabic-speaking teachers, like in many community schools, are neither language specialists nor well versed in the principles of language teaching methodology that applies specifically to the needs of Arabic learners (Boruchowski, 2014; Wu & Chang, 2010).

Latifa wondered about the cultural aspects affecting the personality of some of her teachers. She noticed that Arabic teachers “specifically favored a lot, and this was known throughout the school, and they usually favored based on like your ability to communicate Arabic to them. Like, it was weird, like if you were able to like make jokes in Arabic, you were favored ...it was very intimidating to some and very, like, you know, made them feel bad.” Latifa continued: “Other things like sometimes they were a little bit- this is kind of an Arab thing in my opinion, they were a little bit like informal in their grading. So like if they just didn't like you they just might not give you a good grade, or they'd treat you differently. Sorry- Or they'd treat you differently if you didn't finish an assignment, based on like whether they like you or not. But this is like, I think this is like a private school Arab thing, like sometimes it just wasn't very systematic. Yeah, and that bothered a lot of people.” She was asked if she prefers having somebody who is not first-generation teaching her— a non-native speaker. For Latifa, teachers who are first-generation “instill a pride in you.” Others, she continued: “they just studied Arabic and they're not Arab, they're probably more ... I don't know, it's taught more interestingly... because it comes from a different perspective.”

At times, the way the HL class is conducted may reflect a preoccupation with asserting teacher dominance and traditional teaching methods. Even when interaction might find its way into the class, it may be used to reinforce teachers' authority. This might be similar to the cases found in other cultures such as the Chinese educational system (Wang, 2003, p. 79). Hiba found



such classroom environments to be unappealing and unengaging, even when the instructor was proficient in Arabic and conducted the class in the target language.

Khuloud: So last year class was conducted entirely in Arabic, did you like it?

Hiba: Um, I felt it was boring.

Khuloud: Boring?

Hiba: Yeah, not because he was speaking Arabic, but because the method of his instruction, it was very boring. We didn't do anything fun, it was all reading and then explanation.

Khuloud: Was he a native speaker?

Hiba: No, but um...

Khuloud: He wasn't a native speaker?

Hiba: He- no, he was a native speaker.

Khuloud: From where?

Hiba: I think Palestine.

Khuloud: Palestinian. So he was speaking only Arabic, that's good.

Hiba: I don't know, like, he was older, and like I don't know... Like, I don't know. [Laughs].

Yeah.

Khuloud: Like did he...

Hiba: He didn't like uh, like for people to be loud or for us to get excited, like everything had to be neat and we had to do things, you know, in order. So I don't think we felt like we were learning Arabic. It was always like, everything has a turn; then we read, then we have imla 'dictation,' then we answer questions, and just like, every week was the same thing.

Participants were asked to comment on the characteristics of a good Arabic teacher. A good Arabic teacher, in Amal's opinion is somebody who is more lenient and not too strict because "it kind of discourages the students...somebody who's gonna be able to try to help you and figure out ways, who's creative enough to come at it in a different perspective so you understand." Saleema's view of the good Arabic teacher "would be one that will make sure that her students understand before moving on, conduct the class in Arabic but at the same time she won't go too fast because students here are not ... really in an Arabic speaking country, so sometimes people won't understand what she's saying, I think she should stop and explain things if she needs to." In the same vein, and talking about HLLs, Amirah added that teachers should expect HLLs to do mistakes "because they're native speakers, but like everyone, everyone makes mistakes." It seems when teachers have higher expectations for correctness and fluency as opposed to a focus on expressive range and breadth may, in fact, have unintended consequences for HLLs that may result in a negative learning experience for those learners (Valdés, Fishman, Chávez, & Pérez, 2008).

Amal remarked that Arabic teachers need to be up to date in teaching methodology and be able to present current and relevant instructional material to the class. "Somebody who's able to uh, find out about uh, new events that are happening around the world, or certain things, so we'd be able to talk about those things in class, make it more alive, rather than basing it off something that's only from the past. Something that makes it like, current."

A few studies have made recommendations for hiring HL teachers, such as hiring international master or doctoral students with strong educational background (Li, 2005, p. 74). Shin (2005) suggested hiring 1.5-generation teachers that are familiar with both HL and American teaching styles. Benmamoun recommended hiring a HS who grew up in the U.S., developed good

proficiency in CA and MSA and had went through the experience of learning Arabic as a HL (Benmamoun & Kagan, 2013).

Some of the issues that are raised by the experience of the participants in this study relate to mixed classes. What might complicate the situation in mixed classes (which are populated by AHLLs, Muslim heritage language learners (MHLLs) and native speakers who are new immigrants) is the differences in the target language proficiency level. Amirah thought that mixed classes made it harder on the teacher. She remembered when the class was composed of only AHLLs and there was only one MHLL, the teacher would not stop and slow down the class just for that one student. “But I kinda felt bad at the same time for that one student, 'cause sometimes our instructor will be like speaking in Arabic, and like sometimes people, you know, joke around in Arabic.” Amirah also noticed that non-Arab students often had a better command of reading Qur’an than the Arab students due to their primary focus being tajweed. She stated,

They perfected it when they used to read the Qur’an, like it was amazing, but when it came to like grammar or Arabic like, like just reading stories, they struggled a lot in it. So I thought that was like a big difference, and I think that's maybe why you see them like one year in our class and the other year they go back to like a lower level.

In the same sense, Hiba vividly described the difficulty of having a mixed class. She observed,

Non-Arabs, they obviously don't know Arabic well, and we had to slow down the whole day sometimes because they wouldn't understand like one topic so we all had to wait and listen to things we already know because they don't understand it, and we can't keep going until they understand it, so it wasn't effective.

In school B, the true beginner with no previous linguistic or cultural competence in the target language is placed in the same classroom with the HLLs, some of whom bring with them a wealth

of background familiarity, which is where this problem becomes more highlighted. It should be noted however, some participants did not sense the problem to be so debilitating to HL class work, mainly since the classroom setting did not generally invite discussion and included aspects of the language in which the divergence between the two groups was pronounced, such as Qur'an recitation and memorization, spelling, reading simple texts, and dictation.

Both Saleema and Amal from school C liked the Qur'an class more than the Arabic classes because it was more interactive since there was more English and was not only for AHLLs. Amal stated that she liked Qur'an class more than Arabic class because the content was more relevant. It was less focused on grammar and more beneficial for her in terms of helping her to become a good Muslim. More research is needed on the qualifications and requirements for AHL teachers especially those related to their proficiency and usage of the dominant language, as well as their knowledge regarding the sociolinguistic issues of the target language.

### **Learning and Teaching Arabic as a Communicative Language**

Throughout this study we have seen that there is clearly an effort in maintaining Arabic within the home, community and community schools. One cannot overlook the fact that, the experience of the participants as they reported, entailed a substantial and a prolonged investment in learning Arabic that did not come with the desired benefits and outcomes. The participants' discussions suggest that most of them desired to be at a higher proficiency level with their Arabic speaking than they were. If we listen to what the participants said, we may conclude that a common sentiment shared by them is an expectation of the learning of Arabic as a communicative language. It can be argued, in the case of AHLLs of this study, the sense of "moral imperative" in learning their HL seems not to be lacking. The participants who are second-generation have shown a strong sense of the importance of Arabic in their lives and to the inter-generational maintenance of

communitarian identity and belonging. Yet, Arabic as a social language does not seem to find its way to them, whether at home, in the school curricula or the larger community.

Most participants expressed their desire mainly to participate more fully using their HL and provided various examples, demonstrating that their community school structures are not aiding to advance their HL ambitions to the level they desire. Most participants expressed frustration with their inability to turn to Arabic as a social language or as an academic tool in their repertoire. It can also be argued that a degree of dissonance exists between mostly unstated learning goals under which Arabic language instruction operates, in the three community schools, and the needs of AHLLs

Latifa noted, “I feel dumb when I speak Arabic. Like when I go overseas I feel like I- I, I don't feel as smart as when I say in English.” Speaking proficiency, for these study participants, may compensate for a lack of reading and writing skills, however, proficiency in reading and writing may not fully compensate for a lack of speaking skill. It was frustrating to see how the language barrier impeded the communication between a parent and her children, Laila, for example, indicated instances where communication with her mother had to be put on hold because her mother does not know enough English to text her while Laila is not able to text in Arabic.

Bakhtin (1981-1984) and Bourdieu (1977- 1984) argue that speakers need to work hard to appropriate the voices of others in their speech. Both offer ways to think differently about language learning and usage. This potential act of appropriation is currently blocked or is effectively placed beyond the participant’s reach due to the division held and maintained between CA at home and MSA at the school. Per Bakhtin and Bourdieu, the path to open an appropriation space for the participants to engage in using the language can be through opening the door for communication and discussion beyond reading and comprehending fixed simple texts.

Latifa revealed her inability to appropriate and “bend” the language to serve her purposes and hinted to the difficulties she faces speaking to her interlocutors. “The reactions, trying to access each other's emotions, that's difficult. Because you can understand each other mostly, but when you try to like have like personal, I don't know, I think that's what's specific about it. Like how to react to things when you're talking to someone.”

Bakhtin (1981) explains: “The word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions” (pp. 294-295). It might be unlikely that Latifa, let alone any of the other participants read this quote from Bakhtin, however, it is easy to think they did. Latifa noted her inability to access the emotions of others when she is using her Arabic. This establishes the dialogic relationship in language and means that what Bakhtin is describing seemed to be beyond her reach. HLLs need a space to “appropriate the voices of others and to “bend” those voices to their own purposes” (Norton, 2006). As such, the ultimate aim of HL instruction should be the full participation in the world of the target language speakers (Van, 2006).

Most participants in this study shared common language goals of reaching a functional ability particularly in speaking and listening and to a lesser degree in reading and writing. Many participants were reluctant in joining their parents in watching Arabic media due to their inability to follow along. It seems the goal of teaching/learning Arabic as a HL, for this study participants, is to assist them to get into the habit of using their HL beyond the classroom walls to communicate with friends, family, and community members (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005).

It is important to know that HLLs, like my study participants, unlike what some HL researchers and instructors think, “are ‘deficient’ in formal styles [MSA] of language yet

‘proficient’ in informal styles, when in reality they are also ‘deficient’ in informal styles in some respects ... and ‘proficient’ in formal styles by some measures” (Lynch, 2012, p. 85). Heritage language maintenance requires valuing, promoting, and developing HLLs’ linguistic varieties, which include their home dialect (or preferred dialect) in addition to formal standard variety, which align with the participants’ linguistic, and affective needs (Beaudrie, 2015). Consequently, incorporating the four integrated skills of speaking with reading, writing, and listening is critical to effective HL curriculum design (Schwarzer & Petron, 2005).

Learning Arabic as a communicative language requires a classroom culture in which CA is leveraged as an asset and the main component in achieving Arabic language competence in discussing academic topics and social communication. The interesting and promising thing here is that knowledge in the classroom would not come exclusively from the teacher; the role of the HLLs is no longer passive reception as it might be in MSA only classroom that focuses mainly on teaching MSA and prioritizes grammar and simple reading texts. This leads to a shift towards a largely student-centered classroom (Anderson, 2008; Correa, 2011; Ryding, 2006; Villa, 2004; Younes, 2006). Within this context, a space can be created within which knowledge is generated and identities are negotiated (Wu & Leung, 2014).

Teaching Arabic as a communicative language for a HS who is raised in a home where CA or both CA and English are spoken aiming to develop Arabic diglossic competence could be a three-fold strategy. First is a classroom culture in which CA is leveraged as an asset and a main component. Second is using a “middle language” which means to elevate the level of formality of already familiar CA by blending and borrowing words from MSA and using CA grammar as the context of the usage suggests. Middle language has been suggested by many scholars proposing ways to deal with learning Arabic as a diglossic language (Cote, 2009). The focus of such efforts

might aid in promoting conversational and academic language. This may allow students to utilize their knowledge in CA in a manner that may facilitate their newly acquired academic language. In other words, students may use this middle language, which consists of MSA vocabulary and phrases, in discussing and studying class materials that focus on topics beyond everyday usage, such as health, politics, current events, history, and probably science. Third is to teach MSA mainly through reading, formal writing and presenting scripted speeches of MSA. The above formula is in harmony with what the participants suggested.

It is needless to say that this effort within the school should aim to take the students beyond their established familiarity level of CA to a wider and more sophisticated level of language use that employs abstract thinking, beyond the day to day level of conversation. Hiba noted that her linguistic ability in HL shrunk as her capabilities were limited to social and conversational knowledge and the absence of academic knowledge (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2009). Home exposure alone does not suffice in attaining HL high proficiency level. Arabic as an HL may move ahead to more challenging levels where learners can better assimilate their accumulated linguistic background knowledge.

The instruction of Arabic, especially in advanced levels, may be designed to enable students to absorb higher levels of complexity in learning academic language. To reap the full social and cognitive benefits of proficiency, instruction must target the higher order skills (Carreira, 2013), such as accessing authentic HL culture materials in print and media (Tse, 2001). Greater targeting of language proficiency and content knowledge may provide advanced-level students a foundation for contextualizing what they learn. This contextualization may require a higher degree of abstraction and critical thinking than less-proficient learners are able to articulate in Arabic.



AHLLs could be supported to advance their HL by many measures, such as (1) administering “diagnostic tests” for understanding HLLs in terms of HL proficiencies (Alarcón, 2010; Albirini, 2014c); (2) providing a multi-level program such as schools A and C; advanced and less so; (3) discussing specific goals that may lead to higher proficiency level and make it clear to students what achievable goals might be (Benmamoun & Kagan, 2013); (4) building on HLLs’ prior strengths in speaking and listening to design HL instruction that may enable students to absorb higher levels of complexity in learning and using conversational, academic and standard Arabic.

Both Freire (2010) and Heath (1983) use ethnographic methods to determine pedagogic content and give students the opportunity to develop their reasons to learn content that is relevant to their interests and surroundings. A more feasible approach to identify student needs and attitudes could be achieved through the employment of methods such as surveys at the beginning of the school year to be used as a starting point for class structures and planning (Alarcón, 2010; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Carreira & Kagan 2011; Jansen & Llosa, 2007; Kagan, 2005). As for this study’s participants, a community-based approach best suited to the development of a curriculum that specifically targets HLLs. Such a curriculum “builds upon learners’ intercultural experience and also broadens their linguistic and cultural range” (Kagan, 2012, p. 80).

Content-based instruction, guided by a community-based instruction, may enable HLLs to establish ties between their school subjects and their HL classrooms and homes, where knowledge and conceptual development are not only accelerated, but are also further illuminated and viewed from fresh angles that are uniquely provided by different languages and cultures (Alptekin et al., 2007). It introduces perspectives that reflect the voices of the students and their backgrounds. It shifts the culture of community schools from operating in disjointed units to a project that connects

HL classes to other school classes and to the students' subjectivity and sense of identity. Such approaches can be characterized as top-down or macro-based approach, is the most relevant for fostering HLLs' functional abilities (Kagan & Dillon, 2001, 2004, 2008). Such an approach prioritizes meaning-making at the discourse level over linguistic forms at the sentence level and the teaching of vocabulary and grammar should be integrated in the context of the relevant texts (Parra, Bravo & Polinsky, 2018). Once HLLs have achieved literacy, all their courses can be content-based (Kagan & Dillon, 2004, p. 108).

This touches on what participants found to be among the most problematic practices; that the class instruction had a singular and narrow focus on some linguistic gains as outcomes, and that for the most part, neither the teachers nor the textbooks discussed issues related to the lives of the students. The difficulty of that relates to the "lack of immediate relevance to the learning process and the environment of the child" (Maamouri, 2007, p. 6). Curriculum may be tied to the students' lived world by making the connection between school and home to accomplish worthwhile and meaningful goals; helping students not to feel like outsiders during the learning process; breaking the boundaries between the classroom and the community that the students come from and encouraging the flow of cultural patterns between them (Heath, 1983). It is about making the content of the class activities relevant and meaningful to the students' world and consequently connecting the school curriculum to the present moment of the students' life. All of these revolved around relevance that the students can see: they learn in relation to who they are (Correa, 2011).

In a curriculum guided by critical pedagogy, content of the instruction revolves around problems and issues related to the particular characteristics of the student body; communicative, meaning focused instruction is implemented; and, literacy is positioned in social contexts

(Newman, 2006), namely, anxieties over terrorism, Islamophobia, deportation, representations in the media, civic engagement, questionable allegiances, and gender issues.

A final aspect is that students must be taught using topics and current issues that may bring into relief the risks of controversial topics that are hotly debated in the community as well as the larger society. It may be needless to say that the language and sentiments with which these controversies are discussed could be highly emotive; added to that, most Arabs and Muslims feel that they are constantly put on the spot when these issues are talked about. It may be thus very important to make clear to the students the shared universal values and standards of justice and truth, and that these may constitute the criteria with which these issues are explained and discussed (Delpit, 1988; Giroux, 1991).

The meaningful learning goals and valid curricula may be tied to investments in better-prepared HL teachers to design instructional environments that help HLLs reach their fullest potential (Carreira, 2013). Highly trained teachers apply research on human learning to better design formal instructional environments that help students reach their fullest potential. Fully funded scholarships and workshops by the U.S. Department of Education that focus on applying standards-based instruction are spread throughout the U.S. for training teachers in the critical languages, Arabic being one of them. Teaching that is guided by theories help the pedagogy be unified and coherent and is reflected in how the instruction is applied (Brown, 2007).

Finally, Islamic schools, like many community schools, can play an integral role in HL maintenance and development, particularly if there are successful collaborations between community schools and state/local universities (Nichols & Colon, 2000). Heritage language learners' capacity in heritage languages such as Chinese and Arabic, "will be developed only when they have opportunities to use their HL and desire to learn it" (Na Liu, 2013, p.1).

An HLL with the desire to learn may find ways around obstacles (Na Liu, 2013). When HLLs are not challenged and are forced to complete tasks that are mostly meaningless for them, or when talking about insignificant topics, they may lose the desire to learn (Lynch, 2003). HL instructors need to be aware of the effective academic, sociolinguistic and cultural identity issues that are prevalent to HLLs (Potowski & Carreira, 2004).

The result of the current study exemplifies the need to make the connection between home and community school to attempt to remedy the foreignness of the HL and its limits in a society where it is not dominant as well as to expand the space within which it makes itself both present and available at home and community schools. Creative and strategic efforts may be invested in opportunity-creation for a wider space where the language is found and ready to be experienced. This can be achieved by many methods, such as exposing AHLLs to the right register and cultural content via authentic materials such as Internet-based interactive technology. This can also be done by creating real opportunities to connect and communicate with real parties of native speakers and AHLLs through social media. For example, in their diasporic communities as well as the countries where Arabic is spoken and expose AHLLs to a vast space of language social use (texting, emailing, chatting, tweeting, Skyping, etc.) to be included as an important part of their lives. Finally, Laleko (2013) highlights that “until the language begins to be viewed as having real value in the present and future lives of the speakers, rather than only as a bridge to the past, it is unlikely to have a sustainable future” (p. 98).

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the experiences of AHL former high school students in learning and using their HL in their homes, community and community schools. Participants’ views in terms of the role of home, community, and community schools in maintaining Arabic were presented. The

interviews also revealed major challenges of Arabic language learning and usage, perspectives on the future prospects of maintaining Arabic and provided unique perspectives of participants themselves, offering a window into their attitudes and practices.

The study revealed a number of patterns of linguistic profiles of reading, writing and speaking behaviors of these former high school students that may suggest that the participants' experiences are generally more similar than different. For example, most of the participants seldom use Arabic with siblings and friends, and only speak Arabic or Arabic and English with their parents. For the most part they are not able to speak fluently, engage in academic reading, read for pleasure, follow the press or media, or use personal writing in Arabic.

The study revealed that participants have a wide range of HL competence that was supported by their schools and communities in different ways. However, participants' responses highlighted a sense of general discontent towards the outcomes of learning Arabic and their Arabic language status as it stands. These outcomes seem to be a consequence of the language ideologies and pedagogies held at home, in the community and the schools. This discontent was consistent regardless of community size or school setting. For example, participants from school A, being a choice school, did not report better learning outcomes from schools B or C. Nor did the learning outcomes differ with differences in community size, what with schools B and C located in what is arguably one of the top five concentrations of Arab-Americans in the U.S. compared to school A. Both schools B and C displayed different linguistic outcomes. Participants from school C, which appeared to have a more structured Arabic program and a dedicated class for HLLs, reported better HL learning outcomes.

The study concluded that socio-linguistic, pedagogical, and ideological factors that are required for the attainment of language competence may be lacking for this group of study

participants regardless of community size or community school settings. Clear also is the fact that most participants display a keen desire to become more proficient in their HL, mainly to overcome a lack of confidence in speaking Arabic as well as a desire to improve fluency. For these desires to be met, it may be necessary to recast the view of the Arabic language in a manner that takes account of its diglossic nature, particularly within the diaspora communities where the space of the language is far more limited. The current state of teaching Arabic language acquisition, as was experienced by the study participants, may demonstrate the disconnect between the true nature of Arabic as a diglossic language and the manner in which it is taught. When the participants are at school, Arabic is mostly in the modified mode instruction of MSA. When they are at home, Arabic is almost exclusively CA. And when they are in the community, Arabic is mostly a series of memorized formulas from the Qur'an, other religious reference materials and some cultural phrases. To reiterate, this disconnect may contribute to producing the current status of HL learning, and for it to change there may be a need to bring all language forms closer within the experience of the AHLLs. In other words, home, community and community schools may need to function as a joint unit in responding to the need of AHLLs and to adopt linguistically and sociolinguistically rich practices.

Participants of the three schools emphasize the lack of experience with Arabic inside and outside the classroom. Changing the status of Arabic as a HL in a manner that responds to the expressed desires of the learners may require changes in the attitude toward learning the language on behalf of the learners, community, and the schools. The responsibilities of community schools may not be only to teach the Arabic language, but also to provide their students with opportunities to acquire and experience their HL.

### **Future Research**

This study sheds light on the perspectives of the language learners, the primary stakeholders in HL maintenance. Although the study started with the candid voices of the most important party, the voices of all the stakeholders should also be heard. Future studies could focus on parents, teachers and school administrators' perspectives and practices on maintaining and promoting HL in their contexts. I did not intend for this study to be seen as exhaustive; rather, it is to be understood as a preliminary effort. I believe making these experiences explicit may contribute to the spread of attitudes that ultimately will contribute to the promotion of HL development and maintenance.

For diglossic languages, the advantages of early exposure most likely remain within the scope of the home dialect, resulting in some sort of communicative competence but falling short in literacy skills. In the households that most of these participants come from, English is not spoken as the day to day language with parents nor is Arabic spoken in a form similar to MSA, instead, is a form of local dialect that depends on the country or region of origin. More research is needed to gauge to what extent language and possibly cultural and language barriers originate and or are maintained between first and second-generation Arab-Americans due to this situation.

Looking further into teaching Arabic as a communicative language for HLLs and developing materials for its application is a real challenge. One topic for future research is investigating the potential impact of implementing internet-based interactive technology. Another topic for future research is investigating the potential impact of implementing a curriculum that includes a sociolinguistic research component such as incorporating surveys, oral history, interviews, and journal writing.

## Reference

- Abbadi, S. O. (2014). Teaching Arabic Post 9/11: Humor and the Potential for Critical Language Awareness. *Dirasat: Human & Social Sciences*, 48(2559), 1–13.
- Abdulaziz, M. H. (1986). Factors in the development of modern Arabic usage. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 1986(62), 11–24.
- Abu-Rabia, S. (2000). "Effects of exposure to literary Arabic on reading comprehension in a diglossic situation." *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 13:147- 157.
- Alarcón, I. (2010). Advanced heritage learners of Spanish: A sociolinguistic profile for pedagogical purposes. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43(2), 269–288.
- Al-Batal, M. (1995). "Issues in the teaching of the productive skills in Arabic." In M. Al-Batal (Ed.), *The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language: Issues and directions* (pp. 115–133). Provo, Utah: American Association of Teachers of Arabic.
- Al-Batal, M. (1992). 13. Diglossia proficiency: The need for an alternative approach to teaching. *The Arabic language in America*, 284–304.
- Al-Batal, M. (2007). Arabic and national language educational policy. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(2), 268–271.
- Al-Batal, M. & Belnap, R. K. (2006). The teaching and learning of Arabic in the United States: Realities, needs, and future directions. In Kassem M. Wahba, Zeinab A. Taha, & Liz England (Eds), *Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals* (pp. 389–399). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Albirini, A. (2011). The sociolinguistic functions of codeswitching between Standard Arabic and Dialectal Arabic. *Language in society*, 40(05), 537–562.
- Albirini, A. (2014a). The socio-pragmatics of dialectal codeswitching by Al-Keidaat Bedouin speakers. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 11(1), 121–147.
- Albirini A. (2014b). Toward understanding the variability in the language proficiencies of Arabic heritage speakers. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 18(6), 730–765.
- Albirini, A. (2014c). The role of the colloquial varieties in the acquisition of the standard variety: the case of Arabic heritage speakers. *Foreign Language Annals*, 47(3), 447–463.
- Albirini, A. (2016). *Modern Arabic sociolinguistics: Diglossia, variation, codeswitching, attitudes and identity*. Routledge.
- Albirini, A., & Chakrani, B. (2016). Switching codes and registers: An analysis of heritage Arabic speakers' sociolinguistic competence. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 1367006915626587. 1–23



- Al-Huri, I. H. (2012). The Impact of Diglossia in Teaching/Learning the Arabic Course in Sana'a Secondary Schools. *Learning the Arabic Course in Sana'a Secondary Schools (June 1, 2012)*. 1–15
- Allen, R. (2007). Arabic—flavor of the motherent: Whence, why, and how?. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(2), 258–261.
- Almubayei, D. S. (2007). Language and the shaping of the Arab-American identity.
- Alptekin, C., Ercetin, G., & Bayyurt, Y. (2007). The effectiveness of a theme-based syllabus for young L2 learners. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 28 (1), 1–17.
- Arabaa, S. (1986). Diglossia in the classroom: the Arabic case. *Anthropological linguistics*, 28(1), 73–79.
- Al-Romi, N.H. (2000). Muslims as a minority in the United States. *International Journal of Education Research*, 33(6), 631–638.
- Alshamrani, H. (2012). Diglossia in Arabic TV stations. *Journal of King Saud University- Languages and Translation*, 24(1), 57–69.
- Anderson, J. (2008). Towards an integrated second-language pedagogy for foreign and community/heritage 1 languages in multilingual Britain. *Language Learning Journal*, 36(1), 79–89.
- Avineri, N. (2014). Yiddish endangerment as phenomenological reality and discursive strategy: Crossing into the past and crossing out the present. *Language & Communication*, 38, 18–32.
- Avineri, N. (2015). Yiddish language socialization across communities: Religion, ideologies, and variation. *Language & Communication*, 42, 135-140.
- Ayari, S. (1996). Diglossia and illiteracy in the Arab world 1. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 9(3), 243–253.
- Ayari, S. (2009). Shifting winds of Arabic teaching in Islamic schools. *Islamic Horizons*, 38(2), 41.
- Ayari, S. (n.d.). Developing & sustaining an articulated K-12 Arabic language program. Retrieved from [http://www.necis-usa.org/documents/arabic\\_workshop/Building\\_&\\_sustaining\\_K-12\\_Arabic\\_program.pdf](http://www.necis-usa.org/documents/arabic_workshop/Building_&_sustaining_K-12_Arabic_program.pdf)
- Badawi, H. (2006). Why Islamic Schools? *Islamic Horizons*, 35(2), 18–28.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Bagui, H. (2014). Aspects of Diglossic Code Switching Situations: A Sociolinguistic Interpretation. *European Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 2 (4).86–92
- Bale, J. (2010). Arabic as a heritage language in the United States. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 4(2), 125–151.
- Bani-Khaled, T. A. A. (2014). Standard Arabic and Diglossia: A Problem for Language Education in the Arab World. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 4(8). 180–189
- Beaudrie, S. M. (2015). Approaches to language variation: Goals and objectives of the Spanish heritage language syllabus. *Heritage Language Journal*, 12(1), 1–21.
- Beaudrie, S., & Ducar, C. (2005). Beginning level university heritage programs: Creating a space for all heritage language learners. *Heritage Language Journal*, 3(1), 1–26.
- Benmamoun, E., & Albirini, A. (2012). Arabic as heritage, L1, and L2 language: Similarities and differences. *Sixth Heritage Language Research Institute, UCLA*. 1–30
- Benmamoun, E., & Kagan, O. (2013). The administration of heritage language programs: Challenges and opportunities. *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(2), 143–155.
- Benmamoun, E., Montrul, S., & Polinsky, M. (2013). Heritage languages and their speakers: Opportunities and challenges for linguistics. *Theoretical Linguistics*, 39(3–4), 129–181.
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, 15(2), 219–234.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). The economics of linguistic exchanges. *Social science information*, 16(6), 645–668.
- Boruchowski, I. D. (2014). *Curriculum development in a heritage language community-based school: A Qualitative inquiry regarding a Brazilian-Portuguese program in South Florida* (Doctoral dissertation, Florida International University).
- Bravo, M. L., Parra, M. L., & Polinsky, M. (2018). De bueno a muy bueno: How Pedagogical Intervention Boosts Language Proficiency in Advanced Heritage Learners Maria Luisa Parra Harvard University. *Heritage Language Journal*, 15( ), 205–241.
- Boyle, H. N. (2006). Memorization and learning in Islamic schools. *Comparative Education Review*, 50(3), 478–495.
- Brown, H. (2001). D. 2007. Teaching by Principles—An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. *White Plains, NY: Pearson Education*.

- Callahan, L. (2010). US Latinos' use of written Spanish: Realities and aspirations. *Heritage Language Journal*, 7(1), 1–27.
- Campbell, R. N., & Rosenthal, J. W. (2000). Heritage languages. *Handbook of undergraduate second language education*, 165–184.
- Carreira, M. (2004). Seeking explanatory adequacy: A dual approach to understanding the term “heritage language learner.” *Heritage Language Journal*, 2(1), 1–25.
- Carreira, M. M. (2013). Advanced proficiency: A practitioner's perspective on this special issue. *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(2), 1–14.
- Carreira, M., & Kagan, O. (2011). The results of the National Heritage Language Survey: Implications for teaching, curriculum design, and professional development. *Foreign Language Annals*, 44(1), 40–64.
- Chang, Y. L. (2011). "The Tongue of Pangcah and of Savages Are the Same": Language Ideology in a Multilingual Aboriginal Village in Taiwan. *Heritage Language Journal*, 8(2), 17–43.
- Chinen, K., & Tucker, G. R. (2005). Heritage language development: Understanding the roles of ethnic identity and Saturday school participation. *Heritage Language Journal*, 3(1), 27–59.
- Chiu, L. Y. L. (2011). *The construction of the "ideal Chinese child": a critical analysis of textbooks for Chinese heritage language learners* (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia).
- Cho, G. (2000). The role of heritage language in social interactions and relationships: Reflections from a language minority group. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 24(4), 369–384.
- Comanaru, R., & Noels, K. A. (2009). Self-determination, motivation, and the learning of Chinese as a heritage language. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 66(1), 131–158.
- Correa, M. (2011). Heritage language learners of Spanish: What role does metalinguistic knowledge play in their acquisition of the subjunctive. In *Selected proceedings of the 13th Hispanic linguistics symposium* (pp. 128–138).
- Cote, R. A. (2009). Choosing one dialect for the Arabic speaking world: A status planning dilemma. *Arizona Working Papers in SLA & Teaching*, 16, 75–97.
- Creese, A., Bhatt, A., Bhojani, N., & Martin, P. (2006). Multicultural, heritage and learner identities in complementary schools. *Language and Education*, 20(1), 23–43

- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five Approaches*, (2nd ed) Sage publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Crotty, M. (2013). *Foundation of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Dakwar, R. K. (2005). Children's attitudes towards the diglossic situation in Arabic and its impact on learning. *Languages, Communities, and Education*, 3, 75–86.
- Daugherty, E. (2011). Language in the Name of National Security: The Transformation of Arabic Language Instruction in US Institutions of Higher Education.
- DeCapua, A., & Wintergerst, A. C. (2009). Second-generation language maintenance and identity: A case study. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 32(1), 5–24.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard educational review*, 58(3), 280–299.
- Delpit, L. (1998). What should teachers do? Ebonics and culturally responsive instruction. *The Real Ebonics Debate* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Doerr, N. M., & Lee, K. (2009). Contesting heritage: Language, legitimacy, and schooling at a weekend Japanese-language school in the United States. *Language and Education*, 23(5), 425–441.
- Douglas, M. O. (2005). Pedagogical Theories and Approaches to Teach Young Learners of Japanese as a Heritage Language. *Heritage Language Journal*, 3(1), 60–82.
- Dowling, M. (2007). From Husserl to van Manen. A review of different phenomenological approaches. *International journal of nursing studies*, 44(1), 131–142.
- Dressler, R. (2010). "There Is No Space for Being German": Portraits of Willing and Reluctant Heritage Language Learners of German. *Heritage Language Journal*, 7(2), 1–21.
- Ducar, C. M. (2008). Student voices: The missing link in the Spanish heritage language debate. *Foreign Language Annals*, 41(3), 415–433.
- Ehrich, L. (1996). The difficulties of using phenomenology: a novice researcher's experience. *Qualitative research practice in adult education*, 199–216.
- England, L. (2006). Methodology in Arabic language teacher education. *Handbook for Arabic language teaching professionals in the 21st century*, 419–436.

- Engman, M. (2015). Muslim-American identity acquisition: Religious identity in an Arabic language classroom. *Heritage Language Journal*, 12(3), 221–244.
- Ferguson, C. A. (1959). “Diglossia: Language in culture and society” *Word* 15, 325–40
- Fillmore, L. W. (2000). Loss of family languages: Should educators be concerned?. *Theory into practice*, 39(4), 203–210.
- Finlay, L. (2009). Debating phenomenological research methods. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 3 (1), 6–25.
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury publishing USA.
- Gee, J. P. (1989). Literacy, discourse, and linguistics: Introduction. *Journal of Education*, 171(1), 5–17.
- Gilgun, J. (2010). Reflexivity and qualitative research. *Current issues in qualitative research*, 1(2), 1–8.
- Giroux, H. A. (1991). Border pedagogy and the politics of modernism/postmodernism. *Journal of Architectural Education*, 69–79.
- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Glisan, W.G., Shrum, L.J. &(2005). *Teacher’s handbook contextualized language instruction*. (3 ed.). Boston, MA: Thomson Heinle.
- Guardado, M. (2010). Heritage language development: Preserving a mythic past or envisioning the future of Canadian identity? *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 9(5), 329–346.
- Guarfathero, M. (2014). The discourse of heritage language development: Engaging ideologies in Canadian Hispanic communities. *Heritage Language Journal*, 11(1), 1–23.
- Haeri, N. (2000). Form and ideology: Arabic sociolinguistics and beyond. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 61-87.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Routledge.
- Hatch, J. A. (2007). Assessing the quality of early childhood qualitative research. *Early childhood qualitative research*, 223–244.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge university Press.

- He, A. W. (2004). Identity construction in Chinese heritage language classes. *Pragmatics: A quarterly journal of the international pragmatic association*, 14(2), 199-216.
- He, A. W. (2006). Toward an identity theory of the development of Chinese as a heritage language. *Heritage Language Journal*, (1), 1-28.
- He, A. W. (2010). The heart of heritage: Sociocultural dimensions of heritage language learning. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 30, 66-82.
- Helmer, A. K. (2014). "It's not real, it's just a story to just learn Spanish": Understanding heritage language learner resistance in southwest charter school. *Heritage Language Journal*, 11(3), 186-205.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Wang, S. C. (2008). Who are our heritage language learners? Identity and biliteracy in heritage language education in the United States. *Heritage language education: A new field emerging*, 3-35.
- Husseinali, G. (2012). Arabic Heritage Language Learners: motivation, expectations, competence, and engagement in learning Arabic. *Journal of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages Vol. 11 Spring, 2012*, 97-110
- Hycner, R. H. (1985). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. *Human studies*, 8(3), 279-303.
- Ibrahim, M. H. (1986). Standard and prestige language: a problem in Arabic sociolinguistics. *Anthropological linguistics*, 115-126.
- Ibrahim, M. H. (1983). Linguistic distance and literacy in Arabic. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 7(5), 507-515.
- Ibrahim, Z., & Allam, J. (2006). Arabic learners and heritage students redefined: Present and future. *Handbook for Arabic language teaching professionals in the 21st century*, 437-446.
- Ilieva, G. N. (2012). Hindi Heritage Language Learners' Performance during OPIs: Characteristics and Pedagogical Implications. *Heritage Language Journal*, 9(2), 18-36.
- Jaspal, R., & Coyle, A. (2010). "Arabic is the language of the Muslims—that's how it was supposed to be": exploring language and religious identity through reflective accounts from young British-born South Asians. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 13(1), 17-36.
- Jensen, L., & Llosa, L. (2007). Heritage language reading in the university: A survey of students' experiences, strategies, and preferences. *Heritage Language Journal*, 5(1), 98-116.

- Jeon, M. (2008). Korean heritage language maintenance and language ideology. *Heritage Language Journal*, 6(2), 54–71.
- Kagan, O. (2005). In support of a proficiency-based definition of heritage language learners: The case of Russian. *International journal of bilingual education and bilingualism*, 8(2–3), 213–221.
- Kagan, O., & Dillon, K. (2001). A new perspective on teaching Russian: Focus on the heritage learner. *Slavic and East European Journal*, 507–518.
- Kagan, O., & Dillon, K. (2004). Heritage speakers' potential for high-level language proficiency. *Advanced foreign language learning: A challenge to college programs*, 99–112.
- Kagan, O., & Dillon, K. (2008). Issues in heritage language learning in the United States. In *Encyclopedia of language and education* (pp. 1242–1255). Springer US.
- Kagan, O. (2012). Intercultural competence of heritage language learners: Motivation, identity, language attitudes, and the curriculum1. In *Proceedings of Intercultural Competence Conference September* (Vol. 2, pp. 72–84).
- Kaye, A. S. (2007). Classical and colloquial arabic archaisms. In *Approaches to Arabic Linguistics* (pp. 595–605). BRILL.
- Khoja, S. (2001). APT: Arabic part-of-speech tagger. In *Proceedings of the Student Workshop at NAACL* (pp. 20–25).
- Klein, W. (2013). Heritage language socialization and language ideologies in a Sikh education program. *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(1), 3–650.
- Kondo-Brown, K. (2010). Curriculum development for advancing heritage language competence: Recent research, current practices, and a future agenda. *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 30, 24–41.
- Kondo-Brown, K. (2003). Heritage language instruction for post-secondary students from immigrant backgrounds. *Heritage Language Journal*, 1(1), 1–25.
- Kurata, N. (2015). Motivational selves of Japanese heritage speakers in Australia. *Heritage Language Journal*, 12(2), 110–131.
- Laleko, O. (2013). Assessing heritage language vitality: Russian in the United States. *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(3), 89–102.
- Lee, J. S. (2002). The Korean language in America: The role of cultural identity in heritage language learning. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 15(2), 117–133.

- Lee, J. S. (2005). Through the learners' eyes: Reconceptualizing the heritage and non-heritage learner of the less commonly taught languages. *Foreign language annals*, 38(4), 554–563.
- Leeman, J. (2015). Heritage Language Education and Identity in the United States. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 100–119.
- Leeman, J., Rabin, L., & Román-Mendoza, E. (2011). Critical pedagogy beyond the classroom walls: Community Service-learning and Spanish heritage language education. *Heritage Language Journal*, 8(3), 1–22.
- Liu, N. (2013). The linguistic vitality of Chinese in the United States. *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(3), 1–11.
- Li, X., & Pu, C. (2010). Promoting Intercultural Competence in Chinese Heritage Language Education. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 19(2), 128–144.
- Lippi-Green, R. (2012). *English with an accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*. Routledge.
- Lo-Philip, S. W. Y. (2010). Towards a theoretical framework of heritage language literacy and identity processes. *Linguistics and Education*, 21(4), 282–297.
- Lu, C., & Koda, K. (2011). Impact of Home Language and Literacy Support on English-Chinese Biliteracy Acquisition among Chinese Heritage Language Learners. *Heritage Language Journal*, 8(2), 44–80.
- Ludanyi, R (2013). Can German remain a vital heritage language in the United States? *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(3), 12–22.
- Lu, C., & Koda, K. (2011). Impact of home language and literacy support on English-Chinese biliteracy acquisition among Chinese heritage language learners. *Heritage Language Journal*, 8(2), 44–80.
- Lynch, A. (2003). The relationship between second and heritage language acquisition: Notes on research and theory building. *Heritage Language Journal*, 1(1), 26–44.
- Lynch, A. (2008). The linguistic similarities of Spanish heritage and second language learners. *Foreign Language Annals*, 41(2), 252–381.
- Lynch, A. (2012). Key Concepts for Theorizing Spanish as a Heritage. *Spanish as a heritage language in the United States: The state of the field*, 79–100.
- Maamouri, M. (1998). Language Education and Human Development: Arabic Diglossia and Its Impact on the Quality of Education in the Arab Region.
- Maamouri, M. (2007). Arabic literacy. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, 1–16



- Maguire, M. H. (2010). Lessons in understanding Montreal heritage language contexts: Whose literacies and voices are privileged?. *Cahiers de L'ILOB/OLBI Working Papers*, 1, 25–50.
- Maguire, M. H., & Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2007). Multiple schools, languages, experiences and affiliations: Ideological becomings and positionings. *Heritage Language Journal*, 5(1), 50–78.
- Mrak, N. A. (2011). Heritage speakers and the standard: Fighting linguistic hegemony. In *Selected proceedings of the 13th Hispanic linguistics symposium* (pp. 161–168).
- Martin, M. L., Swender, E., & Rivera-Martinez, M. (2013). Assessing the oral proficiency of heritage speakers according to the actfl proficiency guidelines 2012 - speaking. *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(2), 73–84.
- Martinez, G. (2003). Classroom based dialect awareness in heritage language instruction: A critical applied linguistic approach. *Heritage Language Journal*, 1(1), 1–14.
- McFarland, J., Hussar, W., & de Brey, C. (2017). The condition of education 2017. NCES 2017-144. *National Center for Education Statistics*.
- McLoughlin, L. (2009). *Colloquial Arabic (Levantine)*. Routledge.
- Merry, M. S. (2005). Advocacy and involvement: The role of parents in western Islamic schools. *Religious Education*, 100(4), 374–385.
- Merry, M. S., & Driessen, G. (2005). Islamic schools in three western countries: Policy and procedure. *Comparative education*, 41(4), 411–432.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., Huberman, M. A., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. sage.
- Moloney, R., & Oguro, S. (2012). Constructing a Japanese identity beyond the borders of Japan: an analysis of the role of heritage language development and use in identity formation. 1–10
- Mol, V. M. (1999). Arabic language and vocabulary acquisition. Catholic University Leuven
- Montrul, S. (2010). Current issues in heritage language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 30(1), 3–23.
- Monzó, L. D., & Rueda, R. (2009). Passing for English fluent: Latino immigrant children masking language proficiency. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 40(1), 20–40.

- Montrul, S. (2013). How “native” are heritage speakers. *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(2), 15–39.
- Moore, L. C. (2006). Learning by heart in Qur'anic and public schools in northern Cameroon. *Social Analysis*, 109–126.
- Newman, M. (2006). Definitions of literacy and their consequences. *Language and linguistics in context: Reading and applications for teachers*, 243–256.
- Nichols, P. C., & Colon, M. (2000). Spanish literacy and the academic success of Latino high school students: Codeswitching as a classroom resource<sup>1</sup>. *Foreign Language Annals*, 33(5), 498–511.
- Nieto, K. E. (2010). The place of nonstandard Spanish in the classroom: Beyond the ‘separatebutequal’ approach. *Revista de estudios lingüísticos y literarios*, 8(2), 41–53.
- Niyozov, S. (2010). Teachers and teaching islam and muslims in pluralistic societies: claims, misunderstandings, and responses. *Journal of International Migration and Integration/Revue de l'integration et de la migration internationale*, 11(1), 23–40.
- Noddings, N. (2018). *Philosophy of education*. Routledge.
- Norton, B. (2006). Identity as a sociocultural construct in second language research. *TESOL in context [special issue]*, 22–33.
- Oguro, S., & Moloney, R. (2012). Misplaced heritage language learners of Japanese in secondary schools. *Heritage Language Journal*, 9(2), 70–84.
- Oriyama, K. (2010). Heritage language maintenance and Japanese identity formation: What role can schooling and ethnic community contact play. *Heritage language journal*, 7(2), 76–111.
- Otcu, B. (2010). Heritage language maintenance and cultural identity formation: The case of a Turkish Saturday school in New York City. *Heritage Language Journal*, 7(2), 112–137.
- Palmer, J. (2007). "Arabic diglossia: Teaching only the standard variety is a disservice to students." *Arizona Working Papers in SLA & Teaching* 14: 111–22
- Park, S. M. (2013). Immigrant students’ heritage language and cultural identity maintenance in multilingual and multicultural societies. *Concordia Working Papers in Applied Linguistics*, 4, 30–53.
- Parra, M. L. (2013). Expanding language and cultural competence in advanced heritage-and foreign-language learners through community engagement and work with the arts. *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(2), 115–142.

- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Pereira, K. L. (2015). Developing critical language awareness via service-learning for Spanish heritage speakers. *Heritage Language Journal*, 12(2), 159–184.
- Polinsky, M., & Kagan, O. (2007). Heritage languages: In the ‘wild’ and in the classroom. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 1(5), 368–395.
- Potowski, K., & Carreira, M. (2004). Teacher development and national standards for Spanish as a heritage language. *Foreign Language Annals*, 37(3), 427–437.
- Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ricento, T. (2005). Problems with the ‘language-as-resource’ discourse in the promotion of heritage languages in the USA. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9(3), 348–368.
- Richardson, E. (2008). African American literacies. *Encyclopedia of language and education*, 738–749.
- Rodríguez, A. D. (2007). Prospective bilingual teachers' perceptions of the importance of their heritage language. *Heritage Language Journal*, 5(1), 172–187.
- Rossmann, G., & Ralls, S. (2003). Presenting the learnings. In *Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 329–349). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Rouchdy, A. (2013). Language conflict and identity: Arabic in the American diaspora. In *Language Contact and Language Conflict in Arabic* (pp. 151–166). Routledge.
- Ryding, K. C. (1991). Proficiency despite diglossia: A new approach for Arabic. *The Modern Language Journal*, 75(2), 212–218.
- Ryding, K. C. (2003). Teaching Arabic as a foreign language. *Highlights from the 2003 NCLRC summer Institute*.
- Ryding, K. C. (2006). Teaching Arabic in the United States. In K. M. Wahba, Z. A. Taha, & L. England (Eds.) *Handbook for Arabic language teaching professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (pp. 13–20). London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Samaniego, F., & Pino, C. (2000). Frequently asked questions about SNS programs. *Spanish for native speakers*, 1, 29–63.
- Sanders, P. (1982). Phenomenology: a new way of viewing organizational research. *Academy of management review*, 7(3), 353–360.

- Schwarzer, D., & Petrón, M. (2005). Heritage language instruction at the college level: Reality and possibilities. *Foreign Language Annals*, 38(4), 568–578.
- Sehlaoui, A. S. (2008). Language learning, heritage, and literacy in the USA: The case of Arabic. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 21(3), 280–291.
- Seganti, F. R. (2010). Practicing reflexivity in the study of Italian migrants in London. *Qualitative Report*, 15(4), 966–987
- Sekerina, I. (2013). A psychometric approach to heritage language studies. *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(2), 65–72.
- Seymour-Jorn, C. (2004). Arabic language learning among Arab immigrants in Milwaukee, Wisconsin: A study of attitudes and motivations. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 24(1), 109–122.
- Shin, S. J. (2005). Developing in two languages: Korean children in America Child language and child development. *Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters*.
- Shin, S. J., Ellis, R., & Johnson, K. E. (2002). Birth order and the language experience of bilingual children. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36(1), 103–113.
- Shin, S., & Lee, S. (2013). Expanding capacity, opportunity, and desire to learn Korean as a heritage language *Heritage Language Journal*, 10(3), 64–72.
- Shiri, S. (2010). Arabic in the USA. In *Language diversity in the USA* (pp. 206–222). Cambridge University Press.
- Shrum, J., & Glisan, Eileen W. (2005). *Teacher's handbook: Contextualized language instruction* (Third ed.). Boston, MA: Thomson/Heinle.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). Linguistic human rights and teachers of English. *Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 22-44.
- Snow, C. E., Barnes, W. S., Chandler, J., Goodman, I. F., & Hemphill, L. (1991). *Unfulfilled expectations: Home and school influences on literacy*. Harvard University Press.
- Spring, J. (2016). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality: A brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States*. Routledge.
- Stevens, P. B. (2006). Is Spanish really so easy? Is Arabic really so hard? Perceived difficulty in learning Arabic as a second language. *Handbook for Arabic language teaching professionals in the 21st century*, (pp. 35–63).
- Suarez, D. (2007). Second and third generation heritage language speakers: HL scholarship's relevance to the research needs and future directions of TESOL. *Heritage Language Journal*, 5(1), 27–49.

- Suleiman, Y. (2011). *Arabic, self and identity: A study in conflict and displacement*. Oxford University Press.
- Swender, E., Conrad, D. J., & Vicars, R. (2012). *ACTFL proficiency guidelines 2012*. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.
- Szececi, T., & Szilagy, J. (2012). Immigrant Hungarian families' perceptions of new media technologies in the transmission of heritage language and culture. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 25(3), 265–281.
- Taha-Thomure, H. (2008). The status of Arabic language teaching today. *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, 1(3), 186–192.
- Temples, A. L. (2013). *Constructing Arabic as heritage: Investment in language, literacy, and identity among young US learners* (Doctoral dissertation, Georgia State University).
- Trentman, E. (2011). L2 Arabic dialect comprehension: Empirical evidence for the transfer of familiar dialect knowledge to unfamiliar dialects. *L2 Journal*, 3(1), 22–49
- Tse, L. (1998). Ethnic identity formation and its implications for heritage language development. *Heritage language development*, 15–29
- Tse, L. (1999). Finding a place to be: Ethnic identity exploration of Asian Americans. *Adolescence*, 34(133), 121–138.
- Tse, L. (2001). Resisting and reversing language shift: Heritage-language resilience among US native biliterates. *Harvard educational review*, 71(4), 676–709.
- Valdés, G. (2001). Heritage language students: Profiles and possibilities. In J. Kreeft Peyton, D. A. Ranard, & S. McGinnis (Eds.), *Heritage languages in America. Preserving a national resource* (pp. 37–77). Washington, DC: CAL, ERIC; [McHenry, IL]: Delta Systems Co., Inc.
- Valdés, G., Fishman, J. A., Chávez, R., & Pérez, W. (2008). Maintaining Spanish in the United States: Steps toward the effective practice of heritage language re-acquisition/development. *Hispania*, 4–24.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Van Deusen-Scholl, N. (2003). Toward a definition of heritage language: Sociopolitical and pedagogical considerations. *Journal of language, identity, and education*, 2(3), 211–230.
- Vang, M. (2012). *Hmong heritage language learners: A phenomenological approach* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee).

- Van Maanen, J. (2011). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. University of Chicago Press.
- Van Mol, M. (2006). Arabic receptive language teaching: A new CALL approach. *Handbook for Arabic language teaching professionals in the 21st century*, 305–314.
- Villa, D. J. (2004). Heritage language speakers and upper-division language instruction: Findings from a Spanish linguistics program. *Advanced foreign language learning: A challenge to college programs*, 88–98.
- Wahba, K. (2006). Arabic language use and the educated language user. In K. M. Wahba, Z. A. Taha, & L. England (Eds.), *Handbook for Arabic language teaching professionals in the 21st century* (pp. 437–446). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Wallace, R. A., & Wolf, A. (1999). *Contemporary sociological theory: expanding the classical tradition* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Wang, M. (2003). An ethnographic study of Chinese heritage language education and technological innovations. *Journal of National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages*, 1, 69–94.
- Wardhaugh, R. (2010). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (6th ed.). Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Willoughby, L. (2014). Meeting the challenges of heritage language education: Lessons from one school community. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 15(3), 265–281.
- Wilmsen, D. (2006). What is communicative Arabic. *Handbook for Arabic language teaching professionals in the 21st century*, 125–138.
- Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: description, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Wolcott, H. (2009). *Writing it up: Qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Wong, K. F., & Xiao, Y. (2010). Diversity and difference: Identity issues of Chinese heritage language learners from dialect backgrounds. *Heritage Language Journal*, 7(2), 153–187.
- Wright, W. E. (2007). Heritage language programs in the era of English-only and No Child Left Behind. *Heritage Language Journal*, 5(1), 1–26.
- Wu, C. H. (2005). Attitude and behavior toward bilingualism for Chinese parents and children. In *Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism* (pp. 2385–2394). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

- Wu, M. H., & Leung, G. (2014). Re-envisioning heritage language education: A study of middle school students learning Mandarin Chinese. *Heritage Language Journal*, 11(3), 207–223.
- Wu, M. H., & Chang, T. M. (2010). Heritage language teaching and learning through a macro-approach. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 32–33.
- Yanow, D. (2006). 27 Qualitative-Interpretive methods in policy research. *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis*, 405–415.
- Yi, Y. (2008). Voluntary writing in the heritage language: A study of biliterate Korean-heritage adolescents in the US. *Heritage Language Journal*, 6(2), 72–93.
- You, B. K., & Liu, N. (2011). Stakeholder Views on the Roles, Challenges, and Future Prospects of Korean and Chinese Heritage Language-Community Language Schools in Phoenix: A Comparative Study. *Heritage Language Journal*, 8(3), 67–92.
- Younes, M. (1990). An integrated approach to teaching Arabic as a foreign language. *Al-Arabiyya*, 23(1), 105–122.
- Younes, M. (2006). Integrating the vernacular with Fusha in the Arabic-as-aforeign-language classroom. *Handbook for Arabic language teaching professionals*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

## APPENDIX

### Interview 1

1. How do you identify yourself? How do you feel when identified as an Arab?
2. Do you feel connected with Arabs and Arabic-speaking world? How?
3. How do you view Arabic as a language? How important is Arabic to you compared to English?
4. How do you view your dialect?
5. In what language do you prefer to express your thoughts and opinions? Why?
6. From whom do you feel supported to speak Arabic? How?
7. Do you enjoy Arabic media (news, films, and shows)? What is your favorite Arabic movie, show? Why?
8. Do you access the Internet in Arabic? If so, what types of material and why?
9. In what context do you want to use Arabic now and in the future?

### Interview 2

1. Have you studied Arabic outside your community school? Where, when and how was it?
2. What is the hardest part of communicating with people from different dialects?
3. How important is it for you to be able to read and write in Arabic?
4. How is learning to read and write in Arabic different from learning to read and write in English? Do you read Arabic for fun? How often?
5. What is the hardest part of reading non-school materials?
6. How much does your colloquial Arabic contribute to your reading, writing, and grammar development?

### Interview 3

1. In your opinion, what were the goals of teaching Arabic at your school? What do you think about them?
2. What is the best classroom learning environment for you?
3. What were some of the most memorable instructional units you had in learning Arabic? Why were these memorable?
4. What was the name of Arabic the textbook that you were using in your high school? What are some strengths and weaknesses of the Arabic textbook used at your school?
5. In your opinion, would it be useful to integrate the study of Arabic with other school subjects? For example, teachers would incorporate some familiar content like American History using Arabic or using on-line articles about health. What are the benefits of such integration?
6. What do you think about mixed Arabic language classes of Arabs and non-Arabs? Is this good for both of them? Or not? Why?
7. In your opinion, what are the characteristics of a good Arabic teacher?
8. How would you go about designing an Arabic language program that would be beneficial for you?



## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

Khuloud Labanieh

Place of Birth: Damascus, Syria

Education:

B.A. Damascus University, June 1988

Major: Arabic Language and Literature

MA. Cardinal Stritch University, May 2007

Major. Master of Education in Education

Ph.D. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Major: Curriculum and Instruction