



# Heritage Language Maintenance in Syrian Families: Parents' and Children's Attitudes Towards Arabic

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AIX-MARSEILLE UNIVERSITÉ

Département d'Études du Monde Anglophone (DEMA)

**Heritage Language Maintenance in Syrian Families: Parents' and Children's  
Attitudes Towards Arabic**

Mémoire présenté en vue de la validation de la deuxième année de

Master Études Culturelles du Monde Anglophone

Sous la direction de

**Pr. Sara GREAVES**

Présenté par

**Rama ALHAMAD**

LERMA – EA 853

Session de novembre 2023



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## 1. Introduction

Displacements and movements of people into different spaces have been increasingly a common phenomenon that characterizes the world today. Different reasons and motives lead people to leave their country. Social scientists categorize migration into "push" and "pull" factors, where pull factors entice individuals to seek better opportunities in a different country, while push factors, such as war, persecution, natural disasters, and economic hardships, force people to seek refuge in another country (Castelli, 2018).

Statistically speaking, overall, the estimated number of international migrants has increased over the past five decades. The current global estimate is that there were around 281 million people living in a country other than their countries of birth in 2020. Approximately one-third of them were forced to leave their home countries due to push factors, including conflict, persecution, and human rights violations (UNHCR, 2017).

The number of people seeking international protection outside of their country of origin has increased by 78% since 2011<sup>1</sup> and most of this increase was concentrated between 2012 and 2015, "driven mainly by the Syrian conflict" (UNHCR 2016, 5). From the early days of the Syrian civil war in Spring of 2011, more than 10 million Syrians have been displaced, approximately 4 million of them across international borders (Betts & Collier, 2015).

Canada, acknowledging the global refugee crisis, initiated a response by announcing plans in November 2015 to welcome more than 25,000 Syrian refugees by February 2016, backed by a \$250 million investment (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015). As of February 28, 2018, Canada had successfully resettled 51,835 Syrian refugees (Immigration, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the newly released data covers trends up to the end of 2021, which does not include the current situation around Ukraine.

This process was overseen by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2 (IRCC), the federal government ministry responsible for facilitating the arrival of immigrants to Canada, providing protection to refugees, and offering programming to support newcomers' successful settlement and integration. These needs typically include registering adults in official language classes (Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017). Canada, as everywhere else around the world, recognizes the important role that language plays to help refugees to effectively integrate into their new community.

With the big focus on the linguistic integration and cultural adjustment of refugees, and the continuous courage to reach proficiency in the official language, the maintenance of heritage language becomes a serious challenge, impacting cultural identity, community cohesion and family relationships (Hashimoto & Lee, 2011; Yan, 2018; Hinton, 2001; Fishman, 1991; Guardado, 2002; Kouritzin, 2000; Octu, 2010).

The loss of immigrant heritage languages in Canada is a wide-spread phenomenon with different contributing factors. This trend incurs substantial consequences for immigrants, their children, and the communities they belong to. With the rising numbers of Syrians in Canada, alongside the importance of preserving heritage language and as a Syrian myself planning to reside in Canada, there is a need to investigate the attitudes of both parents and children towards their Arabic heritage language. To do so, their beliefs, their feelings and their actions will be examined. Do their attitudes differ? Are children influenced by their parents' attitudes? Are there any signs of HL loss? If so, are parents aware of that?

Despite various studies on language use and attitudes among ethnic groups worldwide, there still seems to be no single study that has investigated the Syrian community that immigrated to Toronto, Canada from a sociolinguistic perspective, on a specific linguistic group, in this case, Syrians, provides a more comprehensive view of heritage language challenges faced by immigrants in Canada.



In order to answer these questions, this research study employed qualitative research methods, using semi-structured interviews as the primary means of data collection. Semi-structured interviews involve in-depth questioning where respondents provide answers to predetermined open-ended queries. These interviews are guided by a semi-structured interview guide, outlining key questions and associated topics to be explored by the interviewer (Jamshed, 2014).

To ensure the comprehensive capture of interview data, the recording of interviews was deemed a suitable method, albeit sometimes subject to debate between the researcher and the respondent. Handwritten notes during interviews are considered relatively unreliable, risking the oversight of crucial points. Recording interviews facilitates the researcher's focus on the content and ensures a more accurate representation of the conversation.

This approach enables the collection of open-ended data, allowing for an exploration of participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on a specific topic, delving deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Thematic analysis was chosen as the method to comprehensively examine and interpret participants' attitudes toward the preservation of their heritage language. Thematic analysis involves scrutinizing qualitative data, identifying patterns and themes in the meaning of the data. It is an active, reflexive process in which the researcher's subjective experience plays a central role in making sense of the gathered data (Nowell et al., 2017).

### **Research Path:**

In Chapter 2, I delve into historical events that led to the displacement of Syrians and explore Canada's response to this crisis. Additionally, I provide an overview of the Syrian community in Canada, with a specific focus on language.

Following this, I transition to a literature review, examining attitudes toward heritage language evolution over time, theories of heritage language maintenance, processes of heritage language loss, factors related to language maintenance in the immigration context, and the family's role in relation to child agency in heritage language loss and maintenance. Then I detail the methodology of the study, outlining the participants, instruments for data collection, and data collection procedures.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to presenting the results derived from interview and observation data. These results are categorized into three main sections, each supported by relevant interview excerpts.

The Discussion chapter 7 involves the researcher's interpretation of the findings and an attempt to address the research questions. Finally, in the Conclusion chapter, implications of the study are outlined, and reflections on its limitations are provided. Considering these limitations, the researcher suggests potential directions for future research, concluding with a summary of the study and a comprehensive discussion of its limitations.

## **2. Setting The Scene**

In this chapter, the background of the research paper serves as a roadmap for the readers. It gives an overview of what happened in Syria, and how Canada responded to the situation there. It also provides a brief explanation of the Syrian profile in Canada. The main point of this part is to help the readers to establish the context of Syrians in Canada.

### **2.1 Uprising of Syrian revolution and Canada's position**

As part of the Arab spring, an unarmed uprising began in the southern city of Deraa in March in 2011, demanding the release of 14 school children who were detained and brutally tortured after writing on a wall the well-known slogan of the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt: "The people want the downfall of the regime" (BBC News, 2012). The protesters also called for democracy, greater freedom, and an end to corruption. Many in Syria thought the hope was for the government to introduce real change, but they didn't know that the change was going to be them. The Syrian government, led by Bashar Al-Assad, responded to the protests by sending out security forces who killed hundreds of demonstrators and imprisoned many more (Sinjab, 2011a). That was the start of what would turn into a full-scale intra-civil war, leaving behind half a million fatalities, ruined cities and 11 million refugees (more than half of Syria's population) around the world.

Canada's response to the political turmoil in Syria has been mainly based on human rights. When the crisis began in Syria, the Canadian government called for the protection of Syrians' rights and freedoms. However, as the crisis escalated and the Assad regime continued to use force against protestors, Canada changed its position 'from an emphasis on democratic reform to an emphasis on regime change' (Boulden 2015:183) (as cited in Mohamed & Bastug, 2020).

With the continuation of the conflict in Syria, which eventually turned into a civil war and resulted in the largest refugees and displacement crisis in our time, the Canadian government announced its plan in November 2015 to welcome more than 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of February 2016. This also included investing \$250 million to enhance refugee processing, as well as sponsorship and settlement services capacity in Canada (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015). The Canadian Liberal Government did not stop there and made their commitment to finalize the 12,000 Syrian privately sponsored refugee applications that they received by March 31, 2016. In contrast to other Western countries, notably the US, which adopted restrictive policies towards Syrian refugees, Canada implemented more inclusive policies towards Syrian refugees (Mohamed & Bastug, 2020). As of October 31, 2020, Canada resettled a total of 44 621 Syrian refugees (Immigration, 2021).

## **2.2 Syrian refugees' profile in Canada**

The Syrian Outcomes Report presents an overview of the outcomes of Syrian refugees resettled in Canada between November 2015 and December 2016 (Immigration, 2020). During this period, a total of 39,636 Syrian refugees arrived in Canada, with 50% being over 18 years old and 51% being male. The majority were Syrian Government Assisted Refugees (55%), followed by Privately Sponsored Refugees (35%), and Blended Visa Office Referred Refugees (10%).

Upon arrival, 75% of Syrian refugees reported having no knowledge of English or French, while only 2% indicated proficiency in both languages, and 21% reported knowing either English or French. This significant language gap can be attributed to the fact that Syrians, unlike individuals from other Arabic-speaking countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, or Jordan, undergo their entire education in Arabic—from primary school to university. Consequently, many Syrians have limited exposure to English or French, placing them at a disadvantage when beginning their new lives in Canada. As a result, prioritizing language

training becomes crucial for this group to facilitate their integration into Canadian society (Meghdadi, 2020).

In line with this need, 89% of Syrian adults accessed IRCC-Funded Language Assessments, and 77% accessed IRCC-Funded Language Training since arriving in Canada (Immigration, 2020). Survey responses indicated that most Syrian respondents could complete day-to-day tasks in English without help. However, those who spoke only French reported a lower ability to do so. Language classes, such as LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada), and informal supports played a crucial role in enhancing language skills among Syrian refugees. A study revealed increased English language proficiency two years after arrival (*Alberta Syrian Refugee Resettlement Experience Study – AAISA*, 2017).

Research also highlighted challenges for mothers of young children in accessing language classes due to a lack of available childcare. In some cases, families sent one parent, typically the father, to language training, emphasizing the need for more inclusive solutions (English et al., 2017).

### **3. Literature Review**

This chapter is informed by the existing body of literature on heritage language maintenance and loss, providing a foundational context for the inquiry presented in this thesis. The review commences with an examination of theories and studies exploring how attitudes toward the preservation of heritage languages evolve over time. Subsequently, various factors influencing both the maintenance and loss of heritage languages are discussed. This literature review serves as a crucial backdrop for understanding the complex dynamics surrounding heritage language attitudes and outcomes.

#### **3.1 Attitudes Towards Heritage Language**

Historically, there has been a tendency to view heritage languages (HLs) as a potential obstacle to second language acquisition (SLA) and integration. This perspective often stemmed from assimilationist ideologies and the belief that proficiency in the majority language and full integration into the dominant society necessitated the abandonment of heritage languages. This negative perception of HLs and their impact on SLA and integration was prevalent throughout much of the 20th century, particularly in contexts where monolingualism and language homogeneity were valued. Linguist Noam Chomsky (1965) captured this when he wrote,

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions (p. 3).

Immigrant communities were often pressured to prioritize the acquisition of the majority language and to minimize the use of their heritage languages. Policies promoting

language assimilation were implemented, including restrictive language policies in schools and discouragement of HL use in public spaces (Yilmaz, 2017).

However, over the past few decades, there has been a shift in attitudes towards heritage languages and their role in language acquisition and integration. Research and advocacy have highlighted the cognitive, social, and cultural benefits of bilingualism and heritage language maintenance. Scholars and educators have emphasized the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity, recognizing that heritage languages can enhance second language acquisition and contribute to a sense of identity, self-esteem, and community cohesion.

Peal and Lambert (1962) were among the first researchers to find a positive relationship between bilingualism and cognitive ability. They found that bilingual children performed better than monolingual children on certain cognitive tasks, particularly those that required mental flexibility and control, which, in turn, fosters higher academic expectations. Their study challenged the earlier assumptions that bilingualism was detrimental to intelligence and contributed to a shift in perspective. Subsequent studies built upon their findings and expanded our understanding of the advantages of heritage language maintenance.

Proficiency in a heritage language was shown to be related to higher academic success (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Lee, 2002), better cognitive development (Cummins, 1979; Bialystok, 2001) and more job-related opportunities (Chiswick & Miller 2010).

Other scholars have focused their efforts on demonstrating that being bilingual or maintaining a heritage language does not have a negative impact on second language acquisition (L2). Their studies challenge the belief in a trade-off between proficiency levels in one's first language and second language, as there is no empirical evidence supporting such

a claim. (Yilmaz, 2017; Dustmann, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Instead, they highlight the positive influences and interconnections between languages, emphasizing the value of maintaining and developing proficiency in L1 to enhance second language learning by providing a solid foundation of linguistic and cognitive skills, fostering metalinguistic awareness, and supporting language transfer.

It has become widely accepted that while learning another language, L2 learners benefit from their existing language skills and strategies (Yilmaz & Schmid 2015). Moreover, the preservation of a connection to one's heritage language is increasingly acknowledged as a constructive approach to enhance social integration. This contrasts with earlier perspectives that considered maintaining the heritage language as an impediment or an act of resistance (Chiswick & Miller, 2001; Portes & Rivas, 2011).

From a psychological standpoint, bilingual individuals who are more motivated to develop their HL tend to have higher self-esteem (Yan, 2018), a stronger sense of belonging and integration into their communities and family cohesion (Piller, 2001) and better psychological well-being compared to monolingual individuals, which in turn enhances their ability to engage with the wider community (Landry et al., 2013).

### **3.2 Factors Influencing Heritage Language Maintenance**

When discussing heritage language maintenance, we can trace its theoretical underpinnings back to Fishman's influential research on language maintenance and shift. Fishman in his book *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages* (1991) focuses on the theoretical and empirical aspects of language shift, providing a foundation for understanding and addressing the challenges faced by endangered or threatened languages.



Fishman made a distinction between two concepts: “language transmission” and “language maintenance.” According to Fishman, “language transmission” refers to the process of passing a heritage language to young children within the family setting. On the other hand, “language maintenance” refers to the subsequent stage, the “post-transmission process” occurring within the wider society, that aims to further develop the transmitted language (as cited in Zhang, 2020).

Fishman argues that if the heritage language continues to be used in domains that are important to the community, such as the home or religious settings, education, and the workplace, it is more likely to be maintained across generations. Fishman's theory emphasizes the role of individual and societal factors in language maintenance and shift processes. The theory is also known as the “Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale” (GIDS). The GIDS scale consists of seven stages, ranging from the highest level of maintenance (Stage 1) to complete language loss (Stage 7). The stages represent different degrees of intergenerational transmission and language vitality within a community.

Many researchers have followed Fishman's lead in exploring the factors that affect the maintenance and attrition of heritage language ranging from social to individual and familial factors. This process is influenced by internal and external political, social, and economic factors unique to each community. As its causes and effects are not uniform, a universal model for reversing language shift does not exist. However, several broad principles can be applied across multiple contexts and situations for successful language revitalization.

### **3.2.1 Parental role**

Just as Fishman recognizes the family’s vital role in maintaining heritage language, other scholars emphasize the significance of parent’s support and involvement and see it as the most important factor related to successful maintenance of HL (Arriagada, 2005; Oh &

Fuligini, 2007; Suarez, 2002, 2007). Research has found that the more heritage language is used at home with family members, the more proficiency in the language. Therefore, it has indeed been treated as a fascinating environment because it is considered a source for the improvement of children's languages (Sapriati, 2021).

Cummins (2000) also advocates for the exclusive use of the heritage language in the home environment. This is in large part because HL starts at home and parents are the first HL contact for second generation immigrant children and the main source of HL for those children (Brown, 2011). Similarly, Park and Sarkar (2007) underscore the pivotal role of parents in influencing the maintenance of the heritage language, with research indicating their significant impact on language retention.

In his Family Language Policy (FLP) model, Spolsky (2004) suggested an analysis of three interrelated main components: language Practices: (the actual language behaviours and patterns observed within the family), language management (the strategies and decisions made by family members to improve existing language practices) and language beliefs (the attitudes and ideologies that family members hold regarding languages and language use). They are all connected but at the same time, if you apply one doesn't necessarily mean you apply the others. For instance, choosing to use "only mother tongue at home" rule or adopting the "one parent, one language" (OPOL) strategy, where one parent speaks the heritage language (HL) with the child and the other parent speaks the majority language, is not sufficient on its own. Parents also need to actively regulate language use by requesting reformulation when children do not use the appropriate language or by not responding when they use English (Krashen, 1998). Consistency in language use has been shown to have a positive impact on heritage language acquisition, as demonstrated in studies conducted by Kasuya (1998), Lanza (1997), De Houwer (2007), Kouritzin (2000), and Caloi and Torregrossa (2021).

Consistency also reflects the value placed on the heritage language. When parents are dedicated to using the heritage language consistently with their children, it demonstrates their recognition of the importance of preserving and nurturing the heritage language within the family context (Lao, 2004; Li, 2006).

Guardado (2002) divided the four families he interviewed into two groups, “the maintenance families” and “the loss families” based on their children’s competence in Spanish and English. He found that the parents in “the maintenance families” encouraged their children to use their heritage language, while the parents in “the loss families” expressed strong beliefs of heritage language maintenance, but they never actually promoted its use.

Curdt-Christiansen (2016) rightly notices that determining what languages to practise, encourage, avoid or abandon is largely dependent on parental beliefs and goals for their children’s linguistic development. García (2003) also agrees that parents’ language ideology and related practices will have an impact on children’s language preference and use. Taking into consideration that parents’ language choice seems to depend on their attitudes towards their heritage language (Park & Sarkar, 2007) and bilingualism (Hinton, 1999).

Examining Korean immigrant parents’ attitude towards language maintenance in a Canadian city, Park and Sarkar (2007) used interviews and a questionnaire and found that the participants were positive towards their children’s language maintenance. The parents also believed that their children’s heritage language proficiency would positively influence their identity as Korean, enable them to communicate with their grandparents more effectively, and lead to better economic opportunities.

Language ideology is considered as a foundation for shaping language policies and practices (Sapriati et al., 2021), while Curdt-Christiansen (2009) regards language ideologies as “the driving force” underlying the formation of Family Language Policy (FLP).

Schiffman (1996) emphasizes the importance of beliefs that people have about language, as they become “the root” for their language policy (as cited in Turgaleyeva, 2017). Other scholars like King et al. (2008) also argue that language ideologies are central to understanding essential factors related to language control and usage.

Curdt-Christiansen (2009) provides a comprehensive understanding of parent’s language ideology by discussing its manifestations at both the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, it includes sociolinguistic and sociocultural variables such as parents’ educational background, their immigration experiences, their comprehension of bi-/multilingualism, and their cultural dispositions and values. Parents may attach particular cultural, religious, or emotional significance to the heritage language, considering it an essential part of their identity and cultural heritage (Tannenbaum, 2012). Mills (2004) examined the language perceptions of 10 bilingual Pakistani mothers and their children in the U.K. She observed a close relationship between religion, identity, dress, and language. Arabic literacy for reading the Qur’an was an important component of their identities, even more than Punjabi or Urdu parents in several cases.

Han (2003) conducted a study on Korean parents and found that children whose parents instilled a sense of pride in their heritage language (HL) were more likely to maintain it. On the other hand, Suarez’s (2002) study identified a Spanish-speaking parent with a contrasting perspective on heritage language maintenance (HLM). This participant associated negative impressions with Spanish, such as crime, rudeness, and school suspension, which differed from the views of other participants in other studies. The parent highly valued English as a means to assimilate into mainstream society, leading to resistance towards their children’s HLM. In contrast, other participating Spanish-speaking parents strongly believed that their children should master Spanish in response to existing discrimination and work towards challenging others’ misconceptions.

On the other hand, at the macro level, language ideology refers to broader societal and institutional beliefs and practices concerning language. It demonstrates the economic and socio-political factors that can influence language planning, language policies, language hierarchies, language rights and language education on a larger scale.

For instance, certain languages may be perceived as advantageous for economic opportunities. In Curdt-Christiansen's article (2016) focusing on Singapore, it is highlighted that explicit policy mandates studying both English and the mother tongue, but most jobs in the public and private sectors prioritize English proficiency. The research involved three multilingual families from different ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay, and Indian) in Singapore. The findings indicated a hierarchical approach to language use, with English being the primary language, followed by Mandarin and Hokkien.

In a case study by Lee (2013) involving Korean immigrant parents and their children, it was found that parents who planned to stay in the United States held the belief that their children would have better job opportunities in the growing economy if they were bilingual or multilingual. This perspective is consistent with findings from Guardado (2002), where parents associated knowledge of multiple languages with gaining economic benefits and increased job market capabilities.

At the same time, government's language policies can also determine which language fosters economic progress, and which language serves political objectives and is permitted in public spaces. For instance, in Quebec, the state endorses a unilingual French language ideology, driven by political interests, while English, perceived as a significant threat to French, is deliberately excluded from public domains, along with various minority languages (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009).

Comprehensive understanding of language ideology necessitates consideration at both micro and macro levels, acknowledging the intricate interplay between parents' language ideologies and practices and larger sociocultural and political forces. This interplay, in turn, determines whether a minority language is transmitted across generations, leading to its maintenance or loss. The scholarly discourse has increasingly recognized the pivotal role of children in shaping and reshaping parents' language policies (Fogle & King, 2013; Smith-Christmas, 2022, etc.). It underscores that children are not passive recipients of language transmission but are active agents who engage actively in language learning and use (Bergroth & Palviainen, 2017). Scholars like Curds emphasize the need for increased attention to children's agency, considering them to possess significant influence. In instances where parents strongly advocate and practice heritage language maintenance, heightened agency is observed in their children, fostering continued use and learning of the heritage language. A child's active cooperation, agentive use of the heritage language in the home domain, and creative utilization of the language in socialization with peers serve as strong indicators of successful Family Language Policies (Shen & Jiang, 2023).

### **3.2.2 Community**

The impact of ethnic communities on heritage language maintenance is a crucial area of research that explores how belonging to an ethnic community influences individuals' attitudes, language use, and efforts to preserve their heritage language (King, 2000; Sai, 2022).

Guardado (2006) highlights the significant role of the community in supporting individuals' social, cultural, and linguistic needs. Within these communities, there emerges a platform that fosters the development of spaces where the L1 can be preserved and cultivated over time. Individuals within these communities can interact with others who share the same

language and cultural background, creating a sense of belonging and pride in their heritage language.

Tse (2001) conducted interviews with 10 bilingual adolescents of the second generation in the United States who displayed positive attitudes toward their heritage language and culture. These positive attitudes were attributed to their active participation in community programs.

In this way, the community becomes a crucial mode of transmission not only for heritage language but also cultural values, contributing to the ongoing maintenance of L1 and cultural identity across generations (Guardado, 2006).

Wang (2018) also recognizes the power of participants' local ethnic communities and their firm connections to help maintain heritage language and culture. In her study, the engagement of families in their ethnic community provided the first opportunity for their children to practice their heritage language outside of their home and family settings and helped to raise children's heritage language learning goals. She also reflected on the participants' thoughts and plans of combining events in order to expand their networks and connections, advocating for their efforts in maintaining heritage languages and culture to be acknowledged and supported by the larger community. Thus, she strongly encourages immigrant families to reach out to the larger community in order to "transform their status from invisible to visible", emphasizing the link between the perceived value of a heritage language in the host country and its likelihood of successful transmission to the next generation of migrants. For instance, in a mixed-method study, Gogonas (2007) investigated the language maintenance of second-generation Egyptian and Albanian children in Greece, and found that Arabic, despite being spoken by a relatively small migrant community, holds a higher status compared to Albanian, which has a larger number of speakers. The critical

factor in accounting for language status is the social status of the respective groups. For Albanian pupils, the stigmatized status of their group in Greece has led to the development of negative attitudes towards their ethnic language, as they seek to dissociate from it. In other words, language maintenance or loss can be influenced by the social standing of the L1 community, and the presence of discrimination based on perceived hierarchies (Babae, 2014).

On the other hand, other researchers placed more emphasis on the educational status and political involvement of community members. In research conducted by King (2000), it was found that community members with higher levels of education and political engagement displayed more positive attitudes toward their heritage language and demonstrated greater success in revitalizing it. Conversely, the community with lower levels of education and political involvement tended to overlook the importance of their heritage language and did not actively support efforts to revive their endangered language.

Understanding the impact of the social status of members within an ethnic community on heritage language maintenance is also essential for implementing effective language policies and interventions to preserve and promote heritage languages.

Overall, community forces have a significant impact on shaping the unique cultural environment of a particular ethnic group (Zhou & Li, 2003) and these forces also play a role in facilitating the formation of social networks within that environment. However, when it comes to the language socialization of children and teenagers, schools emerge as another crucial setting alongside the community.

### **3.2.3 Schools**

According to Moreno-Fernández and Lamas (2023), effective communication among immigrant students, as well as between students and teachers, plays a crucial role not only in



language acquisition but also in the transmission and potential adoption of social ideologies, identities, and values. They highlighted that complementary Russian schools serve dual roles as both a “strong educational center based on solid formal educational plans” and an “informal social club providing a space for a wide range of social interactions.” The preservation of heritage language within these schools in Scotland fosters cultural ties among Russian speakers, instilling a sense of emotional belonging to the global Russian cultural heritage and reinforcing shared socio-cultural values (Ivashinenko, 2019).

Tse (1997) found that ethnic language programs benefit ethnic minority children by developing both their proficiency in their heritage language and their appreciation for it. Similarly, Octu (2010) argued that community-based heritage language schools positively influence ethnic minority children's heritage language maintenance by providing a context for individuals with similar beliefs and attitudes toward their heritage language to meet and socialize.

It is crucial to acknowledge that schools often serve as the most influential socializing institution in children's lives, and the positions presented by the school may significantly impact a child's identity formation. Chow (2001) highlighted the establishment of co-ethnic friendship networks as a benefit for Chinese immigrant families in Calgary and Toronto attending heritage language schools. Asian immigrant parents also reported that heritage language schools not only promote linguistic competence but also raise cultural awareness and connect the children to their homeland. Children in these schools celebrate their country's holidays and learn their culture manners and behavior (Hong, 2016).

Cummins (2000) also emphasized the importance and benefits of creating a supportive environment for linguistically and culturally diverse learners in school. Tse (2001)

similarly highlighted the advantages of schools openly recognizing the value of heritage language and fostering a friendly and supportive heritage language learning environment.

### **3.3 Heritage Language Loss**

Despite the various theories and strategies designed to preserve heritage languages, along with discussions emphasizing the significance and advantages of such maintenance, the shift and loss of these languages continue to occur.

Grenoble and Whaley (2006) provide a comprehensive model outlining four common situations that often lead to language loss. These situations include sudden attrition, which occurs rapidly due to external events like war, disease, natural disasters, and famine, causing the abrupt disappearance of native speakers. Radical attrition, similarly, swift, is caused by political suppression or genocide, forcing speakers to adopt the dominant language to assimilate. Gradual attrition, a slower process, involves speakers transitioning to a more influential language, often driven by economic opportunities and migration from rural areas, leading to a decline in the speech community. The final form, bottom-to-top attrition, sees a language remaining strong in specific contexts, such as religious practices, but diminishing in everyday use, particularly within homes (as cited in Martin, 2022).

Fillmore (2000) asserts that the loss of language is influenced by a range of external and internal factors. External factors, stemming from the broader societal, institutional, or environmental context, impact language use, preservation, or loss. On the other hand, internal factors originate within the individual or the specific group.

#### **3.3.1 External factors:**

The attitudes of the society towards a language or a community group play a crucial role in shaping individuals' language behavior, impacting language maintenance and loss. Shin (2005) emphasized the significance influence of social norms, societal attitudes, and

power dynamics on heritage languages. Similarly, Yu (2010) noted that hostile beliefs towards minority languages could lead to increased efforts for language preservation or result in language assimilation.

Unfortunately, an enduring unfavorable attitude towards immigrants' native languages persists in several countries, where linguistic diversity is viewed as a threat to the host community. This perspective advocates linguistic assimilation rather than integration (Lindner et al., 2020). As a result, there have been instances where political discourse reflects this sentiment, calling for immigrants to exclusively speak the language of the host society both publicly and at home to enhance proficiency in the host society's language. For instance, the Christian Social Union (CSU), a German political ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel, proposed mandating immigrants to speak German in public and within the family. This approach has led to instances where Syrian immigrants tend to abandon their heritage language in favor of assimilation over acculturation (Lindner et al., 2020).

Fillmore (1991) highlighted that the pressure to attain proficiency in the dominant language may lead to significant implications for language preservation and the linguistic choices of immigrant communities.

Other scholars point out that negative societal attitudes and dominant ideologies can also influence immigrant children's perceptions of heritage language maintenance. Even when parents actively encourage the retention of heritage, the children themselves can present a considerable obstacle, as highlighted by Curdt-Christiansen (2009). The challenge becomes especially daunting when children fail to see the relevance of their heritage or heritage language in the host country, making the preservation of culture and the learning of the heritage language a laborious and often unattainable task (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009).

Shin's (2005) study emphasizes that young learners, through interactions in the community and school, quickly recognize that one language is more valued by mainstream society than others, and that heritage language is perceived as a symbol of minority status and lower social status. Children may then find that eliminating linguistic differences is the most effective way to bridge the gap with their peers in the dominant culture (as cited in Miller, 2008).

Lee and Oxelson's (2006) study demonstrates that school teachers may exhibit indifferent attitudes or even negative views towards heritage language preservation. Some teachers subscribe to the notion that practicing a heritage language can have detrimental effects on learning.

When societal institutions convey the message that linguistically diverse minority groups, their bilingualism, and cultural backgrounds are irrelevant or undesirable, and when interactions with teachers reinforce these status differentials, students disengage from their home languages, accelerating the process of language loss (Cummins, 2007).

### **3.3.2 Internal factors:**

A significant contributor to the loss of heritage language (HL) among immigrants is the language chosen by parents within the household (Hinton, 1999). Fillmore (1991) argues that immigrant parents, keen to see their children acquire proficiency in the dominant language of the host society, may avoid implementing a policy mandating the use of only the heritage language at home. Consequently, children may not recognize the usefulness of their heritage language (Nesteruk, 2010).

In addition, Brown (2013) identifies a lack of parental action as a potential cause of Heritage Language Maintenance failure. The gap between parental intent and actual practice may be explained by the natural inclination for both parents and children to favor the

dominant language as their proficiency in it grows. Brown's study indicates that younger siblings often become monolingual in English, revealing a deficiency in HLM efforts by parents. This underscores that the home environment is not straightforwardly conducive to successful HL maintenance. The findings suggest that positive parental ideologies alone may not be sufficient; active engagement in linguistically related activities enhances the likelihood of HLM success (2011).

Zooming out to consider the broader community context, Hashimoto and Lee (2011) explore HL literacy practices in Japanese immigrant families navigating challenges in an Anglo and Latino community in the US. Obstacles, such as the absence of an HL-speaking community, HL schools, and limited access to information on pedagogical practices, are identified. School and societal components also play a role, with the quality of instruction in heritage language schools emerging as a contributing factor (Li, 2006).

#### **4. Methodology**

This qualitative study explored the attitudes of parents and children towards heritage language among 20 families in Canada, specifically recent Syrian immigrants to Ontario with children aged between 6 and 18. The research focused on four cities in Ontario: London, Hamilton, Kitchener, and Cambridge. All these families came to Canada after the Syrian civil war started in 2011, either through direct migration to Canada or via a second country (Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia) through sponsorships or visas. Most of the interviews were conducted only with mothers due to varying reasons such as fathers' work commitments or limited knowledge about their children.

The interviews, conducted individually to ensure comfort and freedom to speak, averaged 20 minutes for parents and 10 minutes for children. The interview structure included sections on self-introduction and background questions, followed by inquiries about attitudes towards language and concluding with questions about language maintenance strategies. Language choice played a critical role; parents universally chose to speak in Arabic, their mother tongue, citing ease of expression. In contrast, most children, although regularly speaking Arabic at home, opted for English during the interviews, perceiving it as a more comfortable language for articulating their opinions.

Additionally, for a question about English levels, parents were given a paper describing 6 English language levels to choose from. The interviews were recorded after the parents' approval to ensure all information was captured, and later, the answers were transcribed in detail after listening to the recordings.

## **5. Findings**

This chapter presents the key findings derived from interviews with twenty Syrian families residing in Ontario, focusing on their language use and attitudes. The analysis has uncovered three main themes aligned with the research questions. The first theme centers on the strategies used by parents to maintain Arabic, the second theme delves into children's attitudes towards Arabic, and the last theme into the parents' attitudes, shedding light on the reasons they deem it crucial to maintain Arabic within their familial context. Each theme is further segmented into three to four sub-themes, each of which will be thoroughly explored and explained. The results are illustrated through excerpts from the interviews. It is important to note that these excerpts are the only sections of the interview transcripts that have been translated into English, as the interviews were primarily conducted and transcribed in Arabic. The subsequent sections will provide the original excerpts followed by their translated versions.

Before delving into the three themes, noticeable points about participants' backgrounds will be highlighted to enhance comprehension in subsequent sections. This research utilized semi-structured interviews for data collection, starting with inquiries centered around the date of arrival in Canada, parents' occupation in Canada, and their occupation in Syria before departing. Additionally, participants were asked to rate their proficiency in English as Beginner/ Pre-intermediate/ Intermediate/ Upper-Intermediate/ Advanced/ Mastery.

		Name	Age	Date Ar- rived Canada	Parents Occupation in Canada	Parents Occupation in Syria	Parents English lev- el
<b>Family No 1</b>	Mother	Leena	35	Dec-17	Student	Teacher	Upper- Intermediate
	Daughter 1	Jana	12	Dec-17			
	Daughter 2	Salma	10	Dec-17			
	Daughter 3	Lamia	8	Dec-17			
<b>Family No 2</b>	Mother	Ilham	31	Jan-16	Student	Unemployed	Pre- intermediate
	Son 1	Ahmad	18	Jan-16			
	Daughter 1	Noor	14	Jan-16			
	Daughter 2	Nadia	10	Jan-16			
<b>Family No 3</b>	Mother	Samira	39	Feb-17	Student	Unemployed	Intermediate
	Son 1	Yusuf	14	Feb-17			
	son 2	Usama	8	Feb-17			
<b>Family No 4</b>	Mother	Tasneem	33	Jan-17	Student	Unemployed	Beginner
	Father	Ammar	37	Jan-17	Farmer	barber	Beginner
	Son1	Tariq	12	Jan-17			
	Daughter 1	Yasmeen	10	Jan-17			
	Daughter 2	Maryam	9	Jan-17			
<b>Family No</b>	Mother	Joman	55	Mar-19	Unemployed	Unemployed	Beginner



<b>5</b>	Daughter 1	Omaima	17	Mar-19			
<b>Family No 6</b>	Mother	Sara	38	Mar-19	Accountant	Accountant	Upper- Intermediate
	Daughter 1	Hana	10	Mar-19			
<b>Family No 7</b>	Mother	Iman	44	Jan-18	Unemployed	Unemployed	Beginner
	Daughter 1	Zahra	10	Jan-18			
<b>Family No 8</b>	Mother	Arwa	35	Jan-18	Unemployed	Unemployed	Intermediate
	Daughter 1	Asma	6	Jan-18			
<b>Family No 9</b>	Mother	Basma	30	May-16	Graphic De- signer	School Super- visor	Upper- Intermediate
	Daughter 1	Asia	10	May-16			
	Daughter 2	Amal	8	May-16			
<b>Family No 10</b>	Mother	Hanan	38	Feb-16	Unemployed	Casheir	Intermediate
	Daughter 1	Amira	19	Feb-16			
	Son 1	Umar	18	Feb-16			
	Daughter 2	Bushra	15	Feb-16			
	son 2	Bilal	12	Feb-16			
<b>Family No 11</b>	Mother	Leen	45	Jul-12	Teaching As- sistant	School Ad- ministrators	Advanced
	Father	Ali	49	Jul-12	University Professor	Company Employee	Advanced
	Son 1	Malik	16	Jul-12			
	son 2	Akram	11	Jul-12			
	Son 3	Mohammad	11	Jul-12			

	Son 4	Hadi	7	Jul-12			
<b>Family No 13</b>	Mother	Sahar	53	Sep-19	Unemployed	Unemployed	Pre- intermediate
	Daughter 1	Lubna	15	Sep-19			
	Daughter 2	Lana	14	Sep-19			
<b>Family No 14</b>	Mother	Noura	34	Feb-18	Unemployed	Retail Shelf Stocker	Intermediate
	Daughter 1	Sahar	15	Feb-18			
	Son 1	Anas	14	Feb-18			
	Daughter 2	Shaymaa	12	Feb-18			
	son 2	Karam	11	Feb-18			
	Son 3	Ryan	8	Feb-18			
<b>Family No 15</b>	Mother	Suha	37	Sep-16	Teacher	Teacher	Intermediate
	Son 1	Khaled	11	Sep-16			
<b>Family No 16</b>	Mother	Rasha	38	Jan-15	Teacher	Unemployed	Intermediate
	Father	Zain	39	Jan-15	Programmer	Uber Driver	Intermediate
	Daughter 1	Ward	13	Jan-15			
	Daughter 2	Hana	12	Jan-15			
	Daughter 3	Sana	10	Jan-15			
<b>Family No 17</b>	Mother	Malak	29	Jan-18	Unemployed	Student	Upper- Intermediate
	Son 1	Mustafa	11	Jan-18			
	Daughter 1	Amal	10	Jan-18			
<b>Family No</b>	Mother	Aya	38	Jan-21	Unemployed	Casheir	Pre-

<b>18</b>							intermediate
	Daughter 1	Duaa	10	Jan-21			
<b>Family No</b>	Mother	Rima	39	Feb-19	Unemployed	Unemployed	Intermediate
<b>19</b>	Daughter 1	Reham	13	Feb-19			
<b>Family No</b>	Mother	Arzaq	43	Sep-21	Seamstress	Seamstress	Beginner
<b>20</b>	Son 1	Ibrahim	17	Sep-21			
	son 2	Obada	12	Sep-21			

## 5.1 Strategies used by parents.

The participants interviewed expressed a shared interest in preserving the Arabic language. Following this consensus, the participants were further questioned about their individual roles in addressing the issue of language preservation and the strategies or efforts they are actively undertaking. This line of inquiry sought to explore not only their commitment to the cause but also the practical steps they are taking to ensure the continued vitality of the Arabic language within their families. Responses to this set of questions likely varied, as participants may have shared diverse perspectives and approaches.

### 5.1.1 Arabic Tv Evening

The nightly gathering ritual, where the family convenes to make tea beside some snacks collectively watch Arabic series, seems to be common among all parents. A thoughtful and comprehensive approach by parents serves not only to enhance Arabic language skills but also install a deeper connection to Arab culture and traditions, as stated by Leena.

الاستراتيجيات هند سجلتهم دروس لغة عربية اونلاين وصرنا نحضر افلام عربي ونحضر مسلسلات عربية  
مشان انو اللغة والمفردات يكتسبوها لانو مثلا مفرداتهم هي يلي متعامل فيها بالبيت ففي اشياء ما بفهموها فمشنان نتوسع

بس بالمفردات وكمان بشوفو البيوت العربية والعيشة العربية تواصل الاب مع الأم، زيارات من الأهل، زيارات بالحارة  
مثلا اي بحيث مثلا انو يدلو على اطلاع.

Leena: “We started watching Arabic movies and TV series to help them acquire the language and expand their vocabulary. Since their daily vocabulary is what we use at home, there are some vocabularies they don't understand. I also want to expose them to Arabic households and the Arab way of life. This involves interactions between the father and the mother, visits between relatives, and neighbours, allowing them to gain insight into Arab customs and lifestyle.”

ونحن عندنا يوميا سهرة منعمل شاي ومنقعد كل العيلة ومنتابع شي مسلسل عربي أو حتى في  
مسلسلات تركية مدبلجة.

Lamia: “Every day, we have a nightly gathering where we make tea, and the whole family sits together to watch an Arabic series or even Turkish that are dubbed in Syrian dialect.”

Malak on the other hand tried as much as she can to expose her children to cartoons in Standard Arabic (Fus-ha). Even when she sometimes has to deal with their resistance. Standard Arabic is considered a formal and classical version of the language and is different than spoken Arabic.

And that's where the resistance comes from, due to the potential unfamiliarity with the more formal language structure of Fus-ha. Most of the kids in the interviews prefer to watch English cartoons and resist watching Arabic Fus-ha because it is hard to understand, and they get bored quickly. That's why Malak said that she makes sure she is with them so she can explain the meaning.

### 5.1.2 Arabic Learning

While some parents express their commitment to teaching Arabic at home, they also acknowledge the increasing challenges associated with formal instruction over time. This difficulty is often attributed to their busy schedules, making it harder to consistently follow through with structured Arabic lessons at home.

جبتلهن كتب حاولت اني انا علمهن عالقيلية الأحرف حاليا بس قلقك اني مستمرة لا والله ما مستمرة مثير ما كنت فاضية اعد اعلمهن بس ان شاء الله يعني بدي بالنهاية لازم اتفضالهم.

Basma: “I bought them books, and I tried to teach them at least the letters for now. But I told you, I am not consistently continuing. Honestly, I was not free to sit and teach them. However, Inshallah, I mean, in the end, I have to make time for them.”

وعم بدرسههم هلا وبلشو يقرأو الحمد لله بس بعدين بلشت الدراسة وما ظل عندي وقت ولا لولا دراستي كان واضعهم تحسن بس بسبب دراستي صرت ما عاد فضيت مثل اول لا احكي معهم ولا اصبر عليهم.

Malak: “I used to teach them, and they started to read, thanks to God. But then, I started my studies, and I didn't have time anymore. If it weren't for my studies, they would have made progress, but because of my studies, I no longer had the time like before, neither to talk with them nor to be patient with them.”

However, Rasha, a stay-at-home mom, mentioned that she is using a curriculum and was progressing well with her daughters. However, she acknowledged the evolving dynamics of teaching as her children grow older. The challenges intensify with the older ones exhibiting more resistance and a tendency to rebel against structured learning. This observation sheds light on the complexities parents face in maintaining a consistent and engaging Arabic learning environment, especially as their children enter adolescence.

انا شخصيا بحاول اعلمهم استنادا هلى مناهج معلمة مشان ما يكون التعليم عشوائى بشتري كتب من مناهج لغة عربية - يعنى مثلا من الاول للسادس يغني فيها جزء تعليمي وديني وفيها قرآن وفيها تمارين وفيها خط بس بصراحة

بتعرفي الكبار لما كبرن صار أصعب القعدة معهن عالتدريس يعني اي صارو يتمرّدو أكثر مثلاً ممكن احبر ماريّا ورغد على القعدة بس دانة وميس كثير بصعوبة لانو الكبير بيعطيكي reactions مزعجة لما ما يكون بدو شي.

Rasha: “Personally, I try to teach them based on structured curricula, for example, from the first to the sixth grade, to avoid random education. I buy Arabic language textbooks that cover educational and religious content, including Quranic studies, exercises, and calligraphy. However, to be honest, you know, when they grow up, it becomes more challenging to deal with them in terms of teaching. They tend to rebel more; for instance, I can easily engage Sana in the study session, but it's more difficult with Ward and Hana because the older ones give you more challenging reactions when they don't want something.”

Parents often turn to online classes as an alternative method, finding it more convenient and less demanding. However, both parents and students face challenges in this approach. Issues such as internet connectivity, boredom, and difficulty in maintaining focus or engagement with the tutor were cited as common obstacles.

سجلتلهم لخلود على فترة الصيفية الماضية دروس اونلاين بس ما التزمت كثير كان النت يقطع وأحياناً حسها ما تلتزم وحسيتها صارت تمل من العربي وتستقلها .

Arwa: “I registered Khuloud for online lessons during the past summer break, but she didn't adhere to them consistently. The internet connection was intermittent, and sometimes I felt that she wasn't committed.”

سجلتلهم سنتين بعدين صار كوفيد معاد سجلتلهم لانو ما عاد رضين يقعدن من لما صار اونلاين

Tasneem: “I enrolled them for two years, and then when COVID happened, I didn't register them anymore because they were not willing to sit and learn through online classes.”

Only one of the parents has their kids enrolled in an Islamic School where Arabic is taught as a second language. She said that not only did her kids' Arabic improve, but their identity was also reinforced. She mentioned her son, Mohammad, who used to call himself "Mo," but she said after sending him to the school, his behavior and his regard for his name and identity changed.

The absence of heritage language (HL) schools in the community poses a significant challenge for families aiming to enroll their children in Arabic language programs. This lack of educational resources specifically tailored to Arabic language learning contributes to the difficulty in preserving and promoting Arabic proficiency among children. Additionally, the financial burden associated with the high fees of existing schools further compounds the challenges faced by families. As Malak, Leena, and Noura concurred, the cost factor becomes a considerable barrier, especially for families with multiple children.

### 5.1.3 Language at Home

Language Use at Home: Parents and Children			
<b>Family No</b>  <b>1</b>	Mother	Leena	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Jana	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Daughter 2	Salma	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Daughter 3	Lamia	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No</b>  <b>2</b>	Mother	Ilham	Arabic
	Son 1	Ahmad	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Noor	Arabic
	Daughter 2	Nadia	Arabic
<b>Family No</b>	Mother	Samira	Arabic

<b>3</b>	Son 1	Yusuf	Arabic
	son 2	Usama	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No 4</b>	Mother	Tasneem	Arabic
	Father	Ammar	English
	Son1	Tariq	English with siblings and father
	Daughter 1	Yasmeen	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Daughter 2	Maryam	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No 5</b>	Mother	Joman	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Omaima	Arabic
<b>Family No 6</b>	Mother	Sara	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Hana	Arabic
<b>Family No 7</b>	Mother	Iman	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Zahra	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No 8</b>	Mother	Arwa	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Asma	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No 9</b>	Mother	Basma	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Asia	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Daughter 2	Amal	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No 10</b>	Mother	Hanan	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Amira	Arabic
	Son 1	Umar	Arabic
	Daughter 2	Bushra	Arabic



	son 2	Bilal	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No 11</b>	Mother	Leen	Arabic
	Father	Ali	Arabic
	Son 1	Malik	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	son 2	Akram	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Son 3	Mohammad	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Son 4	Hadi	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No 13</b>	Mother	Sahar	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Lubna	Arabic
	Daughter 2	Lana	Arabic
<b>Family No 14</b>	Mother	Noura	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Sahar	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Son 1	Anas	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Daughter 2	Shaymaa	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	son 2	Karam	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Son 3	Ryan	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No 15</b>	Mother	Suha	Arabic
	Son 1	Khaled	Arabic
<b>Family No 16</b>	Mother	Rasha	Arabic
	Father	Zain	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Ward	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Daughter 2	Hana	English with siblings / Arabic with parents

	Daughter 3	Sana	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No 17</b>	Mother	Malak	Arabic
	Son 1	Mustafa	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	Daughter 1	Amal	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
<b>Family No 18</b>	Mother	Aya	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Duaa	Arabic
<b>Family No 19</b>	Mother	Rima	Arabic
	Daughter 1	Reham	Arabic
<b>Family No 20</b>	Mother	Arzaq	Arabic
	Son 1	Ibrahim	English with siblings / Arabic with parents
	son 2	Obada	English with siblings / Arabic with parents

As mentioned earlier, all parents indicated that they exclusively spoke Arabic to their children. In certain instances, mothers reported that their children responded in English. Additionally, these mothers actively discouraged their children from conversing in English or with each other, emphasizing that only Arabic was permitted within the home. Except for Ammar who clarified that when he began learning English, he continued to practice it with his children and expressed a desire to continue with this practice.

## **5.2 Children's attitudes towards Arabic**

### **5.2.1 Arabic is a tough language.**

All the children who participated in this study shared positive feelings towards Arabic. They all seem to like it. The perception that Arabic is a tough language seems to be common among all the kids. This perception, however, presents a dual emotional response.

On one hand, children appear to take pride in the difficulty of Arabic. there is a sense of pride among the children about their ability to comprehend Arabic effortlessly, as if it's a special skill.

بحبها وبحب اتعلمها بس هي أصعب من الانجليزي.

Lana: "I love it, and I love learning it, but it's harder than English."

انا بحب اللغة العربية لانو اش بقولو أصعب لغة بالعالم هي العربي ومو اي انسان بيقدر يتعلم العربي بس حاليا الانجليزي عم يستخدم بكل مكان بس العربي كلغة الي أحسن.

Lubna: "I love the Arabic language because, as they say, it's the most challenging language in the world. Not everyone can learn Arabic, but currently, English is used everywhere, but Arabic is the language that I consider better."

اللغة العربي هي لغة حلوة بس في كثير ناس بتقول كمان انو واو والعربي كثير صعب وبنحاول نتعملو بس كثير صعب وانو نيالكم بتعرفو أكثر من لغة.

Sahar: "The Arabic language is beautiful. Many people say that Arabic is like wow, and they try hard to learn it, but it's very challenging. They kept telling me, lucky you, you know more than one language."

Shaymaa: "it's a very nice language, and people try hard to learn it. It's like they can't, and so yeah, I like to speak Arabic too."

بفتخر فيها وخصوصا مش كلو بيعرف يحكيها وانو بلاقو صعوبة هيك كأنو special thing

Bushra: "I take pride in it, especially since not everyone can speak it, and they find it difficult. It's like a special thing."

However, on the other hand, the acknowledgment of Arabic's difficulty poses a potential barrier to their active pursuit of learning the language. The recognition of its

complexity creates a hesitancy or reluctance to actively engage in learning Arabic, which leads to a situation where they prioritize speaking English, as they see it as less challenging compared to the efforts required for mastering Arabic.

هو يعني كمان حلو العربي لانو خاصة انو لغة القرآن وحلو إنك تعرفي لغتك بس الانجليزي اسهل من العربي ونحن تعودنا عليه أكثر نكتب ونقرأ فيه .

Ward: “I like Arabic, especially because it’s the language of the Qur’an, and it’s nice to know your language. But English is easier than Arabic, and we are more accustomed to it; we write and read in it more often.”

Asia: “like I don’t like love speaking it, but I don’t like hate it and I’m not uncomfortable speaking it.”

Amal: “I’m comfortable with it, mmm I just rather not, because I feel like I know better ways to start and mostly just talk in English.”

Zahra: “I don’t really know like that much like Arabic how to say stuff in Arabic. I know just the letters, because I used to have online classes to learn Arabic, but this year I quit, because every time it's school, I have to come back to Arabic and I be exhausted of school because I play gem and lot of stuff and I have to read and do math so I have to do a lot of stuff, so I just quit because I didn't know how to do that much of stuff.”

### **5.2.2 I know Arabic enough.**

Another notable perception among the children is the belief that their current level of Arabic proficiency is sufficient. For them, if they can read or write to some extent, it fulfills their language needs. This attitude reflects their little interest in furthering their language proficiency.

A factor that influences this perception is the notion that being in Canada diminishes the necessity to learn Arabic extensively. The environment they are in, with the prevalence of English in their daily lives, creates a mindset that they know Arabic enough. This perception manifests in their reluctance to attend or actively engage in Arabic classes.

The sentiment that “there is no point in learning Arabic” as expressed by one of the children, Mohammad, mirrors the existing resistance. This viewpoint may be rooted in the belief that English is the predominant language in their current context, and they perceive it to be more practical for their daily lives.

Karam: “No, I don’t want to learn more Arabic because I already know enough”.

Anas: “I read and write a little bit. And I don’t really need to know these perfectly because we are in the English world.”

بتحبي تطوري مستواكي بالعربي؟

اي وخاصة بالقراءة بالكتابة مو كثير بهمني يعني بعرف شوي حتى عندي cousin بالاردن احيانا بحكي معها بعرف اكتبها بالعربي وأحيانا منحكي بالإنجليزي واصلا اهلي حكو حتى لو رجعنا على بلد عربي ما رح يحطونا بمدرسة عربية

Researcher: Would you like to improve your Arabic skills?

Ward: “Just reading, I don’t want to learn writing. It’s not a big deal for me, but I know a bit. I even sometimes chat with my cousin in Jordan; I can write to her in Arabic. But sometimes we speak in English.”

### **5.3 Parents’ attitudes towards the Arabic language**

All the parents interviewed for this study expressed very positive feelings and attitudes towards Arabic as their heritage language. When they talked about how important it is to transfer Arabic to their children, they gave different reasons or considerations.

### 5.3.1 Arabic and Identity

The parents' interviews consistently convey the notion that Arabic is a core component of their identity, and culture. The desire to pass on the language to their children is rooted in the belief that doing so is integral to preserving their cultural identity and maintaining a connection to their roots.

طبعاً مهم لانو بالنهاية العربي هو لغتنا هويتنا يعني الواحد بدو يحافظ على ثقافته على هويته على لغته

Sara: "Of course, it is important because in the end, Arabic is our language, our identity. It means that one wants to preserve their culture, their identity, and their language."

Zain also emphasizes the intertwining of language and culture and focuses on the idea that preserving the Arabic language is not merely a choice but a vital obligation.

اول شي ثقافتنا عربية، منحب اللغة وتمسكين بالثقافة، اثنين حلو انو الواحد يكون عندو لغة ثانية بغض النظر شو هي مثل ممكن تتعلم الفرنسي يعني بس لا اكيد بفضل انو تكون عربي لانها لغة الام يعني بالإضافة انها لغة لازم يعرفوه.

Zain: "First of all, our culture is Arabic, we love the language and adhere to the culture. Secondly, it is nice for someone to have a second language, regardless of what it is. For example, French but of course, it's preferable to be Arabic since it's their mother tongue. In addition to being a language that they must know – it's a beautiful language."

Rasha also displayed deep emotions regarding the neglect or the potential abandonment of the language, considering it culturally and morally unacceptable.

يعني بحس انو جزء من هويتنا يعني عيب اصلاً نتخلي عنها.

Rasha: "I mean, I feel that it's [Arabic] a part of our identity. In fact, it's a shame to even abandon it."

### 5.3.2 Arabic and Islamic identity

All participants in this study are Muslims, and they all reported that there is a strong connection between the Arabic language and their identity as Arabic Muslims. They consistently underscored the significance of Arabic as "the language of the Qur'an," emphasizing its pivotal role in preserving their Islamic identity. This sentiment was echoed across all responses. The participants expressed that their interest in learning literary Arabic was primarily driven by the central importance of being able to practice their Islamic faith.

ونحن كمسلمين هي لغة القرآن وهاد الشي منفخر فيه فما بتقدري تخسريه.

Ali: "As Muslims, it is the language of the Qur'an, and this is something we are proud of, so we cannot afford to lose it."

يعني هي لغة القرآن أهم شي. هاد الشي لازم ما ننساه ولا ننسيه لاولادنا .

Arwa: "It's the language of the Qur'an and this is the most important thing. This is something we must not forget and should pass it on to our children."

Samira: "So that our children maintain our Islamic identity and be able to read the Qur'an and pray."

لانو ما بصير ديننا من دون عربي.

Lamia: "because you can't be a Muslim without Arabic."

Zain also agreed with Lamia and stated every Muslim has a duty to attain proficiency in Arabic, considering it non-negotiable.

غير انها لغة القرآن هي مفروغ منها، من أهم الأسباب يعني لغة ديننا نحن، يعني بديها لازم نعرفها

Zain: “Being the language of the Qur’an, one of the most important reasons, meaning inherently, we must know it. It is unnegotiable. “

On a personal note, Malak highlighted the responsibility of parents in teaching their children Arabic, reflecting on her mother-in-law's experience, as she witnessed how difficult it was for her mother-in-law trying to read the Qur’an. She said that she wished that her kids do not have to go through the same hardships and want to experience the joy of reading the Qura’n in its original language.

طبعاً وموضوع القرآن مهم ما بدك يعني يفتحوا القرآن ويعرفوا يقرأوا فيه يعني انو بعمرهم ما بسامحوني إذا  
كبروا، بكرا رح يقولوا يعني انتي حرمتينا من هالشى، يعني انا بتذكر حماتي لا بتقرا ولا بتكتب فكانت تضطر يعني تسمع  
القرآن سمع يعني ولا بعمرها فتحت هيك وجربت متعة انها تقرأ القرآن .

Malak: “Of course, the topic of the Qur’an is important. Don’t you want them to open the Qur’an and know how to read it! They will never forgive me if they grow up without knowing how to read Arabic. They will say, 'You deprived us of this.' I remember my mother-in-law; she neither reads nor writes, so she had to listen to the Qura’n, just listening. She never experienced the joy of opening it and trying the pleasure of reading it.”

### 5.3.3 Significance and future of bilingualism

Many parents in this study seem to recognize the long-term benefit of bilingualism for their children as they grow up, not only for personal growth but for future career opportunities. The observation that the Arabic language is highly demanded nowadays aligns with a global trend of recognizing the value of multilingualism.

انو هي ميزة بالاخير لما يكبروا ويكون عندهم لغتين كويسات يعني مش وحدة ضعيفة ووحدة قوية واجينا نحن  
منعرف عربي يعني حرام نضيعها.



Rasha: "It's an advantage in the end when they grow up and have two strong languages, I mean not one weak and one strong. We come from an Arabic-speaking background, so it's a shame not to preserve it."

اللغة العربية مو قليلة يعني ومطلوبة حتى هون بالسوق الكندي ووين ما رحتي يعني مطلوبة جد.

Samira: "The Arabic language is very valuable and highly demanded, even here in the Canadian job market and wherever you go."

The participant also reflects a broader acknowledgment of the advantages associated with being multilingual. The desire for their children to learn several languages, beyond Arabic and English, signifies an understanding of the globalized and interconnected nature of today's society.

انو اللغات بهالأيام كويس، حتى بدني ياهن يتعلمو كذا لغة مو بس العربي والانجليزي.

Noura: "Languages these days are beneficial; I want them to learn several languages, not just Arabic and English."

يعني ليش مثلا انو يكون عندهم لغة عربية وما يتعلموها ويكونو bilingual بعني للمستقبل ولشغلهم يعني حتى الفرنسي ناوية اذا الله راد حطهم دورات مكثفة بعد المدرسة واذا قدروا يستوعبو جاي كثير عبالى انو حطهم كمان Spanish جاي كثير عبالى علمهم لغات.

Malak: "I mean, why, for example, would I have Arabic and not learn it and be bilingual? for the future and for their jobs. I mean, I mean, even French, I am thinking, if God wants, to put them in intensive courses after school, and if they were able to understand it, I would like to enrol them in Spanish too. I would like to teach them languages."

انا عندي قناعة انو الاولاد مثل الاسفنجة شو ما بتعطيهم يمتصوه.

Leen: "I believe that kids are like sponges, whatever you give them they will observe it."

#### 5.3.4 Ambiguous future: returning to an Arab country?

The participants expressed a genuine concern for the potential scenario of returning to Syria or to an Arab country. This uncertainty becomes a driving force for the participants to prepare their kids and preserve their Arabic language to help them for a smoother integration into the linguistic and cultural environment. The participants express a concern that their children might experience a sense of alienation and confusion if they are not proficient in Arabic in a community where everyone communicates in Arabic.

ممکن انو الواحد بالمستقبل انو يرجع يعيش ببلد عربي فهون أولادو يعني اذا ما كانوا متعلمين العربية رح يحسو بالضياح بهيك شعب كلو بيحكي عربي.

Zain: “It is possible that in the future, that we may return to live in an Arab country, so if they do not learn Arabic, they will feel lost among a people who all speak Arabic.”

لأنو ما بتعرفي وين الله يبسرلنا، شو بصير عالواحد ما بعرف.

Suha: “Because you don't know where God guides us, you never know what might happen.”

مشان إذا رجعنا بيوم من الايام على بلد عربي.

Samira: “In case we return one day to Syria or to an Arab country.”

#### 5.3.5 Communication

Only two parents provided a clear reason for staying in touch with relatives and ensuring their children can speak and communicate with them.

مشان التواصل مع الاهل يلي هناك قد ما كان يعني رح تكبر وتتواصل مغ يلي الننا يعني .

Iman: “to communication with the family back there as much as possible. As she grows up, she will continue to connect with our family there, just like we do.”

ونظّل نتواصل مع أهالينا بنفس لغتنا.

Aya: “so we continue to communicate with our families in our own language.”

On the contrary, when other parents were questioned about their children's communication with their relatives, they cited various reasons for the lack thereof. Some mentioned that their kids refused to engage in conversations, while others attributed the communication gap to their busy schedules and the constraints of time. Additionally, a number of parents pointed out the challenge posed by the poor internet connectivity in Syria, further hindering effective communication with their extended families.

لا للأسف لا هم عم يتواصلو ولا نحن عم نتواصل. النّا"س عم تلتهي كثير يعني هسع الكبار يا دوب عم يتواصلو، يعني واني مو مبسوطه بهالشي بس انو يعني انا نفسي ما عندي وقت فاضي اقعدهم يحكو معهم.

Rasha: “Unfortunately, no, they do not talk with them. People are too busy; even we as adults barely communicate. Personally, I'm not happy about it, but I don't have the time to sit with them and chat.”

لا ما برضو وحاليا الوضع عم بصير أسوأ.

Malak: “No, they refused to talk to them, and the situation is getting worse.”

بس بيتواصلو مع امي يعني جدتهم بس بيحكو كلمة او كلمتين لانو بتعرفي انت هنيك كثير سيء.

Leen: “They only communicate with my mother; I mean, their grandmother. However, it's just a word or two because, you know, the internet there is pretty bad.”

## **6. Discussion:**

The research questions in this study focused on exploring the attitudes of parents and children towards their heritage language, as well as examining the strategies employed by parents to maintain the heritage language. The findings, organized according to these research questions, were presented in the previous part. In this section, I delve into a critical discussion of the emerged findings, taking a conceptual approach divided into three main sections.

The first section centres on the efforts of mothers in preserving Arabic in their children, delving into the language ideologies of parents and their influence on language management and practice, while also addressing the agency of children within these ideologies. The second section delves into how parents perceive Arabic, exploring the complexities of ethnic and Islamic identity formation and emphasizing the value placed on multilingualism. The third section encompasses observations derived from the interviews regarding additional factors influencing the use of the Arabic language by children at home.

This conceptual organization of the discussion allows for a more nuanced interpretation of how language ideologies align with family language planning and use. Ultimately, the discourse presented in this chapter aims to provide an explanation for the challenges that Syrian parents encounter in maintaining their home language within their children.

### **6.1 Strategies and practices**

#### **6.1.1 TV**

Watching Arabic TV emerged as a prevalent strategy among the participants, with the primary goal being the acquisition of Standard Arabic proficiency. However, intriguingly, this approach did not resonate with many children in the study. Some parents observed that

their children, unable to comprehend Standard Arabic and lacking enthusiasm for it, preferred watching English TV instead. Consequently, these parents permitted their children to indulge in English cartoons while ensuring occasional exposure to Arabic content. Notably, two of the parents tailored their approach based on their children's age, permitting older kids (around 14 to 15 years old) to watch English content, while younger ones (around 4 to 8 years old) were encouraged to watch Arabic programs. This strategic decision was rooted in the belief that at a younger age, language acquisition and retention are more feasible, particularly when the children are exposed to English throughout the day.

This is also supported by heritage language (HL) scholars, who, concentrating on age-related factors and the consequences of early language exposure, propose that the HL input received during early childhood has enduring effects (Andreou et al., 2021; Chondrogianni & Schwartz 2020).

Despite parents permitting their children to watch English cartoons, the Arabic TV evening emerged as a noteworthy alternative. I found it intriguing that the Arabic TV evening became a daily routine, creating a warm environment where parents actively engaged with their children. This shared experience involved watching only Syrian series, recognizing them as more than just a linguistic aid; but a unique opportunity for their children to forge connections with the subtleties of Syrian culture, community, and relationships. This emphasis on television as a language and cultural resource aligns with the experiences of immigrants, as documented in previous studies (Lee, 2013; Park & Sarkar, 2007)

### **6.1.2 School**

As previously mentioned, the religious motivations and the significance of Arabic literacy drive participants to make efforts in teaching their children Arabic, particularly focusing on reading skills. Teaching children unfolds in three distinct approaches. Initially,

parents take on the responsibility of teaching and guiding their children. However, this strategy seems to be failed, as confessed by the participants, due to their busy schedules, stemming from work or study commitments. Consequently, they may find themselves lacking the necessary time and energy for their children's heritage language teaching. Additionally, there is a common observation that fathers tend not to prioritize this task, potentially influenced by an Arab cultural norm where fathers traditionally work outside the home while mothers are responsible for childcare. Finally, parents express concerns about potential family tension arising during their children's adolescence, echoing findings in Nesteruk (2010). This tension stems from the children's belief that they don't need to learn Arabic or already possess sufficient proficiency.

The second approach involves enrolling children in online classes, Islamic schools, or weekend programs. Immigrant parents commonly rely on heritage language schools or programs to maintain their children's language skills, aligning with existing literature (Jeon, 2008; Li, 2006).

The parents' willingness for their children to master Standard Arabic is rooted in a deeper rationale. In this study, both parents and children agreed that Arabic, particularly the Syrian dialect, is spoken and understood at home. Notably, none of the parents mentioned maintaining the familial connection as a primary reason for Arabic maintenance. This suggests that, based on participant responses, there might not be a perceived lack of communication through the Syrian dialect, and this makes the parents seek for their children to learn another variety, which is Standard Arabic.

This willingness could also be attributed to other educational and social factors. For instance, parents may view proficiency in Standard Arabic as a valuable skill that aligns with educational aspirations, or broader societal expectations. It may be seen as a means of

connecting with a larger linguistic community, accessing educational resources, or preparing their children for future opportunities.

However, children often show some resistance for learning Arabic, viewing it as either unfair or involving too much pressure, given the demands of completing regular school assignments and then engaging in additional Arabic classes. This further underscores the agency of children in influencing their parents' actions, as noted by Curdt-Christiansen (2009) and Smith-Christmas (2022). This implies that the children are aware of their learning preferences and can independently determine the means to accomplish their objectives without feeling influenced by their parents.

Conversely, due to their existing use of the Syrian dialect within their households, the children lack motivation to acquire a new linguistic variety, especially one that might prove more challenging than their current familiarity. Viewing the acquisition of Standard Arabic as akin to learning an entirely new language, they do not find it necessary.

### **6.1.3 Home language policy**

All parents in this study, except for two, indicated that the language of interaction in the house is Arabic. However, from my observations and the children's responses, there is a contradiction between the language parents claim to use with their kids and whether they allow them to speak English in the house, and the actual practices. Similar results were observed in Lao's study (2004), where 88.5% of Chinese immigrants anticipated that their children would use Chinese or a combination of Chinese and English at home. However, nearly fifty percent of them ended up speaking mostly English with their children.

One interpretation could be that being Syrian; participants might have felt a certain level of apprehension, fearing potential judgment from me. This fear could have led them to present what they perceived as the most favorable answers, aiming to portray their language

practices in a positive light during the study. Another reason is that parents may not be fully aware of their real language practices. Only two families in this study had had the opportunity to return to Syria, and upon their return, they realized that their children's proficiency in Arabic was not as strong as they had thought. Their families in Syria described their Arabic as “broken.”

Most parents succeed in making their kids speak Arabic with them, but they fail to encourage them to speak Arabic with each other or with their Arab friends. Even when I provided them with the option to conduct the interview in English or Arabic, most of them chose English. This suggests that children are more comfortable and confident speaking English, and there is a gradual loss of their first language. Factors such as parental exhaustion, parents being tired of constantly telling the children to speak in Arabic, or busyness contribute to this phenomenon.

The only two parents who indicated clearly that they want their kids to speak English at home, had limited educational background, which might mean that they are not aware how much this issue is serious and will impact the loss of Arabic.

## **6.2 Parents’ attitudes and children’s responses**

### **6.2.1 Identity**

Studies have shown that language proficiency and cultural identity are closely intertwined. Most of the participants interviewed regarded Arabic language as an integral part of their Arab identity and culture, and in order to maintain their identity, they need to preserve their language. Similarly, Park and Sarkar (2007) found that parents believed their children's proficiency in their heritage language would positively influence their identity as Koreans.



In the same context, Eloulabi (2023) pointed out that participants who lacked fluency in Arabic, either due to growing up in Canada or attending international schools in other countries, experienced a sense of disconnection within the community. At times, they faced perceptions of being “whitewashed” or considered “less Arab”. This fear of not being socially accepted is seen in the participants’ answers who stated that there might be a possibility to go back to an Arabic country.

Furthermore, while parents perceive proficiency in Arabic as an identity marker, the perspective of the children may differ. Despite having English skills surpassing their proficiency in Arabic, when asked about their mother tongue or first language, all of them responded with Arabic. They justified this by citing their Arab or Syrian heritage, being born in Syria, or pointing out that Arabic was the first language they spoke as babies.

It is evident that the children still strongly identify as Arabs and Syrians, maintaining emotional ties to their first language and home culture. At the same time, their use of English indicates a motivation to integrate somewhat into mainstream culture. They appear to be at a crossroads, navigating the creation of their new identity. According to Tong (1997), immigrant children's use of language may signify the initial stages of the group's emerging identity within the host culture. This, in turn, implies an additional dimension to their social adaptation, a development of a new “cross-group identity.”

### **6.2.2 Religious identity**

The status of Arabic is linked with its prestige as being the language of the Qur’an and Islamic teachings (Abdelhadi, 2018). Muslims believe that the Qur’an is the literal and verbatim words of Allah (God).

All the participants in this study are Muslims and they all refer to the value of Arabic as the “language of Qur’an”. It even ranks the first in the order of the statements and their responses were often started by “of course” to convey a sense of inevitability or necessity.

The participants stressed that reading the Qur’an in Arabic is an essential aspect of their religious practice. They view it as a non-negotiable requirement for being a practicing Muslim, with one participant explicitly stating, "because you can't be a Muslim without Arabic/ لانو ما بصير ديننا من دون عربي." The unanimous agreement among the participants reveals the profound importance attached to Arabic as an integral element of their religious identity. This supports Fishman’s (1991) claim that Arabic religious status provides a strong incentive for language maintenance among Arab communities.

Similarly, Dweik & Qawasmeh (2014), in their investigation of Muslim Arabs in Vancouver, found that all the participants demonstrated positive attitudes towards Arabic language because of its status. The finding revealed that Arabic was considered the most prestigious language among all the participants because of its connection with the Holy Qur'an.

In the same context, Rouchdy (2013) emphasizes the value and religious significance of Arabic in the hearts of Muslims worldwide, due to the exclusive use of Arabic in fulfilling the obligation of one of the most important pillars of Islam: prayer.

It might also be that parents foster a significant concern for the preservation of Islamic culture in their children's upbringing. This concern can be rooted in the fear that the host countries' culture might wield a strong influence, posing a potential threat to the solidity of their children's Islamic identities. This, in turn, reveals a broader parental aspiration to fortify their children's Islamic identity, with the utilization of the Arabic language seen as a strategic means to achieve this objective.

Yet, upon questioning the children about their views on Arabic, only one of them referred to Arabic as the language of the Qur'an. When asked about why they perceive Arabic as their mother tongue or first language, none of the other children made a direct connection to their identity as Muslims.

This divergence in responses could be attributed to a couple of factors, for example, parents may not have shared their ideas with the children, and the children might want to learn the language independently for their own reasons. There's also a possibility that the parents have communicated their reasons, but the children don't perceive their parents' motivations for learning the language as aligning with their own. This difference could be positive, indicating that the child has an independent personality and expresses opinions autonomously, distinct from their family. As some children may not align with their parents' viewpoint, believing that they can still engage with the Qur'an effectively in English and perform prayers with specific verses in the same language while maintaining their connection to their faith.

### **6.2.3 Multilingualism**

Parents' positive attitudes towards maintaining their language are also evident in their perception of Arabic as a key factor for ensuring a bright future and unlocking opportunities for their children. Some parents went beyond this and acknowledged the value of their children learning a third language, such as French, as an additional advantage. This sentiment is consistent with the idea that multilingualism is an investment in their children's linguistic capabilities.

This perspective aligns with broader language ideologies influenced by socioeconomic factors, as highlighted by Spolsky (2004). Parents hold the belief that Arabic is becoming a language of interest and demand, particularly in the field of marketing jobs.

This perception is supported by the scholarly notion that the utility of a language increases with the growing number of individuals who use it as a tool of communication. According to Canadian statistics, Arabic ranks as the fifth most spoken language in the country. This statistical insight likely contributes to the parents' observation of Arabic's growth and relevance in Canada, reinforcing their perspective on the increasing demand for Arabic language skills, especially in professional sectors like marketing.

In addition to the potential employment opportunities for their children, some parents are considering the prospect of returning to Syria or to an Arabic-speaking country. Hence, they view it as crucial for their children to learn and preserve their Arabic, to enhance career opportunities and assimilation in their country. This observation aligns with findings in Abed Elkhalik's (2018) study, which investigates family language policies within five Syrian families in the UK. In this research, parents express their desire to return to their home country eventually.

Interestingly, the idea of returning to the home country is not prevalent in other research on Arab immigrants, possibly because the circumstances leading to Syrians leaving their countries were unexpected and forced. Moreover, the positive aspects of Syria, including its pleasant living conditions, close-knit communities, and overall quality of life. These are aspects that families still miss here. The challenges of integration into Canadian society due to language proficiency issues further compound their desire to potentially return home. Most of these families haven't exceeded five years of residency, indicating that their struggles with language proficiency continue to impact their successful integration.

These personal experiences shed light on the practical importance of language proficiency, especially in a second language. The difficulties faced by these families

underscore the vital role that language plays in facilitating social integration and participation in their adopted community.

### **6.3 Factors influencing Arabic language use among immigrants children**

The English proficiency of parents emerges as a pivotal factor influencing the children's use of Arabic at home. The distinction lies in the necessity for children to speak Arabic to ensure parents' understanding, which is entirely different from the scenario where they know it is fine to speak English because their parents will comprehend. This observation aligns with Examples found in Zhang's (2010) and Nesteruk's (2010) research, as well as studies by Kang (2012), and Li (2006) who supports the use of heritage language to maintain smooth communication between parents and children.

Additionally, the age upon arrival plays a significant role, with those arriving after grade 2 or 3 demonstrating greater ability to preserve and maintain their Arabic language proficiency. Furthermore, the presence of older siblings is associated with an increased likelihood of speaking more Arabic at home. Notably, research conducted by Brown (2011), Lee (2013), and Nesteruk (2010) supports the observation that older siblings tend to use less English.

## **7. Conclusion**

To conclude, this study delves into the attitudes of parents and children towards the Arabic language within Syrian immigrant families in Canada. The findings reveal a profound connection between Arabic and the preservation of ethnic and religious identity. Arabic, as the language of the Qur'an, emerges as a central element in the religious and cultural landscape of these families. Despite challenges in maintaining proficiency, parents are driven by a deep-seated commitment to ensuring their children's connection to their roots. Additionally, the strategic value attributed to Arabic in the job market underscores the broader trend of recognizing the economic benefits of multilingual individuals, shaping family language planning.

The study sheds light on the strategies employed by parents, such as the home language policy, use of Arabic TV and language classes. However, the observed discrepancies between stated language policies and actual practices highlight the need for increased parental awareness and engagement in fostering consistent language use.

Central to this study is the recognition of children's agency in shaping their language experiences. The study reveals that, while parents emphasize the importance of Arabic proficiency for cultural and religious reasons, children exhibit agency in navigating their linguistic journey.

The children's preference for English, especially in the context of television viewing and language choice during interviews, underscores their autonomy in making linguistic decisions. Despite parental efforts to encourage learning Standard Arabic, the children exercise their agency by choosing dialects over Standard Arabic or opting for English in specific contexts. This agency is further exemplified in their resistance to certain language learning strategies, such as enrolling in formal language classes.

Understanding and acknowledging children's agency in language development is crucial for designing effective language preservation strategies and opens avenues for more inclusive and responsive language planning initiatives. As we consider the implications of this study, the importance of incorporating children's perspectives and preferences into language preservation efforts becomes evident, fostering a more holistic and sustainable approach to heritage language maintenance.

Furthermore, religion appears to be a fundamental value driving the learning and preservation of Arabic among the parents. It is intriguing, however, that during the analysis, the children did not explicitly mention this connection between Arabic and their religious identity. While the discussion attempted to provide plausible explanations, conducting direct inquiries with the children in future research could yield deeper insights into their perspectives. Unravelling how children perceive the link between Arabic and their religious identity may shed light on the intricate dynamics shaping their language attitudes.

Another limitation inherent in this study is the homogeneity of the participant group, as all individuals interviewed identified as Muslims. Since their connection of Arabic preservation is deeply rooted in Islam, a valuable avenue for future research would involve expanding the scope to include participants from diverse religious backgrounds. A comparative study, encompassing Muslim Syrians alongside atheists, Christians, or Jews, would provide a nuanced understanding of how different religious affiliations influence language preservation practices. This comparative analysis could reveal unique patterns and motivations across various religious groups, enriching the broader context of language preservation dynamics within immigrant communities.

Finally, despite the acknowledged richness of the Arabic language in terms of vocabulary, literature, and eloquence, it is noteworthy that none of the parents in the study

explicitly mentioned these aspects. Investigating this gap could offer valuable insights into the varying perceptions of Arabic among parents, potentially uncovering additional dimensions of their attitudes towards the language. A supplementary research topic exploring why these particular facets of the Arabic language were not highlighted by parents may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of their perspectives.



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### **Appendix A: Interview Questions for Syrian Parents:**

1. Can you share your age and the ages of your children?
2. When did your family arrive in Canada?
3. What is your current occupation in Canada?
4. What was your occupation in Syria before your departure?
5. How would you describe your current level of English proficiency?  
(Options: Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced, Master)
6. How do you manage parent-child interactions regarding language policy at home? Is there an insistence on the use of Arabic in your household?
7. Regarding media consumption, do you prefer your children to watch cartoons in English or Arabic? Why?
8. In your opinion, is it necessary and beneficial to maintain the native language (L1)? If yes, why, and how do you ensure its preservation?
9. Have you ever returned to an Arab country, and did this experience impact domestic communication within your family?
10. Do your children still maintain contact with relatives in Arab countries?  
How do they express social commitment through language?
11. Do you worry about your young children losing their home language?  
What strategies do you practice to maintain L1 within the family?
12. Do you have any plans to return to an Arab country and settle? If so, what factors influence this decision?

### **Appendix B; Interview Questions for Children:**

1. Would you prefer to conduct this interview in English or Arabic?
2. What grade level are you currently in at school?
3. Can you describe the frequency of language use in your interactions with siblings and parents? Which language do you prefer to speak, and why?
4. Do you have a preference for watching cartoons in English or Arabic?
5. In which language do you prefer to listen to songs or read books? Are there specific reasons for your preference?
6. How do you feel about the Arabic language, and are there any feelings of shame or pride associated with it?
7. What is your first language or mother tongue? is it English or Arabic? Can you share why you consider that language to be your first language?
8. Would you like to learn or enhance your Arabic language skills? If so why or why not?