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CONSTRUCTING ARABIC AS HERITAGE:  
INVESTMENT IN LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND IDENTITY AMONG YOUNG U.S. LEARNERS

by

AMANDA LANIER TEMPLES

Under the Direction of Dr. Gayle Nelson

ABSTRACT

The numbers of learners studying Arabic in the U.S. have increased more than any other language over the last ten years. As a critical language, important for strategic political and economic reasons, Arabic has received considerable support from the Departments of State and Education (Jackson & Malone, 2009; Wiley, 2007). However, Arabic is also a prominent heritage language, important for cultural and interpersonal reasons to the families and communities who speak it and for whom it is a binding force (Fishman, 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). Nevertheless, research on learners of Arabic and their learning processes is still very limited.

Existing studies have compared Arabic heritage learners' motivation and the structure of their language knowledge with that of non-HLLs (Husseinali, 2006; Benmamoun, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2010), but HLL research has hardly addressed the complex social and cultural influences on their learning processes (He, 2010; Montrul, 2010). Drawing on *investment* in language learning (Norton Peirce, 1995;

Norton, 2000) as a theoretical lens, this study asks how learners and their families construct Arabic as heritage and its implications for their beliefs and practices.

Focusing on students in a public charter middle school in the southeast U.S. who are studying Arabic as a foreign language, this study seeks to bring together language learning, identity construction, and the challenges and implications of biliteracy for Arabic learners from a range of backgrounds in an effort to understand the complexity of the Arabic learning process. To that end, it uses ethnographic methods including interviews with five focal families, class observations, and surveys and strives for grounded theory. In constructing heritage, each learner and family, from a range of national and cultural backgrounds, must balance priorities regarding the multiple varieties of Arabic, religious literacy, and the role of Arabic in local and global contexts.

Results should shed light on the role of social context in language and literacy development for Arabic and comparable LCTLs, contribute to theory regarding the relationship between identity construction and language learning for heritage learners, and suggest approaches to supporting young learners of critical and heritage languages to promote a more multilingual society.

INDEX WORDS: Language learning, Identity, Identity construction, Investment, Motivation, Second language literacy, Heritage languages, Heritage language learners, Critical languages, Foreign languages, Cultural capital, Arabic, Religious identity, Islam, Literacy, Biliteracy, Religious literacy

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by

AMANDA LANIER TEMPLES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013

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INVESTMENT IN LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND IDENTITY AMONG YOUNG U.S. LEARNERS

by

AMANDA LANIER TEMPLES

Committee Chair: Gayle Nelson

Committee: Diane Belcher

Stephanie Lindemann

Nadine Sinno

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2013

## DEDICATION

To the families who shared their stories with me; to my husband John, who redefines *supportive*; and to my son Lawson, whose arrival in the middle of the dissertation process gave me much more insight into the complex decisions that all families face.

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Equally important, if not more so, have been the contributions of the many individuals and families who have allowed me to tell their stories in this study. The El-Gendy, Zaki, Rowther, Brooks, and Kimball families (they know who they are, though I am using their pseudonyms here) shared their past and present with me, and I hope they will share some of their future as well as they continue on their own journeys. The students, who are all in high school now, may not have enjoyed delaying their snacks,



pleasure reading, and homework to meet with me, but their willingness to share their experiences is all the more appreciated for that. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the administrators and teachers at Mawaarith. They hoped that this work would put them “on the map,” but the map is only beginning to be drawn.

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Like all children, on long car trips I used to pester my parents with my impatient, “Are we there yet?” My mother has asked just as many times, “Are you finished yet?” I tell her that one chapter is ending and another is beginning. Without the patience and support of my own family and my academic family, I never would have reached this point and would not be able to go on. All my gratitude.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Language learning in the United States has always been subject to sociopolitical forces at the domestic and international level, both in terms of the number of students who have access to and enroll in foreign language courses and in terms of the relative popularity of different languages. Some of the most dramatic examples of this impact have stemmed from the changing relationships between the U.S. and the Arab world in the years since September 11, 2001. The events of early 2011, which have since been dubbed the Arab Spring, have drawn even more U.S. attention and increased the complexity of those relationships. In this decade, 2001-2011, Arabic language programs and students enrolled in them increased more than any other widely-taught language (Furman, et al., 2010). While the connection between these geopolitical changes and the increased interest in Arabic language learning appears on one level to be a simple case of supply rising to meet demand in the global marketplace, in fact this relationship has complex and far-reaching implications for language learners (Allen, 2007; Kramersch, 2005).

As Arabic has risen in geopolitical significance, it has become more valuable as a resource for those who speak it. At the same time, policy makers in the U.S. increasingly see the people who speak it, either as a mother tongue or through instruction, as resources to be tapped for strategic purposes. This discourse of language-as-resource has supported the growth of programs and funding for Arabic and other less-commonly-taught languages (LCTLs), but there is another side to this discourse that involves the value of this language to the individuals, families, and communities for whom it is a means of everyday communication, a binding force, and a medium of cultural transmission to the next generation (Ricento, 2005). Local communities and families may have reasons for desiring this language that diverge from those of U.S. policy makers, and they may also have different priorities in regard to the variety of the language that is most desired and the importance of literacy in Arabic. Thus programs that offer Arabic in public schools face not only the challenge of teaching a language that is frequently cited as one of the

most difficult for English speakers to learn but also the challenge of negotiating the multiple discourses that impact the desire for competency in this language and the learning process.

The ethnographic study described here focuses on one such Arabic language program, the young learners participating in it, and their families. Some of them come from the Middle East, some do not; some are Muslim, some are not; some have an intense desire for their children to attain high levels of proficiency in the formal grammar and lexicon of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), while some value the less-formal varieties used for day-to-day communication; all are involved in a challenging endeavor that touches on very personal issues of identity and very broad issues of national policy and cultural maintenance. This study draws on data from surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and documents in an effort to understand the desire for competency in Arabic for learners from different backgrounds and their families, the connection between learning Arabic and identity construction for the learners and their families, and the ways that early adolescent learners from different language backgrounds engage with the opportunity to learn Arabic that their school provides.

The program on which this study focuses resides in a public charter school that will be called Mawaarith Academy<sup>1</sup> in this document. Although there are few programs directly comparable to this one in the U.S. today, in Arabic or other less-commonly-taught languages (LCTLs), understanding this learning context and the learners in it may offer insight into many of the larger issues related to heritage language learning and LCTLs.

A number of powerful discourses converge to influence the Arabic language program in this school, and they influence learners from different language and cultural backgrounds differently. These intersections are relevant to the teaching of Arabic and other LCTLs in the U.S., and they need careful consideration if we hope to improve the chances that U.S. American children will be able to achieve high levels of proficiency in such languages. The most significant intersections for this study are:

- The intersection of heritage language learning and foreign language learning;

<sup>1</sup> *Mawaarith* (مواريث) means “inheritance” or “legacy” and often refers to cultural heritage. Thanks to Dr. Nadine Sinno for her help with selecting this pseudonym.



- The intersection of home language and literacy practices and school-based language and literacy practices;
- The intersection of multiple communities of practice or discourse communities in which learners' language proficiency and literacy may have value; and
- The intersection of the individual child's needs and desires regarding language learning and the needs and desires of stakeholders in their educational process, including their parents, their teachers, their cultural communities, and government and national interests.

At the center of these complex intersections, just under a hundred early adolescent learners from many different language and cultural backgrounds were participating in daily Arabic lessons at Mawaarith Academy at the time of this study. For them, the larger discourses that affected their opportunity to learn may have seemed distant and inconsequential in comparison to their grades and their relationships with their parents and their peers. As McKay and Wong (1996) observed in their study of English language learners in a U.S. middle school who had recently immigrated from China and as Caldas (2002, 2006) observed in his own French-English bilingual children, these learners may be far more concerned with issues relating to identity and agency in their immediate context than with the larger implications of emergent bilingualism.

This study takes the perspective that desire to learn a language is closely related to the identity that a learner wants to build, and that the identity a learner can build through learning a language is tightly connected to communities in which the learner wants to participate (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004b; Wenger, 1998). In addition, it acknowledges that language learning is in some ways an individual cognitive process, but in many ways it is not; it is a process of identity construction that involves the learner and, particularly for young learners, a network of other individuals and groups who choose to invest in their learning.

The construct of *investment* in language learning, introduced by Bonny Norton in 1995 and expanded in her 2000 monograph, builds on questions relating to language learning motivation in order to emphasize the ongoing, contested, negotiated processes through which learners commit effort to learning

and using their target language (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). Young children may not have a strong desire to learn the language themselves, but their parents and educators invest in and stand to gain from their language development. Through “an economic calculus at the heart of the concept of investment” (McKay & Wong, 2006, p. 603), learners, parents, and educators must all balance a range of competing priorities and allocate limited resources (including, but certainly not limited to, time, money, and effort) if they wish to develop bilingualism and biliteracy in young learners.

Despite the greatly increased demand for and supply of Arabic language learners in recent years, research on this population of language learners is still limited. Considerable energy has gone into the development and description of language programs and materials, but the instructional practices, learning outcomes, and linguistic variables that relate to this language and context remain to be analyzed in depth. Learners of Arabic in the U.S. represent a wide spectrum of language abilities, language learning experiences, and language learning motivations (Allen, 2007; Husseinali, 2006; Sehlaoui, 2008). This heterogeneity makes comparison and generalization across language backgrounds, ages, and institutions challenging, to say the least. Meanwhile, the considerable investment that the government and educational institutions have dedicated to Arabic programs needs to be balanced by greater understanding of the language and literacy acquisition process among English-dominant learners of Arabic.

Drawing on the concept of *investment* in language learning (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), this study considers the beliefs and practices of learners, their families, and other stakeholders as they invest in the process of developing Arabic language and literacy. By focusing specifically on the learning of Arabic for learners from different backgrounds in one U.S. public school, this study hopes to shed light on larger issues of language learning that impact young learners, learners of less-commonly-taught languages, and heritage language learners. It speaks to the complex ecology of language learning by focusing on individual learners in context, and it also speaks to the ways we theorize identity and the desire to learn languages for individuals and their communities.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I frame this research in four primary ways: as a study of Arabic language learning; as a study of heritage learners and non-heritage learners; as a sociocultural study of second language literacy development; and as a study of identity and investment in language learning. In Section 2.1, I attempt to locate Arabic in the landscape of foreign language instruction in the U.S., where it is both a prominent critical language and an important heritage language. In Section 2.2, I expand the frame to include other heritage languages, consider prevailing definitions of heritage learners, and discuss questions about their learning processes that have and have not been explored. In the following section, 2.3, I provide an introduction to Arabic as a language learning target from the perspective of an outsider, learner, and applied linguist; I hope that this section will provide some insight into features of Arabic that may distinguish it from other target languages and also to offer readers who are less familiar with Arabic a foundation for the discussion of informants' perspectives that follows. Next, in Section 2.4, I discuss the literature on cognitive and social approaches to literacy and biliteracy that guided much of this investigation. In Sections 2.5, I compare motivation and investment as constructs for approaching the question of why a learner is learning a given target language. While this study strives for grounded theory, the construct of investment guided this investigation and provided conceptual tools for analyzing its findings in regard to language learner identity construction; I explain my theoretical framework in Section 2.6.

### 2.1 Arabic as Critical Language and Heritage Language

In the United States today, nearly 50 million people speak languages other than English (LOTEs), but only a small fraction of individuals who set out to learn a LOTE manage to reach a high level of proficiency. Foreign language learning in the United States is a marginalized endeavor at best, particularly in contrast with other nations around the world that place a high premium on bilingual or multilingual proficiency. As global flows of migration, commerce, media, and diplomacy draw people from widely-dispersed backgrounds into greater and greater contact, proficiency in each other's languages

has grown increasingly important. This perspective, along with the long-standing view of foreign language learning as a component of liberal education that develops greater international awareness and intercultural awareness, may help to justify expanding foreign language learning opportunities in the eyes of some stakeholders. Nevertheless, it does not take into account the reasons why children, their parents, and their local communities invest in language learning.

Certain modern languages, particularly German, French, and Spanish, have been taught in the U.S. throughout the nation's existence, despite periods of decline (Fishman, 2001; Ricento, 2005). Of the nearly 1.7 million university students currently enrolled in language courses, over 800,000 are studying Spanish, and another 300,000 study French and German. In recent years, though, languages other than these three, usually labeled less-commonly-taught languages (LCTLs), have expanded at much faster rates (Furman, et al., 2010). The fastest-growing of these LCTLs include Chinese, Korean, and Arabic, which are also among the most difficult for native speakers of English to learn.

Although Arabic has long been considered a LCTL in the United States, it is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Its status as a LCTL may be changing, however. The number of university students enrolled in Arabic in the U.S. has increased dramatically in the last decade and is now only surpassed by Spanish, French, German, Italian, Chinese, and Japanese, while its rate of growth surpasses all other foreign languages. In 1998, there were about 5000 university learners around the country; as of 2009, there were over 35,000, a seven-fold increase (Furman, et al., 2010). At the elementary and secondary levels, numbers of Arabic learners have noticeably increased while numbers of foreign language programs overall and learners of other traditional LCTLs including Russian and Japanese have decreased (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010). The most recent major survey estimated that 50,000 children were studying Arabic at public and private schools in the U.S., though the vast majority of them were in private schools, which frequently offer Arabic as part of an Islamic studies curriculum (Greer & Johnson, 2009).

The growth in demand for Arabic is intriguing, but scholars have expressed concerns about the motivation for this growth and its longevity (Allen, 2007). The timing of this massive increase in the

number of Arabic learners in the U.S. is certainly not a coincidence, and scholars have given considerable attention to the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, and its impact on the study of critical languages including Arabic (Allen, 2007; Blake & Kramersch, 2007; Kramersch, 2005). Due to its perceived importance for purposes of international diplomacy, global commerce, and national security, Arabic is considered a *critical language*.

Currently the list of critical languages includes languages such as Chinese, Arabic, Farsi, Korean, and Russian, all of which are not only traditional LCTLs in the U.S. but also typologically distant from English and thus require extensive time and effort for native speakers of English to master. Their relative difficulty has contributed to their status as critical languages because it compounds the problem of balancing the limited supply of competent speakers with growing demand. Arabic is considered a Category III or “Superhard” language by the Foreign Service Institute<sup>2</sup>, as are Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. These languages are estimated to require approximately 1100 hours of intensive study for adults who are good language learners to reach advanced proficiency and 2200 hours to reach the level of superior proficiency that would support use of the language in a professional setting (Wang, Jackson, Mana, Liau, & Evans, 2010). Reaching 1100 hours takes almost a year of intensive study at the FSI. If grade school learners could progress with the same efficiency and effectiveness per hour, it would take about 8 years of study at 4 hours a week of instruction to reach the same level.

At the same time, there are large numbers of immigrants and children of immigrants in the U.S. who have some proficiency if not full competency in these languages. For them, these critical languages are *heritage languages*, languages with which they have a meaningful connection through their family, their culture, and their family’s nation of origin (Valdés, 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). Heritage languages may or may not be spoken in the home, and heritage language learners may or may not have

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<sup>2</sup> The Foreign Service Institute previously categorized Arabic as a Category IV language. Currently the FSI Language Continuum, available at [http://fsitraining.state.gov/training/Language\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://fsitraining.state.gov/training/Language_Toolkit.pdf), lists only three categories, I (World), II (Hard), and III (Superhard). Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Japanese, and Korean are now considered Category III languages. By comparison, the FSI estimates that reaching general professional proficiency in Spanish or French will take approximately 600 hours of intensive study, German will take about 750 hours, and languages in the “Hard” category such as Modern Greek, Turkish, Thai, and Slavic languages will take 1100 hours.

developed proficiency in the language prior to beginning formal language instruction. However, a heritage language typically has real and symbolic associations with an identifiable community with which heritage learners identify and in which they want to participate (He, 2010). Learners of HLs often seek to strengthen these associations through developing their language skills.

Arabic is thus one of a limited number of languages that is spoken by large heritage language communities around the country and that is also considered a critical language, carrying a high instrumental value for its geopolitical significance (Al-Batal, 2007; Wiley, 2007). As such, Arabic language instruction represents, on one hand, an opportunity for heritage language communities to promote language and cultural maintenance in their children and, on the other hand, a means of developing a more linguistically competent generation of American workers who can fill pressing needs in international relations (including diplomacy and security) and international commerce (including industry, media, human resources, and so on).

While Ricento (2005) points out that justifying greater support for heritage languages because they are critical languages has the inverse effect of allowing non-critical heritage languages to go unfunded, both heritage and non-heritage learners can benefit from the increased availability of programs in languages such as Arabic. However, the promotion of a given language as a critical language or as a heritage language points to considerably different intentions for the language and the language user. To date, I am not aware of any study that has taken into account the values, beliefs, and practices associated with one of these critical heritage languages at the local level and considered their relationship to the larger discourses impacting their growth.

## **2.2 Heritage Language Learning in the U.S.**

Research on heritage language learning and learners in the U.S. is expanding, but as of yet little is known about the particular strengths, needs, and challenges of HLLs and how their knowledge, use, and learning processes compare to what is known about FLLs. A number of researchers are seeking to develop theories of heritage language acquisition that can compare to existing theories of second language

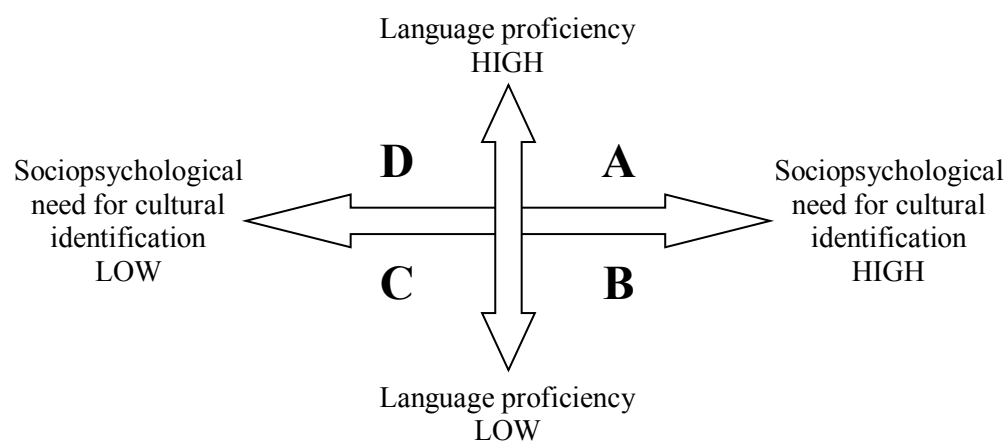
acquisition and describe processes of transfer, interference, growth, and attrition in HLLs (Benmamoun, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2010; Montrul, 2010). Likewise, for many researchers the effort to understand HL learning has begun with studies of the motivations that drive these learners (Husseinali, 2006; Lee, 2005; Noels, 2005).

When learners self-identify as HLLs, they are affirming that their motivation to learn the language is related to their heritage, and thus to some aspect of their identity that they want to make stronger and more salient through gaining skills in this language. HL learning is thus inherently an identity construction process, and that identity construction is tied to membership in heritage communities (Carreira, 2004). The following section compares definitions of HLLs, considers the challenges of HL maintenance and education, and describes issues in bringing together home, community, and school efforts to promote HLs.

**2.2.1 Defining heritage language learners and foreign language learners.** The terms *heritage language* (HL) and *heritage language learner* (HLL) have been defined in various ways, with varying emphasis on proficiency, frequency of use, contact with a community that speaks that language, status of that community, and self-identification with that community (Campbell & Christian, 2003; Carreira, 2004; Kagan, 2005; Lee, 2005; Valdes, 2005; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). In many cases the term *heritage language* may be synonymous with native language, mother tongue, or home language, but in other cases it may not be a given learner's first or dominant language and may not be spoken in the home at all. Generally, the term *heritage language learner* (HLL) implies that the student has a familial or cultural connection to the language but is not fully fluent or fully literate in it, which is a common condition in immigrant families after the first generation (Campbell & Christian, 2003).

Researchers have distinguished HLLs from non-HLLs based on different criteria. Drawing on data from a survey of Spanish teachers, Carreira (2004) differentiated learners who were seeking to preserve the language of community experiencing swift attrition from learners who were seeking a stronger connection with a stable community. Lee's (2005) survey of learners of LCTLs at one university suggested two major factors for an HLL designation: linguistic proficiency and "sociopsychological need

for cultural identification.” These factors suggest four types of learners who may enroll in a language course: a) learners who have some proficiency and see the language as part of their cultural identity; b) learners with little or no knowledge of the language who nevertheless identify with it culturally; c) learners with no proficiency and no cultural identification; and d) learners who have some previous knowledge of the language but do not connect it with their cultural identity. Of these, (c) and (d) are foreign language learners (FLLs) of the type that most research on second language acquisition has analyzed. Types (a) and (b) are heritage learners. Figure 1.1 illustrates the intersecting continua that Lee (2005) proposed.



**Figure 1.1**  
Lee (2005)'s “Reconceptualization of heritage and non-heritage learners of LCTLs”

Because HLL status is largely a matter of the learner’s own personal orientation to the language, identifying HLLs can be more complex in regard to certain languages and regions than others. For example, students of Mandarin may self-identify as HLLs because their family comes from China, although their family members only speak Cantonese (Kelleher, 2010; Lee, 2005). Meanwhile, self-identified HLLs of Arabic may use Arabic as a religious language in their practice of Islam but use a different language such as Urdu with their families (Ibrahim & Allam, 2006; Lee, 2005). As a result, even among students who claim to be HLLs of the same language, proficiency can vary from none at all to near-fluency, though proficiency rarely compares to peers in countries where the language is dominant.



Proficiency levels in the target language play a different role in HLL identification in different studies (Husseinali, 2006; Kagan, 2005; Kondo-Brown, 2005). Kagan (2005) proposes that heritage learners of Russian should be placed in courses designed for their specific linguistic needs on the basis of biographical characteristics including level of education in their country of origin and their proficiency. She demonstrates that patterns of errors vary in HLLs and non-HLLs, and that Russian HLLs profess motivations including a desire to maintain family communication and, more frequently, a desire to maintain access to Russian culture and literature.

In an effort to determine how HLLs should be placed into courses in Japanese as a foreign language, Kondo-Brown (2005) compared standardized test scores and self-ratings of language preferences and abilities among university learners. She concluded that not all learners from Japanese backgrounds should be tracked into courses for HLLs. Those with at least one Japanese parent were expected to have some proficiency in Japanese; these students were also more likely to have lived in Japan and to have received Japanese instruction at complementary schools in the U.S. Kondo-Brown (2005) contends that these learners should be taught in HLL-oriented courses, while all other learners of Japanese heritage, such as those with Japanese grandparents, could reasonably be taught in the same classes with non-HLLs.

In his study of motivations for language learning among Arabic learners, however, Husseinali (2006) makes the opposite choice, defining HLLs entirely based on cultural factors. In his opinion, “learners who are of Arab descent” and “non-Arab Muslims” could be “safely collapsed into one [group], due to the fact that students in both have cultural and historical ties to Arabic” (p. 396). While this choice may have served his purposes as he compared the reasons for studying Arabic among HLLs and non-HLLs, a complete picture of patterns in the HLL population for a given language needs to take into account the learners’ actual competency in and use of the language as well as their professed connections to the language.

Furthermore, efforts to define HLLs and groups of HLLs depend on the unique features of each population of learners. Carreira’s (2004) work, mentioned earlier, took into account differences in the

strength and solidarity of the heritage language community, but this consideration may not be equally relevant for languages other than Spanish in the U.S. In regard to Arabic, Ibrahim and Allam (2006) determined that heritage learners studying in Cairo could be divided into three or even four groups. They assumed that learners with only two Arabic-speaking parents would be able to communicate in Arabic prior to beginning formal study, but learners with only one Arabic-speaking parent and non-Arab Muslim learners would not. Meanwhile, Allen (2007) offers the generalization that in his experience Arabic-speaking parents often discouraged their children from learning Arabic because it hindered assimilation. Any such assumptions about HLL identity, proficiency, and sub-groups may thus prove to be inappropriate in another context, though these observations suggest further questions to be asked in investigations of Arabic HLLs.

Across target languages and across contexts, then, HLLs may be placed on a continuum of varying comparative abilities in their heritage language and the dominant societal language. Because the patterns of proficiency, exposure to literacy relative to oracy, connections to heritage communities, and strength and coherence of heritage communities vary for different languages and different contexts, instructors of HLLs can benefit considerably from analysis of the particular learners and their communities as well as drawing from general knowledge about HLLs (Carreira & Kagan, 2011).

**2.2.2 Heritage language acquisition.** In recent years, efforts to theorize heritage language acquisition (HLA) as a corollary to second language acquisition (SLA) have been growing (Benmamoun, et al., 2010; Montrul, 2010; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2011). These efforts tend to narrow the definition of HLLs to those who have been exposed to the HL at home and developed some proficiency in it (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). In comparing HLA with SLA, researchers have differentiated HLA from SLA by framing it as incomplete first-language (L1) acquisition. The primary distinctions from SLA include the contexts in which HLLs usually learn the language and the learners' typical level of literacy. If HLLs have developed proficiency in the target language, they have typically acquired that proficiency at home, from an early age, in informal contexts. Thus, they may have advantages related to the breadth of their vocabulary, phonological awareness, implicit knowledge of grammar, cultural knowledge, and pragmatic

skills. On the other hand, L2 learners typically acquire literacy and oracy together while HLLs often remain illiterate in the HL, and L2 learners may also develop greater metacognitive awareness of the language and its features through years of classroom-based instruction (Montrul, 2010). As a result, Montrul (2010) calls for further investigation of “how HLLs of different levels of proficiency in their different abilities (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) perform on different types of tasks, and how they compare with L2 learners of similar proficiency in the same skills” (p. 17). Both groups, however, are expected to be dominant in the majority language (in this case, English), and to experience interference from English when using the target language (Montrul, 2010).

Although researchers have moved toward understanding the phonological, grammatical, and lexical differences between HLL and FLL language use for particular languages and hope to find patterns that apply across languages (Benmamoun, et al., 2010), the fact remains that HLA must take into account the great heterogeneity of HLL populations across and within target languages. Furthermore, theories of HLA are incomplete without awareness of the role of exposure to the language outside the relatively controlled environment of the classroom as well as the cultural implications of language learning.

As He (2005) argues, this situation demands sociocultural approaches to HLA, but very few researchers heretofore have considered the role of context in HLA. The argument that HLLs differ from FLLs in their language acquisition processes has received considerable support, but the nature and implications of these differences for learning in and out of the classroom remain to be studied in depth. The current study therefore focuses on opportunities to learn, language and literacy practices, and their relationship to identity and culture in one specific learning context, but may contribute to the broader development of theories of HLA.

**2.2.3 Heritage language maintenance and loss.** From a sociocultural perspective, HL learning primarily differs from FL learning in its importance for the maintenance and transmission of culture, ethnic identity, and intergenerational relationships. Research on relevant factors in language shift and language maintenance suggests that the transmission of heritage languages from one generation to another is an ongoing struggle that can be exacerbated by national ideology, school policies and curricular goals,

and parental (mis)conceptions about language acquisition (Blake & Kramersch, 2007; King & Fogle, 2006; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006). While the only clear consensus among researchers is that heritage language transmission is difficult and highly context-sensitive, there does seem to be widespread agreement that collaboration between parents and schools along with alignment between school practices and government policies at all educational levels can increase the likelihood that heritage languages will be maintained and developed and that second/foreign languages will be acquired (Lee, 2005; Miramontes, Nadeau, & Commins, 1997; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003).

Although immigrant families may acknowledge their home language as an important part of their heritage and desire to pass it on to their children, the most prevalent pattern among immigrants to the U.S. is a shift to English dominance by the second generation and near-inevitable loss of the home language within three generations (Campbell & Christian, 2003; Fishman, 2001; Portes & Hao, 1998). This swift attrition of the family language and shift to English seems to result from the hegemony of English in the U.S., lack of institutional support outside the family for language maintenance, and parents' beliefs and practices in regard to their children's heritage language development (Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001; Schecter & Bayley, 1997). Although immigrant parents may value their native language and hope to pass it on to their children, they typically view English as an "economic and social necessity" (Wiley, 2007, p. 252) and may not be able to devote sufficient energy to heritage language maintenance while working to provide for the family's other basic needs (Wong-Fillmore, 2001). Adolescents in particular tend to be highly sensitive to their social context when choosing among their languages and to speak English predominantly while living in an English-dominated society (Caldas, 2006; Wong-Fillmore, 2003).

Language loss, or the failure to transmit a heritage language to the next generation, has a number of consequences including disconnection from family members and social networks. Children of immigrants who lose their heritage languages experience more family conflict and lower self-esteem than those who achieve bilingualism (Portes & Hao, 2002). Loss of language has been connected with destabilization of the family structure and lower academic performance (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-

Orozco, 2001; Wong-Fillmore, 2001). Borland (2005) documented this phenomenon specifically with adolescent speakers of Maltese in Australia; community language maintenance and academic achievement were directly correlated in the population she studied.

Also, failure to pass on a family and community language to the next generation may have significant consequences for the parents' own identities. In her research with Pakistani immigrants and their children in London, Mills (2004) found that her informants equated language transmission "with a more general responsibility as guardians of a culture" (p.165) and observed that "language was presented as a powerful means of exclusion and inclusion... it was made clear that the loss of a language may lead to exclusion and alienation from groups one wishes to affiliate with or the group that wishes to sustain cross-generational relationships" (p.177).

When language maintenance succeeds, it appears to depend on a range of family, language, and community variables. Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang (2001) found correlations between the strength of parent ethnic identity, in-group peer interactions, adolescent language proficiency, and adolescent ethnic identity, though these relationships varied across the different ethnic groups they studied. Maintenance of social networks played an important role in language maintenance in a study of ten bilingual immigrant women in the U.S. (Stoessel, 2002). Stoessel (2002) found that those who maintained communication with members of their home language community and retained positive emotional connections to the language were far more likely to pass on their language to their children. In Schüpbach's (2009) research among Swiss German-speaking immigrants to Australia, some parents had little desire to pass on their language, and those who did rarely succeeded. Parents whose children did learn Swiss German were most often married to Swiss Germans, had a greater number of fellow Swiss Germans in their community, persisted in speaking the language at home, and placed a high value on language transmission. In one study of Iranian immigrants to Sweden, age of arrival in the host country and level of education in the first language were important individual characteristics, while geographic concentration, status, and cultural core value of language were important characteristics of the language community (Sohrabi, 1997).

Just as some adolescents may respond to their context by choosing to use English exclusively, other adolescents may find ways to promote their own development in the heritage language. Yi (2005) documented the bilingual practices of Korean adolescents in the U.S. who use the internet to connect with English-speaking and Korean-speaking peers. In early adolescence the Caldas children avoided using French when living in Louisiana, but when living in Quebec they sought out opportunities to immerse themselves in French (Caldas, 2006).

In one of the very few studies that considers context and literacy practices among Arabic heritage learners, Cruickshank (2004) found that in the families of Arabic-speaking immigrants to Australia, both parents and teenaged children engaged in practices that promoted their heritage language. The parents continued to expose their children to Arabic through conversation at home, Arabic-language videos, letters and tapes exchanged with family members in their home countries, visits to those countries, and particularly Saturday schools. They also served as mediators of the formal religious Arabic used to read the Qur'an and pray. Over time, however, their teenage children increasingly found their own ways to access Arabic language, particularly through Internet chat with other Arabic-speaking teens, and in some cases the children reached higher levels of literacy in formal Arabic than their parents.

**2.2.4 Foreign language learning and family policy.** Not all families who want to achieve additive bilingualism with their children are immigrant families. They may be majority-language speakers who believe that learning an additional language will enrich their child's education and understanding of the world (King & Fogle, 2006), or they may be the families of diplomats, businessmen, or other sojourners living in an environment where a language other than the home language is dominant (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2001). Multilingualism is an achievable goal, certainly, but it often requires specific, consistent language policies on the part of parents (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2001). King and Fogle (2006) found that the parents of young children whom they interviewed did not grasp "the consistency and effort that is needed to support additive bilingualism" or "the challenges ahead as their children entered their school years" (p.707).

Parents who advocate for additive bilingualism may find themselves in conflict with educators. In their ethnographic research with bilingual parents of young children and early childhood educators in Canada, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Armstrong de Almeida (2006) found that the pressure to emphasize English over the home language begins with a child's earliest experience of day care. They argue that "existing dominant discourses of monolingualism have become ideological, and they need to be challenged to ensure the maintenance of home languages among young children in immigrant families" (p.312). These families may be advised to teach English exclusively by doctors, speech therapists, teachers, and counselors who believe that a bilingual policy will confuse the child (Shin, 2003), and other parents may also advocate this erroneous belief (Souto-Manning, 2006). Pressure to emphasize English continues in the elementary grades due to the fear that anything less than total immersion in English will hinder students' performance on standardized tests (Wong-Fillmore, 2003). These pressures increase the already daunting challenges of maintaining the home language as children enter school.

**2.2.5 Bilingual and heritage language education in school.** Most bilingual programs in the U.S. are designed to ease immigrant children's assimilation into English-dominant education or to provide elite populations with an academic edge. When a child comes to school with some level of fluency in a LOTE, that language is usually seen as a deficit rather than an additional linguistic resource and is not encouraged to develop in conjunction with English (Christian, 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006). Programs that actually promote additive bilingualism for heritage learners and foreign language learners together are extremely rare. In order to expand their numbers, Fishman (2001) contends that further research and promotion highlighting the country's needs can move HLs away from "the battlefield that public elementary and secondary bilingual education has become, in large part because of the ties to poverty and politics that heritage languages are perceived to have" (p.95). Nevertheless, recognizing the interconnectedness of heritage language education programs and their contexts is essential to effective pedagogy and policy:

Successful HL education is inseparable from the role of school systems, social institutions, and historical experiences of particular language communities, as well as language ideologies, suitable proficiency assessment instruments, and adequate literacy development. (He, 2010, p. 76)

In schools that have attempted to promote children's development in their heritage language simultaneously with English, the two acquisition processes have been found to interact positively (Miramontes, et al., 1997). Heritage language maintenance benefits children and adolescents by allowing them to maintain their connection to the heritage language culture, but fluent bilingualism (HL maintenance combined with successful acquisition of English) carries a number of additional advantages. Analyses of data from over 5,000 adolescents in south Florida and the area around San Diego, CA, suggest that children of immigrants who speak both English and their family's language well have higher grades, higher self-esteem, and higher educational aspirations than those who become monolingual in English, those who remain monolingual in the family language, or limited bilinguals (Portes & Hao, 2002). Although these children's education may result in fluent bilingualism, English monolingualism, limited bilingualism, or foreign monolingualism, the most frequent outcome by far is English monolingualism (Portes & Hao, 1998).

As for the contention that bilingual education diminishes students' performance in English, some researchers have suggested that bilingual education can lead to a "mixed-dominant" pattern of language use in which the students cannot express themselves fully in either language, but Miramontes, Nadeau, and Commins (1997) attribute this to flaws and inconsistency in the educational program. In a longitudinal mixed-methods study of an Australian school that promotes bilingualism among children of Chinese- and Vietnamese-speaking immigrants, Molyneux (2008) found that there was no disadvantage to English language development for children educated bilingually in this program, while the stakeholders reported considerable advantages for family communication and identity construction. Likewise, Branum-Martin, Foorman, Francis, and Mehta (2010) found no significant differences between the early



English literacy skills of Spanish-speaking ELLs in English immersion and Spanish bilingual programs, though English immersion was detrimental to Spanish skills.

Because heritage learners may experience a range of different language development processes, addressing their diverse needs can be challenging for educators. Learners may need to develop their HL beyond what they have learned at home; to further activate language they have only mastered receptively; to re-learn aspects they have lost through attrition; to develop literacy, though their HL oral skills may be strong; or to learn more formal registers and styles or even another dialect Valdés (2005). The range of proficiency levels, the different prior learning experiences, and the particular needs of a given language require specialized pedagogical approaches. All of these HL acquisition processes may be relevant for HLLs of Arabic, who typically encounter a new variety of the language in school (Modern Standard Arabic, described further in Section 2.3).

According to the former director of the Center for Applied Linguistics, a strange paradox faces language education in the U.S. today in that the Department of Education and the Department of Defense are calling for the immediate need to increase monolingual Americans' linguistic resources, while at same time "students who enter our schools with native-like proficiency in a language other than English (their heritage language) often suffer academically because they receive instruction only in English" (Christian, 2007,p.271). For her, a national educational policy would include encouragement for HL maintenance in schools and incentives for achieving academic competence in multiple languages such as special bilingual diplomas. In this way, promoting bilingualism in HLLs would also benefit classmates who are not HLLs. This notion of the HL as a resource rather than a detriment is echoed by Blake and Kramersch (2007), Wiley (2007), Donato and Tucker (2007), and most of the other contributors to the *Modern Language Journal* Perspectives issue devoted to national language education policy.

Additionally, Donato and Tucker (2007) and Brecht (2007) have called for government agencies and non-governmental organizations to promote curriculum planning, materials development, construction and use of appropriate assessment tools, and teacher training so that U.S. children can begin studying LOTEs at a young age and continue through the university level and beyond. Particularly in

languages that require the greatest effort for English-dominant learners, early exposure and effective articulation through grade school, university, and beyond are essential in order for both HLLs and FLLs to reach highly proficient levels of language and literacy (Wang, et al., 2010).

The discourse of language-as-resource (Ricento, 2005) suggests that heritage communities and languages can and should be tapped by means of well-designed programs that serve political interests, and the government has funded a number of initiatives to encourage heritage learners to increase their proficiency. As a critical language, Arabic has received support in the form of funding to found the National Middle East Language Resource Center at Brigham Young University in Utah; Language Flagship programs for promoting advanced learning at Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Texas at Austin; a wide range of programs for language teacher training and student language learning through the STARTALK initiative; and other programs. Also, learners can obtain support for intensive overseas study through programs such as the Critical Language Scholarship Program and participate in established study-abroad programs like the one at the Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA) in Egypt.

Approaches to bilingual education that include heritage language learners need not and arguably should not rely on government support alone, however. While public funding enables many programs to exist, their success may depend on the inclusion of parents and wider communities in initiatives to promote heritage language learning and also on local efforts to encourage non-heritage learners to achieve proficiency (Christian, 2007; Donato & Tucker, 2007; Lee, 2005; Miramontes, et al., 1997; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Even if they do not include parents in curricular decisions, schools can play an important role in educating parents about the challenges of raising multilingual children and easing their fears that their children will be disadvantaged by the effort to master two languages (King & Fogle, 2006; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006). As Donato and Tucker (2007) maintain, language teaching policy “needs to include recommendations for educating parents on the nature and structure of contemporary foreign language

programs, on their goals, and on the program's relationship to the school-wide curriculum and to the total education of their children" (p.257).

Community schools can play an important and influential role in heritage language maintenance, particularly if there is successful collaboration between public schools and community school language education (Christian, 2007; Cruickshank, 2004; Donato & Tucker, 2007; Kagan, 2005; Sarroub, 2002). Parents who are highly motivated to encourage HL acquisition or maintenance in their children seek out and even found such schools. Pre-college Arabic instruction in the U.S. takes place primarily in community-based schools, while Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and many other languages are taught in similar programs (Sehlaoui, 2008).

Often, community-based schools that support heritage language maintenance are associated with religious institutions that also serve as a means of binding and maintaining cultural communities. Fishman (2001) found in his 1985 survey of heritage language programs across the U.S. that there was "a high correlation between the number of schools associated with any particular language and the number of local religious units (churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples) associated with that language, giving us a clear insight into what has thus far been the major and most durable support for heritage language schooling in the U.S." (p.89-90). This support from religious institutions seems to be an important component of Arabic language learning in the U.S. Unfortunately, efforts to teach the language have been misunderstood or misrepresented as efforts to promote Islamic fundamentalism (e.g., in Pipes, 2007), when in fact they are peaceful efforts to support cultural maintenance.

### **2.3 Learning Arabic as a Foreign or Heritage Language**

Learning Arabic presents unique challenges to both heritage and non-heritage learners. Learners who set out to study Arabic in the U.S. rarely persist in their study to reach high levels of proficiency (Ryding, 1991). While the impressive growth in numbers of students enrolled in Arabic courses around the country over the last fifteen years suggests great enthusiasm for starting to study this language (Furman, et al., 2010; Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010), the ratio of students in advanced Arabic courses to

students in beginning courses, about 16%, is the lowest among the fifteen most popular foreign languages in the U.S. (Furman, et al., 2010). Ryding (2006) attributes the difficulty of Arabic to the influence of diglossia, which necessitates the learning of two relatively distinct varieties of the target language in order to develop a full range of linguistic proficiency. Along with other educators including Wilmsen (2006), Ryding argues that the tendency to focus on MSA in language classes to the exclusion of communicative competence in a spoken variety leads to frustration and student attrition.

The extent of diglossia distinguishes Arabic from other “superhard” languages (Ryding, 2006), but diglossia is not the only feature of Arabic that contributes to its perceived and actual difficulty. Other features, which will be discussed in the sub-sections below, include the orthographic system of Arabic; a number of syntactic, morphological, and lexical features that differ dramatically from the typology of English; complex sociolinguistic features; and pedagogical concerns that have not yet been resolved in the U.S. context.

The challenges of learning Arabic in instructed settings may be particularly acute for young learners, who may not have any other language learning experience and may not be able to draw on metacognitive awareness or strategies to facilitate the learning process. Although young learners may not need to develop explicit awareness of all the features of the language described below, these challenges do affect their emergent understanding of the language.

**2.3.1 Orthographic and phonetic challenges.** The first and perhaps the most immediately daunting aspect of Arabic as a foreign language for English-dominant learners is the Arabic alphabet in which it is written. While English uses an alphabetic writing system, Arabic employs a consonantal system, or *abjad*, as do other Semitic languages including Hebrew. There are 28 consonant graphemes in Arabic, three of which double as vowels, while short vowels are written with diacritics if they appear at all. Whereas English letters keep the same forms no matter where they appear in a word, except in cursive handwriting, the majority of Arabic letters link together in both print and handwriting. Learners must therefore master initial, medial, and final forms of the letters in order to identify them and produce them in different word positions.

A common misconception about Arabic is that the vowels are not written at all. In most Arabic writing, only long vowels (ʾ /a:/ or /æ:/, ي /i:/, و /u:/) that double as consonants are typically represented; readers must draw on grammatical knowledge to infer the locations of short vowels. In certain types of texts, however, short vowels can be marked by three diacritical symbols that appear above and below the consonants, called *fatha* (a low mid or back vowel, approximately /a/ or /ə/), *kasra* (a high front vowel, approximately /i/, /ɛ/, or /ɪ/), and *damma* (a higher, rounded back vowel, approximately /u/, /ʊ/, /o/, or /ɔ/). Diacritics may also signal the lack of a vowel (◌◌◌, *sukun*) and the lengthening or doubling of a consonant (◌◌◌, *shadda*). Typically, these diacritics appear in Classical Arabic texts including the Qur'an and the Hadith and in modern texts for children or language learners (Brustad, Al-Batal, & Al-Tonsi, 2004a; Ryan & Meara, 1991). The simplified paradigm for the past tense of the verb “to write” in Table 2.1 shows how these diacritics appear, and exemplifies how they signal grammatical differences. Most of the singular forms are identical in their consonants, though the vowels vary:

**Table 2.1**  
Simplified paradigm for the verb “to write” in Arabic. Modified from Brustad, Al-Batal, & Al-Tonsi (2004a).

Plural			Singular		
1 <sup>st</sup> p	<i>katabnaa</i>	كَتَبْنَا	1 <sup>st</sup> p	<i>katabtu</i>	كَتَبْتُ
2 <sup>nd</sup> p masc	<i>katabtum</i>	كَتَبْتُمْ	2 <sup>nd</sup> p masc	<i>katabta</i>	كَتَبْتَ
2 <sup>nd</sup> p fem	<i>katabtunna</i>	كَتَبْتُنَّ	2 <sup>nd</sup> p fem	<i>katabti</i>	كَتَبْتِ
3 <sup>rd</sup> p masc	<i>katabuu</i>	كَتَبُوا	3 <sup>rd</sup> p masc	<i>kataba</i>	كَتَبَ
3 <sup>rd</sup> p fem	<i>katabna</i>	كَتَبْنَ	3 <sup>rd</sup> p fem	<i>katabat</i>	كَتَبَتْ

When it is printed with diacritics representing the short vowels, the Arabic writing system is considered a shallow orthography, meaning that there is a near-perfect one-to-one ratio between the graphemes and phonemes of the language (Cook & Bassetti, 2005). As a result, learning to decode Arabic writing is easier than learning to accurately pronounce English words based on their written form, and young native speakers of Arabic master decoding at a younger age than do young readers in English (Saiegh-Haddad, 2003).

There are also a number of phonetic differences between English and Arabic that lead to further challenges. Arabic learners must master new phonemes and learn to discriminate between separate phonemes that parallel a single phoneme in English in order to pronounce words they read and write words they hear. Some sounds do not exist in English, including the voiceless uvular (*khaa*) and pharyngeal (*Haa*) fricatives, both of which resemble English “h”, which is yet another phoneme in Arabic; the voiced uvular fricative (*ghayn*); and the voiced pharyngeal fricative, *ayn*, which is inconsistently represented in Roman transliteration with an apostrophe or with a superscript mark that looks like a small c. Arabic also has a number of phonemes that exist in emphatic (velarized or pharyngealized) and non-emphatic pairs, which means that they are produced similarly except that the tongue is somewhat hollowed out when pronouncing the emphatic phonemes (Brustad, al-Batal, & Al-Tonsi, 2004b; Ladefoged, 2006). Also unlike English, Arabic represents glottal stops in its orthography (as a *hamza* sitting on a vowel “seat”). The vowel system, in contrast, is actually far simpler than that of English, with each grapheme in Arabic representing a range of sounds that would be considered several separate phonemes in English. The small inventory of vowels eases the process of reading but seriously complicates the issue of devising transliteration systems based on Roman script.

When Arabic is written without diacritics, as it is newspapers, novels, and academic texts, it is considered a deep orthography. The script in this form offers less information about pronunciation to the reader than a vowelized text, so that proficient readers must learn to supply the missing information regarding vowel pronunciation based on their knowledge of morphology and syntax and their comprehension of the surrounding text. In other words, they must build and maintain a complex situation model of the text in order to identify words, pronounce them accurately, and comprehend meaning (Grabe, 2009; Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill, 2005).

**2.3.2 Lexical, morphological, and syntactic challenges.** The lexicon, morphology, and syntax of Arabic are all much farther from the typology of English than the languages commonly taught at the pre-college and college levels in the U.S. Regarding the lexicon, it suffices to say that there are very few cognates between Arabic and English, though a number of English words are derived from Arabic.

Arabic words, particularly verbs and their related nouns, are based on a root made up of three or four consonants. The derivational process by which these roots take on different word forms and meanings involves inserting different vowels between these consonants and adding prefixes and suffixes. For example, *KiTaaB* (كتاب, *book*), *maKTaB* (مكتب, *office or desk*), and *KaaTiB* (كاتب, *writer*) are all derived from the root K-T-B.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, when learners begin to understand the root-based system, their vocabulary increases exponentially, but until then the roots can be difficult to identify and the process of derivation through insertion can seem very foreign. Reading words in Arabic and pronouncing them correctly requires not only knowledge of the alphabet but also knowledge of the grammatical system. Written alone in a text without vowel diacritics, the letters K-T-B usually signify a verb with past masculine singular inflection, كتب, *he wrote*, but could also signify the plural noun *books*. Readers must rely on vowelizing or context clues to make this distinction clear and to identify and pronounce words accurately.

In addition to its complex derivational morphology, Arabic has inflectional morphology that may seem familiar to learners who have previously encountered a Romance, Germanic, or Slavic language but can be overwhelming to those who come to Arabic as their first foreign language. Nouns, adjectives, and demonstratives are inflected for gender and number, and verbs are inflected for person, gender, number, and tense. Inflection for number includes singular, plural, and also dual forms. Mastering this morphological system is further complicated by the lack of vowel marking in most written texts, since many of the differences that distinguish inflected and derived forms of verbs are then not represented in the orthography.

As for the syntax of Arabic, the basic word order of MSA, verb-subject-object (VSO), differs from that of English (usually SVO). Another area of confusion lies in the lack of a copula verb in the present tense. Other differences result from this feature, including the tendency to place a prepositional phrase at the beginning of the sentence when a comparable English sentence would begin with “there is”

<sup>3</sup> There is a not-uncommon misconception (Cruickshank, 2006) that these words have the same orthographic representation. Words from the same derivational family are often similar, but rarely identical.

or “there are.” Furthermore, MSA is also inflected for nominative, accusative, and genitive case, though only one of the six possible case markings typically appears in unvoweled orthography. Many of these syntactic differences are prominent in MSA but do not occur in the various spoken varieties that are used around the Arab world, which brings us to the sociolinguistic challenges of learning and using Arabic as a foreign language.

**2.3.3 Sociolinguistic challenges.** Despite the many differences that I have just discussed, the linguistic challenges of Arabic as a foreign language are not at all insurmountable; the lexicon is no more distant from English than that of Chinese or Japanese, while the morphology and syntax are no more intricate than Slavic languages such as Russian, Polish, and Czech (Stevens, 2006). The feature of Arabic that makes it one of the most challenging foreign languages to learn is, ostensibly, sociolinguistic (Ryding, 2006; Wilmsen, 2006). Arabic is characterized by *diglossia*, meaning that different varieties of the language are used for different social purposes in the same physical space (Ayari, 1996; Saiegh-Haddad, 2005). Across the Arab world, a consistent, formal, literary variety known as Modern Standard Arabic<sup>4</sup> (MSA) is used for written communication, while spoken communication takes place in a range of different varieties, referred to variously as *colloquial*, *vernacular*, or *dialect* forms, that vary from region to region.<sup>5</sup>

While scholars agree that there is considerable distance between MSA and the various spoken varieties of Arabic, the boundaries between these varieties and ways of referring to them are a matter of some debate. Even in a single edited volume such as *The Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21st Century* (Wahba, Taha, & England, 2006), scholars differ in the ways that they characterize the multiple target varieties of Arabic. Ryding (2006) opposes Modern Standard Arabic with “colloquial dialects,” Wilmsen (2006) compares “formal” and “vernacular” varieties and also coins the term “formacular” to emphasize that Arabic-speaking professionals use some mixture of the two, and

<sup>4</sup> This literary lingua franca is not always called MSA, but MSA is widely used in U.S. educational contexts.

<sup>5</sup> In this paper, the term *spoken variety* will be used as a default to refer to forms of Arabic used primarily for oral communication. If an alternative designation such as *vernacular*, *colloquial*, or *slang* appears, it is used to reflect the term used by a given scholar or informant.



Younes (2006) draws on Badawi's (1973) five "levels of contemporary Arabic," which range from the most formal *fuSHa*<sup>6</sup> "of the Arabic/Islamic heritage" to the "vernacular of the illiterate" (p. 158). Despite their use of dichotomous terms at times, these scholars all assert that the varieties of Arabic form a continuum, ranging from formal to informal:

Native Arabic speakers function within a continuum of linguistic competence that encompasses an extensive range of performance, calibrating their interactions according to a number of sociolinguistic factors, including the formality of the situation, the location of a situation, and the people involved in it. (Ryding, 2006, p. 14-15)

Consequently, proficient second language learners must not only manage multiple varieties of the language but also develop awareness of the contexts in which these varieties are appropriate. Wilmsen (2006) notes that learners who are not provided with the opportunity to develop competence in both formal and vernacular varieties of Arabic may not only lack basic linguistic skills necessary for survival in the Middle East and building relationships, but also may not be prepared for the tasks that are in greatest demand among non-academic employers, including interpreting and translating.

At the same time, given that spoken varieties differ across the Arab world, learners must make choices about which spoken variety to learn. Many of these varieties are similar and differ from MSA in predictable ways, but they can be mutually unintelligible. Furthermore, they occupy a far different sociolinguistic position from MSA, in that they are "vital, sophisticated, complex, living languages," but at the same time "they are not considered suitable for written communication and, therefore, not written down," which means that they can change more freely than literary forms of the language (Ryding, 2006, p. 14). Faced with this variation and mutability, programs such as the National Middle East Language

<sup>6</sup> In Arabic and when borrowed into English, *al-fuSHa* (الفصحى) is used to refer to the more formal variety of the language. *Al-fuSHa* can be translated to "the most eloquent" or even "the purest" form of the language.

Resource Center recommend that learners select a spoken variety depending on their own goals, opportunities to study abroad, or other considerations (*Handbook for Students of Arabic*, 2011).

These sociolinguistic features, diglossia and the range of spoken varieties in different countries, have different implications for heritage and non-heritage learners of Arabic. Heritage learners who have been exposed to Arabic at home may still need to acquire a second variety through classroom instruction in order to develop literacy in Arabic, and they may experience interference from their home variety that is evident in their pronunciation and syntax. The impact of these differences on the process of Arabic second or heritage language acquisition has been observed but has not been studied in depth by researchers taking either a cognitive or a sociocultural approach to language learning.

The implications of orthographic characteristics and diglossic distance between the spoken and written forms of the language suggest intriguing challenges for researchers and educators interested in L1 literacy development (Abu-Rabia, 2000; Saiegh-Haddad, 2003, 2005). In addition, the comparative typology of Arabic and English suggests a variety of interesting contrasts that have intrigued researchers and inspired a number of studies analyzing literacy development in two language systems and orthographies (Abu-Rabia, 2000; Abu-Rabia & Siegel, 2002; Abu-Rabia, 2002; A. Ryan & Meara, 1991; Saiegh-Haddad, 2003, 2005; Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2008). However, this research on Arabic literacy or Arabic-English biliteracy deals primarily with the decoding aspect of reading (Perfetti, 2010). To date there is very little research on L2 Arabic language and literacy that considers other cognitive components, including comprehension, or that takes into account the role of context and language experience.

Perhaps an even more important sociolinguistic factor lies in the role of Arabic as a liturgical language for the practice of Islam. Practicing Muslims all over the world read the Qur'an, memorize suras<sup>7</sup> from the Qur'an, and pray in classical Arabic, no matter what language they use in their day to day life. They believe that the Qur'an itself is a miracle, revealed by God to Muhammad in Arabic, and thus

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<sup>7</sup> The Qur'an is made up of 114 suras, which are sub-divided into 6000 ayas (Esposito, 2005). While these terms can be roughly translated as "chapter" and "verse", I borrow these terms from Arabic because my informants do so. Likewise, the Arabic plurals *suwar* and *ayat* would be more accurate, but I follow their lead in using English plural morphology.

Arabic itself is sacred (Esposito, 2005). Whereas other religious texts including the Bible have been translated into vernacular languages around the world so that believers could worship and study in their own native languages, the Qur'an continues to be studied in Arabic. Although the Qur'an and other religious texts have also been translated to many languages, Classical Arabic retains its status as the primary language of worship, prayer, and study for believers. Furthermore, the Qur'an has served as the model for Arabic literacy for 1400 years, and even now Modern Standard Arabic is closer to the classical Arabic of the Qur'an than it is to the varieties of Arabic that are spoken in Arab countries today (Esposito, 2005). Specifically, the text of the Qur'an is printed using the consonantal alphabet and full diacritics, so that a reader does not have to speak Arabic fluently in order to pronounce the text accurately.

Due to the importance of reading Arabic and memorizing the Qur'an in the practice of Islam, Muslims outside the Arab world have founded religious schools where children can develop their Arabic literacy skills. Of the 313 U.S. K-12 Arabic language programs surveyed in 2009, 70% were private programs (Greer & Johnson, 2009). Of these, it is unclear how many teach Arabic in the context of Islamic studies programs. Although statistics on Arabic programs outside public schools that have a religious focus or affiliation are limited, the proportion is likely high. Meanwhile, public K-12 Arabic programs in the U.S. have met resistance in their communities, apparently due to the tendency to associate teaching Arabic with promoting Islam (MacDonald, 2009; Pipes, 2007).

**2.3.4 Pedagogical and programmatic challenges.** While Arabic increased in prominence as a foreign language in the U.S. in recent years, it still only accounts for about 1% of university language learners, about 0.6% of secondary school programs, and about 1% of elementary school programs that teach foreign languages at the pre-college level (Furman, et al., 2010; Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010). To date, very little research has been done on the acquisition of Arabic as a second or foreign language, not to mention Arabic as a heritage language<sup>8</sup>. Scholars such as Mahmoud Al-Batal, Kirk Belnap, Kristen

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<sup>8</sup> Much of the research on Arabic L2 reading comes from Israel, where the government is investing in Arabic literacy among children who speak Arabic at home. These children are, by most definitions, heritage learners, but Saiegh-Haddad and her colleagues do not use this term, and the sociopolitical issues are considerably different from those in the U.S.

Brustad, Karen Ryding, and Elabbas Benmamoun who are focusing on Arabic as a foreign language in the U.S. today are largely concerned with the linguistic features of Arabic and with pedagogical challenges, including materials design, curriculum development, program establishment, and teacher training.

In pre-university Arabic programs, as well as in university programs, the availability of qualified teachers and programs to train them remains very limited (Greer & Johnson, 2009). Furthermore, teachers of Arabic in public schools have few options of well-designed and published materials and curricula available to them, though materials have been developed for Islamic schools. *Al-Kitaab fi Ta'allum al-'Arabiyya* ("The Book for Learning Arabic," commonly abbreviated to *Al-Kitaab*) (Brustad, et al., 2004a) is widely used, as is *Ahlan wa Sahlan* ("Welcome") (Alosh, 2000), but published materials appropriate for young learners are difficult to find. Oxford University Press has published *The Oxford Picture Dictionary: English-Arabic Edition*, but it serves learners of English better than learners of Arabic. Even appropriate bilingual dictionaries are difficult to obtain. Among the most frequently-recommended dictionaries (and the one I have used most in my study of Arabic) is Hans Wehr *Arabic-English Dictionary* (Cowan, 1994). This dictionary offers extensive detail on the range of meanings and the relationships of words that share roots, but requires the learner to have sufficient morphological awareness to be able to search for words by root. Oxford's recently-published contribution (*Oxford Essential Arabic Dictionary*, 2010) is accessible for beginners, provides Arabic-English and English-Arabic translations, presents Arabic script with vowel diacritics, and sequences Arabic words by first letter, but it offers only a "basic vocabulary" (p. iii).

At the same time, the choice of which variety or varieties of Arabic to teach in various programs is still hotly debated. While most programs begin with a focus on MSA, there has been a shift in the Arabic teaching profession toward integrating spoken varieties into the formal study of Arabic. Recent editions of the influential *Al-Kitaab* reflect this shift, while Younes (2006) describes a fully integrated approach for simultaneously teaching Contemporary *fuSHa* (CF) and a variety that he dubs "Educated Levantine Arabic" (ELA) that has been implemented at Cornell University. This approach involves

introducing CF through written materials and ELA through audio recordings and classroom oral communication in the same lessons. CF written materials may be discussed in ELA, a practice that Younes (2006) claims is reflective of typical academic communication in Arabic-speaking contexts. While such approaches are beginning to be implemented and documented, there has been little or no empirical research comparing the impact of various approaches to teaching Arabic, such as MSA first, a spoken variety first, or simultaneous introduction.

In an effort to remedy the lack of programs and teachers and to increase the number of learners studying and reaching high levels of proficiency in Arabic, the U.S. government has devoted considerable funding to a number of different programs. Among these initiatives are the founding of the National Middle East Language Resource Center at Brigham Young University and the Arabic Language Flagship Program (<http://www.thelanguageflagship.org/arabic>), available through five universities and as a study-abroad program. Other sources of government support for Arabic language teaching include the STARTALK program, which funds summer intensive programs for learners and teacher training, and the Critical Language Scholarship Program, funded by the State Department. Also, the National Capital Language Resource Center, the National Heritage Language Resource Center, the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (all funded by the Department of Education), and the Center for Applied Linguistics offer materials for teachers of LCTLs including Arabic. Advanced learners may also attend the Center for Arabic Study Abroad in Cairo, funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the Ford Foundation, where they can broaden skills gained in U.S.-based instructional settings through language and content courses in Arabic (Ryding, 2006).

Nevertheless, all of these programs fall in the category of programs that Allen (2007) mentions as programs founded to meet a need identified by U.S. government officials for critical language development that depend on current sociopolitical conditions. The extent to which these resources are taken up by local language programs, how much mutual support has developed with communities and community-based language programs, what impact these programs have on the education of heritage or

non-heritage learners, and if these programs are actually fulfilling the stated needs for increasing U.S. citizens' foreign language proficiency all remain empirical questions.

**2.3.5 Developing proficiency in heritage learners of Arabic.** As a result of these particular challenges, Arabic complicates the prevailing definitions of heritage language learners. As mentioned above, learners who have a family affiliation with the language and who have developed some proficiency through using Arabic at home may be considered heritage learners, but Muslims who come from non-Arabic-speaking families may also consider themselves heritage learners of Arabic (Ibrahim & Allam, 2006; Lee, 2005). Based on their survey of 34 students of Arabic at the American University in Cairo, Ibrahim and Allam (2006) found four different profiles of Arabic heritage learners, all differing in terms of their exposure to Arabic prior to studying it in a university setting and their proficiency. Their taxonomy includes learners who had two Arabic-speaking parents and learned Arabic at home, learners who had one Arabic-speaking parent and one non-Arab parent who did not speak Arabic at home, learners who were Muslims from non-Arabic-speaking families, and learners who had grown up in Arab countries but who had attended international schools and thus had never been educated in MSA. This taxonomy may have been appropriate for their population of students and illustrates the complexity of identifying Arabic HLLs, but these groupings cannot be applied to other programs, including the one described in this study. Furthermore, this study did not attempt to describe the implications of these varied language backgrounds for the learners' language skills before and during the program.

Analyses of Arabic language learners at any age should consider the variety of prior language experiences and the language abilities that heritage learners bring to the classroom as well as their intentions for language study. As with HLLs of other languages (Montrul, 2010), their strengths in regard to oral language and literacy skills may vary considerably. In addition, HLLs' exposure to different varieties of Arabic is likely to differ from that of native speakers in the Arab world and FLLs. HLLs who speak Arabic at home in an English-dominant environment may only have been exposed to the variety of Arabic that is spoken in their family's country of origin, whereas their peers in the Arab world would have learned a spoken variety at home and MSA in school. Muslim HLLs may have learned to read

Arabic in a religious school, though they may not be able to communicate in Arabic. If and when they enter university programs that teach MSA, as most still do (Al-Batal & Belnap, 2006), HLLs who use a spoken variety at home and lack literacy skills must learn different lexical, morphological, and syntactic patterns along with the orthographic skills of reading and writing, while HLLs who have only developed literacy skills in religious contexts need to develop awareness of the differences between Qur'anic Arabic and MSA while expanding their communicative abilities and contemporary vocabulary.

Research on heritage learners of Arabic heretofore has dealt primarily with the motivations of these learners (Husseinali, 2006; Ibrahim & Allam, 2006; Lee, 2005). Work on the specific features of heritage language learners' language systems or learning processes is limited in general, though Benmamoun, Montrul, and Polinsky (2010) mention work in progress with heritage learners of Arabic, among other languages. Few studies of heritage learners have attempted to address the complexity of social and cultural influences on language learning in regard to most heritage languages, though Yousef Mohammad Alshaboul's (2004) unpublished dissertation offers rare insights into the literacy practices of Arab parents in the U.S.

In summary, the complexity of Arabic language learning in general and specifically the challenges of developing proficiency in heritage learners of Arabic warrant considerable attention. Further research is needed to support appropriate pedagogical decisions and materials design for Arabic learners, but research on heritage learners of Arabic in particular also stands to contribute to the emerging body of literature on heritage language acquisition. While the context of Arabic learning and the population of Arabic learners discussed in this study illustrate many of the complexities discussed here, the focus of this study is on the social and cultural influences that drive investment in Arabic language learning and the practices that support that learning among a selective group of focal families.

## **2.4 Literacy and Biliteracy in HLs and FLs**

Literacy skills and practices are an essential element of a study on the learning of Arabic as a heritage and foreign language. As discussed above, the challenges of acquiring Arabic largely lie in the

orthographic system and diglossia, the differences between the most widely-used spoken and written forms of Arabic. Additionally, literacy often constitutes the greatest distinction between the command of the language among heritage learners and among non-heritage learners at the same general proficiency level (Montrul, 2010). The types and uses of literacy that learners, parents, educators, others in desired communities value may be so widely divergent that a single instructional approach may not be able to align with all of their priorities at once.

Literacy has been studied from two very distinct research perspectives. According to a cognitive perspective, literacy may signify the cognitive abilities to decode and encode text that reside in an individual's mind, enabling the processes of reading and writing (Goswami, 2006; Grabe, 1991; Perfetti & Marron, 1998). According to a sociocultural perspective, literacy can be understood as a range of practices relating to textual artifacts that enable, create, and are constrained by features of the socio-cultural contexts in which they take place, and that allow an individual to interact with a discourse community of other literate individuals (Heath & Street, 2008; Street, 1995). Street (1984, cited in Street & Lefstein, 2007) refers to these two views of reading and literacy as the "autonomous model" and the "ideological model," and even a brief perusal of the literature on reading in a second language reveals that these models are held and studied by distinct groups of scholars and researchers with distinct priorities who have engaged deeply with the workings of their own constructs but rarely engage with each other's views.

**2.4.1 Biliteracy from the inside out: Cognitive approaches.** The cognitive view of reading prioritizes the basic, technical skills of deriving meaning from text, and the most basic of these skills is the ability to accurately pronounce a word based on its orthographic representation, or decoding. If an individual can look at a series of graphemes, recognize them as meaningful print, identify the sounds that this print represents, and connect this phonological representation to a lexical item in their language system, then he or she can read in the most basic sense. The key ability here involves the understanding that "writing systems encode spoken language," a principle that Perfetti (2003) has labeled "The Universal Grammar of Reading." This "grammar" consists of knowledge (at whatever level of implicit



or explicit awareness) of the way that the target orthographic system encodes the phonology, morphology, and syntax of the spoken language into words, syllables, and phonemes (Cook & Bassetti, 2005; Perfetti, 2003). Perfetti (2003) considers this principle “universal” because studies have shown that even experienced readers of Chinese, who were previously believed to access meaning directly from print, access phonology when they read, though they may also recruit visual processes (Hu & Catts, 1998; Perfetti & Zhang, 1991).

The challenges of decoding graphemes vary depending on the orthographic system in which a text is written. According to the Orthographic Depth Hypothesis, “differences in orthographic depth lead to processing differences for naming and lexical decision” (Katz & Frost, 1992). No orthography is completely transparent, but when a learner with normally developing language abilities encounters a language with a shallow orthography, in which the relationship between the phonology of the language system and the graphic representation of this phonology in print is straightforward and consistent (Katz & Frost, 1992), they can usually learn to decode text in a matter of weeks or months and continue to do so with a high level of accuracy (Goswami, Ziegler, Dalton, & Schneider, 2003; Koda, 2007). In contrast, decoding in a language with a deep orthography such as unvoweled Hebrew or Arabic tends to be much more challenging. Both languages require the reader to draw on morphological and lexical knowledge to pronounce and identify the word correctly (Abu-Rabia, 2002; Katz & Frost, 1992; Ryan & Meara, 1991).

Learning a second language requires an individual to move from using one set of principles for associating sound with spelling to another, and this challenge is greater to the extent that the languages use different writing systems. A number of studies have suggested that a learner’s first language writing system may influence the development of literacy in a second writing system through cognitive and metacognitive awareness and strategies (Bialystok, Luk, & Kwan, 2005; Wade-Woolley, 1999). Arabic and English have different inventories of phonemes, or meaningful distinctions among sounds as well as different writing systems. Learning to read accurately in the other language accurately requires developing PA in the opposite language, a process that educated learners have usually completed in their first language by the age of six and that is more effortful for learners over that age.

While readers rely on well-developed cognitive processes in order to interpret written text accurately and efficiently, interacting with written text seems to impact cognition and cognitive abilities. Olson (2002) claims that “writing is what introduces our speech to us, revealing our speech as having a particular structure” (p. 164), just as Castles and Coltheart (2004) explain that learning to read may be the source rather than the outcome of phonological awareness. In their model of “linguistic literacy,” Ravid and Tolchinsky (2002) refer to speech and writing as “the two major linguistic modalities” (p. 420). They propose that “the reciprocal character of speech and writing in a literate community makes it a synergistic system where certain features (e.g. basic syntax) originate in the spoken input, while others, such as complex syntax and advanced and domain-specific lexical items, originate in the written input” (p. 430). At a cognitive level, an individual’s experience of text constrains or supports their metacognitive awareness of their own language’s structure or that of a target second language (Tarone & Bigelow, 2005). Whether a learner develops language skills at home, in school, or in another context, rich, more frequent, comprehensible, and meaningful interactions with text provide opportunities to develop the cognitive foundations of successful reading.

**2.4.2 Biliteracy from the outside in: Sociocultural approaches.** The majority of studies that consider cognitive components of second language reading and transfer among languages do not take into account language learning contexts or experience. However, language learning and biliteracy development are complex, highly varied processes that are contingent on a number of contextual factors. Hornberger’s (1989, 2003) continua of biliteracy offer a heuristic model that takes into account factors such as the comparative dominance of the two (or more) languages in the surrounding society, the relationships between vernacular and literary forms of the language, the sequence of exposure to the languages, and the similarity or dissimilarity of linguistic structures and writing systems. Hornberger and other scholars who take an ecological approach to literacy development consider the language learner’s prior experience of language learning and use in home, community, and instructional contexts to be crucial components of the development process (Barton, 1994).

Researchers in this tradition typically use ethnographic methods to analyze the role of literacy practices in a larger context, but one of the unifying characteristics of their work is a focus on two core units of analysis: rather than focusing on competencies demonstrated by individuals, they observe and analyze *literacy events* and *literacy practices* in which these individuals engage. Literacy events are “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (Heath, 1982/1986). Quite simply, they are activities that involve reading and writing. However, they go beyond these activities. When analyzing events, researchers also attend to “how meanings are constructed” and to the “underlying conventions and assumptions” that accompany and direct these events (Street, 2000, p. 21). Events are the observable instances of practices, which are “patterns of activity around literacy” (Street, 2000, p. 21) that represent “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7). Importantly, practices are linked to broader cultural and social meanings, values, experiences, and constraints. Literacy practices include:

people's awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy. These are processes internal to the individual; at the same time, practices are the social processes which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities. Practices are shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them. They straddle the distinction between individual and social worlds, and literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than a set of properties residing in individuals. (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, pp. 7-8)

Barton and Hamilton (2000) go on to emphasize that literacy practices “are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices” (p. 8), that they are usually a means to achieving

or attaining something else. A further feature of the New Literacy Studies approach is the concept of multiple literacies (Street & Lefstein, 2007). This multiplicity lies in the variety of distinct practices used in a community, the variety of communities that use sets of literacy practices, the variety of media that these practices may involve, and also the variety of languages (and combinations of languages) in which these literacy practices may take place (Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000). In Heath's classic study, she describes the profound differences in the literacy practices that children from working-class African-American families and working-class white families were exposed to prior to school, and establishes that both sets of practices varied from those most valued in the school context, though this was more immediately apparent among the African-American children (Heath, 1982/1986).

In a more recent example, Martin and Stuart-Smith (1998) surveyed and interviewed children of Panjabi parents growing up in Britain who were faced with the challenges of literacy in English and in Panjabi using methods that included showing them photographs of literacy events in each language. Not only did the children engage in different practices with each of these languages, but their attitudes toward literacy varied in regard to each language. Strikingly, the children described their practices, attitudes, and values differently when they were interviewed in English than when they were interviewed in Panjabi. As these two studies show, the New Literacy Studies approach may address issues of schooling and literacy acquisition in more or less direct ways, but it consistently seeks to draw the surrounding context and its implications into the analysis.

**2.4.3 Specific implications of literacy in Arabic.** As in other languages that use an orthographic system other than the Roman alphabet, literacy in Arabic deserves particular attention. However, the unique features and challenges of literacy in Arabic extend beyond the orthography to encompass the unique sociolinguistic features and cultural associations that literacy bears in Arabic and in the Arab world. The primary issue is that literacy in Arabic requires learners to engage with a variety of the language that is not often used for spoken communication. Heritage learners must learn MSA in addition to their home variety, just as non-heritage learners who start their studies with MSA must also find a way to access a regional spoken variety in order to develop the full range of language competencies needed for

advanced proficiency. Instead, it may be valuable to focus on the particular issues involved in Arabic reading. This work has begun at the cognitive level, but much remains to be studied at the sociocultural and sociocognitive level.

What research has been done on reading in Arabic focuses primarily on the process of decoding Arabic orthography and the impact of biliteracy or diglossia on the component skills of reading. Due to the differences between the Arabic consonantal system and the English alphabet, experienced readers of Arabic may make errors in English word reading that do not occur in learners from other language backgrounds, such as deleting or transposing vowels or substituting words with similar consonants (A. Ryan & Meara, 1991), and proficient adult readers of Arabic may read more slowly in Arabic than comparable readers in English (Abu-Rabia, 2002).

A series of studies conducted with children learning to read Arabic in Israel shows that the diglossic situation has a considerable effect on children's reading accuracy. They have very high levels of reading accuracy when words contain phonemes that are used in both spoken varieties and MSA, while they are much less accurate in identifying and differentiating phonemes that only appear in MSA (Saiegh-Haddad, 2003, 2005). This difference leads to incomplete or inaccurate phoneme-grapheme correspondence and slows the development of proficient reading. The same challenges would presumably apply to university-age learners of MSA who are familiar only with a spoken variety of Arabic as well as FLLs, who are not familiar with the unique phonological features of Arabic.

In their exploratory study of children in grades 3-6 attending an English-Arabic bilingual school in Canada, Saiegh-Haddad and Geva (2008) considered within-language correlations and cross-linguistic influences of PA and MA on word reading accuracy and fluency. They describe English as orthographically deep but morphologically transparent, in that complex words can be easily decomposed into roots with prefixes and/or suffixes. Vowelled Arabic, in comparison, is as orthographically transparent but morphologically opaque.

## 2.5 Motivation and Investment in Language Learning

When a child acquires his or her first language, learning to communicate is so essential to human contact and even survival that there should be no question of motivation. In all other language learning contexts, however, desire to master a language stems from a wider range of motivations that are less immediate and essential but nevertheless deeply valued. For Krash (2006), the desire to identify with others, their language, and their way of speaking “is the basic drive toward self-fulfillment. It touches the core of who we are” (p. 101). The effort and commitment required to master an additional language can stem from interest in communicating with a specific group of people who use the language, from interest in the language learning process itself, or from a recognition that learning the language can serve other purposes that may or may not depend on actual communication in the language.

Reasons for language learning have been theorized in research on motivation over the past several decades (Dörnyei, 2003), but recent research with heritage learners suggests that their preferences and preoccupations do not necessarily align with those of language learners in general (Husseinali, 2006; Kondo-Brown, 2005; Noels, 2005; Noels, Pelletier, Clement, & Vallerand, 2003). This section provides a brief overview of widely-used approaches to motivation research in applied linguistics as well as recent shifts in the research to recognize the variability of motivation depending on context and experience (Dörnyei, 2009). Some of the constructs used in the study of motivation as an individual difference retain their utility in constructivist research. However, this study aims to show that the desire to learn a language is intimately connected to context and particularly to the communities in which that language is valued in ways that motivation studies usually do not encompass.

**2.5.1 Integrative or instrumental motivation.** One of the most prevalent models of motivation in language learning is Gardner and Lambert’s (1959) delineation of *integrative* and *instrumental* factors. These can be viewed as “language level” motivational subsystems, with learners expending effort to learn a language either for “social, cultural, ethnolinguistic” reasons such as a desire for greater involvement and identification with speakers of the language or, alternatively, because they believe it will contribute to the achievement of academic and professional goals (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 279). For example, someone who

is integratively motivated might believe that “Studying [Arabic] is important because it will enable me to better understand [Middle Eastern] life and culture,” whereas someone who is instrumentally motivated might believe that “Studying [Arabic] is important because it will give me an edge in competing with others” (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995, p. 511).

**2.5.2 Intrinsic or extrinsic motivation.** Another perspective that has influenced studies of language learning motivation is Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This model identifies three types of motivation: *amotivation*, *extrinsic motivation*, and *intrinsic motivation*. Learners who see no specific reason to continue learning are considered amotivated, while those who proceed primarily because they find learning to be interesting, stimulating, and satisfying are intrinsically motivated. While this form of motivation is considered the most powerful and desirable type, extrinsic motivation can also lead to strong, sustained effort to learn if it is internalized.

According to Self-Determination Theory, motivation that is initially extrinsic, such as grades in school or access to professional opportunities, can become internalized as a result of three factors: *relatedness*, meaning that “the behaviors are prompted, modeled, or valued by significant others to whom they feel (or want to feel) attached or related” such as parents and teachers; *perceived competence*, meaning that the learner feels capable of completing the tasks at hand, and *autonomy*, which “allows individuals to actively transform values into their own” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73). As extrinsic motivation becomes more internalized, it can take one of four forms: *external regulation*, *introjected regulation*, *identified regulation*, and *integrated regulation*. A learner who feels related to members of the target community, who feels confident that his or her efforts will lead to achievement, and who feels enough agency to engage with the target language in the way he or she chooses is, according to Self-Determination Theory, likely to be a more motivated and persistent learner. These internalizing factors may all be more accessible and influential to a heritage language learner than to a foreign language learner.

**2.5.3 Motivation in HLLs.** The distinction between heritage language learners and foreign language learners is almost inseparable from issues of motivation. A learner who self-identifies as a

HLL, by definition, associates the language with a community that uses the target language and with which he or she has some kind of ancestral identification; in most cases, the HLL is motivated to learn the language by a desire to strengthen connections to this community. The prototypical FLL, then, is motivated by other factors, including personal and professional goals, enjoyment of language learning, or desire to connect with a different cultural community than his or her own.

In her study of motivation among learners of German at a Canadian university, Noels (2005) compared motivation among HLLs and non-HLLs using both the instrumental/integrative and intrinsic/extrinsic dimensions. She attributed heritage and non-heritage status to learners based on whether they reported having a parent with a German-speaking background and whether they self-identified as a heritage language learner. The vast majority of these participants was dominant in English and did not speak German at home, so proficiency was not included in the HLL definition here.

Using a survey instrument that combined the two models of language learning motivation discussed above (Noels, et al., 2003), Noels (2005) showed that the learners in the heritage language group and the learners in the foreign language group were more similar than different in regard to most aspects of their motivation to learn German. Both groups identified with integrative and instrumental orientations; their reported levels of intrinsic motivation were similar; and all of these motivations correlated with their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and with increased engagement in learning and desire to continue studying the language. Although HLLs' actual language use differed from that of FLLs because they reported greater contact with German-speaking communities, the only statistically significant difference in motivation between the two groups was that heritage learners experienced more identified regulation, meaning that they were extrinsically motivated but believed that "learning German helps to achieve goals that are important for their self-concept" (Noels, 2005, p. 301).

**2.5.4 Effects of language learning environment.** The methods used to identify and test these models of motivation with different populations have been survey-based and quantitative, with learners stating how strongly they identify with certain statements and often self-reporting their competence and achievement in language learning. Noels (2005) acknowledges, however, that understanding the ways



that motivation relates to identity for these HLLs of German is beyond the scope of the survey-based research she has conducted. She calls for “qualitative research to explore the phenomenology of representative learners from each of these contexts” (p. 303).

Increasingly, motivation researchers have come to recognize the influence of context and the limitations of psychologically-based approaches that focus on the individual learner and rely on their self-report of agreement with broad statements about motivation. Gardner (2006) insists that motivation “definitely cannot be assessed by asking individuals to give reasons for why they think learning a language is important to them...” because reasons need to be accompanied and evidenced by observable behaviors; a motivated person “expend effort, persists in the activities, attends to the tasks, shows desire to achieve the goal, enjoys the activities, etc.” (p. 243). Further, he explains that his model of language learning motivation is dynamic and that factors such as self-confidence, willingness to communicate, and language anxiety can be outcomes of language learning as well as antecedents of (future) motivation. Dörnyei (2003) has usefully included factors related to the learner, including need for achievement and self-confidence, and factors related to the learning situation, including the immediate influence of the course, the teacher, and the group in his model of language learning motivation. As Dörnyei (2009) explains, the effects of individual differences including motivation “cannot be identified accurately without taking into account the idiosyncratic features of the specific temporal and situational context we are investigating” (p. 232). These features cannot be fully addressed by the “snapshot” view that survey methods usually produce.

**2.5.5 Investment in language learning.** When she proposed her theory of language learning *investment* (Norton Peirce, 1995), Norton leveled the critique that existing methods and concepts of motivation research were insufficient for encompassing the influence of environment and actual day-to-day encounters with speakers of the target language and the changes in motivation over time. As Norton (2000) explains, investment serves to describe a learner’s effort to learn a language, but unlike the construct of motivation it “signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it” (p. 10). Investment

encompasses identity construction and serves as an alternative to the more traditional understanding of motivation, which seeks to measure the individual's commitment to language learning at a given point in time, in isolation from other learners and the learning environment, and without reference to actual language use. As Norton herself has insisted (personal communication, April 2010), the concepts of investment and motivation are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they place their emphasis on different considerations regarding the learner and the learning process.

Researchers including Gardner (2006) and Dornyei (1994; 2003) have moved in recent years from a view of motivation as a static trait (a learner can be motivated or unmotivated, consistently motivated by certain factors or others) toward a view of motivation as dynamic and responsive to factors including instructional context, teacher and peer relationships, and the learner's judgment of success or failure. The contribution of investment, then, is not only that it recognizes the fluctuation of desire to learn over time, but that it considers the influence of the broader sociopolitical context on learners' opportunities to speak and the differences in power held by learners and their desired interlocutors that influence language learning.

The theory of investment, therefore, provides a conceptual framework for analyzing the desire to learn Arabic as a heritage or foreign language in young learners. In looking at their language learning from this perspective, we are led to ask not only why they are learning but also how their commitment to learning relates to the communities in which that language is used and valued, to experiences with various interlocutors, to the opportunities that learners have to speak, to the sociopolitical issues that may affect their opportunities to use the language, and to the learning environment and process. This theoretical framework, which serves to link language learning, identity construction, and literacy, will be described further below.

## **2.6 Investment and Identity in Language Learning**

According to Firth and Wagner (1997), research on second language acquisition (SLA) has typically been preoccupied with language learning as an individual cognitive process and on one identity

only: that of the *learner*, someone receiving instruction in a second or foreign language. However, much recent research on language learners and multilinguals has undergone “a shift in emphasis from the interface between language use and linguistic development to the interface between language use and identity” (Block, 2007, p. 867). Furthermore, this research takes a constructivist view of identity “not as something fixed for life, but as fragmented and contested in nature” that resists static categorizations (Block, 2007, p. 864). Bonny Norton, whose work in this area has influenced many other researchers, uses *identity* “to refer to how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (Norton, 1997, p. 410). Identities may be *imposed*, *accepted*, or *negotiated* (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004a): imposed by interlocutors and by the wider social context in largely unintentional ways, accepted by individuals who do not feel that they can resist them, and negotiated by those who find the power and agency to maintain or construct acceptable positions for themselves.

This perspective on identity as something that can be and arguably must be negotiated constantly in different contexts of interaction reflects a general shift in the study of language learning and multilingualism from a positivist paradigm to an interpretivist view of reality and evidence, as well as a shift from predominantly quantitative methods toward more qualitative approaches (Block, 2007; Chapelle & Duff, 2003). Whereas positivism assumes that reality or truth exists and can be studied through rigorous scientific methods similar to those used in the natural sciences, *interpretivism* assumes that reality is subjective and that the purpose of inquiry is to discover how individuals interpret the reality around them as result of their context, culture, and experiences (Willis, 2007). For research on identity, the major implication of this shift in perception of reality and in the focus of inquiry is that studies using this construct over the past twenty years or so take identity as multiple, as malleable, and as “crucially related to social, cultural, and political context” (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005, p. 23). These studies tend to ground their theoretical position in the work of scholars such as Bourdieu, Foucault, Weedon, and Butler in order to support claims that identity is influenced by socialization and located in

various levels of discourse, but that subjectivity allows room for individuals to choose the ways in which they perform and conform to certain roles (Block, 2007; Menard-Warwick, 2005; Norton, 2000).

As the theoretical understanding of identity has shifted, the most appropriate and widely-used methodologies for studying identity have also changed. If identity is tightly connected to context, individuals can construct their own identities, and identity is bound up in relations of power, then appropriate methodologies must take into account the immediate context of language use, the perspectives of those who are interacting in that context, and the larger political and social context. Thus the emergence and growth of identity as a construct of interest in applied linguistics has been accompanied by the growth and development of methodologies that serve well to study it, including ethnography, (critical) discourse analysis, and narrative inquiry (Nunan & Choi, 2010; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004b).

In the field of second language teaching and learning, the roles of identity and culture have garnered increasing attention as researchers in second language acquisition have realized that language occurs not only in the mind but also in a complex sociocultural context and that a multitude of factors affect individuals' desire to learn as well as their access to opportunities to learn a language (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Atkinson, 2007, 2010). This growing body of research views identity and culture as something that learners can construct through their use of language and interactions with others:

Identity and culture are not static, but complex, perpetually evolving, and sensitive to such diverse social constructs as social status, education, language contact, current and shifting ideologies, and historical and political legacies. (Hinkel, 2005)

Particularly in quantitative studies of language learning, researchers have tended to assign learners to identity categories based on specific attributes, but it is no longer considered adequate to assign learners to categories and seek to discover the impact of these identity categories on some aspect of language acquisition. Instead, we must seek to understand how those categories are impacted by larger discourses, instantiated differently for different people, and negotiated through ongoing interactions with

speakers of one's native language and target language(s), or we must avoid categories entirely in favor of a focus on the process through which individuals strive to construct desired identities.

Identity is “multiple” and “a site of struggle,” as Norton claims in her call for a coherent theory of identity in second language acquisition research (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). Thus our focus should not be on *identity*, as a fixed trait or set of fixed traits, but on *identity construction* throughout the process of language learning and use. The factors that impact this identity construction process are not peripheral to the language learning process, but rather integral to initiating and sustaining it:

The learners' historically specific needs, desires, and negotiations are not simply distractions from the proper task of language learning or accidental deviations from a 'pure' or 'ideal' language learning situation. Rather, they must be regarded as constituting the very fabric of students' lives and as determining their investment in learning the target language. (McKay & Wong, 1996, p. 603)

The process of identity construction occurs through negotiating membership and participating in multiple intersecting communities (Wenger, 1998). This process takes place not only at the level of immediate and direct participation in local communities, but also as we envision participation in much larger or more distant communities through imagination. As Wenger (1998) uses the term, “imagination refers to a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves” (p. 176). He draws on the examples of “looking at an apple seed and seeing a tree” and of “playing scales on a piano, and envisioning a concert hall” (p. 176). Surely this process of constructing identity by imagining participation in communities beyond the immediate confines of reality is no less relevant for a language learner sitting in a classroom, who may look at a vocabulary list or rehearse a simple greeting and imagine a globe-trotting career.

Imagination not only allows an individual to construct an identity as a potential member of a community that may or may not exist, but it also generates and binds communities that extend much

further than the scope of our immediate involvement. When we use an identity category to define ourselves, such as American, Arab, Muslim, Christian, immigrant, native speaker, or scholar, we invoke an imagined community of people, most of whom will never meet, but who, we believe, share certain competencies, perspectives, and practices. Thus, even a nation may be viewed as an imagined community (Anderson, 1983). As Norton (2011) explains, drawing on Anderson's (1983) and Wenger's (1998) concepts of imagination:

A focus on imagined communities in SLA enables us to explore how learners' affiliation with such communities might affect their learning trajectories. Such communities include future relationships that exist only in the learner's imagination as well as affiliations – such as nationhood or even transnational communities – that extend beyond a local set of relationships. These imagined communities are no less real than the ones in which learners have daily engagement and might even have a stronger impact on their identities and investments. (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 76)

The form that membership takes in terms of ways of participating in these communities of practice or discourse communities varies from community to community. If we take Wenger's (1998) view that identity is a *nexus of multimembership* in a range of communities, then we can see that membership in some communities affects our access to and participation in the practices of other communities. Thus, it becomes important to investigate a given learning context as the intersection of multiple communities of practice or discourses in order to understand the relationship between identity construction and learning, and the part that learning, and specifically language learning, plays in an individual's efforts to negotiate membership in desired communities.

The link between identity construction and learning lies in the idea, expressed by Lave and Wenger (1991) as *legitimate peripheral participation*, that newcomers to a given community of practice negotiate membership in that community by gaining greater access to and control of the reifications and

practices that characterize that community. This process of learning the ways of thinking, behaving, and interacting that belong to that community allows the learner to construct an identity as a member of that community, but it is constrained by the legitimacy that prior members give to the newcomer's efforts. Learning a language involves individual cognitive processes, but it is largely a social process requiring engagement with users of that language. A view of learning as increasing access to a community of practice positions language and languages as sets of practices among many that belong to certain communities (Hall, Cheng, & Carlson, 2006). Individuals and communities can both be defined by their bilingual communicative repertoires, or *multicompetence* (Cook, 1996).

In a very broad and general way, all the users of a given language can be seen as one discourse community to which language learners gain access by increasing their knowledge of and communicative competence in the language. This view of language and language learning, however, fails to take into account the immense variation among users of a given language, the many purposes for which that language may be used, and the many contexts and communities in which practices rely on multiple (traditionally-defined) languages. At the same time, however, many communities that are unified by shared goals and interests (*joint enterprises*, in Wenger's terms) may conduct interactions and tasks in multiple languages. In a school like this one, for example, practices conducted in English and practices conducted in Arabic are both characteristic features of the community of practice. Furthermore, knowledge and skills related to using the language itself are not the only valued reifications and practices related to the language. Newcomers, the language learners, also gain greater access to the practices of bilingual communities through gaining knowledge and skills that pertain to using the language, such as when, how, with whom, and for what purposes to use it.

When we engage with language learning from a sociocultural perspective, then, we need to work with a broader definition of language, and we need to understand the practices for which it is used in communities as much as we need to understand the development of proficiency in individuals. Heritage language learners in particular, Ricento (2005) has argued, can be seen as learners who are attempting to

negotiate legitimate participation and membership in multiple communities through their increasing control of the heritage language.

Within each of the communities in which we participate and hope to become fully legitimate members, then, we allocate and expend resources as we attempt to consolidate *cultural capital*, a concept developed by the sociologist Bourdieu (1977, 1991) to refer to intangible, non-monetary assets including education, skills, knowledge, and relationships that can be exchanged for other types of capital, including social relationships and wealth. Just as the extent of wealth is measured by the price that others assign to the things you want to exchange that wealth for, the value of cultural capital depends on the value that others in desired communities place on that capital. As Bourdieu (1977) emphasized, “a language is worth what those who speak it are worth, i.e. the power and authority in the economic and cultural power relations of the holders of the corresponding competence” (p. 652). As a component of cultural capital, language abilities serve both as markers of social grouping and status and of educational attainment and as the means of interacting with others in these desired communities who can confer value on your cultural capital and allow you to exchange it for other assets.

As learners negotiate membership in a desired community, they gain access to (or attempt to gain access to) the resources controlled by that community, in whatever form they take. In their discussion of critical sociocultural literacy research, Moje and Lewis (2007) take up Gee’s (Gee, 1999) distinction of “small d” discourses and “big D” Discourses in order to analyze the relations of power that affect a learner’s access to desired resources and identities:

[L]earning provides access to and control of Discourses—or ways of knowing, thinking, believing, acting, and communicating—that may be used to control the activity and material goods within a community. Moreover, because material resources are always limited, discourse communities produce and struggle over cultural tools, resources, and identities (both within and across communities) that provide them access to Discourses and thus, to the material goods.

Some participants in discourse communities may have better access to or control of tools,



resources, and identities necessary for full participation and control of Discourses and material goods. (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 17)

Taking up this idea of investment in cultural capital from Bourdieu, Bonny Norton has proposed a theory of *investment* to explain individuals' ongoing, dynamic, context-sensitive commitment to language learning (Norton Peirce, 1995, Norton, 2000). It seems logical that an economic metaphor serves to help us understand the nuances of identity construction, particularly in a context in which parents are expending their resources in order to make it possible for their children to expand their resources. Parents invest in their children's language learning so that these children can have better futures, in whatever way these parents value and envision (Dagenais, 2003; King & Fogle, 2006).

While Norton (2001) focused on the ways that her participants struggled to negotiate opportunities to *speak* through interactions with their English-dominant Canadian interlocutors in the new community into which they had immigrated, questions of participation, legitimacy, access, and power are also highly relevant to *reading* and *writing*. Literacy, like language, has been understood as a cognitive skill contained within the individual's mind and also as a set of social practices mediated by written texts that belong to specific discourse communities (Barton, 1994; Barton and Hamilton, 2000; Street, 2000). Barton's (1994) *ecological approach* "involves a shift to studying literacy, a set of social practices associated with particular symbol systems and their related technologies" (p. 32). These social practices mediated by texts, then, are among the practices that must be considered in an understanding of learning as identity construction and identity construction as participation in valued communities.

Sociocultural studies of literacy among bilingual or emergent bilingual children in classroom settings understand literacy broadly as the school-based practices that allow these children to participate fully and to learn and succeed in the school context (Duff, 2002; Hawkins, 2005; McKay & Wong, 1996; Lewis & Moje, 2007). Like Barton (1994), Hawkins draws on the metaphor of *ecology* to emphasize the importance of the immediate and broader contexts of language learning and the ways in which they afford opportunities for the learner to develop higher levels of proficiency or hinder the learning process. In her

study of English language learners in kindergarten, she demonstrates that these young learners were able to amass cultural capital as they learned and harnessed certain practices in and out of school. Some of these practices were more valuable in the community of their school and classroom, and some of these practices served as a means of resisting school but added value to social relationships with classmates. Thus, the cultural capital that different learners were able to gain depended on the overlapping communities in which they were involved and the appropriateness of their use of language for those communities.

As Hawkins (2005) also shows, young learners do have agency in their identity construction. Nevertheless, children are typically surrounded by stakeholders who make educational and other life choices for them and who stand to gain cultural capital from their success. These stakeholders include their parents, their teachers, their school administrators, government officials, neighbors and neighborhood leaders, other members of their language or cultural communities, potential employers, and so on. Adults, too, are influenced by the people with whom they interact, but the influence of people external to the language learning process who stand to gain from that language learning is more apparent among children.

In summary, language learning takes place in discourse communities and creates opportunities to negotiate legitimacy in discourse communities. As learners use language learning as a means of increasing participation in communities, they connect language learning to the process of constructing desired identities. Thus investment in language learning and biliteracy is essentially an investment in identity construction. Individuals and those who hold a stake in their learning invest in language learning and literacy in order to gain cultural capital for the learner and for others, and that cultural capital varies, both in its nature and its value, in each of the communities in which an individual participates.

The literature on Arabic language learning and heritage language learners so far has not taken into account these perspectives on language learning as a complex, contingent, ongoing process of identity construction. Since it seems reasonable to infer that heritage language learning is inherently related to the learner's engagement with and effort to take up and shape aspects of his or her national and

cultural identity, the dearth of research in this area needs to be addressed. Furthermore, the particular implications of Arabic as a target language also demand a multi-faceted, constructivist approach to identity. Allen (2007) insists that learning Arabic offers a means of breaching the divide between the U.S. and the Arab world by encouraging learners to seek deeper understandings of the people who use this target language:

I suggest that our apparent inability to understand and negotiate with the Arab world and Islam in all of their linguistic, cultural, and theological diversity and complexity presents us with the best possible rationale for studying the proverbial Other—linguistically and culturally. Our study must involve an engagement with their value systems and senses of identity within their own frameworks, rather than a view through the distorting lenses of our own perspectives. (p. 259)

With the same objectives in mind, this study draws on ethnographic methods and grounded theory in order to seek emic perspectives on the Arabic language learning process among young learners from various linguistic, cultural, and national backgrounds and those stakeholders who are investing in their language learning. Viewing Arabic language and literacy as resources that can be invested and as a form of cultural capital in which resources may be invested allows us to consider language learning among children who belong to a given school community in its immediate and broader context. As we seek to understand the relationships between language, literacy, and identity among young learners at a U.S. public school, we can develop an understanding not only of Arabic as a heritage language but of the construction of Arabic as heritage and the implications of this process for language and literacy development.

### 3 METHOD

The current study focuses on learners of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) at Mawaarith Academy<sup>9</sup>, a public charter school in the southeast U.S. This school provides instruction in Arabic to nearly all enrolled students, including heritage and non-heritage learners, from kindergarten through eighth grade, for one class hour per day. Given the scarcity of foreign language programs for young learners in U.S. public schools, the even greater scarcity of programs for learners of Arabic, and the complex associations of Arabic today as a heritage language and a critical language, the program on which this study focuses offers a rich context for exploring questions that have so far received little attention from researchers.

Often in the design of ethnographic research, “an opportunity arises to investigate an interesting situation or group of people; and foreshadowed problems [questions] spring from the nature of that setting” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Such was the case for this study, which arose from the opportunity to study this program and the learners in it. The focus and structure of the study itself emerged over time as my understanding of the context, the participants in it, and the contingencies of doing research on such a little-studied language, population, and context grew.

This study relies on ethnographic methods because this exploratory approach appropriately allowed me to begin with the broadest of questions: *What is happening here, and why?* This school and its Arabic language program exist largely due to the efforts of a community of parents who worked to write its charter and convince the state government to fund this school and then brought the staff, facilities, and students together. Without their considerable investment of time, effort, and other resources, this school would not exist. Furthermore, although the school is a public school that any child living in the surrounding county can attend free of charge, all of the students who enrolled in this school are there through their parents’ active choice.

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<sup>9</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, this is a pseudonym.

While the pedagogical choices within the program and their impact on student proficiency deserve further attention, this study focuses on the reasons why so many stakeholders, and particularly the parents and children, have invested their resources in the language learning experience that this school provides. The research questions, then, focus on the reasons why these children are learning Arabic and what it means to them and their families as well as how these learners and families are investing in Arabic.

### 3.1 Research Questions

The current study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Why do learners and their families choose to invest in the study of Arabic? What values and desires do they associate with the Arabic language and Arabic language learning?
2. How do learners and their families invest in the study of Arabic? What practices in both oral and literacy domains characterize this investment? How do these practices change over time?
3. How do variations in the learners' and families' cultural backgrounds and current practices relate to their investment in Arabic language learning?

In order to address these questions, this study relies primarily on data from three main sources: surveys of students and parents; interviews with focal students, their parents, and teachers; and several months of weekly classroom observations. The resulting data, in combination with data from relevant documents, images, and researcher reflections, have been analyzed using a constant comparative method with the intention of generating grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b). These results offer insights into the process of learning Arabic from the participants' view and the theoretical connections between language learning, literacy, investment, and identity, especially in young learners. These results may suggest ways forward for culturally-responsive, inclusive, and effective instruction for these and other learners of less-commonly-taught languages.

### 3.2 Rationale for the Methodology

The study of heritage learners of less-commonly-taught languages (LCTLs) in the U.S. is an emerging field, one that draws on the larger body of research on language learners in general and heritage learners in particular and seeks to contribute to theories of heritage language acquisition. As this field grows, there are many ways forward methodologically that can address major questions regarding the learners themselves, their teachers, their learning processes, effective pedagogy that meets their particular needs, and larger implications. The methodology of this study draws from and speaks to three major areas of research that are relevant to this context and population and the research questions above: the study of motivation in heritage language learners and their non-heritage learner peers, the study of language learning as an identity construction process, and sociocultural approaches to the study of literacy and biliteracy.

**3.2.1 Methods in the study of HL motivation.** The body of research on HLs of Spanish in particular offers a wide range of methodological approaches and findings (Portes & Hao, 1998, 2002; Schechter & Bayley, 1997; Valdés, 2005), from surveys to ethnographic approaches. Meanwhile, the results of large-scale surveys of HLLs in the U.S. are beginning to appear (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). Much of the published research on learners of LCTLs has been preoccupied with issues of motivation, often relying on survey methods (Husseinali, 2006; Kondo-Brown, 2005; Lee, 2005; Montrul, 2010; Noels, 2005). The concern with motivation is in fact well-motivated; these studies have shown that HLLs and non-HLLs not only differ in predictable ways in regard to their prior proficiency and current associations with heritage language communities, but they also differ considerably in their motivations for learning the target language. These studies have largely drawn on quantitative survey methods to gather data regarding the language backgrounds of learners and the motivating factors that they see as relevant to their study of the language and to compare these motivations among heritage and non-heritage learners. Drawing on the approaches these researchers have taken to addressing motivation, the data collection process in this study included surveys focusing on language background, language use, and language learning motivations in the students and their parents. At the time when these surveys were conducted,

Mawaarith administrators and teachers had compiled very little demographic data or data on the intentions of parents and students. While the surveys provided important initial groundwork for this study and supported later decision-making in the process of data collection, survey methods could not provide the rich description of beliefs, practices, context that qualitative methods could in the analysis of language learning investment.

**3.2.2 Methods in the study of identity and investment.** Data on the motivation of LCTL learners that compares HLLs and non-HLLs can serve to inform pedagogical and programmatic decisions and offer insights into ways that teachers can sustain student effort in these languages. However, these studies evidence many of the limitations of motivation research that Norton (2000) highlights in her discussion of investment in language learning. Noels (2005) determined, within the framework of predominant theories of motivation (Dörnyei, 2003; Noels et al., 2003), that heritage learners were influenced by identified regulation more than their non-HLLs. However, this study, like others, relies on individual students' ratings of motivating factors at a single moment, without consideration of the contextual factors that might impact a learner's commitment, progress, and growth over time.

Investigating language learner investment, rather than or in addition to language learner motivation, suggests far different choices in regard to data collection methods. In order to develop a contextualized understanding of the desire and effort to learn a language as an identity construction process, as Norton and others have done (Blackledge et al., 2008; Block, 2007; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004b; Pomerantz, 2008), the researcher needs to engage with the complexities of the individual learner's perceptions of the language, relationship to the language and other users, and ongoing experience with the language. Ethnographic methods have provided the means of gathering data relevant to study of identity construction and its relationship to the language learning process in HLLs and their peers. In the emerging tradition of social constructivist research on language learning and identity, this study relies on ethnographic methods including relatively unstructured interviews with various stakeholders, classroom observations over a period of relatively lengthy engagement, field notes, thematic coding through iterative analysis, and connection to the larger social

and political context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Heath & Street, 2008; Lazaraton, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**3.2.3 Methods in the study of literacy as a set of sociocultural practices.** Likewise, ethnographic methods are powerful tools in the study of literacy and the sociocultural context in which it operates and develops (Barton, 1994; Heath & Street, 2008; Hornberger, 2007; Street, 2000). In comparison with other approaches to literacy, including cognitively-oriented research,

[Ethnographies] offer hitherto unknown maps and perspectives on literacy learning and development, without which teachers and researchers would be operating more or less blindly, in the dark, as they plan for and implement instructional strategies that ‘should’ work according to other research paradigms. (Purcell-Gates, 2006, p. 92)

The study of literacy in this context is inseparable from the study of heritage language learning and learner identity, as the findings of this study show. Understanding the relationships between HLLs’ and non-HLLs’ language and literacy development and their identity construction and investment necessitates a sociocultural approach to literacy practices rather than decontextualized measures of proficiency. Measures of Arabic language and literacy proficiency at the beginning and end of the school year would provide some sense of the language knowledge that learners have gained and would be an appropriate component of a mixed methods study of language and literacy (Calfée & Sperling, 2010). However, as Purcell-Gates implies, exploratory research like this study is needed before measures of proficiency appropriate to young learners of Arabic can be developed and put to use for the purpose of developing instructional strategies<sup>10</sup>. Studies that connect language learning, identity, and literacy among

<sup>10</sup> Currently oral language proficiency measures are available for young learners, though they can be expensive to use. A number of questions specific to Arabic need to be considered prior to the further development of standardized language and literacy measures for young learners, including: What language should be measured, MSA or dialect? Should this differ based on oral or written modality? If we attempt to measure proficiency in a spoken dialect, which one? What standards of proficiency should be followed, those of FL learners or native speakers in Arabic-dominant countries? General questions regarding literacy assessment include: Should we measure phonological



heritage learners of less-commonly-taught languages frequently rely on ethnographic data sources including interviews with learners and community members, observations of classes and community events, literacy diaries, examples of student writing, and other artifacts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Cruickshank, 2004; Sarroub, 2002; Yi & Hirvela, 2009).

**3.2.4 Methods of the current study.** The current study represents an “interplay” of qualitative and quantitative methods for the purpose of developing grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Though there are a number of practical and conceptual difficulties involved in combining these approaches, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that such methodological eclecticism and pragmatism are warranted in order to meet the emergent demands of an exploratory qualitative study. The underlying epistemology of the qualitative and quantitative methods is the same, in that both are used from a constructivist perspective to develop a detailed description and *verstehen* (understanding) of the learners in this particular context (Willis, 2007).

This study therefore follows a trajectory from an overview of the population and patterns within it based on survey and observation data to a discussion of identity construction and investment in particular cases of learners from different language backgrounds. As an ethnographic study supported by survey data<sup>11</sup>, this study draws on the following principal data sources:

- Surveys of students and parents conducted early in the 2009-2010 school year and another survey of students at the end of that year, focusing on language use, language learning experience, motivations for studying MSA at Mawaarith, and attitudes toward language study.
- Interviews with focal participants including children and parents in five families, chosen and recruited primarily based on their responses to these questionnaires. These focus on

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awareness, morphological awareness, lexical knowledge, comprehension, explicit knowledge of grammar, etc.? Should we measure receptive language, productive language, or both? Will the measures have ecological validity in this context and in other contexts, and will they have positive washback for the learners and teachers? How will the results of these assessments be used, and will their uses be appropriate to their design?

<sup>11</sup> There is some controversy about the difference between conducting and writing a true ethnography and conducting a study that uses ethnographic methods. Despite Scollon’s (1995) concern about “the miniaturization of the concept of culture,” contexts as small as a single classroom have become acceptable sites for ethnographic studies.

language learning history, beliefs and attitudes regarding Arabic language and literacy, perceptions and experience of the language learning process at Mawaarith Academy, and actual interactions with Arabic text. Also, interviews with four teachers (three Arabic teachers and one humanities teacher), all recorded with a digital audio recorder.

- Classroom observations in the six middle school Arabic classes, visiting two classes per week throughout the school year, recorded in the form of field notes;
- Documents, including materials describing the school, the language program, and its foreign language model; materials used in the teaching of Arabic at this school; and student-produced materials.

These methods will be described in further depth below. Although diaries of language learning and literacy practices as used in Norton (2000) and Cruickshank (2004) would likely have made an important contribution to this study, they were not explicitly requested in this study. Nevertheless, one mother chose to keep a diary of activities and decisions regarding language learning over the course of several months. This diary was used to guide and inform interviews with this mother.

The analysis of this data, then, was aimed at developing grounded theory situated in this specific learning context. This approach involves identifying and coding emergent themes in early stages of analysis, adjusting those themes as the analysis continues, and seeking connections among those themes that answer the research questions and remain consistent with the full body of data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It should also take into account the intersections of this data and theory with the larger discourses that may impact the learning of Arabic in this sociohistorical moment (Heath & Street, 2008; Purcell-Gates, 2006). Analysis began with a broad foundation of descriptive statistics provided by quantitative analysis of the initial survey data. Following that, I used a process of iterative analysis and constant comparison to closely map the content of the qualitative data; to identify major themes in the interviews, observations, documents, and researcher reflections; and to connect this data with the quantitative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each stage of the data collection and analysis, which will be described below, has informed the next and contributed to the identification of emergent themes.

This analysis was greatly facilitated by the use of Atlas.ti 6.2 (Muhr, 2011), a software program for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis.

The following section describes the school that provides the unifying context for this study. Then, I provide an overview of the school population and explain the sampling decisions that led to the selection of focal participants and their families. Next, I describe the data collection procedures and provide rationale for my approach in each area. Finally, I discuss the process of data analysis, which includes both quantitative and qualitative analysis but aims for a holistic picture of the language program and the learners who come together in it and delves most deeply into the experiences of the focal families.

### 3.3 Context and Population

Mawaarith Academy was in its fifth year of operation when this data was collected. Situated in a commercial shopping center in a fast-growing, relatively affluent, predominantly white suburb, Mawaarith Academy draws students from all over its county and has attracted some families to move from other counties in order to have access to it. Middle schools in this county and state frequently offer Spanish, French, and German programs (commonly taught languages), and high schools consistently offer these languages, Latin, and a number of LCTLs, of which the most prevalent are Chinese and Japanese. Only a handful of middle schools offer LCTLs, though two schools within a few miles of Mawaarith offer Japanese and Turkish respectively. However, only one other program in the state offers Arabic, and that program is offered at a high school that is only accessible to students in its local district ("World Language Data Summary," 2009).

At the time of this study, the school served about 500 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, of which about 100 were in middle school. As a public charter school, Mawaarith Academy receives government funding as other local schools do but operates under its own charter, which involves electing a board of directors and maintaining a specific mandate. In Mawaarith Academy's case, this mandate has two components: one is its educational model, an approach known as Expeditionary Learning (ELOB) developed by the organization Outward Bound that emphasizes a supportive learning

community, integrated approaches to subjects, character development as well as intellectual development, and involvement with the natural world ("Expeditionary Learning: Our Approach," n.d.). The other component of the school's charter is its Arabic foreign language program, modeled on the state's Elementary Foreign Language Standards ("Introduction to the Georgia Performance Standards for K-5 Modern Languages," 2010). Another noteworthy feature is the school's decision to separate students by gender in the middle school grades. In the years since it opened its doors, the school has consistently reported test scores in core content areas that are far above state and county averages, and it has received achievement awards for charter schools from the state governor.

The official policies and philosophy of Mawaarith Academy position Modern Standard Arabic as a subject like other subjects, to be taught in conjunction with content areas through the Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound (ELOB) curricular structure:

Language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, PE/health, and technology are integrated through the ELOB project-based framework as we focus on building communication, ethical character, Modern Standard Arabic, civic responsibility and environmental stewardship skills. Mawaarith Academy's curriculum can best be summarized by describing it as focused and connected. Students at all levels investigate the natural, social, political and economic history of our community. As they advance, they make increasingly complex global comparisons and connections. (Official School Website<sup>12</sup>)

At the time of this study, all students in the school were receiving Arabic instruction as a subject area on a daily basis; the only exceptions to this were students who received remediation in reading or math during that class period. In the elementary grades (K-5, approximate ages 5-11), an Arabic teacher would typically go to the classroom and teach all the students together, regardless of prior exposure or proficiency, for about 30 minutes per lesson. In the middle school grades, which are the focus of this

<sup>12</sup> The web address for the official school website has been omitted here in an effort to preserve anonymity.

study (6-8, approximate ages 11-14), the students from all three grades were placed in one of six separate classes based on proficiency level and gender. In the school context, these classes were generally referred to as Beginning Girls/Boys, Intermediate Girls/Boys, and Advanced Girls/Boys. These skill levels are relative rather than aligned with external standards such as those constructed by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2012).

Largely because of its unique language curriculum but also due to its other features and achievements, Mawaarith Academy attracts a highly diverse student body. About half of the students reported that they spoke a language other than English (LOTE) with their families, including Arabic, Urdu, Spanish, and others. Many parents were bilingual, and many of these bilinguals had immigrated to the U.S. as adults. The school's efforts to raise awareness of the variety of cultures represented by its students went hand in hand with its attractiveness to families of diverse backgrounds.

Many of these families had immigrated from the Middle East, while another large group came from Muslim communities in Pakistan and India. The school also served, and still serves, a number of families who are neither Arabic speakers nor Muslims but may use another language other than English at home. In fact, students who would be considered the majority in the U.S. at large are the minority at this school. Because Mawaarith administrators had not compiled demographic statistics on the school population, the initial surveys for this study were intended to gather data on the home countries, languages spoken, and religious affiliations of Mawaarith students and their families that would be useful for this investigation. The results of these surveys, including description of the school population, their values regarding Arabic and the school, and their self-reported proficiency in Arabic, are discussed in Chapter 4.

Although many families may come to Mawaarith because of the value they place on classical Arabic as the language of the Qur'an, school administrators, teachers, students, and parents have emphasized that the approach to teaching and learning Arabic at Mawaarith neither reflects the influence of Islam nor is intended to promote Islamic beliefs or practices. The teachers consider themselves bound by the same guidelines for separation of church and state that other public schools do in the U.S. This

effort to provide a fully secular curriculum is one reason why the Arabic teachers have chosen to create almost all their materials themselves. Although they were aware of existing materials for young learners, most of them were unusable because they were designed for religious schools.

While religion is not included in the Arabic curriculum, awareness of other religions is part of Mawaarith's humanities<sup>13</sup> curriculum. Seventh graders spend an entire unit learning about the major religions of the world, including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam. Also, acceptance of Muslim religious practices such as fasting during Ramadan and wearing headscarves (mothers, students, and teachers in *hijab* are a frequent sight) are a conspicuous element of the school culture. Muslim children are allowed to leave their classrooms at prayer times, and the early dismissal on Fridays makes it possible for Muslim families to attend religious services.

The curriculum for Arabic in this school, as mentioned above, is based on MSA and has been designed almost entirely by the school's team of Arabic teachers for their own student population. Teaching MSA, a frequent choice in U.S. Arabic programs (Ryding, 2006; Younes, 2006), is intended to balance the differences among varieties spoken by heritage learners' families and to provide the learners with a basis for literacy. According to the teachers, the emphasis on literacy is much greater in the middle school grades than in the elementary grades. When the children enter middle school, either by matriculating from Mawaarith's elementary program or by enrolling as a new student, they are placed in the three proficiency levels largely based on their ability to use the Arabic alphabet. These classes and their instructors are summarized in Table 3.1. As the results discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 below demonstrate, students vary widely in the balance of their oral and literate abilities in Arabic when they enter the school.

<sup>13</sup> The subject area that is referred to as "humanities" at this school covers the material that would be included in language arts and social studies curricula at other public schools.

**Table 3.1**  
**Middle school Arabic classes.**

Group		Teacher	Ability at 1 <sup>st</sup> Survey	Approx ACTFL Level
Beginner	<i>Girls</i> <i>Boys</i>	Nadira	None	Novice-Beginner
Intermediate	<i>Girls</i> <i>Boys</i>	Salima	Some reading/writing Limited vocabulary	Novice-Mid
Advanced	<i>Girls</i> <i>Boys</i>	Majida	Full use of alphabet Varying MSA vocabulary	Novice-High to Intermediate-Mid

This study focuses on the middle school Arabic program (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade) as opposed to the entire school population (kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade) for four major reasons. First, this choice limits the study population to a more manageable size for an investigation using ethnographic methods. Second, instruction at the middle school level differs from elementary school instruction in the ways that learners are grouped. As of sixth grade, students are separated by gender, and in Arabic they are divided by proficiency into three groups, as described above. Third, this study takes a particular interest in emerging biliteracy among these young learners of Arabic and the challenges associated with this language; thus the increased focus on literacy in middle school was expected to increase opportunities to observe literacy learning and practices. The fourth major reason rests on the assumption that learners at this age, in early adolescence, are old enough to reflect on and describe their language learning experience and are just beginning to establish independence and agency in their educational choices.

### 3.4 Data Collection

My entry into this school began in the fall of 2008, when I conducted a small qualitative study focusing on two students and their mothers. One was a HLL and the other a non-HLL, though both were girls in the seventh grade. This study involved interviews with each student and her mother together (Parent-Child), an interview with the two students together (Child-Child) and one classroom observation in each of their Arabic classes. The findings of this study offered insights into the motivations of these learners and their mothers, their perceptions of Arabic and the language program at Mawaarith, and the relationships between language learning, identity, and community for each of these families. Although

data from this preliminary investigation will not appear in the current study, these findings provided the basis for the development of the initial survey questionnaires and interview guides used in the current study.

As mentioned above, the current study draws on data from surveys, interviews, classroom observations, documents, and other sources including images, informal conversations, and researcher reflections. Table 3.2 summarizes the principal data collection methods in general chronological order. The sections below will describe and provide a brief rationale for my approach to each of the data collection methods.

**Table 3.2**  
**Overview of data collection procedure**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Surveys</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Classroom Observation</b>
<i>Preliminary study</i>			
Fall 2008	---	2 Parent-Child 1 Child-Child	1 observation in each of 2 proficiency levels
<i>Current study</i>			
Beginning of 2009- 2010 school year	First student survey Parent survey		
Fall 2009		Recruitment Initial Parent-Child interviews	Weekly observations, rotating visits to 6 classes
Spring 2010		Follow-up interviews with parents and children separately Interview with Arabic teachers and humanities teacher	Weekly observations, rotating visits to 6 classes
End of 2009-2010 school year	Second student survey		
Spring & Summer 2012		Follow-up interviews with some focal families	



**3.4.1 Surveys.** In this study, the surveys served two purposes. One was to provide a basis for selecting a purposeful sample of informants for the more intensive process of interviews (Morse, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The other, related purpose was to glean data on language backgrounds, language use, attitudes, and motivations from a larger number of participants than I could feasibly interview (Dörnyei, 2007; McKay, 2006). The results of the first student survey and the parent survey support a description of demographic characteristics of the population as a whole. The second student survey, conducted at the end of the year, was intended to reveal the dynamics of motivation (Gardner, 2006), showing change in the students' self-report of language ability over the year and responses to the instructional experience.

**3.4.1.1 Survey questionnaires.** The questionnaires for these surveys were designed specifically for this population and context. Surveys in applied linguistics ask three primary types of questions: factual questions, behavioral questions, and attitudinal questions (Dörnyei, 2007). These questionnaires included all three. Factual questions asked about languages spoken, language learning history, self-assessments of proficiency, and history with this school. Behavioral questions covered the ways in which Arabic or another home language is used. Attitudinal questions asked about motivations for learning Arabic, attitudes about learning, and intentions for Arabic and language learning in the future. The student and parent questionnaires included a variety of question types, including specific open questions, closed questions with a number of options, Likert scale items asking respondents to agree with various statements, questions regarding frequency of behaviors, and open clarification questions (Dörnyei, 2007). The complete questionnaires are included in Appendix C.

**3.4.1.2 Survey procedures.** The initial student questionnaire was administered during Crew meetings (the school's equivalent of homeroom classes). The questionnaires were distributed to teachers who led Crews, who gave them out to their students and made themselves available to answer questions. The completed surveys were returned to an administrator, who gave them to me. The parent questionnaire was sent home in folders with other school materials, and parents were asked to return the completed surveys to school in these folders. A statement on these questionnaires explained in non-

technical terms that the results of the surveys would be shared in aggregate and that their names would not be associated with their responses. These surveys were piloted with the Arabic teachers, which was not an ideal choice but provided opportunities for clarification.

The second student survey was conducted near the end of the school year during Arabic class time. I was present to distribute the questionnaires and answer questions. For the second survey, which asked students to express attitudes about the learning experience that they may not have wanted to reveal to teachers, I identified the questionnaires by number and maintained a list that associated these numbers with each student's name. Hereafter, I will refer to the first student survey as the "initial" survey and the second student survey as the "final" survey.

*3.4.1.3 Survey participants.* There were approximately 100 students enrolled in the middle school in the 2009-2010 school year, of whom 83 responded to the initial student survey. Ages ranged from 10 to 14. Numbers of male and female respondents were almost equal, with 40 girls and 43 boys. About a quarter ( $n = 19$ ) of these learners had been attending Mawaarith since the school opened in 2005, but 27 learners (32.5%) were new to the school in 2009.

These 83 learners were spread across the three proficiency levels, with 21 beginners, 25 in the intermediate class, and 25 in the advanced class. The remaining 12 survey respondents reported that they were not currently taking Arabic. The reasons for this were not requested on the survey, but in most cases these learners were receiving some kind of remedial support related to English reading or math skills. Very few, if any, middle school students were categorized as English language learners in that school year.<sup>14</sup>

The discussion of family backgrounds in Section 4.1 below includes all 83 learners who responded to the initial survey, including those who were not taking Arabic, because they are nevertheless part of the middle school population and their parents also made active decisions to send them to this school. In the remainder of Chapter 4, however, the sections that consider values regarding Arabic

<sup>14</sup> It was difficult to pinpoint an exact number of middle schoolers receiving ESL support because this number overlapped with those receiving other types of remediation, but based on discussion with the ESL teacher the number seemed to be two or less.

language learning, reported proficiency, and practices only include the 68 students who were taking Arabic and who completed the entire survey. The second survey was distributed in Arabic classes, so all the participants in the final survey were enrolled in Arabic at the time and no data were collected for learners who were not taking Arabic. A total of 60 students completed the final survey, and data from all of these learners are included in the discussion of items from the final survey in Ch 4.

Thus, the initial survey provides an overview of 68 Arabic language learners and the second survey yielded information on 60 learners. There was substantial turnover in the school population between the two surveys, with the greatest change taking place among students who were new to the school in 2009, most of whom were in the beginner level. No attempt was made in this analysis to compare responses from the same individual learner on the initial and final surveys, though future analyses may discuss these connections.

Participation among parents was lower than participation among the students, likely due to the extra effort involved in completing a survey at home and returning it to school. The 37 parents, including 22 mothers and 15 fathers, who responded to the survey represented 24 families and 26 children. This means that parent data was available to correspond with about one in four learners.

**3.4.2 Interviews.** As in most ethnographic research, interviews are used in this study as a means of learning about participants' experiences and accessing their emic perspectives on the context of the investigation and the concepts and categories within it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Lazaraton, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 2006). They are semi-structured or unstructured and allowed me, the interviewer, and the interviewees to collaborate in directing the flow of talk as we delved into the participant's life history, current practices, and perceptions (Spradley, 1979).

Although interviews may appear to be neutral encounters that occur for the purposes of gathering data about a natural context, it is important to keep in mind that the interview itself is a context in which reality is socially constructed (Baynham, 2006; Coffey & Street, 2008). This point is particularly relevant to situations like the interviews in this study, in which the researcher belongs to a different cultural group from most of the informants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). That said, the impact of this difference is an

empirical question. Due to the repeated interviews and frequent observations, the interviewees and I were able to build rapport over a period of months that likely contributed to the openness and breadth of these interviews.

*3.4.2.1 Selection of focal participants.* Early in the 2009-2010 school year, I sent a recruitment letter (see Appendix D) and the parent questionnaires home with students in a folder that they regularly used to transport important documents to their parents. Parents were asked to complete the contact information form at the bottom of the letter and return it to school in the folder if they were willing to participate in interviews and allow their child to participate. Initially, families were selected from this group of willing respondents, but it became clear that more focal participants would be needed in order to understand the context more fully. As a result, two students and their families were recruited later, as will be discussed below. Although I asked teachers and administrators for some guidance as to which parents would likely be willing to devote the necessary time to the study, I did not specifically tell them which participants I contacted and chose. My choice of informants also rested to some extent on my early interaction with the students and my sense that these learners would be able to describe the context and their experiences articulately.

Based on the literature, it seemed clear from the outset of this study that an appropriate sample would include heritage and non-heritage learners of Arabic, based on the definition of HLLs as learners who speak Arabic at home. Also, since boys and girls attend separate classes in the middle school, I wanted to include an informant of each gender. As a result, my initial goal was to recruit a purposeful sample consisting of one male and one female HLL and one male and one female non-HLL who would be willing to participate in interviews along with their mother or father. In an effort to locate informants who were well acculturated in the school environment, I also tried to choose participants who had been at Mawaarith for longer than one year. At this stage, I recruited the Yusuf family, the Zaki family, the Brooks family, and the Kimball family, all of whom I hoped would be good informants<sup>15</sup>: currently

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<sup>15</sup> All participant names in this study are pseudonyms, almost all of which were selected by the informants.

involved in and knowledgeable about the context, willing and able to participate in a series of interviews, and able to speak articulately about themselves and their experiences (Spradley, 1979).

Relying on *a priori* categories, however, may mean that we ignore categories that are meaningful to the context, that we fail to recognize variation within categories, or that we expect all members of a given category to be good informants (Morse, 2007). The frequency of bilingual families in the survey results suggested that my sample also needed to include a student who had a HL other than Arabic; to that end, I asked Martin Hamid and his mother, a native speaker of Polish, to participate, but I was only able to interview them once before they moved back to Egypt, where Martin's father was still living.

Survey results and early observations also suggested that I should include a student who was Muslim but whose family spoke a language other than Arabic, of which there were several in the intermediate and advanced classes. I recruited the Rowther family, who are Muslims from India, in order to include informants with this experience. Also, the Yusuf family declined to participate after the first interview<sup>16</sup>, which led me to recruit another female HLL. By then I had also realized that my HLL informants in the informal pilot study and the current study all had mothers who had not been educated in Arabic. I wanted to include a HLL family in which both parents were born in the Middle East. By this time, I had met Farah El-Gendy, a sixth-grade girl whose family had moved from Egypt to the U.S. when she was two, and she had begun to tell me stories about prior schools and her reasons for valuing Mawaarith. After I contacted Farah's mother by phone, her family agreed to participate in the study as well.

As a result, these informants represent a theoretical sample that began with assumptions about the relevant categories in the population based on the existing literature but came to include additional informants based on "the emerging categories, and the researcher's increasing understanding of the developing theory" (Morse, 2007, p. 240). Table 3.3 summarizes the seven families who served as

<sup>16</sup> The Yusufs did not actively withdraw from the study, but as Mrs. Yusuf ceased to return phone calls it seemed mutually beneficial to seek another family of informants.

informants for this study. This analysis focuses on the five families who completed a series of interviews: the Zaki, El-Gendy, Rowther, Brooks, and Kimball families.

**Table 3.3**  
**Overview of focal families**

Includes parents' countries of origins, languages parents speak or have studied, and countries in which children have lived as well as languages children speak or have studied.<sup>17</sup>

	Mother		Father		Child	Family	
	Native country	Languages Spoken	Native country	Languages Spoken	Countries lived in	Languages Spoken	Religion
Zaki	U.S.	English, Arabic	Syria	Arabic, English	U.S.	English, Arabic	Muslim
El-Gendy	Egypt	Arabic, English	Palestine, Egypt	Arabic, English	U.S.	Arabic, English	Muslim
Rowther	India	Tamil, English, Hindi, (Arabic)	India	Tamil, English, Hindi, (Arabic)	U.S., India	English, Tamil, Arabic	Muslim
Brooks	Malaysia	English, Malay, Mandarin	U.S.	English, (Mandarin)	U.S.	English, Arabic, Spanish, Japanese	Christian
Kimball	U.S.	English, Spanish	U.S.	English, Spanish, German	U.S.	English, Arabic	Christian

It should be stated here that this study deals with families who are invested in Arabic language learning and in the language program at Mawaarith. Unfortunately, this was not true for all families at the school, particularly among beginners. Also, this study does not include any families whose children could be considered HLLs but who have not chosen, or have not been able, to provide their children with formalized instruction outside the home in Arabic. While classroom observations did provide some insight into those learners who are sitting in Arabic classes but have not become invested in Arabic, I have only had informal conversations with HLL parents who are not investing in Arabic learning outside the home. Their stories are valuable, as well, but this study aims to illuminate the values, intentions, and

<sup>17</sup> In order to maintain focus on the five focal families who participated more fully in the interview process, data from the single interviews conducted with the Hamid and Yusuf families have been omitted from this analysis.

practices of parents and children who have actually invested in the language, while leaving these other experiences for future research.

*3.4.2.2 Interview procedure.* With each focal family, I aimed to conduct five interviews, moving from semi-structured to unstructured as the process went on. Each interview lasted about an hour and was recorded with a Sony digital audio recorder. The first interview included both the student and a parent. One reason for this choice was to facilitate the process of explaining the study and obtaining informed consent for the parent's and child's participation and to establish rapport with all the participants from the beginning. Furthermore, this interview allowed me to see how the parents interacted with the child, and in some cases to get a sense of the dialogue that might take place between them around family language policy, educational decisions, and desire to learn Arabic. The subsequent four interviews, two with the student and two with a parent, were conducted with parents and children separately, though usually on the same day. The same parent could participate in all three interviews, or the mother and father could alternate, but the total number of interviews remained the same. The Zaki, Brooks, and Rowther families participated in five interviews, the Kimballs in four, and the El-Gendys in three during the 2009-2010 school year. Two years later, I followed up with the El-Gendy and Brooks families, asking about changes in their learning and use of Arabic since the prior interviews.

The locations of the parent and student interviews varied depending on space and the informants' preferences. Most of the initial interviews and many of the later interviews were conducted at the school, in a small, bright, isolated room near the teachers' break area that is normally referred to as the conference room. This room had two low tables and a few plastic chairs at the beginning of the year, but later in the year a committee of parents added a conference table and paint to make it more appealing as a conference room or teachers' lounge. Although I often mentioned that I was willing to meet with participants at their homes, for their convenience and to allow me to observe the home environment, only two interviews were conducted in homes.

The majority of the data regarding the three Arabic teachers comes from field notes based on interviews and informal conversations, but all three teachers were interviewed as a group in May of 2010.

Through observations and these conversations, I was able to glean insight into their intentions for the Arabic program, their reflections on the students and their progress in general, and their perspectives on certain practices that I observed and their relationship to their beliefs about Arabic and language teaching. Further research should include a greater focus on teachers' beliefs and practices, though these beliefs and practices might also be informed by the results of this study.

*3.4.2.3 Interview questions.* In designing the interview questions, I tried to find a balance between defining the topics that I thought would be of interest and allowing the interviews to take shape based on the informants' preferences. The interview guides for parents, students, and teachers is included in Appendix A. The initial interviews with students and parents generally followed the structure of the language background questionnaires, asking about languages spoken, language learning experience, use of the language now, and reasons for coming to Mawaarith Academy. This process generated something of a life history, focusing on language. In preparation for subsequent interviews, I listened to the prior interview and reviewed my notes, and then made a list of topics that I wanted to cover.

The second interview involved a more specific discussion of the same topics. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) emphasize, the richness of interview data largely depends on the quality of follow-up questions, and the interviews after the first one were essentially constructed as follow-up to the first interview. With the parent, this involved a greater focus on her or his experience of language learning and use. With the child, the interview involved discussing their prior experience with Arabic and other languages as well as what they were experiencing in their language classes, including aspects of the language, activities, and relationships with peers. We also talked about their perceptions of the school program.

In the second and third interviews with the children, I introduced practices that were intended to elicit more information about the learners' knowledge and metacognitions about Arabic. In addition to bringing materials I had collected from their classes including vocabulary lists, reading passages, and quizzes, I brought alphabet charts, index cards with words from their lessons written in Arabic, and texts from unfamiliar Arabic language learning materials including the story of Sindbad the Sailor from *The*



*Arabian Nights*, which was excerpted from a book designed for Arabic self-study (Smart, 2003). These materials served as a basis for different conversations with different learners, as I encouraged them to explain to me what they knew about the language, how they had come to know it, how they used the language, and how they expected to use the language in the future.

**3.4.3 Classroom observations.** The primary focus of this study is the students' and parents' investment in language learning, and the classroom observations provided insight into the practices and interactions that reflected the students' desire to learn and that may have impacted their desire to learn over time. The focus of the observations shifted over the course of the year. Initially, the observations allowed me to see students interacting with teachers and to begin making decisions about student informants. As the interviews began and progressed, the observations provided context for discussions about classroom practices in the interviews. In addition, the observations offered an opportunity to see teachers' instructional practices and students' behavior, including participation in teacher-directed activities, unsanctioned behavior, and interactions with each other. Furthermore, these observations allowed me to document literacy practices in the classroom, to collect documents used and produced in class, and to observe how learners interacted with Arabic-language materials.

Over the course of the 2009-2010 school year, I observed 47 Arabic class sessions and 6 humanities class sessions. There were six groups of Arabic students (see Table 3.1 above), with girls' classes and boys' classes at each proficiency level. The three girls' classes met during the same class hour and the three boys' classes met immediately afterward, so I was able to attend two classes on each day that I visited the school. I rotated the classes, observing one teacher with both genders or two different teachers in a given day. The former choice allowed me to see differences with each group, while the latter choice allowed me to see each teacher and each group of students more frequently. In addition to observing each of the six Arabic classes several times during the year, as summarized in Table 3.4, I also observed boys' and girls' humanities classes at the sixth-grade, seventh-grade, and eighth-grade levels in order to compare student engagement and literacy practices in English-language classes with their Arabic classes.

**Table 3.4**  
**Classroom observations by type, level, and gender.**

Group	Teacher	Gender	Hours Observed
Arabic Beginner	Miss Nadira	Girls	7
		Boys	6
Arabic Intermediate	Miss Salima	Girls	7
		Boys	8
Arabic Advanced	Miss Majida	Girls	8
		Boys	7
Arabic - all students together	All	Girls	2
		Boys	2
Humanities	Various	Girls	3
		Boys	3
<b>Total</b>			<b>53</b>

Observations were recorded in the form of ethnographic field notes. Drawing on Richards (2003), McKay (2006) suggests four strategies for ethnographic observation in second language classrooms. The researcher can attempt to pay attention to everything in an effort to develop a broad overview of classroom processes and procedures; pay attention to “nothing in particular, which may lead the observer to notice unusual happenings” (p. 80); take note of paradoxes, which involves recognizing when events or actions defy expectations; or “identify the key problems facing a group” (p. 80), such as imbalances in student participation. Over time, I employed each of these strategies, but the first mode predominated.

In each class, I created a record of the classroom activities, noting the time when each began. Within this framework, I noted what was happening in the classroom during that activity, text that appeared on the board, any materials the students were using, and how they used them. Also, I copied the text that the students saw on the board into my notebook along with the teachers’ comments on this text. Although I could not write down all the words spoken in the classroom verbatim, I recorded interactions between students and teachers as well as student-student interactions that seemed significant, including negotiations regarding words or tasks, statements that suggested attitudes toward language and literacy, and examples of apparent miscommunication or resistance. I noted sanctioned behavior, as students

participated in teacher-directed activities, and unsanctioned behavior, as students engaged in other conversations and activities, and I also noted how students seemed to be grouped within the class as well as differences among groups. After class, I made further notes in my notebook about the observation or recorded my response to the classes on my digital audio recorder.

While I did pay attention to the students who were my primary informants, I also made an effort to observe students who seemed to have different approaches to the learning process than my informants. In particular, I observed the behavior of beginners, most of whom would be classified as non-HLLs and nearly all of whom were new to Mawaarith Academy as of the beginning of the year. Over time, there seemed to be a pattern of increasing resistance and amotivation. To illustrate, at one point Miss Nadira asked me to interact with a disruptive beginner boy who did not seem to be responding to her encouragement or discipline, asking him why he was not invested in learning Arabic and explaining some of the reasons for my own non-HLL interest in the language. He informed me that Arabic was not *his* family language and that his parents had discouraged him from putting time and energy into his Arabic studies because they believed the language would be useless to him.

Such amotivated learners certainly need to be understood just as do learners who are deeply invested in Arabic language learning, but it proved impossible to recruit learners and parents who were not invested in Arabic for multiple interviews. This study focuses on learners and parents who were invested in Arabic, but observing learners like this one nevertheless allowed greater saturation of the data in terms of students' responses to the language learning opportunity than would have been available through interviews alone (Morse, 2007).

**3.4.4 Documents.** In addition to the classroom observations, interviews, and surveys, this study includes data from documents related to the school, the language program, and learner literacy. Regarding the school, I collected brochures, information provided on the school's public website, and intake forms. Before, during, and after my observations, I collected materials that the Arabic teachers provided to the students and newsletters that they sent home to parents. I also took note of the published materials that were available to the teachers and learners and any use of them that I observed. I attempted

to collect student work, but more often I looked at work in progress and completed projects and took notes and photographs. Student work was frequently displayed in the hallways, including projects such as the family trees that the beginner groups produced in Arabic and illustrations of various theological concepts, including the Five Pillars of Islam, that were discussed in the seventh-grade world religions unit.

**3.4.5 Researcher reflexivity.** As a researcher, I am an outsider both to the research site and to the heritage language community that largely supported the founding of this school and continues to drive its operations and culture. I learned about this unique school and its Arabic language program in 2008, and I conducted a small pilot study that fall. A year later, in the fall of 2009, I was able to begin the research project in earnest and to begin studying Arabic.

In the course of this project, I have taken on a number of different roles, constructing identity as I participated in the community of Mawaarith, in my own academic community, and in multiple communities of Arabic learners. Through imagination in Wenger's (1998) sense, I was also constructing my identity in the communities of applied linguistics scholars and Arabic users. Like the participants in this study, I am a learner of Arabic. Unlike most of the participants, I do not have easy access to many native speakers or learners of Arabic in my day-to-day life. Also unlike most these learners and their parents and teachers, I did not have preconceived notions about Arabic and the teaching and learning of Arabic that would impact and perhaps constrain my understanding of these children's learning processes and their context. While my own learning curve in regard to Arabic and those who use it has been steep, and certainly steeper than that of an Arabic native speaker, teacher, or linguist would have been in conducting this study, I hope that my background and perspective as an applied linguist and a learner and teacher of other languages will allow me to make a needed contribution to the very limited literature on Arabic language learners in the U.S. as well as the more expansive literature on heritage learners and language learner identity and investment.

**3.4.5.1 Researcher as learner of Arabic.** Among the roles that I had to take on in order to complete this study, that of a learner of Arabic was intriguing but effortful. In addition to self-directed

study using a number of different resources, I met with a tutor weekly throughout the 2009-2010 school year. I have since taken three semesters of MSA at my university, including a summer intensive course and a semester of intermediate Arabic, both in 2010, and audited classes in Lebanese (Spoken) Arabic, Egyptian (Spoken) Arabic, and further MSA in 2012 and 2013.

While it would have been convenient to have greater proficiency in Arabic when my research in this environment began, there were, and have continued to be, benefits to being a learner alongside the learners at Mawaarith. As I sat observing Arabic classes at Mawaarith over the course of a year, I shared the identity of “learner” and the challenges that went with it. Because I brought very different experiences and resources to this learning experience than the children did, my learning process was more efficient and self-directed than theirs; I could move far faster and comprehend more aspects of the language than they could. Also, my experience learning other languages (French in high school and college, Czech and Serbian while living abroad, brief forays into Spanish and Russian) and my linguistics training facilitated my understanding and learning of the new alphabet, the phonological patterns, the distant lexicon, the unfamiliar syntax, the intricate conjugation and tense patterns, and the case marking (a feature of formal Arabic that seems to frustrate native speakers but is simpler than that of Slavic languages). Also, I had well-articulated intentions for my use of the language, and I knew from experience how to develop and benefit from a tutoring relationship.

All that said, the process of developing linguistic competence, and particularly communicative competence, in Arabic has been a long, slow journey with more frustrations than I anticipated. Returning to an instructed setting after having studied languages in the countries where they are spoken brought on a kind of culture shock. I speculated that this contrast might be similar to the adjustment that Mawaarith learners might have to make when they shifted from using a spoken variety for communication at home to learning MSA vocabulary and grammar in the classroom. Although I taught myself to recognize and produce Arabic letters within a week or two, while many Mawaarith beginners could not decode them in their second year, I still struggled to increase the very slow pace of my reading and to distinguish and use unfamiliar sounds, especially the emphatic consonants and the *ayn* (voiced uvular fricative). In contrast,

most Mawaarith learners from Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic-speaking Muslim backgrounds could decode fluently and were familiar with the phonemes of Arabic by middle school. The system of consonantal roots and their use to derive nouns, adjectives, and other verbs was intriguing to me and expanded my vocabulary, but the use of roots and particularly the many derived forms of verbs were beyond the scope of what Mawaarith learners encounter. I am still engaged in the first steps of the long journey to appreciating the complexity and elegance of Arabic in the way that my Arabic-speaking informants do, but the distance I have traveled so far has greatly influenced my understanding of the various trajectories of these young learners.

*3.4.5.2 Researcher as observer.* Honing my competence as an observer meant not only balancing or suppressing my responses as learner but also distinguishing observation from judgment. As a learner and an observer, I was frequently struck by the difference between the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach (Brown, 2001) that I had been trained to use when teaching English and the grammar-translation approach that prevailed in the Arabic classes in which I participated as observer or student. Despite my efforts to remain neutral in my observations of these teaching practices, the gap between the teaching practices that I wanted to see as a learner, a language teacher, and a researcher and those I saw was difficult to ignore, and impacted my decisions about the focus of this study. These observations led me away from a focus on language learning and use in the classroom to a focus on the sociocultural context of learning for the purposes of the current study. Recognizing this contrast nevertheless heightened my interest in studying teacher cognition among Arabic teachers and possibly other teachers of LCTLs at a later date.

*3.4.5.3 Researcher on the periphery or margin.* In conducting this research, I was peripheral or marginal in ways that are inherent in this kind of work but also somewhat unique to this study. The role of observer in a classroom is necessarily peripheral, if not marginal, though the process of doing this work is part of legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1998) in the community of researchers. In framing this research and analyzing my findings, it became increasingly important for me to understand some of the competencies, practices, and perspectives of Arabic teachers and scholars as well as those of Muslim

language learners and those who teach them, though I do not imagine membership in these communities for myself. Throughout this process, I have sought the input of native speakers, advanced learners, instructors, and researchers, and I continue to rely on their insights.

*3.4.5.4 Researcher as broker.* In conducting, writing, and sharing this research, I envision a role for myself as a broker between academia and the classroom, as many applied linguists strive to be. My hope is that my observations and analysis and the questions that they raise for me as an outsider will be able to inspire further inquiry and innovation in the community of Arabic language teachers. At the same time, I hope that my research on this little-studied population and less-commonly-taught (though rapidly-expanding) language will contribute to ongoing efforts in the scholarly community to develop theories of second language acquisition and particularly heritage language acquisition that incorporate “alternative” approaches to SLA and seek to encompass the sociocultural context of language use (Atkinson, 2011; Norton & McKinney, 2011).

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Analysis of ethnographic data begins before the data collection has ended, and it typically relies on the constant comparative method to establish categories that describe the range of observed phenomena and then to hone those categories. Various scholars place different levels of emphasis on the role of theory-building in ethnography, but ethnographers can (and arguably should) develop theories that can explain the observed interactions and their relationship to the context in ways that fit their own data well and that may be generalizable to similar situations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Heath & Street, 2008). This inductive process of developing theory from data differentiates ethnography from other approaches, which begin with an existing theory and then consider how well empirical findings align with it.

As discussed above, this study includes data from surveys, interviews, observations, documents, and other sources. As a result, it involves both qualitative and quantitative analysis, but it is not in essence a mixed methods study. Instead, the quantitative analysis of survey data addresses the lack of general

information about the school population and forms a backdrop for the qualitative analysis. Here quantitative analysis is discussed prior to qualitative data not to suggest primacy of one approach over the other but to align with the direction of the larger shift in studies of identity from the use of categories to the complex analysis of identity construction. Likewise, this sequence underscores the need for a similar shift in studies of heritage languages and learners. The results chapters also appear in this sequence.

**3.5.1 Quantitative data analysis.** In this study quantitative data analysis was used to summarize and analyze the results of the surveys. The primary focus of this analysis is descriptive statistics of frequency and central tendency. The results of the first and second student survey and parent survey were coded, entered into spreadsheets, and analyzed in terms of students' and parents' language use, history at Mawaarith Academy, motives for Arabic study, self-assessment of proficiency, and intentions for future study and use of Arabic.

As discussed above in Section 2.2.1, the existing literature on HLLs tends to rely on clear binary classifications that distinguish HLLs from non-HLLs on the basis of family affiliation with the language or on the basis of proficiency. Some researchers have considered all learners with self-professed or researcher-defined family affiliations with the target language to be heritage learners, even if those family members were a generation or more removed from the HLL in question. Others have included only those learners who come from families that speak the target language and have developed some proficiency in the language as HLLs. Based on these definitions, then, all non-HLLs and some HLLs would have only been exposed to the language in classroom settings, and non-HLLs should have no prior proficiency.

In the quantitative phase of this analysis, it was a relatively simple matter to identify and code Mawaarith learners who used Arabic for family communication. In the vast majority of cases, learners with any kind of family affiliation did in fact use the language at home and had some proficiency in Arabic. Descriptive statistics based on this distinction, however, suggested that there was considerable heterogeneity in the population of non-HLLs, many of whom claimed a level of proficiency in Arabic gained outside the public school setting. This heterogeneity among the non-HLLs led me to code the data further to distinguish Muslim learners who belonged to non-Arabic-speaking families from learners who



had neither family nor religious affiliations with the language. This coding process will be discussed further in Section 4.1.3, in conjunction with the relevant findings.

At this point, it seemed appealing to draw on inferential statistics to make the argument that the resulting three groups of learners were verifiably different, each characterized by a different set of language skills. However, the complexity, heterogeneity, and relatively small size of the school population suggested that it would be inappropriate to engage further in inferential statistics. Rather, quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data served primarily to illuminate the diversity of the school population, to offer guidance for theoretical sampling of learners and families to be interviewed, and to contextualize the experiences of these informant families at their school.

**3.5.2 Qualitative data analysis.** This study, like other ethnographic research, strives for description of a specific phenomenon, which in this case is investment in Arabic language and literacy among early adolescent U.S. schoolchildren and their families. Through the extended, iterative process of transcription and axial coding, it strives to develop grounded theory that offers insights into this phenomenon.

*3.5.2.1 Transcription.* Transcription of recorded data in qualitative research is not without its own theory, and can be viewed as an early phase of analysis (Duff, 2008). This theory determines the level of detail with which data should be captured in text for further analysis and how the text will reflect features of spoken data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). While Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) admit that it may sometimes be acceptable to transcribe selectively and summarize the remainder of the recorded data, the researcher's perception of which data are essential may change as the analysis goes on, and then important instances may be missed. The data from this study have been transcribed using SoundScriber software ("SoundScriber," 1998). These transcripts, which generally follow the conventions recommended by Duff (2008, p. 157), include enough detail to record the explicit content of the speech, general intonation patterns, pauses, rephrasing, actions such as laughter, and overlapping speech as well as interruptions. However, these transcripts do not contain details such as the exact length of pauses, and they use standard written punctuation to convey intonation contours (for example, question marks suggest

rising tone, whether or not the preceding syntax suggests a question). A complete list of orthographic conventions used in the transcription process appears in Appendix B. However, the quotes that appear in this text have been modified to resemble standard text more closely and thus to maintain focus on the content of the utterances.

**3.5.2.2 Grounded theory.** Grounded theory can be described as both a theory and a method, and some scholars consider it to be a defining characteristic of ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Lazaraton, 2003). As Hood (2007) demonstrates, however, many more studies claim to use grounded theory than actually incorporate all of its core components. Among these core components are theoretical sampling and saturation, coding based on emergent themes, the constant comparative method, analytical memos, and theory building (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Hood, 2007; Stern, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

*Theoretical sampling and saturation.* The researcher selects informants based not on demographic characteristics but based on emerging themes in the data; this process continues until new instances are no longer contributing to the development of new categories and understandings. The same is true of sampling from the data. Purposeful and theoretical sampling in regard to informants in this study have been described above.

*Coding based on emergent themes.* The process of analysis begins with open coding, creating codes that identify segments of the data based on their properties rather than assigning codes based on pre-existing theory. The following step, axial coding, involves grouping these codes into categories so that they reflect different possible actions or meanings within the category like spokes around each axis in a set of wheels. Prior knowledge from the literature on heritage learners, Arabic linguistics and sociolinguistics, family language policy, and motivation affected my selection of key data, but the themes that were actually present in the interview transcripts, field notes, and other data guided coding as I sought emic perspectives on the relevant aspects of Arabic language learning.

*Constant comparative method.* Analysis begins shortly after the beginning of data collection, and “the analyst examines each item of data coded in terms of a particular category, and notes its similarities

with and differences from other data that have been categorized in the same way,” renaming, combining, or subdividing categories to fit the new data and reflect additional aspects of the phenomenon (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 165). In this case the analysis began with compiling and analyzing the survey data to guide the interview process, transcribing the first round of interviews, submitting them to early analysis by hand to look for early emergent themes, and considering the findings of the interviews to develop the second survey.

*Analytical memos.* In the process of data collection and analysis, the researcher writes memos that serve as a record of emerging insights into the data and the phenomena. These are not limited to description and can be used to guide ongoing data collection and to build theory from the data. In this case, memos were recorded in my notes and on my digital recorder during the data collection process and during the process of transcribing and coding the data. In order to compile and further facilitate the creation and use of these memos, I began to use the program Microsoft OneNote, which allowed me to create a single file with tabbed pages assigned to elements of the guiding theory, to each family, and to various aspects of the analysis.

*Theory building.* The data are actually used to build theory. Grounded theory, particularly in ethnography, involves detailed description, but “it implies moving up from the detailed descriptive to the more abstract, conceptual level” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a, p. 15). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) emphasize that we need to not only describe the content of the data but also “use the data to think with” (p. 163).

A number of risks are involved in the effort to produce grounded theory: the researcher may sample based on demographic characteristics or *a priori* theory, not on emergent theory, and stop before reaching saturation (Hood, 2007; Morse, 2007); the researcher may code minutely but detach data from context or not bring codes together into meaningful categories (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007); the researcher may describe extensively but not move toward the development of theory (Hood, 2007); or the researcher may fail to convey the story of the data in a way that reveals its “sense” and allows readers to recognize its applications beyond the immediate context (Stern, 2007). If

carried out in a rigorous and yet creative way, however, grounded theory can produce insights into the nature of a phenomenon that are deeper, that fit the data more closely, and that are more “solid” than studies that follow other approaches (Stern, 2007).

In the process of analyzing the data, it is entirely appropriate to be aware of theories that may be applicable to the data and to try them out on the data to see how they fit and what they reveal (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Heath & Street, 2008). As Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) assert, “the mind works in terms of analogies and metaphors” (p. 162), and pre-existing theory or knowledge about the context can provide these analogies and metaphors. In this study, the concepts of *investment* and *cultural capital* guide the analysis, but the analysis also complicates concepts that have not been widely contested in the literature, particularly *heritage* itself, *diglossia*, and *biliteracy*.

Developing grounded theory relies on the categorization of similar events or statements using an iterative process of open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and this coding can be conducted by hand or by means computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). In fact, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest that CAQDAS has been developed specifically in order to facilitate grounded theory, though it may also generate problems if the data become divorced from their contexts. With the help of this software, all instances of a given code can be pulled from their original contexts and presented in another document as a list of disconnected excerpts. As a result, an instance of a behavior or mention of a topic may be coded and pulled out of the narrative that gives it meaning (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). With that caveat in mind, data from this study were coded using the program Atlas.ti 6.2 (Muhr, 2011). In analyzing the coded texts, I took care to code chunks of data large enough to maintain some context and to read the coded quotes both by reading output documents and by scrolling from quote to quote in each primary document within the Atlas.ti program itself.

This analytical process led to 140 thematic codes. These were eventually grouped into eleven code families: *Family Background*, *Family Practices*, *Social Network*, *Value Mawaarith*, *Motivators*, *Arabic at School*, *Beliefs and Attitudes*, *Role of Religion*, *Investment (General)*, *Language Awareness*, and *Language Development*. A complete list of codes and code families appears in Appendix F.

These thematic codes and code families essentially provided a map to the experiences and preoccupations of these learners and their families, particularly in terms of their beliefs about Arabic language and literacy development and the practices that emerged from and perhaps affected those beliefs. The profiles of the general school population and the focal families that appear in Chapters 4 and 5 draw from these code families in that they are organized according to family background, beliefs and values regarding Arabic and Mawaarith, and current practices related to Arabic in and out of school. These categories were sufficient to support “the detailed descriptive” level of analysis; however, it became apparent that another round of analysis would be necessary in order to reach “the more abstract, conceptual level” that Bryant and Charmaz (2007a, p. 15) deem necessary for theory-building.

In the process of compiling data to create detailed descriptions of the focal families and the larger Mawaarith population, I began to identify a few key issues that were arising in each of the families in ways that departed both from other families and from the literature. In order to sort out the complexities of these issues, I created pages in OneNote dealing with heritage and identity, language varieties and literacy, the role of religion, and the larger political context. At first, as I compiled data from each of the families into tables on these pages, I felt that I was solving problems in the analysis. As these pages grew, however, I realized that they constituted an additional level of analysis. Rather than solving problems in the analysis itself, these pages and the data they contained appeared to index key concerns that these families have had to address, consciously or unconsciously, in their processes of constructing Arabic language and literacy as heritage. These concerns that cut across families and backgrounds form the basis for the cross-case analysis in Chapter 6.

### **3.6 Organization of the Results Section**

As scholars have sought to identify the particular features and needs of heritage language learners and to formulate theories of heritage language acquisition, they have generally used the designation heritage to distinguish a particular group of learners from first language learners and from second language learners of the target language. At its inception, the study presented here also sought to

distinguish heritage from non-heritage learners. However, the data gathered through the methods described in this chapter continually suggested that identifying heritage learners of Arabic, and the meaning of Arabic as heritage, belied the prior categorizations of HLLs and non-HLLs.

The three chapters that follow discuss the findings of this study in a sequence from quantitative to qualitative findings and also from general patterns to specific experiences and then focus on issues that cut across families and backgrounds. First, Chapter 4 draws primarily on survey data to discuss the backgrounds of the learners and families at Mawaarith, to give an overview of the factors that have motivated them to study Arabic at Mawaarith, to propose groups of learners in this population, and to compare patterns of proficiency and practices in these groups.

Chapter 5 then draws primarily from interview and observation data to provide detailed descriptions of the five focal families as case studies. These profiles include a more nuanced discussion of each family's language background and use; the decisions that brought them to Mawaarith; their perceptions of Arabic language and literacy; the current practices, both observed at school and reported from religious contexts, that characterize their investment in Arabic; and their intentions for the children's use of Arabic.

Following these two chapters, Chapter 6 provides a cross-case analysis based on key issues discussed in the previous chapters, highlighting major factors that contribute to the complexity of investing in Arabic language and literacy for these learners and their families and explaining how these families orient to those factors. Finally, in Chapter 7 I will discuss implications and limitations of this study. Further, I will suggest ways that these findings may serve to inform theory and research regarding identity construction in heritage learners and their families as well as guiding the design, development, and promotion of other programs for young learners of Arabic from a variety of language backgrounds.

## 4 THE LEARNING CONTEXT AND THE LARGER COMMUNITY

The chapter that follows provides a broad overview of the student population at Mawaarith Academy, drawing primarily on survey data and field notes. Like the profiles of the five focal families that follow in Chapter 5, the structure of this chapter aligns with the research questions. It begins in Section 4.1 with an overview of the learners and their families in terms of their language backgrounds and other demographic features. Section 4.2 then responds to the first research question, focusing on the parents' and the learners' values in regard to Mawaarith, Arabic, and language learning. Then, Section 4.3 examines the learners' reports of their language abilities, including their proficiency in Arabic prior to entering Mawaarith, contexts in which they have developed these proficiencies, and the abilities they reported at the end of the year, offering some insight into the second research question. Finally, Section 4.4 discusses a re-examination of this data in light of and in response to the existing literature on heritage learners and considers their efficacy in this community. This section begins to answer the third research question, though Chapters 5 and 6 take this answer much further.

This description of the school context and population is intended to locate the characteristics and stories of the focal families within the larger community of learners and families. Furthermore, it provides groundwork for the larger argument in this study that learners of Arabic are difficult to categorize based on prevalent definitions of heritage and non-heritage learners and that any such categorization belies the heterogeneity inherent in these groups as learners and their families negotiate investment in Arabic in their own complex ways.

### 4.1 Family Backgrounds

As stated earlier in the discussion of context and population, the students at Mawaarith Academy come from many different backgrounds in terms of their parents' countries of origin, the languages they have been exposed to, and their religious affiliations. This section summarizes these features among the

parents and the students and provides a foundation for the discussion of their values and intentions regarding Arabic.

**4.1.1 National backgrounds.** The vast majority of Mawaarith students were born in the U.S., though many of their parents were not. Only three students stated that they had begun their lives outside the U.S., though 23 (27.7%) said that they had lived outside the U.S. at some point, including 9 in Arabic-speaking countries. For greater clarity, the second survey asked separately about experience living in other countries and visiting other countries. At that point 15 learners (24.6%) said that they had lived outside the U.S., including 4 in Arabic-speaking countries, and 37 learners (60.6%) said that they had visited other countries, including 16 who had traveled to Arabic-speaking countries. Most of these visits were fairly lengthy, lasting as long as four months. Of the parents who responded, 59.5% were born outside the U.S. Most had been in the country for more than ten years, with the most recent arrival in 2000. The average length of time that immigrant parents had lived in the U.S. was 25 years.

**4.1.2 Language backgrounds.** This school is dominated by children who come from families that use a language other than English (LOTE). Including learners who stated that they had learned a language other than English at home or that they used another language with family members, 47 (56.6%) children had been exposed to a LOTE at home. Of the remaining 36 children who apparently came from monolingual English-speaking families, another 23 learners (27.7%) had encountered a language other than English or Arabic at some point in their education, usually in a prior school language program. As for Arabic specifically, children who come from families that speak Arabic made up a large proportion of the student body relative to the population of the surrounding county, but they were still a minority in the school. These children constituted 24.1% (n=20) of the middle school students. Another 22.9% (n=19) of these students could be considered heritage learners of a language other than English or Arabic, most of whom used Urdu or Spanish with their families.

The parents who responded to the survey were almost all multilingual, though the majority indicated that they were more fluent in English than other languages. Of the 37 parent respondents, just under two-thirds (64.9 %) said English was their “strongest” language, or one of two strongest languages.



The parents who said that English was their first language were in the minority, however, at 14 (37.8 %). Parents who spoke a LOTE made up 83.7% of the respondents; 35% reported that they speak three or more languages. The proportion of parents who spoke a language other than English was therefore much larger than that of students who claimed that they used a LOTE with their family, which suggests that multilingual parents were more likely to respond to the survey than monolingual parents. Thirteen parents (35.1%) spoke Arabic, with 9 (24.3%) claiming it as their first language and 7 (18.9%) indicating that it was still their “strongest” language.

**4.1.3 Religious backgrounds.** These surveys did not ask children or parents directly about their religious tradition. Later, it became apparent that religion played an important role in parents’ and children’s investment in Arabic, and it therefore became necessary to return to the survey data and attempt to determine which learners considered Arabic to be important for religious purposes. On the initial survey, three items could reveal a connection between Arabic and religion. These were items that asked whether the respondents had learned Arabic in a religious school, if they used their home language for religious purposes (and that home language was Arabic), and if religion was an important motivator for learning Arabic. On the parent surveys, the items asking parents where they had learned Arabic and the item asking them to rate the importance of Arabic for religious purposes could be used in the same way.

Learners tended to respond positively to one or another of these questions while rarely responding positively to all of them. Seventeen learners (20.5%) said that they had studied Arabic in a religious school, 16 (19.3% of the respondents, and 34% of those who had a home LOTE) said that they used Arabic at home and for religious purposes, and 22 (32.4% of those studying Arabic) responded positively to the item *My religion tells me that I should know it*. While this phrase may not have offered an ideal reflection of the relationship the children perceive between the language and their religious practices, it was accessible to them, and most Muslim children selected it. Additionally, 21 (56.8%) of the parents stated that learning Arabic was important for religious reasons.

Students who responded to one of these items in a way that indicated they associated Arabic with their religion were coded as Muslim. In this population, all of the learners and parents who spoke Arabic with their families also indicated that it was important for religion. While it is certainly true that many families that speak Arabic in the U.S. are not Muslim, the results of these surveys do not suggest that any such learners were studying Arabic at Mawaarith. Furthermore, many families that did not use Arabic at home stated that Arabic was important for their religion. These non-Arab Muslim learners and their families raise a number of questions regarding prevalent categories of heritage learners, as will be discussed further below.

In a few additional cases, I considered other data sources to determine whether other learners should be added to the group of learners with Muslim heritage. In some cases parents stated that they valued Arabic for religion, though the child only responded positively to the item *My parents want me to learn it*. In the cases of three girls and three boys, the learner did not respond positively to any of the religion-oriented items, but I observed that the girls wore *hijab*, or I learned through interviews or other conversations that the families were Muslim. Comparing these data sources led to the conclusion that 36, or 52.9%, of the learners studying Arabic at Mawaarith were Muslim children who associated Arabic with their religion. Of these, 19, or just over half, spoke Arabic at home. Of the remaining 17 Muslim students, 16 spoke at least one language other than English at home, most frequently Urdu.

As for the remaining student, she reported that she only uses English in all contexts, but her younger sister reported that she speaks Urdu with her family. The discord between these two reports from one family offers a reminder of the limits of survey data: if this girl does not use Urdu with her family, as her younger sister says that she does, then she offers evidence that different children in the same family may employ the family language in different ways; if she does use Urdu with her family and has not reported it, then there is a possibility that she has complex personal reasons for choosing not to identify herself as a user of Urdu. Either interpretation underscores the complexity of the interaction between heritage language maintenance and identity construction, as the qualitative data in Chapter 5 should further demonstrate with its more detailed profiles of the focal families.

The features of learners' language backgrounds that will be most relevant for further discussions are summarized in Table 4.1. The proportions in the group of learners who were actually enrolled in Arabic were slightly different from that of the overall population. There was a slightly higher proportion of traditional HLLs (children who spoke Arabic at home with their families) and Muslim learners (those who stated that they associated Arabic with their religion) in this group.

**Table 4.1.**  
**National, language, and religious backgrounds of Mawaarith students.**

Family Background Traits	Total Population (n = 83)		Enrolled in Arabic (n = 68)	
	N	%	N	%
Born in the U.S.	80	96.4	-	-
Lived outside the U.S.	23	27.7	-	-
Speak LOTE at home	47	56.5	-	-
Speak Arabic at home	20	24.0	19	27.9
Associate Arabic with religion (Muslim)	41	49.4	36	52.9

#### 4.2 Value of Arabic language, language learning, and Mawaarith Academy

In order to understand the nature of the Arabic language learning opportunity at Mawaarith and the decisions that bring learners to it, we need to ask not only why these learners are studying Arabic but also why they are studying a foreign language in middle school and why they are studying at this particular school. For different parents, these choices are interconnected in different ways: some chose the school based on its philosophy of education, its small size, and other factors, while Arabic was an afterthought or an added bonus; other families were looking for a school that provided Arabic instruction, and this school met their needs better than other available options, including homeschooling and private Islamic schools. In the results of the parent survey, these two approaches to choosing Mawaarith align with parents' language backgrounds, as will be summarized in the next section. When I began to discuss the decision to invest in Arabic language learning at Mawaarith with my focal families, however, it became clear that each family had carefully weighed the costs and benefits of choosing this learning environment, and that their decisions did not fall neatly into categories based on heritage learner status.

**4.2.1 The value of Mawaarith Academy as a context for learning.** One of the characteristics that distinguish this school from other schools is that, as I have mentioned, every child who goes to this school is there because of an explicit, active decision on the part of the adults who are responsible for his or her education. Why, then, do the parents make that choice? Why not send the child to the public school in whose district the family lives? Why not send the child to another public charter or private school where another language, or other unique educational opportunities, might be available? If the family is Muslim, why not send the child to a private school affiliated with a mosque, of which there are a few in this metropolitan area?

On the survey, parents were offered three options as to the reasons why they had decided to send their child to Mawaarith. They were not asked to rank these choices or to estimate the importance of each but were simply instructed to mark any of the three statements that applied to their family:

- *I thought my child would benefit from Mawaarith's teachers, philosophy, and methods.*
- *I wanted my child to study a language other than English (any language).*
- *I wanted my child to study Modern Standard Arabic.*

In general, the parent respondents agreed on the importance of Mawaarith's educational approach in their decision, while answers related to language learning and particularly Arabic varied more widely. Table 4.2 summarizes these results. A large majority of the 33 parents who answered this question<sup>18</sup>, 90.9% (n = 30), said that they valued the school's "teachers, philosophy, and methods"; 42.4% (n = 14) said that they valued the opportunity to learn any foreign language; and just over half, 51.5% (n = 17) said that they valued MSA specifically. Of those who selected the school's philosophy as a reason, 10 parents, (30.3% of all parents who responded) gave this as their only reason.

<sup>18</sup> Only 33 of the 37 parents answered this question; three of these parents also did not answer the questions that followed it, but one father, left this question blank while answering the following questions and later, in response to an open question, expressed displeasure with his child learning Arabic.

**Table 4.2.**  
**Parent backgrounds and reasons for school enrollment**

	Philosophy of School		Foreign Language		Arabic Language		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Speakers of Arabic	11	84.6	8	61.5	11	84.6	13
Non-speakers of Arabic	19	79.2	6	25.0	6	25.0	24
Arabic is important for religion	19	86.4	9	40.9	16	72.7	22
Arabic is not important for religion	11	100.0	5	45.5	1	9.1	11
All parent respondents	30	90.9	14	42.4	17	51.5	33

Parents were asked to choose any and all reasons that were relevant for their family. N reflects the number who chose that reason in each group, and percentages reflect the proportion of that group (i.e., 16, or 72.7%, of the parents who said Arabic was important for religion selected the Arabic program as an important reason for enrolling in Mawaarith.

What do these comparisons really say, then, about the reasons parents have chosen Mawaarith? The options given on the survey were based on parents' answers during the preliminary study, but did they in fact encompass the values that parents associate with Arabic? How did parents think about these reasons in relation to each other, and what other factors did they consider? The interview data shed considerable light on these decision processes.

**4.2.2 The value of language learning in general and Arabic in particular.** The students and parents were asked in different ways about the reasons why they were studying Arabic at Mawaarith. While only half the parents stated that they had decided to send their children to Mawaarith for the sake of the Arabic program, many of the parent respondents did see the benefits of language learning for their children. However, parents who spoke Arabic, or whose children would be considered heritage learners according to traditional definitions, and those who did not speak Arabic responded very differently to the questions that asked about language learning in general and those that asked specifically about Arabic. Meanwhile, the vast majority of the students responded that they were studying Arabic because it was a school requirement and a large proportion also said that they were studying it because their parents wanted them to, but only a minority stated that they were learning the language because they wanted to communicate with native speakers of Arabic. These findings, among others, suggest that there was a lack

of alignment between the students' perceptions of the reasons they were studying Arabic and the reasons that other stakeholders, including educators and parents, might value.

*4.2.3.1 Parent responses.* After the item that asked why they had enrolled their children in Mawaarith, parents were asked to rate nine statements based on the importance that they attributed to them. The first five statements were intended to refer to language learning in general:

- *Learning another language is good for the development of my child's mind (LLMind)*
- *Learning another language will help my child communicate with more people (LLComm)*
- *Learning another language will help my child understand other cultures (LLCultrs)*
- *Knowing another language will help my child get into a good college (LLCollege)*
- *Knowing another language will help my child get a good job (LLJob)*

Though the parents may have interpreted the first five statements in light of their intentions for Arabic, the latter four items referred to Arabic explicitly:

- *Knowing Arabic will allow my child to communicate with our relatives and friends (ArbComm)*
- *Knowing Arabic will allow my child to travel in the Middle East (ArbTravel)*
- *Knowing Arabic will allow my child to participate in our religious activities (ArbRel)*
- *Knowing Arabic will allow my child to access Arabic-language media including books, television, and Internet. (ArbMedia)*

This questionnaire item asked respondents to use Likert scales to convey their estimation of the value of each of these nine statements, with 1 being "Not important" and 5 being "Extremely important". Table 4.3 presents the mean responses across all parents and compares parents whose children would or would not typically be considered heritage learners.

**Table 4.3.****Parent ratings of Arabic and language learning motivators.**

Mean rating of the importance of each statement, where 1 = “Not important” and 5 = “Extremely important”. Listed in order of average rating, from highest to lowest.

	All	HLL	Non-HLL
LLComm	4.76	5.00	4.60
LLMind	4.73	4.92	4.60
LLCultrs	4.61	4.85	4.45
LLJob	4.27	4.92	3.85
LLCollege	4.03	4.46	3.75
ArbMedia	3.78	4.85	3.05
ArbRelig	3.56	4.85	2.68
ArbTravel	3.44	4.38	2.79
ArbComm	3.09	4.62	2.05

As this table shows, most parents believed that language learning would benefit their children in that they would be able to communicate with more people, their minds would be challenged, and they would understand other cultures more. However, there was less agreement about the remaining benefits. HLL parents were likely to report that they found all nine of these reasons to be valuable for their children. Meanwhile, non-HLL parents valued language learning for the purpose of improving college admission and employment prospects less than did HLL parents, and they placed much less value on the potential benefits of learning Arabic specifically.

As a further means of determining how these reasons for learning Arabic may have been related in parents' minds, I conducted a correlation analysis among the nine statements. Because these data are non-parametric, I utilized a Spearman's rho intercorrelation analysis of the parents' responses. Table 4.4 summarizes the results. Only significant correlations are given.

**Table 4.4.**  
**Correlations among parent ratings of motivations for children to learn Arabic.**

	Reasons for Child to Study Arabic								
	LLMind	LLComm	LLCult	LLColl	LLJob	ArbExtF	ArbTrav	ArbRelig	ArbMed
LLMind		.892**	.517**	.498**	.578**				
LLComm			.597**	.501**	.551*				
LLCultures				.458**	.521**	.481**	.477*	.433*	.605*
LLCollege					.782**				
LLJob						.517**			.553**
ArabExtFam							.593**	.519**	.725**
ArabTravel								.699**	.649**
ArabRelig									.636**
ArabMedia									

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Two primary patterns emerged in this correlation analysis: the statements about language learning in general correlated strongly with each other and the specific statements about Arabic correlated with each other. The item regarding future jobs is correlated with the other language learning items, but it is also related to Arabic use with extended family and access to Arabic media. However, it is not significantly correlated with travel to Arabic-speaking countries or the importance of Arabic for religion. Extended family communication and travel to the Middle East correlate with religion, possibly because all the parents in this study who have Arabic speakers in their extended families are also Muslim. It is possible that travel to the Middle East correlated with religion more strongly than extended family communication because RHL parents as well as AHL parents might anticipate their children going on *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca that is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and that Muslims are expected to make at least once in their lifetime if they have the means to do so (Esposito, 2005), but this consideration never came up in the interviews.

The importance of a language as a way to understand other cultures was correlated with all eight of the other statements. Although different parents may have interpreted this statement differently, this feature seems to have a universal appeal within this population. The importance of mutual understanding and developing intercultural awareness as outcomes for language learning was also an unexpected theme in the interview data.



4.2.3.2 *Student responses.* The item on the student questionnaire allowed them to select any statement that seemed appropriate from a list of ten statements, listed in Table 4.5 in order from most frequently to least frequently selected. Again, these numbers are based on the 68 students who completed the entire survey and who were taking Arabic at the time of the survey. Table 4.5 shows the number and percentage of students who selected each of these reasons for studying Arabic, among all respondents and among HLLs and non-HLLs. The most frequent response was that the child was taking Arabic because the school required it. This statement could apply to all of the students, but in fact over a quarter of the students did not choose it, perhaps because it is true but not a motivating factor. Parents' desires were cited as a motivating factor by half the learners.

The remaining motivators were all selected by a minority of the learners. Perhaps one of the most striking findings here is that *I want to speak to native speakers of Arabic* is among the least-frequently selected motivators, even below *travel* and *extended family*. In fact, the bottom two factors could be associated with Gardner's concept of integrative motivation, which suggests that increasing access to the community of Arabic speakers in general does not seem to be a driving force among these young learners. The instrumental motivators of improving college and job prospects were only selected by about a quarter of the learners in either group. Meanwhile, less than half the learners chose *I enjoy learning languages*, the item that reflects Ryan & Deci's concept of intrinsic motivation, and non-HLLs were more likely to choose this motivator than HLLs. The HLLs may have actually enjoyed their classes less, but they may also have considered this factor less important in relation to other reasons for learning.

The most meaningful differences between the two groups, HLLs and non-HLLs, probably lie in the areas of extended family, travel to the Middle East, parent support, and religion. The first two of these, extended family and travel, could be predicted based on the definition of HLL that is being used here; these learners have family members who use Arabic and very likely still have family in the Middle East whom they might visit. The other two reasons are interesting in that the HLLs did select them at a higher rate, but they were frequently selected by non-HLLs as well. Many of the learners categorized below as non-HLLs stated that religion was a motivator, and, although it may be surprising that only a

minority of non-HLLs said that their parents wanted them to learn the language, many of the non-HLLs did seem to have parent support. Table 4.5 presents the percentages of learners selecting each motivator, in order according to the frequency with which they were selected by all the respondents.

**Table 4.5.**  
**Student selection of language learning motivators.**

<i>What are the reasons you are studying Arabic in school?</i>	HLLs		Non-HLLs		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
It's required by my school (SchReq)	15	79.0	34	69.4	49	72.1
My parents want me to learn it (Parents)	13	68.4	21	42.9	34	50.0
I enjoy learning languages (Enjoy)	7	36.8	23	46.9	30	44.1
My religion tells me that I should know it (Relig)	8	42.1	12	24.5	20	29.4
It will help me get into a good college (College)	5	25.3	14	28.6	19	27.9
I want to travel to an Arabic-speaking country (Travel)	9	47.4	7	14.3	16	23.5
It will help me get a good job (Job)	4	21.1	11	22.5	15	22.1
It will help me communicate with my relatives (ExtFam)	13	68.4	1	2.0	14	20.6
I want to speak to native speakers of Arabic (SpeakNS)	6	31.6	3	6.1	9	13.2
I want to understand Arabic on TV or Internet (Media)	5	26.3	4	8.2	9	13.2

In general, these findings suggest that the values that lead parents and children to invest in Arabic language learning are different from each other, vary depending on the family's orientation to the language as heritage, and tend to differ from the priorities that would be associated with the larger role of Arabic as a foreign language and a critical language. Students tended to choose reasons for learning the language that were imposed from above: their school required it and their parents wanted them to learn it. While parents may have believed that learning Arabic would improve their children's prospects in the areas of communication, travel, college admissions, and jobs, most of the children do not seem to have taken on these values as motivators for their own investment in Arabic.

Comparing the parents and students based on the family's relationship to Arabic, differences are apparent in their preference for motivators that are directly related to Arabic, as opposed to those that relate to language learning in general. HLL parents and children were much more likely than non-HLL parents and children to value reasons related to their relatives and to religion, and HLL students were more likely to say that their parents' desires motivated them than non-HLLs, but less likely to say that they were learning Arabic because they enjoyed learning languages.

If we look at the reasons that these students' emergent proficiency in Arabic might be valued at in the U.S. educational system, society, and labor market, however, these parents' and students' values in relation to Mawaarith, language learning, and Arabic do not necessarily align with other stakeholders' priorities. The state standards that this school's curriculum is designed to meet value learning about culture and broadening communicative abilities, but many of the students do not seem to associate what they are doing in school with greater abilities to communicate with users of Arabic. Also, in designating Arabic as a critical language, the U.S. Departments of State and Education have established that there is a need for more proficient users of Arabic to work in the U.S. and abroad; colleges and universities would value Arabic abilities in their admissions decisions for the same reasons. However, non-HLL parents and both HLL and non-HLL children placed little value on higher education and jobs, not to mention communication with native speakers, as motivators for the students' current participation in Arabic language learning. This discord may suggest that parents and students have other priorities that are more valuable to them, that the students and non-HLL parents are not as aware of the potential benefits of Arabic language skills outside the context of Mawaarith, or that these parents and students do not have a long-term vision for the further development and use of the students' Arabic skills.

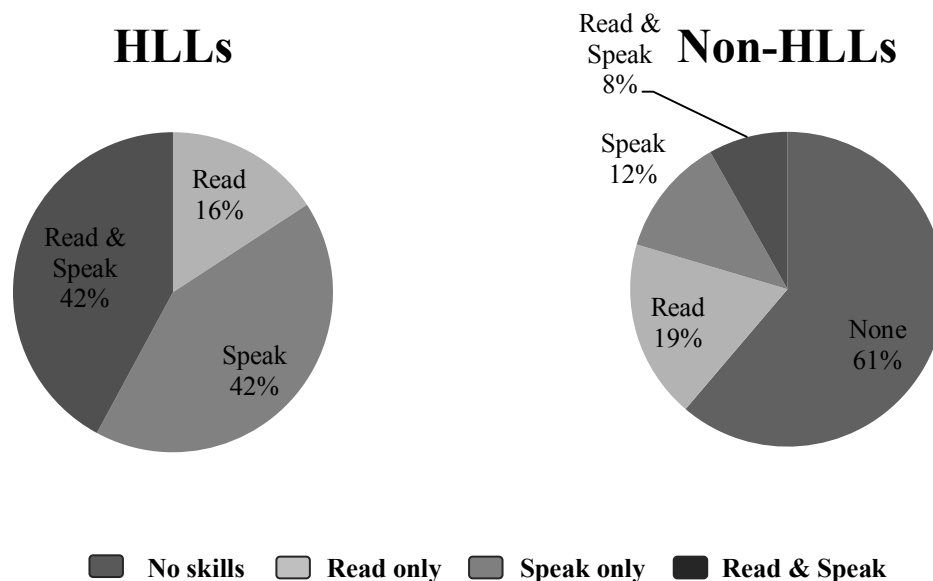
### 4.3 Proficiency and Practices in Arabic

When I designed and piloted this survey, I was aware that many learners at Mawaarith had had some exposure to Arabic prior to enrolling in the school, and I anticipated that they would provide different answers in relation to different sub-skills. However, the findings in relation to prior proficiency were among the most influential in terms of re-shaping my understanding of these learners. This section first focuses on their reported proficiency prior to entering the school and then discusses the abilities that the learners claimed in Arabic at the end of the year.

**4.3.1 Prior proficiency in Arabic.** Over half the students at Mawaarith claimed that they had some proficiency in Arabic when they enrolled in the school. Their abilities varied considerably; they reported different abilities in regard to sub-skills of language use, and this survey did not make any

attempt to assess their level of ability in the language overall or these sub-skills. However, even without objective assessments of proficiency (which, I will argue again, could not have been designed appropriately prior to investigations like the one described here), these findings highlight the heterogeneity of this learning community not only in relation to their priorities for language learning but also in their experience of learning Arabic.

Looking at all of the students enrolled in Arabic, 30 students, or 44.1%, said that they had no skills in Arabic prior to entering Mawaarith. The remaining 38 students were evenly divided: 12, or 17.6%, could only read; 14, or 20.6%, could only speak; and 12, or 17.6%, reported that they could both read and speak. Four of those who said they could speak Arabic still reported very low proficiency at the end of the year, which suggests that they could say a few words in Arabic but had little communicative ability. Comparing HLLs and non-HLLs shows that all of the HLLs reported some ability in Arabic, while the majority of the non-HLLs reported none. No non-HLLs reported that they could read and speak Arabic when they enrolled, but there were many non-HLLs who reported that they could read or speak to some extent. These data are shown in Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1.**  
Prior abilities in Arabic among HLLs and non-HLLs.

The finding that some learners claimed that they could read but not speak the language is intriguing in and of itself. While HLLs of many languages, and particularly those that use a different writing system from English, may report that they could speak but not read before they began learning the language in an instructed setting, this situation in which literacy is dominant over or precedes oracy has not been considered in the literature. Over a quarter of the learners included here as non-HLLs have clearly engaged in practices outside school that have allowed them to develop some level of literacy in Arabic.

**4.3.2 Reported abilities in Arabic at the end of the year.** At the end of the school year, students were asked a very similar question about their prior proficiencies. Based on their responses to the initial survey, piloting of the final survey, and the understanding that I had gained over the course of the year, however, I added two options to the list of prior abilities: *I knew a few words in Arabic* and *I knew Arabic, but not formal Arabic (MSA or فصحي)*. Five students, 2 HLLs and 3 non-HLLs, selected *a few words* as their only ability. Ten students, all but one of them HLLs, reported that they knew *Arabic, but not formal Arabic* when they entered Mawaarith; of these, only two students listed this as their only prior ability. The remaining responses to this question had very similar proportions to those at the beginning of the year.

After several months of observing these learners in class and noting what they seemed to be able to do in Arabic, I constructed a list of “can-do” statements that included both oral and literacy skills and that broke these skills down into activities that aligned with tasks that I knew the learners had done in class. During piloting of the final survey, students from the beginner and intermediate classes asked me to add more basic options so that they could report their ability to understand a few words when they heard them. Table 4.6 below lists the options that the learners were given and the percentage of all the learners who reported that they had that skill, in order from the most-selected to least-selected option.

In my observations of the Arabic classes at Mawaarith, I found that learners in the Advanced class were expected to do all of these tasks, though they might not be able to express their thoughts or feelings in much depth or detail. The Intermediate group varied; they were expected to do all of these

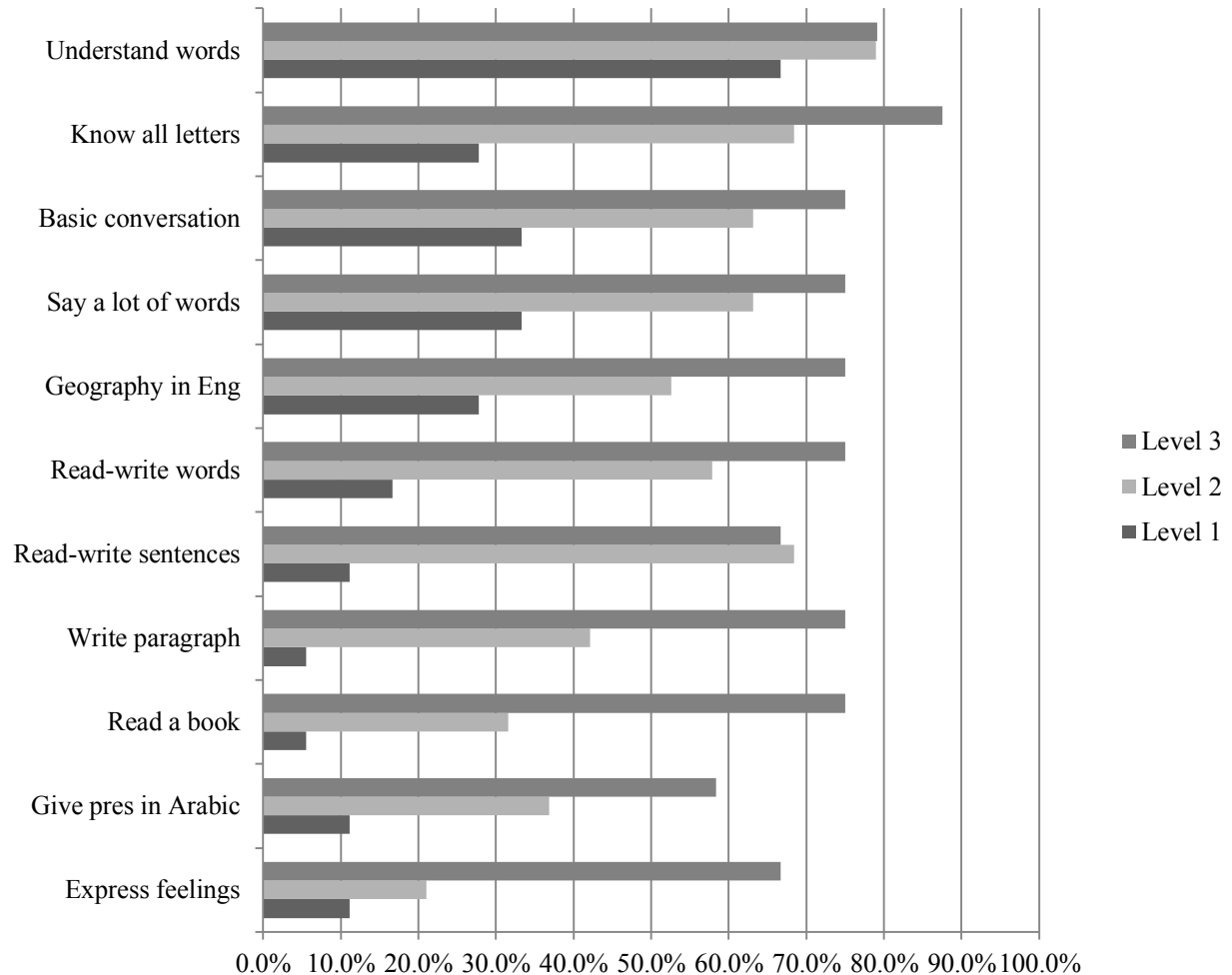
tasks except the last three in Table 4.6, but some were still not able to read fluently at the end of the year.

The Beginners could in some cases read and write sentences, but for the most part they were comfortable with reading, writing, and saying a few words. Again, their ability to decode the alphabet varied.

**Table 4.6.**  
**Self-reported abilities at year end among all learners.**

	N	%
I understand some words in Arabic when I hear them.	46	75.4
I know all the letters in Arabic and the sounds they make.	39	63.9
I can have a basic conversation in Arabic.	36	59.0
I know how to say a lot of words on different topics in Arabic.	36	59.0
In English, I can talk about some differences among Arabic-speaking countries.	33	54.1
I can read and write a lot of words on different topics in Arabic.	32	52.5
I can read and write sentences on different topics in Arabic.	31	50.8
I can write a paragraph about myself, my family, or my school in Arabic.	27	44.3
I can read a simple book in Arabic and understand the meaning.	24	39.3
I can give a presentation to my class in Arabic.	23	37.7
I can express what I am thinking or how I feel in Arabic.	22	36.1

Nearly all the traditional HLLs were in the Advanced level at Mawaarith, with one exception in the Intermediate group and another among the Beginners. The Beginners were usually learners who had just entered Mawaarith and had no prior exposure to Arabic, though a few were in their second year. The Intermediate learners, then, were those who were not traditional HLLs but who had been studying Arabic for some time. Figure 4.2 compares learners' reported abilities in each of the three class levels.



**Figure 4.2.**  
**Student-reported abilities at year end by class levels.**

#### 4.4 Values, Proficiency, and Practices in Relation to Heritage Learner Status

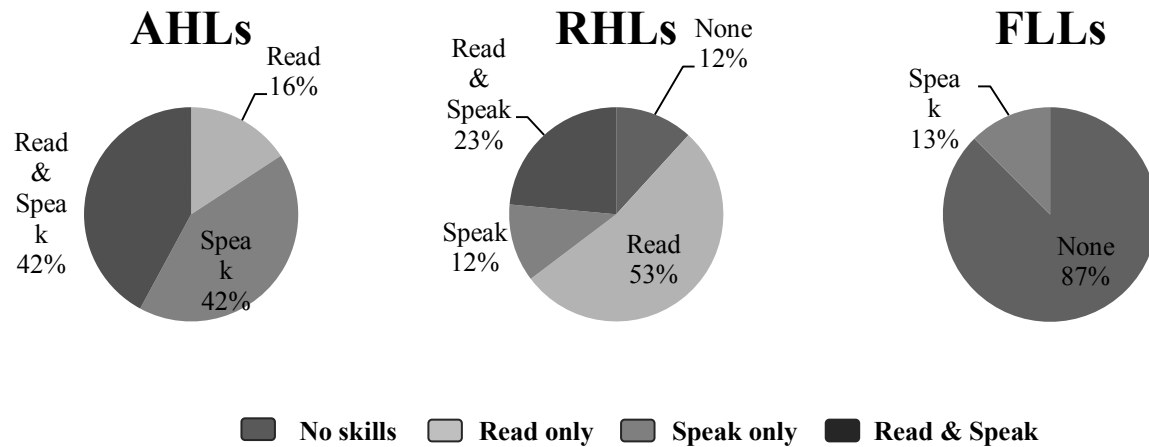
Based on the definition of a heritage learner as someone who has developed some proficiency in the language at home, presumably through communication with family members (Valdés, 2005; Montrul, 2010), the population in this school is approximately one quarter HLLs and three-quarters non-HLLs of Arabic. As the data above show, however, the non-HLLs in this population had a very wide range of prior proficiency in Arabic. Where had they developed these skills, and why had so many of them developed literacy skills without oracy? The answer lies, as I found in the course of interviews and observations, in the religious practices of many Muslim families.

I recognized that if I wanted to consider heritage learner identity in this population, I needed to make a decision about the role of religious heritage. Following the precedent of researchers such as Kondo-Brown (2005), I could have drawn a boundary between those learners of Arab descent who had some prior proficiency in Arabic and all the other learners. On the other hand, I could group non-Arab Muslims together with Arabs without regard to proficiency, as Housseinali (2006) did. While my data did not lend themselves easily to a statistical procedure such as factor analysis to determine whether learners from Arabic-speaking families, learners from Muslim families that did not use Arabic for communication but did use it for religious practices, and learners with neither national nor religious heritage were three distinct groups, it was clear from survey, observation, and interview data that the learners who claimed religious heritage differed from those learners who were neither Arab nor Muslim in their patterns of prior proficiency and their current practices.

Looking at the prior Arabic abilities among those students who were actually studying Arabic, 8 of the 12 learners who claimed to be able to read, write, and speak Arabic came from Arabic-speaking families, while the other four came from non-Arab Muslim families and had all been attending Mawaarith since the school opened. Meanwhile, 10 of the 12 learners who said that they could read the language but not speak it (in other words, they could decode without comprehension) were from non-Arab Muslim families. The other 2 were from Arab Muslim families but apparently did not use Arabic frequently at home.

The learners who said that they could speak but not read the language included Arab (n=8), non-Arab Muslim (n=2), and clear non-heritage learners (n=4), though as mentioned above the proficiency of these non-HLLs was likely very low since they were all in the Beginner or Intermediate class and reported little ability at the end of the year. As for the learners who said that they had no competence in Arabic prior to coming to Mawaarith, 28 of the 30 (93.3%) were clear non-HLLs, and the other two were from non-Arab Muslim families. Figure 4.3 presents similar data to that in Figure 4.1 above, but it compares learners who reported that they associated Arabic with their religious practices and learners who had no family or religious affiliation with the language.





**Figure 4.3.**  
**Prior abilities in Arabic among Arab-Heritage Learners, Religious-Heritage Learners, and Foreign Language Learners.**

In this figure, all of the learners represented in the first graph use Arabic with their families, and they all reported some proficiency prior to entering Mawaarith. The group on the right did not offer any evidence that they had learned Arabic from their families or in another setting outside Mawaarith, though a few said that they could speak. In the center graph, however, we can see that the small proportion of learners who did not report any prior skills in Arabic is the same size as the small proportion of learners on the right who said that they had any skills at all in Arabic.

These patterns clearly suggest that it would over-simplify the complexity of this population of learners if I were to consider all learners who did not come from Arabic-speaking families together as non-heritage learners. Likewise, the different proportions of reading and speaking abilities in the left and center graphs suggests that it would also be an oversimplification to consider Arab and non-Arab Muslim children as one category. Hereafter I will refer to three groups of learners who were studying Arabic at Mawaarith:

- *Arab-Heritage Learners (AHLs)*, children from Arabic-speaking families, all of whom in this study are also Muslim<sup>19</sup>;
- *Religious-Heritage Learners (RHLs)*, referring to the association that non-Arab Muslims may make between Arabic and their religious heritage<sup>20</sup>; and
- *Foreign Language Learners (FLLs)*, learners for whom Arabic is completely foreign, and therefore who resemble the populations most often studied in research on second language acquisition<sup>21</sup>.

Table 4.7 shows the number and proportion of learners in each of these groups among the 68 students who completed the survey and were enrolled in Arabic. Though the majority of students who are pulled out of Arabic are FLLs, the proportion of all students in the middle school population is similar.

**Table 4.7.**  
**Learners in each of the heritage learner identity groups.**

	MS Ss Taking Arabic	
	N	%
<b>Arab-Heritage Learners</b>	19	27.94
<b>Religious-Heritage Learners</b>	17	25.00
<b>Foreign Language Learners</b>	32	47.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	

If these learners show different patterns in their prior proficiency, then it also follows that they would have differing values in regard to learning Arabic. These differences are most apparent if we reconsider the parents' ratings of the nine statements about language learning and learning Arabic and if we take another look at the motivators the students selected. Table 4.8 breaks the parents' ratings into two

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that all the children from Arabic-speaking families in this study also happened to be Muslim, but many learners who consider Arabic a heritage language for national and ethnic reasons may not be Muslim. These learners are not represented in this particular context, but are also worthy of careful inquiry. I am grateful to fellow attendees at the National Council of Less-Commonly Taught Languages meeting in 2010 and to Dr. Nadine Sinno for drawing my attention to this point.

<sup>20</sup> This term is not, of course, meant to imply that AHLs are not religious but rather to signal that these learners associate Arabic with their religious heritage, if not their family heritage.

<sup>21</sup> This term also avoids defining this group in negative terms as "non-HLLs".

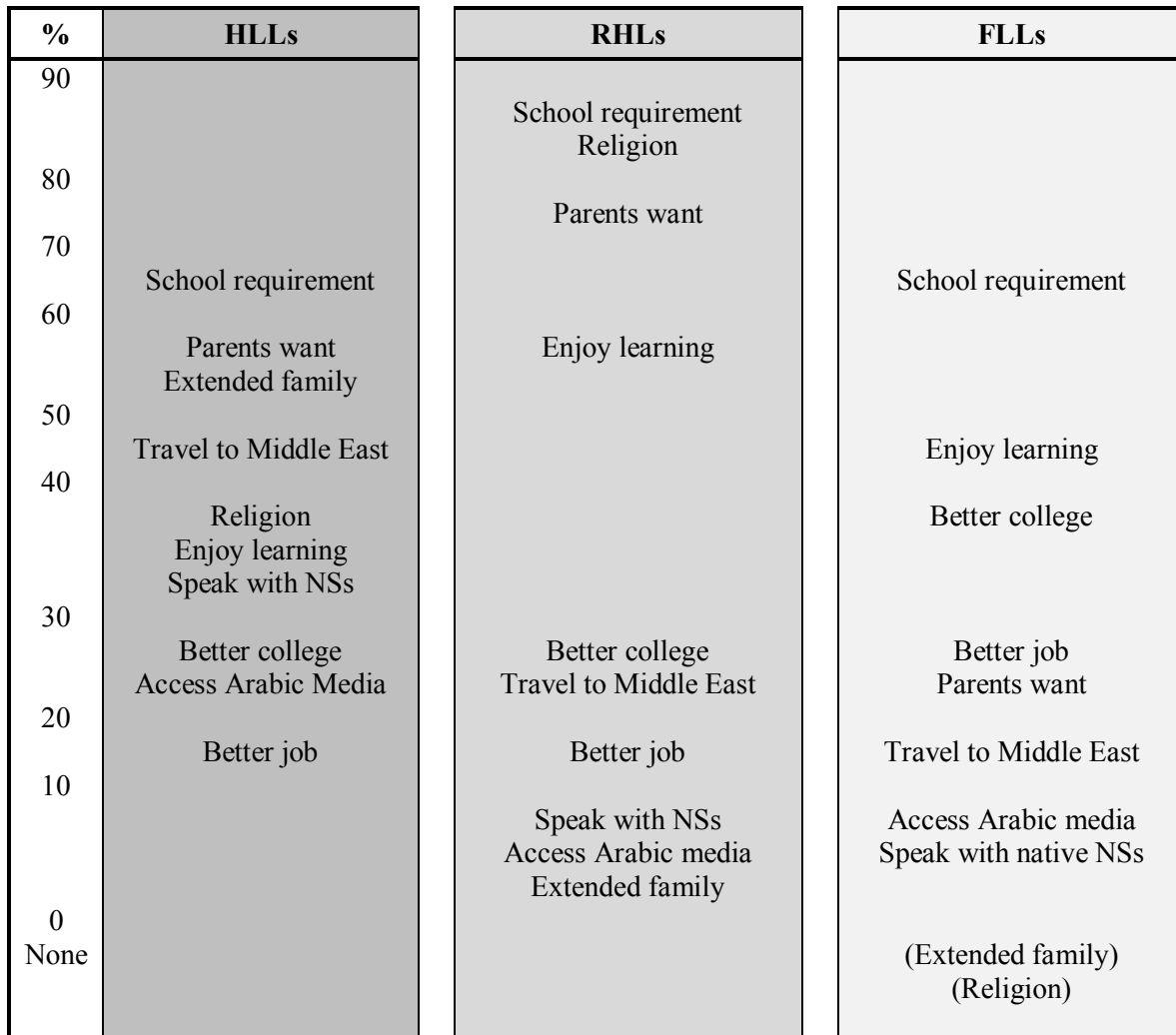
sets, providing a mean for the first five items and a mean for the latter four items across the parents whose children are AHLs, RHLs, and FLLs.

As this table shows, all three groups of parents were similar in regard to language learning in general, but distinctly different in terms of the value they placed on Arabic specifically. The FLL parents actually rated job and college higher than the RHL parents did, but they did not consider Arabic specifically to be very important in comparison with language learning overall. This pattern is reflected in the ways that the two FLL focal families described their priorities for language learning. At the same time, the RHL parents gave the Arabic-specific items nearly the same importance as the AHL parents, except that, as we might expect, the RHL parents were not concerned with extended family communication. On the other hand, they were unanimous in rating *Arabic will allow my child to participate in our religious activities* as “Extremely important.”

**Table 4.8**  
**Parent ratings of reasons for children to learn Arabic by child heritage status**

Reasons for studying Arabic	Mean Ratings		
	AHL	RHL	FLL
Language learning improves <i>mind</i>	4.9	4.9	4.4
Language learning expands <i>communication</i>	5.0	4.9	4.4
Language learning helps understand <i>cultures</i>	4.8	4.9	4.4
Language will help with <i>college</i>	4.5	3.6	3.8
Language will help to get a good <i>job</i>	4.9	3.6	4.0
<b><i>Mean of language learning items</i></b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>4.2</b>
Arabic will help communicate with <i>extended family</i>	4.6	2.4	1.8
Arabic will help <i>travel</i> to Middle East	4.4	4.3	1.7
Arabic will allow participation in <i>religion</i>	4.8	5.0	1.0
Arabic will allow access to <i>Arabic media</i>	4.8	3.8	2.5
<b><i>Mean of Arabic items</i></b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>1.8</b>

The differences among the children are similar. Figure 4.4 presents the children’s priorities in graphic form. The motivators from the initial survey (see Table 4.5 in section 4.2 above) are listed from most frequently to least frequently selected in each column and aligned with the percentages of learners who selected them at the left.



**Figure 4.4.**

**Language learning motivators for AHLs, RHLs, and FLLs.**

Motivators are presented in order from most to least frequently selected. Learners could choose as many motivators as they wanted. Numbers at left designate percentages of learners in each group.

The most striking characteristics of the data in this figure have to do with religion and parent support. Not only were the RHLs highly likely to select religious activities as a motivator while no FLLs selected it, but also they were twice as likely as AHLs to select this motivator. While neither RHLs nor FLLs selected communication with extended family as a motivator, as might be expected, over 70% of the RHL students said that they were studying Arabic because their parents wanted them to learn it, while less than a quarter of FLLs said that they were learning Arabic because their parents valued it. Based on

qualitative responses to the survey and interactions with FLL learners during visits to Mawaarith, a number of FLL parents would prefer that their children were learning another language and might even encourage their children not to put energy into learning Arabic. What these findings suggest is that although neither RHLs nor FLLs learned to use Arabic for communication at home, the RHLs had opportunities for exposure to Arabic in religious contexts as well as in school, and they were aware of much more support from their families for their Arabic learning in any context.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the AHLs selected a higher number of motivators than the RHLs, and the RHLs in turn selected more than the FLLs. AHLs selected an average of 4.2 motivators, RHLs an average of 3.4, and FLLs an average of 2.2. While the average motivators selected cannot stand as a proxy for the strength of their investment in Arabic language learning, it can be inferred that a student who is aware of more reasons for learning the language may have a stronger and more resilient commitment to language learning even if the learning process seems challenging or if the context is not ideal. Thus the commitment of AHLs and RHLs to learning over time might be greater than the FLLs.

Indeed, when the learners were asked about their interests and intentions for the future in regard to Arabic, a greater proportion of RHLs said that they were interested in further study and proficiency in Arabic than AHLs or FLLs. Over 90% of RHLs said that they would (Yes or Maybe) like to study Arabic next year in school, while only 76.1% of AHLs and 71.4% of FLLs said the same. Likewise, 83.3% of RHLs wanted to study Arabic in high school or college, while only 61.9% of AHLs and 64.3% of FLLs said the same. While the proportion overall of learners who thought they would use Arabic in their career were lower than their responses to other questions, two-thirds of the AHLs and RHLs thought this was possible, while only 39.3% of FLLs saw any possibility that they would use Arabic in a future job. AHLs and RHLs were also more confident than FLLs about their prospects for becoming fluent in Arabic someday or finding it easier to learn another language now that they had studied Arabic.

In summary, the learners of Arabic at Mawaarith did not fit neatly into any of the definitions of heritage learners that have been prevalent in the literature so far. Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) allows for cultural associations with the language that might be broader than the family's actual use of the language

for communication at home, and Lee (2005) points out that heritage learners can be placed on two intersecting continua that consider cultural affiliation and prior proficiency (see Figure 1.1). Lee (2005), Husseinali (2005), and Ibrahim & Allam (2006) acknowledge that non-Arab Muslims must be taken into consideration in any effort to understand heritage learners of Arabic. However, the data discussed here demonstrate in detail not only that these learners might be considered heritage learners but also the competencies that they might bring to an instructed setting and their priorities for Arabic language learning. Thus this chapter stands as an argument that learners of Arabic can be divided not into the traditional binary groupings of heritage and non-heritage learners that have been prevalent in existing research into the reasons why learners study their heritage language (e.g., Husseinali, 2006; Noels, 2005) but rather into at least three groups. In this community of learners, it has therefore been useful to compare three groups of learners: Arab-Heritage Learners, Religious-Heritage Learners, and Foreign Language Learners. Appendix G provides a chart comparing prevalent traits among each of these groups, based on a combination of survey, interview, and field note data.

With that said, this chapter also stands as the first step in the larger argument made by this dissertation that we must deconstruct the notion of heritage as it has been used to define categories of heritage learners in order to understand how learners and their families *construct* heritage through Arabic language learning. The categories defined here represent a more nuanced and specific understanding of the heterogeneity among heritage learners of Arabic and the ways that they may differ from non-heritage learners, or FLLs. However, just as work on identity in regard to language learning has shifted, particularly in the last twenty years, from a focus on identity as a category to an understanding of the larger negotiations that are necessary as a learner constructs identity over time through language learning and use, so the qualitative data in this study demonstrates that the relationship that each family has formed with the Arabic language is much more complex and multi-faceted than these categories can encompass. The self-reports of learner proficiencies, reasons for learning Arabic, and intentions for Arabic in the future that are provided here in Chapter 4 only begin to address the many factors that are involved in the process of Arabic language maintenance and development in these learners and families.

Likewise, in supplementing or supplanting the concept of motivation in regard to language learning, the construct of investment emphasizes that an individual's desire to learn and use a target language is sensitive to context, that it changes over time, that it is contested and thus involves choices and negotiations in relation to other priorities, and that it is tied to an expectation of return in the form of cultural capital. The motivators that have been discussed here and the parents' ratings of the importance of various motivators point to particular priorities for language learning. However, the family profiles that follow illuminate the different trajectories that individual students and their families have followed as they have learned the language over a number of years and as they look to the possibilities for using the language in the future.

The decision to look at the learners in this population as three distinct groups led me to ensure that my small group of focal participants included heritage learners from Arabic-speaking families, heritage learners for religious purposes, and non-heritage or foreign language learners. The profiles that follow consider the backgrounds of the five families that became my focal participants, their values in regard to Arabic and Mawarith, and the practices that characterize their learning and use of Arabic. Each of these families can be placed in a category, but they complicate these categorizations. All of these families could be said to have a high level of investment in Arabic, and the children for the most part shared their parents' priorities for Arabic learning and use. However, their contexts of use, priorities, and practices vary considerably.

The Zakis and the El-Gendys can be considered AHLs, differing from each other in that the El-Gendys use Arabic for the majority of their family communication, while the Zakis have an English-speaking mother and rely more on English at home. The Rowthers are also a bilingual family, coming from a Tamil-speaking background in India, though the parents and children have learned Arabic for religious purposes. Finally, the Brooks and Kimball families are both FLL families, differing from each other in that the Brooks have more international ties, both by heritage and by choice, while the Kimballs have also spent time overseas and developed proficiency in languages other than English.

These families' stories, as presented in Chapter 5, raised a number of questions that were not anticipated from the literature and that could not be explored through survey methods: What does Arabic mean as heritage, and how might it relate to other aspects of family heritage that parents might want to pass on? What Arabic do the children want to and need to learn, and what do they need to be able to do in that Arabic? If Arabic is important for religious purposes, what are those purposes, and what skills do the children need to meet them? Finally, what does Arabic mean beyond the context of Mawaarith, and how does the meaning of Arabic beyond Mawaarith and the local community reflect back on parents' values and practices and children's opportunities to learn? The family profiles presented in Chapter 5 begin to provide some answers to these questions, while cross-case analysis in Chapter 6 relates these profiles to each other and to the larger issues that their stories raise.



## 5 CASE STUDIES OF FAMILY INVESTMENT IN ARABIC LANGUAGE LEARNING

From this population of learners, I focused on five families who I believed would be able to provide a richer understanding of the value of this language and learning experience. These families come from a range of different backgrounds in terms of the parents' countries of origin and native languages, the children's prior schooling and exposure to Arabic, and the family's religious affiliations. While it would be inappropriate to view these families as representing the full range of variation in these areas that can be found in the school population, much less among Arabic learners in general, their stories do illuminate certain patterns in family investment in Arabic language learning.

### 5.1 Introduction to the Focal Families

This chapter consists of extended profiles of each of the five families, focusing on their national and language backgrounds, their values in regard to Mawarith and the Arabic language learning process, and current practices related to Arabic language and literacy development and use. I begin, however, with a brief introduction to these five families (see Table 3.3). Again, all names are pseudonyms, most of which were selected or approved by the participants.

**The Zakis.** The Zaki family consists of a Syrian-born father, Rahim, who moved to the U.S. as a college student, and a U.S.-born mother, Noura, who converted to Islam and began studying Arabic near the beginning of her relationship with Rahim. They have four children, the oldest two of whom were in middle school in the 2009-2010 school year. The elder of these sons, Malik, was in seventh grade, and the younger, Imran, in sixth, but both boys attended the Advanced Arabic class taught by Miss Majida. Rahim and Noura had been among the founders of Mawarith, and both were still heavily involved in school activities and held positions of leadership. Both Noura and Rahim participated in interviews, along with Malik and Imran.

On the basis of even a "narrow" definition of HLLs (Carreira & Kagan, 2011), the Zaki children can be considered HLLs of Arabic. Whereas Ibrahim and Allam (2006) generalized that learners from a

family in which only one parent was a native speaker would not develop Arabic language skills, the Zakis entered Mawaarith with confident literacy in Classical Arabic and considerable communicative ability in spoken Arabic relative to other students. Though their home communication took place primarily in English, they were still developing language and literacy skills in Arabic.

**The El-Gendys.** The El-Gendy parents both grew up in Egypt, though the father (who did not participate in interviews) is Palestinian; their daughter also identified herself as Palestinian. Their four girls ranged in age from eleven to three; the oldest, Farah, was in sixth grade when I met her. Like Malik and Imran, Farah was in the Advanced level at school, though they were in different classes due to gender separation. Shireen El-Gendy and her husband are educated professionals who were able to continue working in their field after they moved to the U.S. By chance, they arrived in the first of their U.S. homes only months before the events of September 11, 2001 dramatically changed perceptions of Arabs in the U.S.

By any definition of HLL that is commonly used in the U.S., Farah and her sisters can be classified as HLLs. Both of their parents were born, raised, and educated in the Middle East, and Farah has had the opportunity to develop a relatively high level of proficiency in Arabic through exposure to the language at home. The fact that she has both oral and literate proficiency in Arabic and that her proficiency is so high actually differentiates her from other HLLs in her class, however. In many ways, it might be more useful to think of her as a *bilingual user* of both Arabic and English rather than a *heritage language learner*, an English-dominant child learning Arabic for cultural reasons.

**The Rowthers.** Maryam Rowther and her husband were both raised in a large community of Indian Muslims in Chennai, India. Mr. Rowther moved to the U.S. first, and Maryam joined him after their wedding. Their children, Hassan and Hibba, were both born in the U.S., though the family later returned to India for nearly two years. In the 2009-2010 school year, they had just moved back to the U.S., and Hassan was in sixth grade. The Rowthers generally spoke English at home, though the children were often exposed to Tamil and Hindi through their parents, conversations with extended family via phone and Skype, and media including Indian films and music. Like the Zakis and El-Gendys, the

Rowthers are Muslims and frequently attend services and events at their local *masjid*<sup>22</sup>. Hassan, who could read Arabic script but had little communicative ability in Arabic in the fall of 2009, was placed in Miss Salima's Intermediate class. While the Rowthers could be considered heritage speakers of Tamil and might even view Hindi as a heritage language, they would be considered HLLs of Arabic by some definitions and not others. Hassan stated that he viewed himself as a heritage learner.

**The Brooks.** Both of the Brooks parents grew up with English as their dominant language but have been exposed to other languages throughout their lives. David grew up in the U.S. Midwest, raised by parents who placed a high priority on refugee concerns, English language teaching, and international affairs and raised David to do the same. Grace was born into a Malaysian family of Chinese descent. Her parents were both educators, running an English-medium school, and English was the medium of family communication as well. David and Grace are both involved professionally in forms of Christian ministry, and the family regularly attends church services and activities. Their son, Justin, was in seventh grade during the 2009-2010 school year, while his younger sister, Jessica, was in third grade at Mawaarith. Having studied Arabic at Mawaarith since he was in the third grade, Justin was in the Intermediate level that year. In most research on heritage language learning, Justin and Jessica would be unequivocally considered non-HLLs, or traditional second or foreign language learners. They might consider Malay or a variety of Chinese, either Mandarin or their grandparents' native dialect, to be a heritage language, but neither they nor their parents made this association in the interviews.

**The Kimballs.** The Kimball parents both grew up in English-speaking U.S. homes, but both mother and father studied foreign languages beyond the basic requirements for U.S. students. Tanya Kimball minored in Spanish and has taught it to children, while her husband speaks Spanish and some German; both have served informally as translators at international gatherings. At the time, he was a minister at a church near Mawaarith, while Tanya was going back to school to finish her bachelor's

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<sup>22</sup> These families borrow the word *masjid* from Arabic to refer to one of the Muslim community centers a few miles from the school, where they meet for prayers, Arabic lessons, and other events. When they use the term mosque, which is much less frequent, they mean the large mosque in the nearest city, where they go for services on major holidays and which also houses a private Islamic school.

degree. Their daughter, Anna, was in eighth grade in the 2009-2010 school year, while her older brother had graduated from Mawaarith and moved on to the local public high school two years earlier and her younger brother was in elementary school at Mawaarith. At the time when I was observing classes, Anna was the only student in the Advanced classes, both boys' and girls', who did not have a family affiliation with Arabic or exposure to the language prior to entering Mawaarith. Like Justin and Jessica Brooks, Anna would be considered a non-HLL of Arabic.

As these brief descriptions show, many different boundary lines can be laid down among these families, aligning them with each other and with other members of the Mawaarith community: two families include native speakers of Arabic; three use a language other than English for family communication at least some of the time; four include parents who were born outside the U.S.; three are Muslim and two Christian; all five families had multiple children enrolled in Mawaarith; and all five include parents who are well-educated and also experienced language learners and who value multilingualism. However, the question of what these identities might mean to their members and which ones seem to be salient to the children's Arabic language learning remains to be seen.

Each of the profiles below is organized according to the following structure: first, I describe the family's background and experiences prior to entering Mawaarith, focusing on language learning and particularly their experience with Arabic. Then, I address their decision to enroll their children in Mawaarith and their values regarding the school and its Arabic program. After that, I focus on the current practices that characterize each family's learning and use of Arabic, including their family language and literacy practices, the children's classroom experiences at Mawaarith, and the children's exposure to Arabic through contexts other than home and school, including the Qur'an Arabic classes at the *masjid*. Finally, I end each profile with a brief coda describing developments and changes in the family's language learning practices and Arabic use in the two years after the primary phase of data collection ended. This structure follows a generally chronological sequence, though it also progresses from a focus on formative experiences, beliefs, and values to a focus on observable, ongoing practices.

## 5.2 The Zaki Family

The Zaki family were a constant and highly visible presence at Mawaarith. With three children enrolled in the school, the father on the school's board of directors, and the mother involved in various volunteer activities, the doors of the school were rarely open without a Zaki in the building. Both Noura and Rahim, the mother and father, were very supportive of this study and eager to participate. In fact, Noura volunteered to keep a journal of Arabic language use in her home and maintained this journal intermittently for several months. A soft-spoken woman with the fair skin of a redhead, though I have never seen her without her traditional headscarf, she converted to Islam when she married Rahim and usually goes by a Muslim name similar in sound to her given name. Noura offered me remarkable access to her efforts and frustrations as she struggled to raise bilingual children in an English-dominant environment. For his part, Rahim managed not only to provide insights into his own experiences but also to draw more enthusiasm, and thus richer data, out of his reticent pre-teen sons than I could alone.

The Zakis viewed developing bilingualism in English and Arabic as a high priority, but they also encountered many of challenges of raising bilingual children in a monolingual society that Caldas (2006) enumerates in his study of his own bilingual children. Although their children were exposed to Arabic at home and in religious settings, they viewed the language program at Mawaarith as a key component of their overall investment in the development of their children's bilingualism and biliteracy. At the time when they were originally interviewed, the Zaki family had two boys in middle school at Mawaarith, one in sixth grade and one in seventh grade, as well as a girl in elementary school at Mawaarith and a younger son who was attending an Islamic pre-school.

**5.2.1 Family background.** Rahim Zaki was born in Syria and moved to the U.S. in order to attend college. He met Noura through school, when they were both studying engineering. Within a few years, she had converted to Islam, they had married, Rahim's mother had moved in with the young couple, and they were expecting their first child. Noura began studying Arabic as a second language around the time of their marriage. Before that, she had studied Spanish in high school, but, although she had opportunities to use Spanish in her immediate surroundings in the U.S., she believed that her

motivation to learn Arabic was always much greater. Over many years, she continued to develop her own skills in Arabic through self-study, through courses at a local university, and through interaction at home with her mother-in-law, who spoke little English. Most recently she had been studying Arabic through comparing English and Arabic versions of the Qur'an as she read and studied the holy book and by participating in a class at her local *masjid*. This class was intended for native speakers of Arabic, which meant that exegesis and discussion of Qur'anic texts took place in Arabic, not in English. Noura explained that the class, which covered familiar religious topics, was valuable to her primarily as a language learning experience.

As the Zakis' children were born, Noura made considerable efforts to speak to them exclusively in Arabic. As she recalls, her commitment to maintaining an Arabic-only environment in the home was manageable when the first son, Malik, was very young, but it grew increasingly difficult as he developed cognitively and verbally. As often as possible, Noura would read to him, and later his brother, in Arabic. Initially, she had few Arabic-language children's books, so she would label books designed to teach babies and toddlers their first English words with their equivalents in Arabic, or she would tell the story of an English-language book in Arabic as if she were reading it: "actually when they were little, they didn't know that the book was in English. I would try to read it in Arabic, and since they couldn't read, they wouldn't know?" (Interview 2). Later she was able to acquire more Arabic children's books when the family visited Syria. Nonetheless, as the boys grew older they began to ask her to read to them in her far more fluent English, and her younger daughter and son began asking for English even earlier.

Reflecting on her children's early childhood, Noura regretted that she had not read to the younger children in Arabic as much as she had read to the older two. She believed that their ability to communicate in Arabic was behind that of their older brothers, and she frequent expressed a desire for all of her children to speak Arabic more frequently at home. In contrast with Noura's frustration with the rate of Arabic use at home, Rahim praised his children's use of English, which he attributed in part to his wife's dedication to reading to the children in English.

Just as Noura had committed herself to learning Arabic, Rahim had invested considerable effort in attaining a high level of English proficiency. His second language learning began with French in kindergarten and first grade, and he studied English from fourth grade until he moved to the U.S. for college. He recalled that when he arrived there, he was amazed at the contrast between the English that he knew and the spoken English that he needed to comprehend and use in the U.S. Furthermore, he had to acclimate to an English-medium university setting, which he did by taking courses in familiar subjects until his competence improved. He went on to study engineering, and continued to work in that field.

Along with his wife, Rahim had tried to maintain an Arabic-only environment with his first son, but as the family grew, the children grew older, and they interacted more with their English-speaking peers, it became more difficult to insist that they communicate in Arabic. Although other parents, including his wife, expressed a sense of deep concern or loss in regard to their children's Arabic language skills, Rahim did not seem worried that their abilities were or would be limited. Rather than focusing on the transmission of Arabic to his children as a parental imperative, Rahim emphasized his love for the Arabic language. He truly began to appreciate the intricacies of the language when he was a teenager. For him, sharing the richness of Arabic with his children seems to be as much a joy as a duty:

Now that I'm working with them on some of their classes, it's coming back to me, why you fall in love with learning language. And the layers of it, and the history of it, and you learn the two thousand year old language, how it used to be and how it evolved and all that... I guess the dimensions of the older language came out when I started learning English. (Zaki Family, Interview 3)

In addition to their use of Arabic for communication at home, Malik and Imran began studying Arabic with tutors as early as age 3, and as a result they could decode Arabic script fluently by the time they entered Mawaarith. Rahim claimed that Malik in particular was bilingual as a young child, though the boys reported that they were not fluent in spoken Arabic when they came to Mawaarith and still had

not reached that point. They had opportunities to hear and use Arabic extensively during summer visits to Syria and continued to use Arabic with friends and family in the U.S., but Malik believed that when he spoke Arabic, “it doesn’t sound normal. Like if I’m talking to someone, then – if I’m trying to respond in Arabic, it’ll just sound like I’m a robot or something” (Zaki Family, Interview 3).

Rahim clarified this statement:

I think what he is talking about is our dialect. When we speak among ourselves, you know as friends for example - in social setting... so people of - not only Syrian, and from that region you know - Syria, Lebanon, the greater Syria they call that region - have similar dialect and they can communicate. And we use a little bit of slang words, or French words even... so it’s quite different. And that’s the part that’s confusing I think to them... even if he wanted to respond, he would - his response would be more - Modern Written Arabic or formal Arabic, as opposed to the dialect. (Zaki Family, Interview 3)

Though the boys had learned Arabic at home as well as at school, they and their father characterized their Arabic as formal in comparison with the “dialect” seasoned with “slang” and “French words” that their father used with his peers. They explained that their social network generally relied on English much more than Arabic for communication, but reading Arabic for the purposes of studying and memorizing the Qur’an remained very important. For many years the Zaki boys had attended classes at their *masjid* in order to develop their religious literacy in Arabic; at the time of the study, they were going to these classes three days a week.

In the long run, Rahim hoped that his children would become bilingual in English and Arabic, like many members of his extended family, able to communicate fluently in both languages. Nevertheless, he and Noura had deliberately decided to prioritize religious literacy over conversational skills in Arabic. Reaching a level of competence in Arabic that really aligned with the purposes for which the Zakis wanted to use the language would involve mastering two if not three different varieties of the language



and using them in a range of different contexts. The Zakis demonstrated clearly that they were a bicultural family, from their enthusiastic chatter about the Middle Eastern foods that they ate to their visits to Syria and their bilingual religious practices, but they were not as bilingual a family as their parents, particularly their mother, would have liked them to be.

**5.2.2 Value of Arabic and the Arabic program.** Unlike the other families in this study, the story of the Zaki family's decision to send their children to Mawaarith begins not with a choice to attend this school over other options but with helping to found the school. The first answer that I heard from anyone in the family as to why they were attending Mawaarith was second son Imran's simple statement that, "Well, the main reason we came to this school is because my parents founded this school" (Interview 1). Without prompting, he added other reasons: "If they hadn't founded the school, then it'd probably be because they teach Arabic and it's a smaller school" (Interview 1). Arabic language learning was valuable enough to the Zaki family that they committed themselves to founding a school that would provide a means of teaching the language, though they made sure that the school had other valued features as well. Thus the Zakis valued both the language and the school highly, and their investment in both deserves further exploration.

When I first asked the boys about the value of Arabic and their reasons for studying it, their responses sounded slightly rehearsed, as if they had been asked this question many times before or knew what answers would be considered most acceptable. The list of reasons with which each boy began aligned fairly closely with the factors mentioned on the surveys, which were in front of them on the table at the time. However, they provided more detail and showed greater enthusiasm as they went on and when this topic came up again later.

Imran listed reasons for valuing Arabic in this order: communication with his dad's relatives, reading and memorizing the Qur'an, the possibility of getting "a really good job" or "a job in the Middle East" (Interview 1). It is not clear whether he saw a job in the Middle East as a really good job or if he saw Arabic as helpful in getting a good job in any location. Later, Imran also brought up the benefits of knowing Arabic if he wanted to do business in the Middle East.

Malik's list also included communication with family and job prospects, but he began with religion. Arabic is "mostly important because of my religion," in that better Arabic skills would make it "easier to read and learn the Qur'an." In addition, he believed that studying Arabic at a young age would help him to get into "more advanced classes" in college, and he explained that he found the idea of later working as a translator interesting "because you're the person's link to the other person" (Interview 1). In the next interview, Malik also mentioned the reporters he has heard on National Public Radio. He was able to imagine himself using Arabic to interview sources, as they apparently did.

Both Noura and Rahim waited until the boys had provided their own comments on the benefits of Arabic before they articulated their perceptions of its value. Each parent had slightly different priorities. Noura presented second language learning almost as a human right: "as a principle they should have more than one language" (Interview 2). Although she acknowledged that Spanish would be accessible in their local community, she considered Arabic "a natural fit" for her children. This "natural fit" may have been most directly attributable to her husband's proficiency and her commitment to learning the language as well as the connection to religion. However, she also related it to U.S. involvement in the Middle East and suggested that the boys might want the option of living in the Middle East as adults.

Rahim focused on economic and cognitive benefits of language learning, but he also emphasized religious and cultural values. He explained that most people from the Middle East (by which I believe he meant his family and educated peers) are "at least bilingual. In most cases three languages are spoken" (Interview 3), and he saw this multilingualism and also "cultural awareness" as imperative for anyone who wants to succeed in business in the Middle East. However, he also stated his belief that language learning would benefit his children's minds: "all of their learning abilities expand," especially if they begin before age fifteen, he thought (Interview 3). After these points had been made, though, Rahim very deliberately asked for the floor in the interview so that he could explain not only his logical, economic valuation of Arabic but also his love for and awe of the language. He quietly revealed to me and to his sons that he enjoyed the language so much that he had once considered a career as an Arabic teacher.

When the survey questionnaire asked him to assign a level of importance to the statement that *Knowing Arabic will allow my child to participate in our religious activities*, Rahim is the only HLL parent who rated this purpose for learning as a 3 rather than a 5 on the Likert scale. However, admitting that the boys' interest in learning Arabic sometimes lagged, he said that he would encourage them by emphasizing "a connection to their faith" (Interview 3). He reminded them that, if they became proficient, they would be able to access the Qur'an and the richness of the language in their own right. It seems reasonable to infer that Rahim wanted his children to learn Arabic out of desire rather than compulsion:

I tell them you know - I can explain to you what I understand from the Quran, but if you learn for for yourself, you may find another dimension that I don't know. And that's how - how fascinating it is when you read something so sophisticated that every - time, from a different generation, people read it, they may get something different. And - and if they don't do that on their own, they're gonna miss out on that opportunity. (Interview 3)

The Zakis both made it very clear that they wanted their children to have a level of Arabic competence that would be similar to their competence in English and to the competence of their peers in the Middle East. This goal had proved difficult for them to achieve. Imran stated, and Malik seemed to agree, that English was his native language rather than Arabic; his criterion for this judgment was that he responded first in English when anyone spoke to him. Also, although they have many Arabic speakers in their extended family, it is apparently not imperative for them to speak Arabic in order to communicate with these family members. Most of them speak English as well as Arabic, and when the Zakis visited their father's hometown, the older generation used Arabic while their younger relatives insisted on practicing their English with them. The parents' insistence on the value of Arabic and struggles to promote it in their children help explain their willingness to commit resources to the founding and operation of Mawaarith Academy.

Noura recalled early conversations about the priorities that she and other parents discussed for Mawaarith as they began to research and choose an educational model for the new charter school. She first mentions character traits: “We’d like them to be humble and modest and articulate and you know - able to do all the things, the flowery language that ended up our wonderful foundation and vision” (Zaki Family, Interview 1), and she also noted that the school’s focus on environmental awareness was important to her and her husband, both of whom were trained as environmental engineers. She was the member of the founding committee who brought the expeditionary learning model to the other parents, with its focus on environmental education and integrated, hands-on learning. Like many other parents in this study, she seems to have made choices for her children’s education based on her reflections on her own education and learning style as well as awareness of her own children’s inclinations.

Although the Zakis thoroughly articulated the value of Mawaarith’s educational philosophy and language learning opportunity, offering Arabic as a second language was clearly a primary goal for the Zakis and other founders:

And we also decided that [if] we were gonna put all this effort into this that – even as a taxpayer – that a second language was what we wanted. And we wanted – Arabic. And we thought that there would be enough interest, especially given – you know, political factors going on at the time, and there was no Arabic, and also that the whole idea of second language was being stripped from schools... But just this whole idea that language is not important in our society, just seemed - I don’t know. So Arabic was the language that we wanted to push for. (Zaki Family, Interview 1)

By the time Noura told the story I have just quoted, she had already established that Arabic was a high priority for her family. Here she presented instead a view of Arabic that could be articulated to stakeholders outside the heritage language community. She asserted that offering any second language would be a valuable use of public funding for education, she recognized that Arabic was (and is) rarely

offered as a foreign language in public schools, and she also implied that second languages needed to be supported in the face of a society that does not value bilingual or multilingual competence. Her reference to “political factors” here likely relates to the aftermath of 9/11, though she did not mention 9/11 and “people’s nervousness” with a woman wearing *hijab* and speaking Arabic in public until our third interview.

In general, the Zakis’ story represents a clear example of parent investment in their children’s Arabic language learning. They were determined for their children to study a second language in a high-quality school, and moreover that the language should be Arabic. The particular balance of backgrounds in this family, in that only the father is a native speaker of Arabic but the mother values Arabic enough to pursue it herself and promote it intensively with her children, differentiate the Zakis from other Arabic-speaking families in which both parents are native speakers<sup>23</sup>. Despite Noura’s enthusiasm for Arabic, she herself does not have the resources, in terms of linguistic competence, to develop her children’s Arabic language skills to the extent that their teachers can at school. Given that Muslim mothers often see the teaching of Arabic as one of their primary responsibilities (see Mills, 2004, and Shireen El-Gendy’s story below), her own limitations as an Arabic speaker may explain in part the tremendous commitment this family has made not only to Arabic language learning but also to this school as a major component of that learning.

**5.2.3 Current investment in Arabic.** The Zaki family offers a striking counterexample to the generalization that only children who grow up with two Arab parents learn to speak Arabic, particularly in regard to the oldest two children. While only Rahim is a native speaker of Arabic, Noura has gone to great effort over many years to advance her own proficiency in Arabic and to support her children’s development in Arabic. These efforts involve a complex set of investments in home practices, in religious study at the local *masjid*, and in school-based learning. For a number of reasons, however, the family’s

<sup>23</sup> I am not aware of a family in this population in which the mother is a native speaker of Arabic and the father is not.

goal of maintaining balanced bilingualism in the children was not being realized. In fact, this contrast between intentions and reality was a near-constant theme in Noura's description of current practices in her family. Nevertheless, the Zaki family's story shows that families who are determined to promote heritage language learning in their children despite the many obstacles to this goal can and do succeed in developing a level of proficiency in their children that can support family communication, religious practices, and further learning in college and beyond.

*5.2.3.1 Language and literacy at home.* Although the Zaki boys both conceded that they were more likely to use English than Arabic in nearly every domain of their life, their family life was nevertheless saturated with Arabic language and culture. They would sit around the dinner table using Arabic words for the foods they eat, and they frequently produced Arabic requests and responded to Arabic commands. At night when they had finished their homework for school, Malik and Imran would review passages they had memorized from the Qur'an. If their parents were available, they would ask their mother to quiz them on the spelling of school vocabulary words or their father to confirm that they remembered the exact wording and pronunciation of their suras. They had access to bilingual children's books, multiple Arabic-English and Arabic-only dictionaries, books on Islamic theology including the *Hadith* (the teachings of Mohammad) in English and Arabic, and multiple computer games designed to teach Arabic. Noura had numerous textbooks, notebooks, and other materials from her own study of Arabic, the children saw both parents engaging with texts in Arabic, and, as did all the Muslim families I interviewed, they prayed at home in Arabic at regular intervals.

Despite these practices and resources, the family's use of Arabic for communicative purposes had declined in recent years. Like the mothers in Mills' (2005) study and all the Muslim mothers I spoke to, Noura seemed to see the teaching of Arabic as her responsibility as the mother, though Rahim was the native speaker, and she seemed to take the children's lack of proficiency personally. Noura explained that she saw a number of reasons for this shift, but the three primary reasons had to do with changes in the Zaki household, differences among the siblings, and the increasing pressures of activities that did not involve Arabic as the children got older.

Whereas Rahim's Arabic-speaking mother had lived with the family when Malik was very small, she had passed away a few years earlier. Without her, the family lost one of its primary incentives and opportunities for maintaining communicative Arabic. Most of the remaining members of Rahim's family, both in the U.S. and in Syria, were bilingual in Arabic and English and tended to use English with Rahim and Noura's children. Also, Noura's mother, who only spoke English, moved into their home in the middle of the 2009-2010 school year due to health problems. Her arrival not only decreased the proportion of Arabic spoken in the home and made it awkward if not rude to speak Arabic around her, but Noura had to commit time and energy to her mother's care that she would have otherwise devoted to her own Arabic study and to encouraging the children to use Arabic. Meanwhile, the younger children's weaker communicative skills in Arabic may have been both a consequence of the more English-dominant home environment and part of its cause, as the other family members adjusted by speaking English with them.

The political context had not been inconsequential in the family's general shift from Arabic to English. After 9/11, Noura became self-conscious about speaking Arabic to her daughter, who was born in 2001, in public places like the grocery store. She began saying everything to her daughter twice, once in Arabic and once in English, due to her concerns about "people's nervousness" (Interview 4), but in time her daughter came to expect English and express frustration with Arabic or with the redundant messages. Whereas the older boys would actually correct Noura's word choice and pronunciation, her daughter and younger son tended to resist using Arabic. Recently, Noura had realized that her youngest son would not consistently count in Arabic by himself and did not reliably respond to Arabic commands. This observation strengthened her resolve to improve the use of Arabic at home and led her to push her husband and sons to speak Arabic more, particularly around the younger siblings, but improvement in these areas was slow.

The forces that worked against the use of Arabic at home were complex because they were also often positive in their own right. The children were all doing very well in school, which required keeping up with regular homework as well as completing large projects quite frequently. The older boys were

increasingly involved in school extracurricular activities like the Honor Society and spelling competitions and activities outside school like karate, which they practiced at least two afternoons a week. Also, they attended Qur'an classes for at least six hours a week, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, which was of course related to Arabic but did not necessarily increase the children's comprehension or use of day-to-day communicative Arabic.

As the study progressed, Noura repeatedly stated that she was struggling to increase the proportion of Arabic used in their home and particularly to increase her youngest son's use of Arabic. She considered using approaches that she had observed in other Arabic-speaking families, such as the practice of punishing the children with time-out if they spoke English with their siblings. While this approach, which she brought up more than once, seemed to be effective, she felt that it would not be a good "fit" for her family and worried that she would not have the "fortitude" of the other mother to maintain it (Interview 4).

Instead, she came up with ways to encourage Arabic use. In addition to encouraging Rahim to speak more Arabic at home and prodding Malik and Imran to use Arabic more frequently with their brother, so that "he'll have a second language... he'll have the same benefit that you guys had" (Interview 2), she developed a plan over the winter holidays for encouraging the children to study and use Arabic. She made a board for all the children with suggestions for "good things to do" that did not involve their iPods or computer games. This board served as a way to encourage the children to do a variety of different things, including studying science or playing with siblings as well as using computer programs to study Arabic, and to reward them for making good choices. Noura was dissatisfied with the results of this experiment, unfortunately, as the children would avoid activities that involved Arabic in favor of other options such as studying science or playing with their siblings. Although Malik said that he enjoyed making a video with his brothers and sister as a result of this arrangement, no Arabic was used in the making of their film. Despite her ongoing efforts, Noura continued to feel that she was not able to increase her children's investment in Arabic; neither their frequency of use or their desire to learn seemed to be increasing enough to suit her.



While frustration with the lack of communicative Arabic in the family home was a constant theme of the interviews with Noura, in fact the Malik and Imran were spending ten hours a week in various classes focusing on Arabic, and they believed that their Arabic had improved considerably in the past four or five years. Given the limits of time and energy, Noura and Rahim both stated that they had had to choose certain priorities over others in terms of their children's overall abilities in Arabic. They chose to focus on the skills needed to read the Qur'an at a high level of fluency and precision and on memorizing suras, aspects of religious literacy that Rahim believed were lagging behind their peers in Syria. He insisted that they should learn as much as possible in the near future, both because their ability to learn another language would diminish after age fifteen (his own version of the critical period hypothesis), and because the boys' schoolwork and other extracurricular activities would only become more demanding when they moved on to high school and beyond.

In summary, Arabic in the Zaki home was not the primary means of communication, but it was a skill, or rather a set of interlocking skills related to different varieties, that nevertheless received considerable attention and effort. The children exhibited different patterns in their abilities and in their comfort with learning and using the language. Both parents would have liked to create a greater balance between the use of the family's two languages, but in order to achieve this goal they would have to overcome the challenges of a busy life in an English-dominant community. In response they had compromised by focusing on religious literacy, and in that effort they relied heavily on the role of the children's participation in classes at their *masjid*.

*5.2.3.2 Language and literacy at the masjid.* All of the Muslim children in my focal families were participating in classes at their local *masjid* on at least a weekly basis, which they referred to as Sunday school or Saturday school. Malik and Imran Zaki had these classes three times a week, adding two weeknight evenings to the four-hour weekend class. Their sister participated in Qur'an classes with other girls at her own level, and their youngest brother attended a preschool program run by the mosque. While I did not observe these classes, I did ask the children to describe their activities in these sessions and to

compare what they were doing and learning there with what they were doing and learning in the classroom environment at Mawaarith.

According to Malik and Imran, a typical Saturday session centered around the learning of a new sura, or part of a sura, from the Qur'an. Malik described the pattern of the class as follows:

Okay like first we just like um like read it, like pronounce it right, and then we start memorizing, and then we have a class about the meaning, and then a class about Arabic, like - what the words mean and how they're broken down like into root words. (Interview 5)

First the students learned to pronounce the passage correctly, through some combination of listening to their teacher read, reading independently, and asking for assistance with certain words. Then their teacher focused on the overall meaning of the passage, including how it could be applied to "daily life" (Interview 5). After that, with perhaps a break in between, the class delved into the meanings of individual words, along with enough grammar to understand how these meanings differed from similar words. Finally, they worked on memorizing the passage, which was again a guided individual process. Later they might be tested on what they have learned; for example, they might have to provide the antonym for a given word or identify differences in meaning among similar passages.

At different times the boys provided a slightly different sequence for the activities in their Saturday school classes, but these segments were mentioned again and again: pronunciation, meaning of the overall passage, meaning of the words, and memorization. According to the website for the *masjid* where they take this course, which is called *Kalimat Al-Qur'an* ("Words of the Qur'an"), the two main portions of the course are *tajweed* and *tafseer*, along with memorization. When the boys first used these terms, they tried to translate *tajweed* as "grammar" before they settled on "pronunciation"; this noun relates to the adjective "good" and to a verb that means, among other things, "to do something excellently," but refers specifically to the accurate and excellent reading or recitation of the Qur'an (Cowan, 1994). *Tajweed* also refers to the extensive and intricate list of phonetic rules that guide the

accurate recitation of the Qur'an (Pickthall, 1930/1996). *Tafseer*, from the verb "to explain, interpret", refers in the context of the Qur'an to exegesis.

I asked Malik how he approached the process of memorizing a sura. Here and in other instances, Malik used "read" to mean that he read each *aya* out loud, focusing on perfect pronunciation. Malik described the way that he completes this task with confidence and familiarity:

First I'll like ask someone who knows it to read it to me, and then I'll try like reading the first *aya*, like one time or two times, and then I'll just go on, and then I'll try and read it together. And then after I read that together a couple of times and it becomes easier to memorize. (Interview 5)

Suras take time to commit to memory and, once memorized, they take some effort to maintain. Malik explained, "Like I have to review it like probably every month, and I have to read it over, or it'll slowly come harder, or you'll forget a couple words" (Interview 5). Once suras have been memorized well, they can be incorporated into daily prayers, as I will discuss further when I come to Hassan Rowther's description of similar practices.

These religious literacy practices, which we spent a considerable amount of time discussing, seemed complex, demanding, and considerably different from the skills that were required to communicate in Arabic at home or to get good grades in Arabic class at school. However, neither Malik nor Imran ever stated explicitly or gave the impression implicitly that they resented the difficulty or the time commitment of this course. They might not choose to spend six hours a week in this way if their parents did not encourage them to do so, but they seemed to have accepted the importance of these classes and the literacy that they were developing there, and they seemed confident in their abilities. If they occasionally engaged in some form of active resistance, then neither they nor their parents conveyed this to me.

Rahim and Noura clearly found these classes and the practices that they taught important and were deeply invested in helping their children read Qur'an Arabic at a high level. However, Noura was

somewhat dissatisfied with the classes that all of her children were taking in Muslim contexts because she did not feel that they were building communicative competence. For her, taking a class in Arabic at the *masjid* was a means of improving her Arabic; she could read theology at home, usually in English. She appreciated the value of these classes in relation to her children's practice of Islam, but she seemed to want them to serve the dual purpose of increasing their ability to comprehend conversation and non-religious texts. Likewise, she would have preferred that her youngest son's preschool teachers spoke to the children in Arabic more rather than simply focusing on tracing letters and memorizing short passages.

When Noura attended an "open house" evening in which the students were to demonstrate to their parents what they had learned in their Qur'an classes, she evaluated the ways that classes chose to present based on the use of the Arabic language in the presentation. While her daughter's class expressed the meaning of a sura in a skit, her older sons played a game of Jeopardy for the parent audience that required them to recite, translate, or use English to explain the meaning of a passage, "so they had a lot more Arabic in theirs. Which I thought was very good" (Interview 4).

Generally speaking, this Qur'an class and religious literacy seem to be receiving the largest proportion of the time and energy that the Zaki boys and their family are investing in Arabic. These practices began years before they began studying at Mawaarith, and the boys reported that, including class time and review at home, their Qur'an studies easily took up more time per week than their school Arabic classes. From another perspective, they were receiving over twice as much exposure to instructed Arabic per week as their classmates who did not participate in Qur'an classes.

While their mother would have liked to see improvement in their ability to communicate in spoken Arabic as a result of this high level of exposure, the emphasis of these classes was on reading for the purpose of recitation and memorization rather than speaking or writing, and comprehension was only one component of the process. The family spoke of aiming for bilingualism in Arabic and English, but in fact they had different goals relating to different varieties of Arabic and communities in which Arabic is valued. The goals for literacy in Qur'an Arabic specifically seemed to be reading fluently, pronouncing accurately according to the complex rules of *tajweed*, and memorizing more passages. In turn, these

competencies would allow the children to participate more fully in prayers, to keep up with peers in the U.S. and Syria, and to appreciate the Qur'an and eventually access the beauty of the language directly.

*5.2.3.3 Language and literacy in the classroom.* Although the *masjid* and the Mawaarith classroom were both valued instructional contexts for the Zaki boys, pedagogical practices, objectives, and content differed dramatically in the two settings. The school-based program helped the children to develop their literacy, their vocabulary, and some communicative competence, but this approach emphasized MSA, not the variety that is normally spoken among the Zakis' family and friends. Asked to describe the differences between his Arabic studies at the *masjid* and his Arabic studies at Mawaarith, Imran made the generalization that at the *masjid* the students study verbs and adjectives because "they're easier" and "they make a lot of difference" while at school the students are "learning more nouns than anything else" (Interview 5). Attempting to understand this perception, I asked him why I thought he was learning more nouns at school. He replied:

Um - I don't know because like - I think they're trying to give us like a broader - 'cause at the *masjid* we're just trying to learn what it means and how to understand it, and at school we're trying to make - like build good language skills so we can like speak and talk and write.

(Interview 5)

Imran seems to have internalized the goals of the Arabic classes at Mawaarith, particularly the Advanced class. He described receptive skills related to his Qur'an class and productive skills in his school classes. In his interview with his father, Imran also pointed out that the Arabic of the Qur'an differs from the MSA taught in school not only in the use of diacritics for vowels and other cues to precise pronunciation, but also in the lexicon. Unlike Qur'anic Arabic, MSA includes modern objects and inventions such as cars and computers. In these comments, Imran pointed out some of the major differences between the varieties of Arabic used in each context and in the priorities for students' development. Along with these differences in the target language, content and teaching practices also

differed considerably and may have influenced these learners' ongoing commitment to the language learning process at Mawaarith.

As Imran explained it, the levels of Arabic were determined based on the length of time that a learner had been studying at Mawaarith and the learner's language background. He did not mention Muslim learners with some proficiency in Arabic whose parents speak another language, of which there were several in his class:

Like they split them up into like three classes, like people who are new to Mawaarith, like who have no clue what Arabic is like, and the people who have been going here for a couple of years. And then the - um - the native speakers, like people whose families speak that, and they know it, really well? And so the classes are based on that. (Interview 1)

This description suggests that Imran has a fairly clear sense of the combined influence of language background and proficiency in the divisions among learners in his school, but his use of "native speaker" for "people whose families speak that, and they know it, really well" offers evidence that "heritage learner" is not a category in his mind. In fact, if he understood that term as a means of distinguishing learners like him and his brother from children who were born in the Middle East or spoke Arabic more exclusively at home, he might see it as diminishing or disparaging his own relationship to the language and effort to learn it.

It is true, nevertheless, that in the Advanced class, the Zaki boys were studying Arabic only with learners who had also been exposed to Arabic outside school, both before coming to Mawaarith and while at Mawaarith. Many of them had also been studying at Mawaarith for a few years, as they had. Within all three levels, the teachers divided the learners groups based roughly on grade in school and proficiency. These groups sat at clusters of desks pushed together. As a result, Malik and Imran were in the same class for Arabic but rarely interacted with each other; each one sat and did group work with other boys in their

own grade. Frequent activities in these groups included writing sentences based on pictures, reading independently and to each other, preparing presentations, and completing projects on various topics.

The boys themselves described three activities that had taken extensive time and energy and provided some satisfaction with the learning process. Late in the fall the advanced students all chose children's books to read, presented them to each other, and then selected three words from each book that they combined into one long word list. This word list then became the basis for a story that the group composed together, with their teacher acting as coach and scribe. Though this activity was more popular in the girls' group and only the girls planned to present their story to the rest of the school at the next assembly, each group had the opportunity with this activity to create and take ownership of a relatively lengthy text in Arabic.

After they put these stories aside, the advanced students spent a month or more on various activities related to houses, rooms, and furniture. These topics were among those that appeared year after year (see Justin Brooks' comments on repetition below), but in this unit the Advanced learners were asked to complete demanding communicative tasks related to these topics. They described their own houses as well as hypothetical houses in which they would like to live if their parents moved to an Arab country, writing paragraphs and drawing floor plans. Then they used spoken Arabic to role play a real estate scenario, selling their hypothetical houses to their classmates. When Noura commented that her boys learned much more from projects than from day to day assignments, they had just completed projects from this unit.

By far the most widely enjoyed unit for the advanced boys was a unit focusing on soccer in which they learned more body parts than they had covered in prior years along with verbs and equipment related to playing soccer, watched video recordings of soccer games with Arabic commentary, and finally brought soccer balls and actually played soccer in the classroom, with certain students acting as commentators for the limited but very enthusiastic game. Malik and Imran each mentioned separately that this was their favorite unit, both because they were already interested in soccer and because they are "both interested obviously in like active things – instead of like non-active things?" (Interview 5). Although

soccer skills were certainly not part of the state standards for language learning at their level, Miss Majida had found a way to promote relatively authentic language use with a topic that was popular both among her students and in the Middle East.

In general, the Zaki boys both seemed to find the difficulty level of the class to be appropriate for their levels of competence in Arabic. They were able to engage in complex tasks but were not so proficient that they became bored easily. Also, each of them seemed to serve as a social leader for his classmates; others would look to them before deciding how to respond to a task or a comment. They both seemed to feel legitimate and well-established in their class, knowing what to expect and knowing that their participation mattered to the teacher and other students.

As a parent, Noura was less concerned with the specific practices of the Advanced class than with the overall function of the language program. She noted that the boys rarely spent much time on homework from school, unless they were working on projects. She believed that they learned more and became more engaged in their work when they had projects to complete, as when they designed and wrote about their hypothetical houses.

Recognizing that all the children and parents in the school were not equally dedicated to the Arabic language learning process, she offered the opinion that it might be beneficial, if unrealistic, for the school to offer other languages than Arabic to learners and allow them to choose. Also, she suggested ways to expand the scope of Arabic use across the school, by integrating it more projects in other content areas, and ways to extend Arabic learning to families, perhaps by producing a desk-top “page a day” calendar with a mini-lesson in Arabic on each page. Furthermore, she believed that the journal she chose to keep after agreeing to participate in this study was helpful to her, and that learners would benefit from using a journal to reflect on their own Arabic learning process and use.

In my last interview with Noura, she articulated her sense that as she and her husband are always “trying to sort between Arab culture, Muslim culture, American culture” to find the beliefs and practices that they believed were best. Thus she highlights possible identities that her family could put forward or construct, and she suggested that the result is a hybrid. In her view, the family tended to find themselves



“in our own little world” (Interview 4). She explained the distinctions that she saw between her family and other families that include Arab immigrants to the U.S. :

Actually what I've observed in terms of Arabic, is that sometimes they're at extremes. They either discard their language altogether, “We don't do that anymore, we're movin' on,” or they're so hooked onto preserving their language that they don't think ahead. Like, “we're going back home” kind of scenario... So that's fine, you're gonna... keep this language, and they don't really put as much effort into - like your child's gonna go to college here, so they need - good English skills as well. (Interview 4)

Contrasting her family with other Muslim Arab families who had decided either not to pursue Arabic or to maintain Arabic even at the expense of English, Noura implied that her family was striving for balance. The day-to-day, month-to-month, year-to-year struggle to allocate time, energy, and money so that the children could have a chance of becoming bilingual, could achieve a respectable level of religious literacy, and could excel in other school subjects and extracurricular activities was a persistent theme of Noura's interviews. Their family, in which the parents were raised in vastly different environments but had come together to raise bilingual Muslim Arab-American children, were deeply involved, legitimate members of the community of Mawaarith and, by all appearances, their local Muslim community. They intended for their children to be able to participate in academic and professional communities in the U.S. that depended on English, but they also thought they would participate in communities that would require high levels of proficiency in Arabic. As they sought to support the development of more advanced skills in their older boys and comparable abilities in their younger children, these goals required considerable ongoing investment in Arabic language learning in a range of contexts.

### 5.3 The El-Gendy Family

The El-Gendy family provided valuable insights into the experiences of parents who have immigrated from the Middle East and who use Arabic as their primary means of communication in the home. Their oldest daughter, Farah, who was in sixth grade at the time, made a strong impression on me and was clearly very proficient in Arabic, and I felt that she and her stories would shed light on the experience of an early adolescent Muslim girl learning Arabic at home and at school. She wore full *hijab*, including a headscarf, long sleeves, and an ankle-length skirt. These garments were not official school uniform items, but she and other girls in *hijab* were permitted to wear them if they were in made in school colors. Farah spoke with striking self-assurance for an eleven-year-old girl; it is impossible to say whether that trait helped her survive the stories of discrimination that she has told me or if it was gained from those experiences. Her confident and opinionated mother, Shireen, soon proved to be a source of rich insights not only in regard to her own family's experience of Arabic-English bilingualism but also in regard to teaching Arabic literacy, which she had done in her own home and in various volunteer settings.

As a child growing up in an Arabic-speaking home, Farah was already a proficient user of Arabic for day-to-day communication when she entered Mawaarith. The value of Arabic for her and for her family hardly seemed to be a matter for discussion. However, her investment in the instructed language-learning process seemed to be limited. She was not actively resistant to the classroom-based learning process, but nor did she or her mother seem to think that it was an essential or primary means of developing her Arabic proficiency.

**5.3.1 Family background.** The El-Gendys had four daughters, who ranged in age from three to eleven in the fall of 2009<sup>24</sup>. Shireen identified herself as Egyptian, though she had spent the first fifteen years of her life in Kuwait. Farah, in contrast, identified herself and her sisters as Palestinian like their father. When Shireen chose to marry a Palestinian man, she explained, she knew that this identity would have implications for her family's entire lives.

<sup>24</sup> Their family grew later, with the addition of a son.

My husband is born in Egypt, and he is treated as a Palestinian. As a refugee. All his life... it's extremely, extremely hard. When I agreed to marry him I knew that I am marrying that whole issue... and I know that's gonna affect my kids. All over the world we keep living like this. And she is like - they are lucky, they are American. They are born here. But still for Farah, for her, for my husband is different. (El-Gendy Family, Interview 1)

Shireen and her husband had moved to the U.S. in 2000, when Farah was a toddler. Adding to the family's sense of dislocation or transience, the El-Gendys had moved at least three times since then due to the logistics of the father's job as an architect, with projects that ended in one city and began in another. Farah had hardly ever attended the same school two years in a row. In the year of this study, she and her sisters were returning to Mawaarith after a year at another elementary school. Farah entered middle school, while the next two daughters continued in Mawaarith's elementary program. Shireen believed that this constant moving had made her more flexible: "really I can't do a plan like other people for a very long time. I live like week by week, month by month, year by year, and whenever - so this taught me how to adjust very fast" (Interview 1). At the same time, making a home in several places had allowed her and her family to experience life in different settings around the U.S., comparing them to each other and to life in Egypt. When she described the level of academic achievement that she expected from her daughters, she explained that she intended for them to be able to excel wherever they might go, even though educational standards would vary from state to state and country to country. At that time, moving to another state or even back to Egypt remained a strong possibility in her mind.

The El-Gendys had also found that their ability to participate comfortably in the society around them varied considerably from one home to the next. As Shireen narrated her life in various parts of the U.S., she began by explaining that people in different places had had different levels of tolerance for people from unfamiliar cultures. She described her neighbors in her first U.S. home, in a small Southern town, as very warm and welcoming. In contrast, she felt "not as comfortable" in the town where she lived now, where, in Farah's words, the people are "all into their own business," unconcerned with their

neighbors (Interview 1). Although they had found it more difficult to build close relationships here than in other places, they had found friends through their sprawling religious network, attending celebrations and other events all over the metropolitan area.

It was not until late in my second interview with Shireen that she delved into a more poignant story of adjusting to life in the U.S. in the aftermath of 9/11. She presented this experience through the lens of the lessons that she took from it, calling herself one of “the lucky persons” because she found that some Americans around her were ready to encourage and protect her. In fact, she remembered that some people, including “the people who loves me,” encouraged her to stop wearing *hijab* because it brought attention to her as a Muslim. With the support of such friends, including one neighbor, a widower who she said was willing to defend her with his rifle if necessary, she continued to dress in a way that reflected her beliefs. Although the following commentary on her experiences may be seasoned with a certain amount of humorous hyperbole, it illustrates both the sociopolitical context in which she is trying to raise and educate her Palestinian-Egyptian children and the equanimity with which she apparently tried to respond to animosity:

Shireen: I have these examples that told me, Okay, don't care about everyone. There is - half, and there is half. In the same time, there is another half, that they look at me and they are like, they wanna shoot me! @@@ Whenever they see me.

Amanda: That's awful... But it comes from fear...

Shireen: I::::'m not sure. No no no no. Some people are fear, and some people are racist even without fear... I don't care about it anymore. (Interview 3)

Throughout her story about this time in her life, Shireen emphasized that she has learned to recognize that Americans' responses to those events varied widely, and that if she had detractors, she also had supporters. Soon after this exchange, she simply stated that “you get practice in life” and changed the subject to focus on the method that she uses to teach her daughters to read Arabic.

Based on narratives like this one, it could be easily inferred that life in the U.S. had not been easy for the El-Gendys, but they remained ambivalent about returning to Egypt. Nevertheless, they had enjoyed at least one long visit since their arrival in the U.S. ten years earlier, spending three months with Shireen's parents in Alexandria. During this visit, Shireen told the girls, "you are not allowed in Egypt to speak English" (Interview 1). Whereas she might have been instituting a family rule to encourage them to strengthen their Arabic while they were immersed, the context of this statement suggests that the rule was more practical than pedagogical: she was warning them so that they would not be cheated by vendors and other locals. They had to speak Arabic in order to blend in with other Egyptian customers. Farah found that she had the linguistic competence to interact with these people, but she also found that she had to be alert to those who would think of her as American and "a tourist" despite her Egyptian appearance (Interview 1). In short, the El-Gendys' experience could be considered transnational, as they moved back and forth across national boundaries and maintained loyalties to communities in both Egypt and the U.S.

*5.3.1.1 Family language and literacy practices.* For Shireen, maintaining her children's academic excellence and also their proficiency in Arabic was a task so demanding, and yet a goal so important, that she gave up her own career almost entirely in order to focus on her daughters' development. Though she and her husband were both trained as architects, she said that she had told him, "Your ambition is your work. My ambition is my kids. This is how it goes" (Interview 1). Because Farah spent the first two years of her life in Egypt, teaching her Arabic deliberately did not become an issue until she was older. She is the only child of the four who was sent to pre-school, where she quickly learned to communicate in English. In contrast, Shireen chose to keep her other daughters, all born in the U.S., at home as long as possible in order to help maintain their Arabic.

The girls had been exposed to Arabic in various contexts and forms. From birth, the children heard Egyptian Arabic spoken in their home, but they code-switched when speaking it. They referred to this practice as "breaking" (Interview 1). Also from a very young age, the daughters had been exposed to the Classical Arabic of the Qur'an. Farah described the way that her youngest sister, who was then three, would put on an older daughter's headscarf and pretend to say prayers and recite suras along with her

sisters and parents. At three, she was already beginning to memorize suras herself, and according to Shireen this is the same age when her other daughters began to develop their religious literacy. One of Farah's many schools had been a full-time Islamic school in Philadelphia, and at the time of the study she and her school-aged sisters were attending weekly Arabic classes at a local *masjid* and more frequent classes in the summers. Meanwhile, Shireen maintained high expectations for the girls' performance in their English-medium schooling, and also brought back curricula from Egypt that she used to help the girls maintain a level of Arabic closer to that of their grade-level peers there.

As Shireen put it, parents of children like hers had to teach three languages, including the Classical Arabic of the Qur'an, the spoken Arabic used by her relatives in Egypt, and English:

And this is why we have a struggle with our children. It's not that we're supposed to teach them just the Arabic. We need to teach them *two* kinds of Arabic. One Arabic is to communicate with their family, which most of our families they don't speak English. She goes to her grandma, my mom doesn't speak English. So it's like - it's so difficult! It's like she's learning three languages, not just two. And in the same time, to keep your religion, to know what is it about, it's - you have to learn your Qur'an and to learn your Arabic. The different way of Arabic. The revelation one. The one that has the teachings. (Interview 1)

The El-Gendys' endeavors to promote bilingualism and biliteracy in their children demonstrate the complexity of this process in many Muslim Arab homes, where both a spoken variety and Classical Arabic are valued and serve important purposes. It should be noted that whereas Rahim Zaki referred to "Modern Written Arabic," Shireen does not mention a variety that could be compared to MSA. She might consider it equivalent to one of the two varieties she mentioned, or she might not consider it a priority for her children. She described varieties of Arabic that could be considered "high" and "low" based on prevailing understandings of diglossia, but for her these were colloquial Egyptian and Classical Arabic, not colloquial and MSA. Comparing these varieties, she considered the Egyptian spoken variety to be so

different from Classical Arabic that she presented her family's situation as comparable to Muslim families who speak a home language other than Arabic, like the Rowthers in this study:

All the the different Muslims, you'll find this the struggle. Like he's Turkish, he needs to learn Turkish. To communicate with his family. And he learn - he need to learn the Qur'anic Arabic. To be connected to his religion. And he needs to learn English, to connect to the community that he's living in. (Interview 1)

From Farah's descriptions of language use in their home, it seems that she had learned spoken Arabic informally through conversation, with her mother supplying words and phrases when Farah came across a gap in her knowledge and struggled to express herself. Learning to read Classical Arabic, however, had been a long, highly structured process. Shireen developed a method of her own to teach her first two daughters to read Arabic, and then she encountered a method developed by a Pakistani *imam* that used different colors to differentiate the linked letters from one another and directed the tutor to present each series of letter combinations in a repetitive rhythm. Practicing her letters with this system a few times a week had helped her third daughter to learn to decode Arabic much more quickly than her older two.

**5.3.2 Value of Arabic and the Arabic program.** The story of the El-Gendys' life in the U.S. prior to coming to Mawaarith that year suggests that the family's decision to send the girls to this school had as much to do with the political context as with their belief that the educational standards would be higher at Mawaarith than at nearby public schools. When asked about her reasons for sending the girls to Mawaarith, Shireen never mentioned that the availability of instruction in Arabic as a second language was an important reason for sending her girls to this school. Based on other comments, it seems that she was confident in her own ability to teach the girls what they needed to know in Arabic, both in spoken and written forms, and that in fact she was dissatisfied with the way that Arabic was taught at Mawaarith.

However, Mawaarith provided an alternative to public school in this state, where other children had taunted her daughters.

When the El-Gendys moved to this area, they enrolled their daughters in Mawaarith briefly, but they had to transfer them to the local elementary school for which they were districted due to transportation problems. I have already described the struggles that Shireen went through when her friends encouraged her to stop wearing *hijab* in order to protect her as animosity toward Muslims grew after 9/11. Farah had also faced discrimination and animosity from her peers at her prior public elementary school. Late in our first interview, I asked Farah to repeat the story that she had told me earlier about the elementary school she had attended for part of fourth and all of fifth grade, where the other children seemed to target her for wearing hijab and for the religion that prescribes it. At her prior school,

there was a lot of - like there were people who didn't respect like different religions. And like they weren't - like they didn't accept me as a part - although like I was an A student and everything, like I had friends, but still other people they didn't act normally around me, and - they called me little kid bad words. And stuff. @@ And um - it's like it didn't bother me that somebody's calling me - calling this like first grade insult, it just bothers me that it's like - I'm not doing anything to you, just because - probably it was because I covered my hair. And I wore skirts most of the time. And so I don't know why like they have a problem with that, but they did. And so - they didn't really respect me, although I respected them back. (Interview 1)

These children brought her to tears over and over, calling her a “diaperhead” and claiming, “Oh, you cover your head because you have cancer and you're bald,” (Interview 1). Her mother offered words of encouragement that echoed the same personal creed that helped her to respond with equanimity to people who threatened her after 9/11: “This is not about you. Don't take it personally. Don't make it affect you emotionally. Believe in what you are, and know that whoever is like this, he will be like this for anyone” (Interview 1). The family tolerated this situation for the remainder of the year, by which time



Farah had won both respect and allies, many of whom had also been discriminated against on the basis of their appearance and ethnic identity.

When the El-Gendys were able to drive their daughters to Mawaarith again, beginning in the year prior to this one, Farah found a much more supportive environment. When I asked Farah how she liked her school now, she insisted fervently that “I love Mawaarith. I don’t wanna leave,” though that remained an always-looming possibility (Interview 1). Later she reiterated that she wanted to stay: “When you get attached to a school, you don’t want to leave at all” (Interview 1).

Through these stories, the El-Gendys explained why they preferred Mawaarith to other options they might have had for their children’s schooling. In addition to regular (non-charter) public schools, Shireen had also tried sending her daughters to a private Islamic school in Philadelphia. However, she felt that her children were being exposed to cultural influences there that would be harmful to them, as well. Whereas she had hoped that this school would support their faith as well as their Arabic language learning, she came to believe that exposure to the way that other children and families there were acting out their Muslim identities would be detrimental to her children: “They have this mix, that they don’t know, should I be proud? Should I hide it? ... You know what they are like? They don’t have character” (Interview 3). She ended this statement with a laugh and continued to struggle to articulate what she found objectionable, but in light of her comments about striving to maintain her identity in the face of discrimination, this perception conveys values that have affected her educational decisions. She would rather, apparently, send her children to a school where not all the children are Muslim than send them to a school where many of the Muslims they met seemed, in her eyes, to lack integrity.

Considering the level of detail and the vivid stories that the El-Gendys provided when they were asked why they were attending Mawaarith and why they valued this community, they spent very little time articulating the purposes for which the children needed to learn Arabic. They mentioned that their extended family members did not speak English, and Shireen seemed to believe that her children might need to speak Arabic well enough to go to school in Egypt at some point in the future. Overall, I believe that they were not being reticent about the value of Arabic; instead, the value of Arabic to their family is

so obvious, or so inherent in their family identity, that they had little need to argue for it or negotiate its value. They seemed to consider it a given that they would use Arabic for family communication and also to participate in religious practices. Throughout the interviews, however, Shireen reiterated the idea that passing on Arabic to her children was a role and a responsibility that she took very seriously:

Shireen: Each individual is different. What is your priorities. For me my priority is like  
 - whenever I am living anywhere - in any part of the world - but I can't lose my identity.  
 This is who I am, this is my basic language, this is my basic religion, for any reason I'm  
 not going to give this away.

Amanda: And so if the girls couldn't speak Arabic, that would be like you losing something from  
 your identity?

Shireen: Of course! It's like I'm responsible about this creature. If she failed in it, this  
 doesn't mean that she's the one who failed. It means that I am the one who didn't  
 do my job. (Interview 1)

In this exchange, Shireen presents the teaching of Arabic as a way of maintaining not only communicative competence but also her religion and her identity. In this context, the identity that she was striving to maintain and strengthen through teaching her children Arabic could encompass membership in the imagined, extended communities of Arabic speakers, Egyptians, and Muslims, as well as her identity as a good mother. At the same time that Shireen believed that maintaining Arabic in her home was integral to her own identity construction, Shireen also articulated a vision for the identities that raising her children as Arabic-English bilinguals would enable for them. She hoped that her daughters would exceed her own limited bilingual abilities and be able to participate in both English-speaking and Arabic-speaking worlds:

My English sometimes hold me from expressing what I wanna say in a very advanced language... but I hope my girls, when they grow up, could be a bridge... and they could connect, with a good mind, with a good language, with a good attitude, and with a good character, they could like – fill the gaps. (Interview 3)

Even before the Arab Spring of 2011, which was largely instigated by young people, rocked Egyptian society, Shireen envisioned a role for her daughters in a modern global society:

This is why the new generation, they're a very strong generation, that they're both – they will be able to fix a lot of the mess that's happening in the world, because they are open-minded, they took from both cultures, they are more stable, they are more balanced. (Interview 3)

This idea of the children becoming bilingual and building bridges between societies that find it difficult to communicate and to understand each other was a theme that emerged over and over in these interviews. I heard it first from Grace Brooks, but Anna Kimball also expressed a desire to help her peers outside Mawaarith to understand and avoid stereotyping Muslims, and then Shireen expressed these hopes for her daughters. I will return to these ideas in the Brooks and Kimball family sections below and in Chapter 6.

**5.3.3 Current investment in Arabic.** Among the focal participants in this study, the El-Gendys use Arabic most often. For them it is not an object of study, removed from the exigencies of daily life, but rather a constant medium of communication. Their current practices in regard to developing Arabic language and literacy skills involve a combination of school activities, Qur'an classes at the local *masjid*, and even occasional visits to Egypt, but the foundation for this development is consistent use of Arabic at home.

**5.3.3.1 Language and literacy in the home.** When I asked Farah what her parents do in order to enrich her Arabic language learning, she simply replied, “we speak Arabic at home” (Interview 2), as if

the question were not applicable. She went on to explain ways that her mother would help her to express herself more accurately and talked about the ways that her mother teaches reading in Arabic, but the idea of deliberately encouraging the children to learn the language seemed not to fit the way that her family perceives their own interactions with and through Arabic. Rather than learners *per se*, they are they are active users of Arabic.

In fact, the ways in which Shireen promotes speaking, reading, and writing in Arabic are intensive, multi-faceted, and time-consuming, particularly in regard to early literacy skills. Her efforts to develop her daughters' Arabic involved daily use as well as a range of deliberate pedagogical practices in the home. Teaching her daughters to read and write as well as speak in Arabic was a task that Shireen considered one of her highest priorities and greatest responsibilities, and a responsibility that she viewed as hers more than her husband's. Farah's father might answer questions or offer short, informal lessons, such as teaching her Arabic rhymes to help her remember mathematical formulas. For her mother, however, teaching Arabic, including language and literacy, was an imperative.

Shireen said that she didn't "even remember how I learned the Arabic," but she recalls that it happened both "naturally" and "very academically" (Interview 1). Recognizing that Arabic had to be taught very differently in the U.S. than in Egypt, she had experimented with different approaches with each of her daughters. As I have mentioned, with each child she had tried to find a more efficient and effective process for developing literacy skills, and in these interviews she spoke authoritatively about the sequence that she was beginning with her fourth daughter.

This sequence of stages or "levels" began with learning to associate each letter, in its independent shape, with sounds. She had coloring books to support this stage, which she said would last about a year, that showed each letter in conjunction with one object whose name began with that sound. This use of coloring to teach letters may be among the practices that she learned from Farah's pre-school materials, though Shireen did not state that directly. The second level, then, involved learning the initial, medial, and final shapes of the letters and associating them with their independent shapes: "I will take the three shapes of the letters, and three words and three objects. One that has the letter at the beginning, one has the letter

in the middle, one has the letter at the end” (Interview 1). Finally, she would teach the vowel diacritics: “Third level is where they are fluent in - in speaking, that has each letter with the four signs... *Fatha*, *kesra*, *dumma*, and *sukun*” (Interview 1). While other people chose to teach reading first and then writing much later, she said, she preferred to teach them “so close to each other,” and claimed that, “by the end of the three steps, they are able to read anything, and that’s it. And write it, and write it” (Interview 1).

With the older girls, Shireen was using materials that she brought back from Egypt in an effort to keep their skills in Arabic more in line with the abilities of their peers of the same age there. At the same time, she had asked Farah’s humanities teacher for workbooks and other materials to help her prepare for the CRCT standardized exam in the spring, although she felt she had no reason to believe that Farah’s skills in English were below those of her peers. It sounded as if the girls were essentially attending school in English and then being homeschooled in Arabic, an observation that I shared with Shireen and that she did not deny.

Developing the girls’ proficiency in speaking Arabic was a much less formalized process than developing their literacy skills. Farah explained that her mother provided her with phrases when she had trouble expressing herself. In the example she gave, she wanted to tell her mother that Shireen was not paying attention to her. When her attempt to express this in Arabic faltered, Shireen supplied the phrase, “*inti mish murakkaza*,” which means “You are not focused [on me]” (Interview 1). Apparently Shireen was in fact paying attention; she was focused enough to teach her how to express her frustration in her native language. This incident provides an example of the informal teaching and learning that went on at home, but it also demonstrates the family’s use of *‘ammiyya* features including the pronunciation of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person pronoun, which would be *anti* in MSA, and the negation using *mish*. These forms would have disagreed with the MSA grammar Farah was encountering in school.

While the El-Gendys spoke Arabic to their children, the girls did not always speak Arabic to each other. Farah detailed the codeswitching practices that the girls used, which she called “breaking”:

It's like between the sentences, it's like if you wanna say um – 'I didn't do my homework, but I played' you'd say 'I didn't' in Arabic and then 'do my homework' in English and then 'but I' in Arabic. (Interview 1)

This practice worried Shireen, who said she was “fighting with it all the time” (Interview 1). She immediately reiterated that the family needed to go to Egypt again, this time pointing out that spending time there would strengthen the girls' Arabic and would help to make sure that they knew when they were alternating between languages, because in Egypt the girls were “not allowed to break” (Interview 1). Another visit to Egypt would provide opportunities to hear and use Egyptian Arabic communicatively with more people, but it would also allow the girls to observe Egyptian cultural practices that they might not otherwise encounter or understand. For example, until recently they had been under the impression that all Muslim women wore *hijab*, but Shireen had explained that women interpreted the wearing of *hijab* differently depending on personal beliefs as well as their local community. Although Shireen was wary of television in general because “it's destroying their ability to concentrate” (Interview 1), she had recently decided to allow her daughters to watch some television in hopes that it would aid the development of this kind of cultural awareness.

While some Arabic-speaking families in this population had forbidden English-language television because they were worried that it would diminish the use of Arabic in their home, Farah and her sisters occasionally saw television in English. Shireen did not draw connections, positive or negative, between television and her daughters' language development. However, when she compared her family's language learning and use to that of other families she knew, she insisted that one of the reasons those children had not learned Arabic was related to media use: “They got busy with life. Things like – distract them. More TV, more internet, more games, more electronics. They lost [the language]” (Interview 1).

Her point, however, was not that media use in itself was harmful, but that other families had not had the discipline and dedication to make sure that both languages were strong. She had observed how easily and inadvertently a family could fail to pass along Arabic to their children. As evidence of this

pattern, she described the experience of her uncle, who had come to the U.S. over twenty-five years earlier. His children spoke very little Arabic: “Barely. *Barely*. And what happens is that when they go back to Egypt, it’s very hard to understand, to communicate. And this broke his heart. So this is where I learned” (Interview 1).

Through the process of raising and educating her daughters and in the interview process, Shireen constructed herself as her children’s primary teacher and manager in regard to their Arabic skills and their education in general. Additionally, she constructed herself as a guard and guardian, preventing distractions and pressures from the immediate English-speaking environment from depriving the girls of their bilingual birthright. Farah, in turn, viewed herself as a proficient user of Arabic and seemed to have embraced her mother’s high standards for her educational achievements and language use. However, as time went on, the El-Gendys found themselves adjusting their priorities in regard to Farah’s education in the U.S.

In the summer of 2012, the El-Gendys were planning their first visit to Egypt in four years. By this time they had added a son to their family, and Shireen was planning to fly with all five children to visit her family. In particular, she hoped to spend time with her father, whose health was in decline, but she also wanted to strengthen her children’s ties with the country. At the same time, Shireen conceded with little apparent chagrin that her children were more American than Egyptian. She had attempted to put her daughters in touch with the daughters of her friends in Egypt, but they had found it difficult to establish common ground. Farah had begun studying Spanish at her new school and had taken to this third language so readily that her family began to think that she should “do something with languages” as a career rather than pursuing other careers they had envisioned for her, including medicine. While the family did not seem to have decreased the value that they placed on Arabic, the importance of academics and success in the U.S. context seemed to have increased relative to Arabic language maintenance and development.

5.3.3.2 *Language and literacy at the masjid*. Although Farah began learning to read and write Arabic at home when she was about three, as did her sisters, she began attending Qur’an-based language

classes at a *masjid* when she was in kindergarten or first grade. In sixth grade, she was attending these classes one day a week, though in summer she and her sisters attended such classes as often as three days a week. Comparing these classes with what she had been doing at home, Farah explained that:

On Sunday school it's the more um like educated stuff, like you memorize. They gave you a few *ayas* in every *sura*, today you're gonna memorize that, and then it's rarely you find them [doing] the translation? And so probably you have to do the translation at home by yourself. It depends on where you go. (Interview 1)

The previous summer's classes had been an exception to this generalization that the girls were not taught the meanings of the *ayas* and *suras* they were memorizing. Shireen had volunteered to teach the class that year, and so in "last year's summer school, we did translation" (Interview 1). According to Shireen, the children needed teachers who not only knew Arabic but could also talk about Arabic in terms that they understood from their English-language academic experience. For example, a bilingual teacher (like her, it was implied) could use the English word "adverb" rather than spending a great deal of time explaining the concept and term in Arabic. More than the language barrier, however, Shireen believed that the U.S. children's short attention spans impeded the success of these lessons. She insisted that she should not have to entertain the children and that the class "has to be rigorous" (Interview 1).

Although the El-Gendy girls attended classes at the *masjid* regularly and their mother was involved in these classes as well, it seemed that they viewed the *masjid* as a place for building community with other Muslims as much as they sought language development and religious training there. In fact, they were in the habit of going to many different gathering places for events:

For us, we love to go - all over. ... Whenever there is something... If there is an event, if there is a gathering, anything that will keep us in touch with our culture, with our religion... Anything



like speakers, sometimes it's a celebration, sometimes it's something for the kids, funs for the kids. (Interview 1)

Farah added that there might be a "party" or "a get-together" every month, but that the best month of the year for gathering with Muslim friends and making new friends was the month of Ramadan. "We love it, they love it, yeah," Shireen said of Ramadan. Farah reported that "some of our friends came from Ramadan this year – a lot of people" (Interview 1).

While the *masjid* provided an important social outlet for the El-Gendys, Shireen made sure I was aware that people rarely communicated in Arabic at these Muslim gatherings. Although these events were so multicultural that Farah had learned to recognize different women's countries of origin from the ways that they typically tied their headscarves, they generally used English as the medium of communication. Shireen explained that, "amazingly, we don't ah - we don't talk Arabic... we don't use Arabic except in our home - or with our friends" (Interview 1). Thus, for the El-Gendys, the primary arena for Arabic language learning, both speaking and literacy, remained the home rather than the *masjid*. As will be apparent from the next section, the proficiency Farah had developed this way was so advanced in comparison with her peers that even the highest level of Arabic at Mawaarith was rarely challenging for her.

*5.3.3.3 Language and literacy in the classroom.* Thanks to her mother's efforts at home, when Farah entered the Arabic program at Mawaarith she could read the Arabic alphabet and understand most of what she read, she could tell and write stories, and she could readily understand her teacher's spoken Arabic. Not every girl who was in the Advanced class at Mawaarith could read and write when she entered Mawaarith. The girls who could speak Arabic when they entered Mawaarith, including Farah, spoke a variety that is considerably different from the variety taught in class. As Farah put it, "the Arabic you speak at home is your origin. Like where you're from. But there is no country that speaks *fuSHa*. Every country has its own language, its own Arabic" (Interview 2).

As a result, some of the girls in her class, including Farah, were familiar with the spoken variety that their teacher spoke, and some were not. Nevertheless, she accepted that they were learning the formal variety in class, and she assumed that this was common practice in teaching Arabic as a foreign language:

Farah: I think *fuSHa* is to learn, for learning, but in countries, if you speak *fuSHa* to them, some people won't understand.

Amanda: So what do you mean the *fuSHa* is for learning?

Farah: Like if somebody's learning Arabic, they teach them *fuSHa*. They wouldn't teach them – the Arabic I speak at home.

At times these differences have caused some confusion or disagreements in class. The unit on food and food groups that was completed in the spring highlighted several differences between the MSA and spoken variety terms for foods and food groups and among the varieties spoken by girls in the class. Apparently, for example, some of the girls were accustomed to referring to yogurt as *zabaadi* and milk as *laban*, while others knew yogurt as *laban* and milk as *Haliib*. Farah pointed out that the dictionaries they used in class were little help in sorting out these differences because they only provided MSA<sup>25</sup>. The dictionaries' use of MSA is reasonable considering that MSA is the variety most associated with literacy and education in Arabic, but these girls seemed to want some kind of reference that would reassure them about the terms used in the varieties spoken by their families.

As for the differences between MSA and her family's spoken variety, Farah explained that she often recognized the vocabulary items that were presented in class, but she was often unsure about which terms from her Arabic vocabulary, primarily based in Egyptian vernacular, could be used in formal Arabic. In the case of the unit on food groups and eating habits, the names of the food groups seemed familiar, but Farah explained that her family commonly used a different word to refer to the same group

<sup>25</sup> Comparing two different readily available resources, I found that the *Oxford Essential Arabic Dictionary* listed yogurt as *zabaadi* (زَبَادِي) or *laban zabaadi* (لَبَن زَبَادِي) and milk as *laban* (لَبَن) or *Haliib* (حَلِيب). Translate.google.com (which Rahim Zaki might refer to as “too ‘*ammi*” or colloquial) has yogurt as *zabaadi* (زَبَادِي) and milk as *Haliib* (حَلِيب).

of foods: “like when she said it, I understood... it’s like I use a synonym of it” (Interview 2). For example, she recognized the name of the food group *al-zuyut* as the plural of *al-zayt*, oil<sup>26</sup>, and she recognized *Hubuub* (حبوب) as the word for grains, but she would not have used *Hubuub* to refer to bread and “things like with flour and stuff” (Interview 2). As she described learning these terms in class, her understanding of the differences she perceived between her spoken variety and MSA sounded more like a difference of register, with comparable but distinct terms used in different contexts, than features of two different language varieties.

As she encountered new terms in the classroom and as we discussed features of Arabic in the interviews, Farah demonstrated that, in addition to her relative proficiency in Arabic, she also had the advantage of a greater breadth of cultural context. At the same time, she did not have the familiarity with the ways that certain words would be used that a peer educated in Egypt might. While she understood *al-zuyut*, she was not sure what to say when I asked how “Fat” might appear on a nutrition label. When we spoke of translating “medicine” and “doctor”, she recognized the formal Arabic term that appeared in the dictionary we were using together, *dawaa*’, and immediately associated this term, which refers to a medicine or drug, with going to a pharmacy. She then differentiated *dawaa*’ from *Tib*, which refers to the science of medicine. She also stated that Egyptians would refer to a medical doctor both as *Tabeeb*, the term for doctor that Mawaarith students learned in their vocabulary lists for professions, and as *Tib*, and would use *Tabeeb* to address a medical doctor. When I asked how someone would address a doctor of philosophy or professor, however, she could only make a guess. Nevertheless, that guess was an educated guess informed by her bilingual, bicultural upbringing.

Interestingly, Farah expressed the belief that many of MSA’s words come “from normal Egyptian Arabic” (Interview 2). While an Arabic linguist might describe the relationship between *fuSHa* or MSA and Egyptian *‘ammiyya* differently, she recognizes that there is considerable overlap between the two varieties. Perceiving MSA and her family’s spoken variety as relatively close rather than relatively distant

<sup>26</sup> The USDA now refers to this group as Fats, Oils, and Sweets. Miss Majida was using a list of food groups in Arabic that its authors had aligned with the USDA designations.

may help Farah to avoid the frustration that some of her classmates expressed when they encountered gaps between the Arabic they knew and the Arabic they were expected to use in school.

Although there were several girls in her class who came from Arabic-speaking families, Farah sensed that her proficiency was considerably higher than that of the other girls in the class. At one point I told her that I had the impression that she tended to lose interest in some of the activities in class, even though she seemed to understand what she was doing. She brought up the example of the story that her class had constructed together with extensive coaching from their teacher and explained that she had to modify her writing to adjust for the level of other students in the class:

Farah: Yeah, I mean sometimes it gets annoying. Because she sometimes gives me extra work, but I finish the stuff really fast. That's the problem. I finish it fast, and then I don't know what to do?

Amanda: Okay. Even the hard stuff.

Farah: Yeah - even - the hard stuff – I don't know what the hard stuff were. There were - like the story [that the class wrote together], we had to finish the story, but me - like every time - like she gave me for example, write a story so the class - you could share it. I write it - too hard? For other people to share? So... either I have to do it really easy ... so people could understand, or do it really hard, and they can't understand it. (Interview 2)

When I asked if she thought there were any other students who could keep up with her, Farah said that there were a few and mentioned one by name. However, this classmate has grown up speaking a Levantine variety at home, not an Egyptian variety like Farah and their teacher, “so she speaks totally differently. So even Miss Majida goes gentle on her” (Interview 2). As an exceptionally proficient student in the Advanced class, Farah was not complaining about her classmates or her teacher, but she was

complaining about the boredom of sitting in a class in which she did not think that she was gaining much in her knowledge of Arabic.

In general, Shireen made a practice of involving herself in her daughters' schooling; this applied to the Arabic classes as much as humanities, math, and science. She had expressed concerns to the Arabic teachers, though she did not state whether she felt that these concerns had been addressed or not. The aspect of the Arabic program that bothered her most was not that she felt Farah was not being sufficiently challenged, but rather that she did not believe the language was being taught in a systematic way that would help the learners understand the whole language:

With our curriculums back home, it's the steps. So it's easy. With a smart student, with a smart person, who can go, like kindergarten, finish it, go to the next step, to go to the next step, go to the next step, he will catch the whole Arabic with the right approach, step by step. (Interview 3)

When Shireen speaks of "the whole Arabic" here, she means that children who grow up in Arabic-speaking countries still need to learn to use the more complex grammar of formal Arabic, but she implies that this achievement occurs gradually and effectively over years of schooling. In contrast, she characterizes the Mawaarith teachers and other teachers in the U.S. as avoiding grammar, such as verb inflection for gender and tense: "They approach the language as like - we will give just some vocabulary. Vocabulary doesn't build the language" (Interview 3).

At the same time, Shireen was worried that some of the materials used in the program were diluting the language, providing borrowed words rather than their more traditional Arabic counterparts. For example, class materials might use *tilifun* (تليفون) rather than *haatif* (هاتف) for "telephone" or substitute *biknik* (بيكنيك) for the more traditional *nuzha* (نزهة) for "picnic". In her mind, this use of borrowed words was a dangerous practice, and she described its effect not only as limiting the learners' understanding but also as harming the language itself: "It bothers me, because it kills language... If I am teaching... If I kept doing this – my language is done" (Interview 3).

Farah and Shireen's discussion of their interest in the school and their impressions of the Arabic program suggested that they were more interested in the environment of Mawaarith as a school where Arabic is taught than in the actual opportunity to increase Farah's proficiency in Arabic. Neither Farah nor Shireen seemed to identify the variety of Arabic taught in school as a variety separate from the Egyptian Spoken Arabic they used at home or the Classical Arabic of the Qur'an that the girls study in their Sunday school classes. They seemed to believe that Farah had been able to develop both oral communicative competence and literacy through interactions with her parents and her mother's deliberate tutelage at home. MSA would be important for the El-Gendy girls if they did in fact need to return to Egypt and study in Egyptian schools, but their family did not seem to see the Arabic program at Mawaarith as offering access to a variety of Arabic that they would not otherwise be able to learn.

When the El-Gendys faced the decision of keeping Farah at Mawaarith or moving her to the public middle school, they may not have regretted the loss of the Arabic program because they were not dependent on the Arabic program in the first place. Shireen reported proudly that Farah was thriving at her new school. She had received the highest score in the eighth grade on the standardized exam that spring, and that she had also won a poetry competition at her school. While the choice to leave Mawaarith might suggest a decrease in the value of Arabic learning for this family, I believe it would be more appropriate to infer that, unlike the other families in this study, the El-Gendys did not rely on Mawaarith as the primary means of promoting Arabic language skills in their children, and thus academic rigor took priority in their school decision.

#### **5.4 The Rowther Family**

Maryam Rowther and her husband were born in the province of Tamil Nadu in India, where a large minority of the population is Muslim. Their chosen pseudonym comes from the name of a large community of Indian Muslims and was also the surname of a maternal great-grandfather. Soon after the parents' marriage, Maryam joined her new husband in the U.S., where he was already working as a computer engineer. Their two children, Hassan and Hibba, were both born in the U.S. When this study

began, Hassan was in the sixth grade, and Hibba was in the fifth grade. The family had just returned from two years living in India, where the children had attended a primary school in which most instruction took place in Tamil, which is the parents' first language. Prior to that, the children had attended Mawaarith for a year.

Throughout their interviews, which took place at the school and at their nearby apartment, the Rowthers were often preoccupied with the transitions and comparisons between the U.S. and India. Despite the challenges of changing countries and schools, the children seemed to be achieving academic success at Mawaarith with little trouble. Their mother, Maryam, was in graduate school that year for an education degree. Although her time was already stretched, she professed to be very interested in the focus of this study and more than willing to commit to these interviews. Hassan, an intelligent boy with speech so quick that it was sometimes difficult to decipher, would probably rather have been reading a book or playing with “gadgets” (an obsession that could lead to a career, according to his mother). Though I did not interview his father or his sister Hibba, she was often nearby and hovered curiously during the first and second rounds of interviews.

Based on his own reports and my observations, Hassan was invested in learning Arabic, both in and out of school. This investment seemed to stem from his parents' perspective on the value of the language and his own interest in greater proficiency. However, he was interested in certain skills in and purposes for Arabic that did not always align with the goals of his Mawaarith classes.

**5.4.1 Family background.** Maryam Rowther grew up in a Tamil-speaking Muslim family with a relatively high socioeconomic status. She was educated by nuns in a Catholic school where English was the primary medium of instruction and the girls learned to recite the Lord's Prayer. Though she grew up speaking Tamil with her family, she never studied Tamil in school. English was important not only for her classwork but also because it was the only language that all of her close friends spoke fluently. Her friends came from different religious backgrounds as well as language backgrounds, crossing multiple community boundaries as they studied together. Many of them studied Hindi in school as well, hoping that proficiency in the lingua franca of the government would allow them to seek jobs at the federal level.

Later Maryam took up French also, while some friends continued to focus on Hindi and one opted for Sanskrit, “which is like studying Latin” (Interview 1). As a result of the many home and school languages available in her community, Maryam grew up in an environment in which complex sociolinguistic choices about which language to maintain and promote were an unavoidable aspect of parents’ and students’ educational decision-making.

Though Maryam at one time hoped to become a doctor, she focused on history in school. After she came to the U.S., she took courses in computer programming, which she explained as an effort to understand her husband’s career. As I have mentioned, she was working toward a graduate degree in education when this study began, which meant that she often worked late into the night after her children went to bed. Later, after finishing this degree, she took a job at Mawaarith. She had also worked at Mawaarith briefly during the family’s earlier tenure, and she left that job reluctantly when they moved back to India.

Maryam remembers vividly her reactions to the U.S. when she arrived as a young bride, twelve years or so before this study began. There was a drastic contrast between her home city in India, with its millions of inhabitants and multicultural, multilingual society, and the small city in the southern U.S. where her husband was already working. Like her husband before her, she had to adjust to the unfamiliar food, the small household, the lack of servants, and even the traffic. Like many of the Muslim mothers at Mawaarith, she wears *hijab* in public, including a headscarf and an ankle-length, long-sleeved coat, but she claimed that women from all religious backgrounds dressed very modestly in her hometown. The tank tops, shorts, and bathing suits that were common summer attire in her new home shocked her when she arrived and, for the first time, made her feel out of place in *hijab*.

Despite Maryam’s professed love of language learning and her pride in being multilingual, she soon found that she craved opportunities to speak Tamil. She found that she could feed this craving with Tamil-language movies and with her family’s weekly conversations with relatives in India, spending large portions of Saturday or Sunday contacting them by telephone or Skype voice over internet service. Over



time, she had made Tamil-speaking friends as well, claiming that socializing with other Tamilians<sup>27</sup>, most of whom were Hindi, had often been more important to her than socializing with Muslims from various countries.

Growing up in a Muslim home, Maryam began learning to read Classical Arabic at a young age. When she studied the Qur'an, though, both in India and the U.S., she used an English translation alongside the Arabic text in order to understand the meaning of the suras. She maintained that English was more helpful to her than Tamil in this case; since she was educated in English, she was not proficient in the "high" or more literary form of Tamil. This bilingual process of reading the Qur'an for comprehension was self-directed. Arabic was valued for religious purposes when she was growing up, but she was not expected to understand Arabic when she read it. Unlike her other three languages (English, Tamil, and French), Arabic was not used for communication:

It was never a need to be able to converse in Arabic, or to be able to understand the language... you just had to - you know - memorize the alphabet, so rote memorization, and learn how the verbs are conjugated and just read it, because that was part of our religious texts. And *I* wanted to know the meaning, right? So there was nobody there to help me, basically, because - and so I picked up a translation of the Qur'an, and then I would - do the transliteration and the translation myself. (Interview 2)

Now that her children were studying Arabic in school, she expressed regret that that she had not put more energy into improving her proficiency in the language. By then, her family was investing in Arabic more than in Tamil. Although both of Hassan and Hibba's parents came from Tamil-speaking families, they decided to speak English with their children when they were born. At the time, Maryam had believed that exposing them to more than one language in their very early years would be confusing, and she believed that hearing and learning English would be inevitable. The children were clearly dominant in

<sup>27</sup> This is the term that Maryam used to refer to speakers of Tamil.

English when I met them, though they said that they spoke in Tamil frequently during their recent years in India and, unlike their mother, studied in a Tamil-medium school there. In order to ease their transition to India, Maryam essentially home-schooled them for several months and employed a tutor. While their Tamil skills were not comparable to those of their classmates, their strong English was admired.

Less than a year after returning to the U.S., Hassan was able to read a long list of conversational phrases in Tamil, some of which were unfamiliar, with little hesitation, but both children found it difficult to write in the complex, swirling syllabary that is used for Tamil. As for his spoken Tamil, Hassan might use Tamil with his extended family and with people who didn't speak English in India, but he said that he would be more likely to speak English with Tamil-speaking visitors to his home both in the U.S. and in India. His explanations were simple: "it takes me a long time to say it" in Tamil, and "they all speak English too" (Interview 3). Like Caldas's (2006) French Canadian-American children, he seemed to be more attuned to the language of his immediate environment and ease of communication than to the value or significance of one language or another.

As for Arabic, Hassan began learning to read with a tutor at a very young age, as did his mother. By the time he began studying Arabic at Mawaarith, he was able to read the script fluently, with the complex diacritics and grammar that appear in the Qur'an and not MSA texts, though his comprehension was very limited: "So I didn't know the meaning, but I learned to read very well, I knew the alphabet very well, I was very fl - I could read very well" (Interview 1).

The few words that he knew were related to religious practices. He knew how to greet someone formally, saying "Peace to you" and replying "And to you peace," and but not how to initiate a conversation: "well actually I knew words before, because when you see another Muslim, you say, *as-salaam aleikum*, and he responds, *wa aleikum salaam*... but that was about it" (Interview 3).

The Rowther family's home languages, the languages in which they communicate with each other and their extended family, are Tamil and English. Thus, if the definition of a heritage learner involves a cultural connection to the language and exposure at home, implying that the child has learned the target language through communication with his or her parents, then Hassan and his sister are not heritage

learners of Arabic. However, their parents have made it possible for them to learn to read in Arabic through tutors and Saturday school. More importantly, Hassan himself identified Arabic as a heritage language. He gave a positive answer to the question, *Do you consider Arabic a heritage language?* on the student survey. When I asked him to elaborate on this response in the first interview, he explained that Arabic was “part of my culture? Religion? Religious culture?” (Interview 1).

As the sections below illustrate, Hassan’s self-perception as a heritage learner of Arabic is only one component of the larger picture of investment in Arabic learning. Due to the family’s “religious culture,” Hassan was exposed to literacy in Arabic before he entered kindergarten, and he was continuing to encounter Arabic literacy in classes both at Mawaarith and at the local *masjid* and through other religious events and practices. While he did not often use Arabic for communication, he and his family were making considerable investments in his development of Arabic proficiency. It seems that the family had focused on a different balance of language skills depending on where they lived, and at that time they were prioritizing English and Arabic.

**5.4.2 Value of Arabic and the Arabic program.** The story of the Rowthers’ decision to come to Mawaarith has two parts, in that they made a decision to enroll their children in 2005 when the school opened but after two years decided to return to India for an extended visit that lasted through two school years. The second part of their arrival story, then, is their decision to return to Mawaarith when they came back to the U.S. In fact this family seemed to take it for granted that they would attend Mawaarith when they returned. Instead of dwelling on the comparison between Mawaarith and other schools in the area, as all four of the other families did at some point, they were preoccupied with comparing Mawaarith to their experience of schools in India.

For Maryam, the memory of schooling in India includes the highly-structured education she received from nuns in a Catholic school and the small primary school that she carefully chose for her children during their time there. For Hassan, who was only nine and ten at the time, the memory of schooling in India largely seemed to revolve around the fear of having his knuckles rapped for disobedience, an event that Maryam thinks was quite rare but Hassan recalls vividly. In both cases, Mawaarith

represented an approach to education that felt far more free and therefore required the learners to develop more autonomy.

The features that Maryam seems to value most about Mawaarith have to do with the social network and the educational philosophy. She knows many of the mothers of the children in Hassan's class through their religious community and has known at least one of these mothers for ten years or more. During her recent stint in India, she found herself drawing on the methodologies she associated with expeditionary learning to guide her decisions when she worked as an administrator for an orphanage: "I could say that I was so taken in, and [Mawaarith's methods] had created such an indelible mark, the whole concepts of outdoor class and stuff ... So I kind of implemented a number of these concepts there," (Interview 4). For her, the decision to send her children to Mawaarith seems to be integrally connected to the larger comparisons that she draws between education and career opportunities in India and those in the U.S.

As for the value of Arabic specifically, it is important to recognize the difference between the competence that Hassan had already established in Arabic before he came to Mawaarith and the competence the Rowthers hoped he would gain through studying Arabic at Mawaarith. Hassan states repeatedly that "I could read very well" before he came (Interview 1), meaning that he could decode Arabic fluently and read well enough to learn suras and recite them during his daily prayers. Having already reached this threshold of competence in his religious literacy, he hoped that he would learn not only to read, recite, and memorize Arabic accurately but also to comprehend what he read:

Well, the Quran is written in Arabic, and they have translation books, but if you really wanna - like just get it like looking at a normal book without translation, it'll be better to know Arabic, like to speak it. (Interview 1)

One of the main benefits of studying MSA in a foreign language model at Mawaarith, then, was that he would develop a greater ability to comprehend Arabic, and this would enrich his understanding of

the Qur'an and his ability to read and memorize the Qur'an. In this way, Hassan's reasons for studying Arabic sound very similar to the Zaki boys' explanations of the connection between school Arabic and religious Arabic. However, in Hassan's case the distinctions between the various sub-skills that a Muslim child might develop in Arabic, including the ability to read for religious purposes and the ability to use Arabic communicatively, are more immediately apparent.

At the same time, Maryam seemed to value the study of Arabic as a foreign language both for religious reasons and because it would expand Hassan's ability to communicate with speakers of other languages. Just as she had wanted for herself, she wanted Hassan to be able to understand the Qur'an without translating. When she spoke of learning other languages, including French, she emphasized that she loved languages and wanted to speak many languages because they would increase her ability to communicate: "I like to connect to people and relate to them. I guess that's my ulterior motive" (Interview 2). While Maryam valued Arabic for religious purposes, her experience with and interest in other languages likely contributed to her dissatisfaction with practices that involved reading without comprehension and led her to value a balanced, communicatively-oriented approach to language teaching.

For his part, Hassan could foresee using Arabic both in his immediate community and his future career. He valued Arabic because of his religion, but his religious community also provided opportunities to use Arabic: "in our *masjid*, we have a lot of Arab people, so I could speak to my friends" (Interview 3). He might not use Arabic in that context often, given that the Zakis and El-Gendys reported that most people there communicated in English, but he did have opportunities to interact comfortably and frequently with native speakers of Arabic. Also, he discussed using Arabic in his future career as if it were a strong possibility. He might live in the Middle East for a time, he thought, and, although his career ambitions had to do with computer technology like his father's, he said that this path might take him abroad, "like if I was to develop new technologies in other countries" (Interview 5). When I asked Hassan if this was an attractive possibility, he responded with some enthusiasm: "Um, yeah! I would like to go around the world. That would be interesting" (Interview 5).

To summarize, while religion might provide the most direct and immediate set of reasons for studying Arabic now, Maryam and Hassan both seemed to believe that studying Arabic at Mawaarith would serve Hassan well by increasing his comprehension when he read and his communicative competence. It seems that Hassan had fulfilled what they perceived as the basic requirements for a Muslim child from a non-Arab background in that he could read the Qur'an, but he expected to benefit from the language learning experience provided by Mawaarith.

**5.4.3 Current investment in Arabic.** Unlike the Zakis and the El-Gendys, the Rowthers only used Arabic for religious purposes in their home. However, unlike the Brooks and Kimball children, the Arabic that Hassan encountered at school was informed by and complemented by hours of study outside school every week. The sections below describe the balance of language use across all three of Hassan's languages and across the three contexts in which he used Arabic: home, the *masjid*, and school.

**5.4.3.1 Language and literacy at home.** Hassan Rowther's current use of Arabic was primarily associated with his religious practices and with his school Arabic classes, but he and his sister were first exposed to Arabic in use was at home, like the Zakis and the El-Gendys. Unlike them, no one in his family used Arabic to communicate, but he did have access to Arabic texts in his home. There was Arabic calligraphic art on the walls of the Rowthers' apartment, and Hassan could open the family's Arabic Qur'an and study it whenever he wanted; in fact, he did not hesitate to bring it to me when he wanted to make a point about diacritics during the interview that took place at their apartment.

Prayer in Arabic probably constitutes the most regular and extensive use of Arabic in the Rowther family. Maryam stated that the family lives near their *masjid* so that it is convenient for Hassan's father to pray in community with other Muslims as often as possible, while she and the children generally pray at home. Hassan explained the sequence and timing of daily prayers and detailed how he recites suras that he has memorized, each in the order in which they appear in the Qur'an. Perhaps because he uses Arabic outside school almost exclusively for the purposes of Qur'an study and prayer, the many aspects of religious literacy were most apparent in Hassan's case. For him, religious literacy involves not only decoding text from the Qur'an, pronouncing it accurately, and understanding as much as possible, but also

memorizing and retaining suras, learning the order in which they appear in the Qur'an, reciting these suras from memory during prayer, identifying the locations and meanings of even more suras, and perhaps even skills such as knowing how to determine what time of day one should pray, as the time shifts with the lengthening and shortening of daylight throughout the year.

While Hassan's Arabic was constrained within these domains of religious use, his Tamil language use was almost entirely oral and informal. Hassan watched films in Tamil with his mother, they listened to Tamil-language music given to them by an uncle, and they talked to their extended family in India via Skype every weekend, primarily in Tamil. Hassan's parents did not seem to be investing directly in the maintenance of Tamil, however. Maryam valued Tamil and made sure that her children received help with formal Tamil when they were attending school in India, but currently they were much more focused on the learning of Arabic.

In fact, an incident took place in the middle of my visit to their home for the second interviews that made Maryam more concerned about her children's Tamil literacy. When Maryam asked Hassan to write his name for me in Tamil, he actually began to write the letters from right to left, as in Arabic, although Tamil's elaborate characters are written from left to right, like English. Maryam cried out in disbelief, and Hassan immediately defended himself by saying that he was learning Arabic now. As the family invested more in Arabic than Tamil, Hassan's Arabic literacy seemed to be superseding his Tamil literacy. This shift in the balance of Hassan's skills seemed to result from changes in context rather than changes in Maryam's values regarding the family's languages. While Tamil apparently received greater investment than Arabic when the family was living in India and the same might be true again at a later date, the context at the time of this study favored the development of Hassan's Arabic literacy.

*5.4.3.2 Language and literacy at the masjid.* Like the Zaki boys, Hassan was attending Saturday school at the local *masjid*, though he was not going to classes on weeknights as they were. His description of the class's activities complements theirs. He mentioned memorization, *tafseer*, and also the discussion of "word roots" as major components of the class, and he emphasized that neither *tafseer* nor this analysis of words based on their consonant roots had any corollary in his classes at school. *Tafseer*, which

involves learning not only the meaning of a passage but also about the guidance that passage offers about living a righteous life, would be inappropriate in school, he acknowledged, and he had never heard his teachers mention word roots. In fact it was Hassan, not Farah, Imran, or Malik, who explained to me this aspect of Arabic grammar:

Hassan: So suppose there's a word called *kaathibuun*, which means "liars" {كاذبون} It comes from the root word *kathib* {كذب}, yeah, and then that goes down to *kath* -

Amanda: What does *kathib* mean?

Hassan: *Kathib* is - "lie"... so it's the root word of *kaathibuun* [liars]. So... where you have a root word, so you can understand. So if you know *kathib*, you can know *kaathibuun*.

(Interview 3)

While this explanation does not confirm that Hassan had more metalinguistic knowledge of Arabic than these children from Arabic-speaking families did, it does suggest that he had developed a fairly sophisticated awareness of Arabic morphology. Through his Saturday school class, Hassan believed that he had increased the fluency and accuracy of his reading, and he had also developed lexical knowledge in Arabic and learned to recognize features of the Arabic language that I never heard mentioned in the Arabic classes at Mawaarith. Not only could he recognize words from suras that he had memorized, but, as the quote above demonstrates, he understood, at least in a fundamental way, the role of three-consonant roots in Arabic word derivation. He was able to explain that Arabic is based on a system of roots, and that knowing the root words would expand his vocabulary and allow him to recognize subtle differences in meaning. In my experience, university students in their third semester of Arabic might not have reached this level of metalinguistic awareness of Arabic structure.

While Hassan seemed confident about his ability to read and memorize passages from the Qur'an, he recognized that he was more limited than his classmates at the *masjid* when it came to understanding the meaning of the suras they were studying "because my native language is not Arabic" (Interview 3).



Apparently this difference was frustrating to him because it slowed down his ability to earn candy from his teacher for providing the right meaning of a word, but candy was not his only incentive to learn. Learning to identify the meanings of more words helped him to understand the Qur'an more deeply and independently, and it also increased his advantage in his school Arabic class.

For the Rowthers, like the Zakis and El-Gendys, participation in Qur'an Arabic classes provided opportunities to deepen the children's knowledge of Classical Arabic and of the content of the Qur'an. Importantly, though, these classes and other religious and social events at the *masjid* also provided opportunities to build community with other Muslims and with users of spoken Arabic. This access was likely more significant for Hassan Rowther as a learner of Arabic than for the Zaki and El-Gendy children because they had access to users of spoken Arabic through their immediate and extended families. Hassan stated "most of my friends are Arab" (Interview 3) and that he occasionally tried to converse with them in Arabic. Likewise, while the El-Gendys and Zakis explained that their local religious community rarely used Arabic for the purposes of interpersonal communication, and Maryam Rowther spoke of using Hindi/Urdu with friends at the *masjid*, nevertheless the *masjid* community allowed Maryam to build relationships with the mothers of heritage learners at Mawaarith. Through these friendships with other mothers who had some knowledge of Arabic, Maryam could monitor her child's experience in the Arabic program at Mawaarith, as well as other classes, in ways that most parents who did not have these links to Arab and Muslim communities could not.

*5.4.3.3 Language and literacy in the classroom.* In the *masjid*, Hassan was studying "the Words of the Qur'an" with children from Arabic-speaking homes who could understand the material more easily than he could; he never mentioned classmates who were non-Arab Muslims like him. At school, on the other hand, he was in the Intermediate class with a group of boys that included other non-Arab Muslims, one boy from an Arabic-speaking family (a third-generation Palestinian boy who had attended another middle school for the first half of the year but returned to Mawaarith after being bullied and accused of carrying bombs in his backpack), and several FLLs who were in at least their second year at Mawaarith. Over the course of the year, they studied classroom and family vocabulary; made posters with images of

the rooms in a house; read paragraphs about a student called Layla, her home, and her typical week; and learned vocabulary associated with parties and invitations in a unit that culminated with a party at school (to which one boy responded, “finally, something fun!”). The intermediate students also carried out at least two research projects in English on topics related to the Middle East, first looking for geographic and cultural features of an assigned Arabic-speaking country and then preparing a short presentation on an Arab scientist. They often completed packets of worksheets and worked with sets of flashcards, which they sometimes made and sometimes received from their teacher, to help them learn vocabulary.

As the students worked in their groups, it was not uncommon to see Hassan race through even a complex activity, such as reading a long paragraph and answering questions, while others struggled with their activities. While Hassan could decode Arabic script fluently without relying on transliteration as a stepping-stone to comprehension, his classmates surreptitiously asked each other, “How do you spell that?”, which meant, “How do you write that Arabic word in English letters?” When their teacher tried to phase out all use of English-based transliteration in class, many of these students persisted in improvising English spellings for the new words, which they wrote on their word lists next to the Arabic script.

Compared to the FLLs in his class, Hassan admitted that he and a handful of his classmates had multiple advantages, primarily “because we were Muslims, we read the Qur’an a lot, so we can pronounce it correct and stuff” (Interview 3). The RHL and AHL boys had the benefit of already knowing the writing system of Arabic, so that they could read and pronounce the words accurately even if they could not understand all of them or use them to speak. Additionally, though, Hassan believed that he was a better learner because “I just look at the word and I get it” (Interview 1). He later clarified that his ability to memorize had improved considerably while he was attending school in India, and that this skill served him well in his Arabic class. He also has the benefit of longevity at Mawaarith, despite his sojourn overseas. When he added that, “I’m more comfortable, I’ve seen it before” (Interview 1), at first I believed that he was referring to vocabulary that he had learned from his study of the Qur’an, but later discussion suggested that he meant he had seen this vocabulary in earlier grades at Mawaarith.

The assertion that Hassan was “more comfortable” than his classmates is also deceptively simple. In the Intermediate class, students were generally expected to read and write the Arabic alphabet. Miss Salima often provided texts in transliteration at the beginning of the year in an effort to ease the students into relying on Arabic more fully. By February, though, classroom readings, quizzes, and tests appeared only in Arabic script. This adjustment was almost inconsequential for Hassan, but he noticed that his classmates still struggled to decode text, while he and the other sixth-graders with well-established Arabic literacy raced through their work and had to sit in the corner quietly looking at the Arabic Picture Dictionary (an activity he described as “boring,” from which he said he rarely learned new words) until everyone was finished. More than once, a seventh or eighth grade boy had to sit with the teacher while completing an activity or even an exam while the teacher read the Arabic text to him.

Hassan did not complain that these learners were slowing the class down. However, more than once when he mentioned an aspect of school Arabic that he did not enjoy, he brought up the problems that his classmates were having: “towards the end of the year, she stopped giving the transliteration, which is how the word sounds, so like many people, they didn’t really get the words after that ... and so they ended up like getting bad grades” (Interview 5). Though he acknowledged that, “actually they were here, like last year and the year before, so they should know” (Interview 5), it was not obvious whether he thought the blame should fall on the boys or their teachers if they could not read Arabic. For Hassan, his many years of experience with reading Arabic made it easy for him to work with texts in school that provided Arabic text without translation. Although his communicative skills were not much stronger than those of his classmates, he seemed to be able to learn more efficiently, assisted by his fluent decoding skills. Thus his prior proficiency made the class much easier for him, but it may also have made it more frustrating for him. While he was sensitive to his classmates’ difficulties, the slower pace may have decreased his desire to invest in Arabic at school.

Maryam was aware that Hassan did not “feel challenged” and might benefit from moving into the Advanced class the following year. In that class, he would be comfortable not only because he could read but also he interacted with the boys in that class both in school and at his *masjid*. Another benefit of

moving up would be that Maryam would be able to monitor what was happening in Arabic more closely if he were in that group, since many of her friends also had children in the Advanced class. She had discussed this move with the Arabic teachers, and she seemed to believe that they would move him if she requested that they let him advance. However, she conceded that “he would have to shell out quite a bit of time for Arabic as opposed to the other subjects” (Interview 5) if he moved up. Investment involves a expectation of return, and when Maryam weighed the benefits of moving Hassan up against the strain that might put on his other academic subjects, she preferred to keep him in the less-demanding Intermediate class.

In short, although Hassan did not seem to have a particular love of languages, his experience studying Arabic literacy at the *masjid* and vocabulary at Mawaarith made him a quick and confident learner of Arabic in middle school, easy to work with and comfortable with the demands of his class. While many of his classmates seemed to grow in frustration as the year went on, the greatest threats to Hassan’s investment in Arabic class seemed to be boredom and disinterest. He did not see why they should be studying geography or famous Arabs, which “had nothing to do with Arabic” in his mind (Interview 3), and he often grew bored after finishing tasks before anyone else. Given the relative importance of Arabic and other classes at school, though, his mother chose to keep him in the class that might be too easy rather than move him to a class where he would have to work harder to keep up. By this age, he had already achieved a level of literacy that would allow him to engage in religious practices, and without clear goals for using his school-based MSA he was at risk of becoming a relatively proficient but uninvested learner.

### 5.5 The Brooks Family

The Brooks family came to their first interview *en masse*, with father, mother, son, and daughter gathering around a low table that was usually used to tutor elementary school children. They were prone to speaking over each other and finishing each other’s sentences. I later interviewed their mother, Grace, on the school premises, and their father, David, at the family’s home, and I interviewed their son, Justin,

after each of these one-on-one parent interviews. Justin is an introvert, as I observed and as his father explained; normally after school he would go home and head go straight to his room to read and recharge, but he tolerated the interviews well. He was quiet, but nevertheless cooperative and forthcoming. When this study began, Justin was in seventh grade, and his younger sister Jessica was in third grade. In his fifth year at Mawaarith, he had developed enough Arabic literacy to be placed in the intermediate class, where he sat with other seventh-grade FLL boys at a different cluster of desks from Hassan.

Like many families at Mawaarith, the Brooks family has strong ties to another country that is not in the Middle East, though it does have a large Muslim population. Their father, David, was born and raised in the Midwestern U.S., while their mother, Grace, was born to a family of Chinese descent in Malaysia and moved to the U.S. for college. The parents met when they were training at the same school for Christian mission work, and today both continued to be involved in forms of ministry. They spoke often of their efforts not only to promote their children's academic success but also to build relationships with their teachers, their classmates, and their classmates' parents. As did their mother and father, the children had grown up speaking English at home, but they had been exposed to international visitors and residents from many different countries, both through their parents' work and social networks and through the language school that their grandparents ran nearby.

With their international background and contacts, the Brooks family was much more strongly committed to language learning in general than to Arabic in particular, though they were clearly aware of the geopolitical value of Arabic today and in the foreseeable future. For Justin, though, his parents' awareness of the benefits of learning Arabic did not always translate into a high level of effort on his part.

**5.5.1 Family background.** The Brooks family's international focus and commitment to multicultural interactions stemmed from their mother's birth in another country and their father's upbringing, and they were very much active and present characteristics of their lives. Grace comes from a country with a complex multicultural heritage, and her own heritage is no less complex. She grew up speaking English at home, though her parents spoke a Chinese dialect with each other and neighbors spoke other dialects of Chinese in their homes. The medium of instruction at her school, where her

mother was headmistress, was also English. There she studied Mandarin as a foreign language, and all the children were required to learn the country's national language, Malay. When Grace was in middle school, Malay was phased in as the primary language of instruction, so she only had some of her content courses in Malay, while her younger brother received most of his education in Malay. In addition to English, Malay, and Mandarin instruction, the children were also taught to read and write Arabic script. Though Grace says that Malay can be written in Arabic or Roman script, she learned the Arabic alphabet by rote memorization and repeated writing of letters but rarely used it. She did not recall learning to communicate in the Arabic language. Nevertheless, the features that she remembers about the Arabic language have influenced her ability to help her children learn Arabic, as will be discussed further below. She has also encouraged her children to teach her at the same time that they were learning, though she said that this practice had stopped now that her children's level of Arabic was too advanced for her to keep up easily. Even so, she has supported her children's learning through practical assistance with homework, with encouragement, and by example.

Although David grew up in the Midwest in a family that only spoke English, he was involved with international residents and language learners from a very early age. By the time David was in middle school, his parents had been working with migrant workers and refugees on a volunteer basis for years. They later started their international language school, which was located within walking distance of the Brooks' home. These experiences strongly impacted David's life and career choices:

My interest in international and cross-cultural things is very clearly tied to my early upbringing... so it's natural to keep cultivating that. And then of course I married cross-culturally. And that is just kind of further evidence that cultural things are of interest to me. (Interview 4)

In addition to leading courses in the U.S. that are designed to help raise international awareness and interest in missions among Christians, David is involved in development work in majority-Muslim countries. Meanwhile, Grace's work as a family counselor is not directly related to international

populations, but she has been involved in several projects to support refugees in the U.S., and she has helped the children to participate in these projects as well. In fact, these projects, which include preparing homes for new Iraqi refugees through a church-based organization, have provided some of Justin's and Jessica's few opportunities to use Arabic outside Mawaarith.

Through his involvement with his parents' work and through his own work, David has come to value language learning very highly, but he claims that his own proficiency in languages other than English is still very limited. In college he took a course that was intended to help students learn how to learn a foreign language in an immersion setting. By this time, he had met Grace, and he chose to focus on Mandarin during this course because of her Chinese heritage. Course assignments included walking up to strangers in public places such as the grocery store and attempting to initiate a conversation in his target language, using the short phrases he had memorized and trying to add to his knowledge and competence. Though he did not progress very far in Mandarin, he still thought it was important in language learning to try to interact with native speakers even if his skills were very limited. Later Grace said that she had tried to encourage the children to talk to native speakers of Arabic in places like the grocery store as their dad had in Mandarin, though so far this had not been a very successful language learning strategy.

While the Brooks family communicated with each other in English, they had hosted speakers of many other languages in their home for long periods of time. For large portions of their children's lives, the Brooks home had served as a home-stay location for students from other countries. Of these, the longest sojourn involved a man from Brazil who stayed for five years, but they had had Korean, Japanese, Spanish, Venezuelan, Vietnamese, and Kurdish students for shorter lengths of time. The parents, particularly Grace, made an effort with these long-term visitors to learn phrases in their languages, but the children showed less interest in learning the students' languages, and the students preferred to use their emergent English. While their foreign language abilities grew very little as a result of these experiences, the Brooks' home and their family traditions reflect many different cultural influences. Based on their descriptions, these influences are visible in the range of foods and condiments that stock their kitchen, the

photos on their refrigerator, and other items throughout the house. Also, much of their backyard is filled with a compact, efficient garden that reflects the methods David teaches when he works abroad. As David puts it, intercultural awareness and involvement with people from other countries is “the fabric of our family” (Interview 4).

When Justin and Jessica arrived at Mawaarith, they were completely ignorant about Arabic. Though their mother had learned the Arabic alphabet in school, they knew nothing about the language or writing system. Surrounded by children who had begun learning to read the alphabet at the age of four or five, Justin said that he did not even realize until late in his first year that he should be trying to write words from right to left rather than from left to right. He used to learn the shapes of whole words and retrace them in his own way. Fortunately for Justin, his mother noticed and knew enough about the alphabet that she could correct him. She also looked over the word lists her children brought home, helped her children to make flashcards, used these flashcards to help them practice, and put energy into learning Arabic words herself. In this regard, Justin and Jessica have fared better than other FLLs, whose parents would likely know much less about the linguistic features of Arabic.

As for studying other languages, Justin had learned a bit of Japanese at his prior elementary school but said that he had forgotten everything. He had at times spoken Arabic briefly with students at his grandparents’ school, but he learned few words in other languages from the students who lived with his parents: “My mom, she asked them? But I didn’t really pay attention too much” (Interview 3). Whether he has an advantage over other students as a language learner due to his exposure to other languages from a very young age is an interesting question but impossible to ascertain from the data I gathered. The difference I observed is that Justin has learned to decode the language while others in his class have not, and that, though he does not seem enthusiastic about Arabic in the way that Anna Kimball is, he has not developed a negative attitude about the value of Arabic in his life.

**5.5.2 Value of Arabic, the Arabic program, and language learning.** As Grace puts it, when she and David decided to send their children to Mawaarith, there were “push and pull factors” (Interview 1). The “push” factors were related to their dissatisfaction with the public (non-charter) elementary school in



whose district they lived and which Justin attended for one year. In David and Grace's opinion, the proportion of Spanish-speaking English language learners at that school was so great that it limited the teachers' ability to focus on learners like their son who were highly proficient in English. The school's large class sizes and low standardized test scores were also detrimental. At the time when Justin was a student there, the school offered Japanese as a foreign language, but that program was later cut.

When the parents heard about Mawaarith opening nearby, they were intrigued by the integrated, experiential educational model that the school had chosen as well as the Arabic program:

We researched it a bit and the charter and everything that we heard about it, the second language option and expeditionary learning, we thought especially boys would benefit from more hands-on learning. And the ethnic diversity. We - that was appealing as well. (Interview 1)

At Mawaarith, the parents envisioned their children interacting not only with a multicultural community of learners but also with the children of well-educated parents who would have high standards for their children's education and for their behavior. David and Grace expressed fear that attending public school would expose their children to young people who were experimenting with drugs or sexual behaviors at a young age, as did Tanya Kimball (see the following section). Thus, for the Brooks and Kimball families along with the El-Gendy and Zaki families, Mawaarith served not only as an opportunity for academic excellence and interaction with people from other cultures, but also as a sort of shelter from the perceived risks of attending public school nearby. For Muslim parents, Grace speculated, Mawaarith could provide not only a shelter but also support for their children's identity construction:

I think it affirms their culture. So certainly they will feel much less self-conscious about being different, because they're not? They would be more the mainstream here? So I think just their own embracing of their cultural identities - it will happen much more quickly.

(Interview 2)

In addition to this empathy for the cross-cultural challenges that the Muslim families around them faced, the Brooks family held a particular stance toward the Arabic program at Mawaarith that was distinct from other families I interviewed. These parents clearly recognized that Arabic would open doors for their children in terms of college admissions and career opportunities. Their hopes went beyond pragmatic concerns with earning a living, however. Grace expressed a hope that both in the immediate community of the school and through using Arabic in careers that spanned the U.S. and Middle East contexts, her children could learn to cross linguistic barriers as well as barriers between nations, cultures, and particularly religions:

I think personally because of the conflict in the Middle East I felt like if nothing else you know God could use us as an ambassador of good will and bridge building and peace making. And who knows, He may raise them to be you know workers in the Middle East or people who work in politics and international relations, that would be lovely. (Interview 1)

The fact that the Brooks family has strong ties to Christian community and a Christian belief system was not inconsequential in their decision to send their children to a school with a very large Muslim population. From their perspective, the connections between Arabic and Islam and the number of Muslims at the school were not matters for concern, though many outsiders to the school have expressed worries that the school would promote Islam:

Grace: I think a lot of people, the first thing they're concerned about, is there any religious indoctrination, and I will say, no, it's publicly funded, they're learning Arabic but they're not being taught religion, so you don't have to be so worried about that.

ALT: They learn about world religions, but they're not being taught - Islam.

Grace: Right ... they're not being - proselytized or whatever the equivalent word would be.

(Interview 2)

On the contrary, they felt that their children can benefit from learning about the Middle East and Muslims. They valued the Arabic program as an opportunity to learn Arabic, as an opportunity to learn to communicate in another language, and also as an opportunity to develop an awareness of a distant, or distanced, culture and population through daily, authentic, peaceful interactions with the children of immigrants and international residents. As David recalled:

When they mentioned it, it just seemed like a tremendous opportunity. And because of my own interest in development issues, and the Muslim world - you know I couldn't have hardly designed a better school for my children than to be here at Mawaarith. (Interview 4)

David and Grace had therefore made a point to engage with other parents and with teachers in the Mawaarith community. David once took Jessica to a Muslim classmate's house to play and proceeded to stay for three hours, engaging in a long conversation with the child's father that included a fairly deep theological discussion. He had also attended prayers at the Muslim community center that many of the Mawaarith families attended, which was five minutes away from the Brooks home. Grace interacted with other parents in a variety of informal contexts at school, though that had decreased recently since she had started letting the children ride the bus home from school rather than picking them up on a daily basis.

The investment that Grace and David have made in Arabic language learning is difficult to distinguish from the investment that they chose to make in the community of Mawaarith and in language learning in general. For each aspect of language learning in general that they valued, they seemed to believe that learning Arabic in particular would enhance that value.. David mentioned the cognitive benefits, which he believed were greater for Arabic than many commonly taught languages because the different orthography causes learners "brains to make connections with symbols in different ways" (Interview 4). Both parents focused on the value of greater ability to communicate with members of other cultures, both for practical reasons and because they had seen that using another person's language

pleased them and sent a message about respect for the other person. Speakers of LOTEs “brighten up so much when you use a few words in their language,” she says, and “it’s very important to me, you know, just to show them we’re trying” (Interview 2). Arabic specifically would provide access to the international community of Arabic speakers and to Arabic speakers they encountered in local contexts such as their work with refugees. Also, both parents believed that learning a language now would improve their children’s ability to learn other languages in the future and might lead to career opportunities.

While the parents’ reasons for valuing Arabic were clear, they were aware that Justin had not embraced these values for himself. Although he did not seem averse to learning Arabic and kept up with his Arabic schoolwork, his mother said that he “hasn’t shown a particular drive towards learning a language” (Interview 2). Here she was referring both to Mawaarith and to the many speakers of other languages who have visited and lived in their home. When I asked about ways that they had tried to articulate the value of Arabic to Justin, David said that “he doesn’t believe me yet, but I’ve told him that if he can learn Arabic reasonably well he can write himself a ticket to university and graduate school” (Interview 4).

Justin mentioned many of the same ideas that his parents did when he was interviewed individually, which suggests that he had retained some of the arguments that his parents used to promote Arabic language learning. However, he did not seem to have internalized these arguments to the extent that he had developed his own interest in the language. He thought it might be useful to have language learning experience, but his own interests lay elsewhere, in reading, math, and astronomy. Moreover, when I asked him about using Arabic for travel or work in the Middle East, he acknowledged that speaking Arabic would be useful if that ever happened, but he seemed to find it highly unlikely that he would actually need the language. Despite his lack of enthusiasm about learning Arabic and using it in the future, though, Justin was sufficiently invested in Arabic language learning that he had learned the alphabet more thoroughly and retained more vocabulary than most other members of his class. He may not have had a strong sense of the uses of Arabic in the larger world, but he was fulfilling expectations in regard to Arabic in the immediate context of his school.

**5.5.3 Current investment in Arabic learning.** For Justin Brooks and his sister, the primary context in which they were encountering Arabic was the classroom. Although their parents were supportive of their Arabic language learning and at various points contributed to this process through activities at home, they were dependent on the school and teachers in ways that the Zakis, El-Gendys, and Rowthers were not. At the same time, they had different expectations for the long-term benefits of learning Arabic. Whereas the prior three profiles included sub-sections on language and literacy at home, at the *masjid*, and in the classroom, the Brooks and Kimball profiles are divided into two sub-sections that reflect their experiences and investment more closely: in the classroom and outside the classroom.

**5.5.3.1 Language and literacy in the classroom.** Everything that Justin Brooks knew about Arabic had been learned in his time in Mawaarith classrooms. Five years earlier, he had begun learning to read in Arabic by identifying words on cards on the floor, differentiating the words by shape rather than identifying and decoding letters. For several months he resorted to copying these sight words from left to right so that he could pass spelling tests, until he realized that the words should be written from right to left. He belonged to a group of about nine boys in middle school who were in the Intermediate class because they had been learning Arabic at Mawaarith for more than one year and presumably had developed some level of literacy. Hassan Rowther, who was in the same class although he was younger and had spent less than half the time at Mawaarith that Justin had, noted that not all of these boys had learned to decode Arabic well, but Justin could reliably read and pronounce Arabic. He believed that he had reached this point by the end of fourth grade, largely due to studying a chart that showed the letters independently and in their initial, medial, and final positions.

Over the last four years and in the year I observed, Justin studied many of the same topics over and over again, though he said that each time the same topic appeared, there were more words and more subgroups. For example, “like maybe if we were learning animals, we would learn about the farm animals, then maybe the wild animals and the domestic animals” (Interview 1). He seemed comfortable, almost complacent, in regard to his Arabic classwork, apparently due to his relative proficiency with reading and his familiarity with the topics. When a number of other boys were engaging in various types

of resistance, particularly in the Beginner class but also in Intermediate, Justin's quiet compliance looked like commitment to learning by contrast.

According to Justin, though, he was not always confident about his ability to learn Arabic. He said that he used to be anxious about tests because, "I wouldn't really know the answer, and I would be confused... I didn't exactly like to try to do stuff like that. Learning a new language" (Interview 1). In the elementary school classes, learners from different language backgrounds are not differentiated, so it is understandable that Justin and with little or no prior exposure to Arabic would have felt lost in the beginning as they sat in class with learners who had spoken Arabic since birth or had begun lessons in reading at four or five. As this recollection of early assessments suggests, his confusion and discomfort were likely related to, and may have caused, his lack of interest in language learning.

Justin had persevered, however, and by the time I began interviewing him, he was managing to make high grades in Arabic with little effort, rarely bringing home the binder containing his class notes and no longer making his own flashcards unless his teacher assigned them as a task. While Justin's enthusiasm for Arabic seemed limited, his parents had maintained their belief that the language learning process and Arabic in particular would serve him well. His mother no longer monitored the word lists that teachers sent home or helped quiz him on new vocabulary, but both parents continued to encourage him; the same was certainly not true for all non-heritage learners at this school.

Justin shared the perception of many focal participants that he had learned a lot of words, primarily nouns, but little grammar. He could put together basic sentences, and he could read the paragraphs that have been produced for his class, which contained the target vocabulary for a given unit. These units included numbers, colors, family members, faces, body parts, clothes, house animals, jobs, school furniture and supplies, rooms and furniture in houses, activities in houses, and the popular unit on parties that took place in the spring. While Justin did not feel that he had learned to communicate in Arabic, he became very familiar with the geography of the Middle East, and he had developed a degree of intercultural awareness from day-to-day interactions with Muslims that he would not have learned in a typical middle school. For him it was a matter of course that for one month each year his Muslim

classmates would be allowed to bring games to the lunchroom while they were fasting during the day for the month of Ramadan and that they would disappear at the end of this time to celebrate *Eid* (*Eid al-Fitr*, the holiday of breaking the fast). He knew that his classmates attended the *masjid* together on Friday afternoons, and at the end of the year his father was planning to go along with him on a field trip to the largest mosque in the city as part of the world religions unit in his seventh-grade humanities class.

*5.5.3.2 Language and literacy outside the classroom.* Despite Justin's relatively supportive parents and his immersion in a community that included a large number of native speakers of Arabic, his opportunities to use Arabic outside school were very limited. His parents were delighted when he and his sister could display their literacy in small ways, as when they would surprise waiters in Middle Eastern restaurants by reading off the menu. When his parents encouraged Justin and Jessica to make the most of opportunities to communicate with Arabic speakers, though, they were often reluctant. Faced with Iraqi refugees that they were helping through their church or Arabic-speaking students who were studying English at his grandparents' language school, Justin said that speaking Arabic felt like work to him. His reluctance also seemed to be related to the discouragement of trying to use MSA to communicate with native speakers. Justin, his parents, and his sister had all learned that they could expect to be corrected and taught to say greetings the "right" way in the native speaker's local variety of Arabic, and then they would have to learn new forms of these common phrases when they encountered a speaker of another local variety.

Recognizing that Justin and Jessica had limited opportunities for authentic language use, Justin's father continued to insist that the family needed to increase their exposure to Arabic, either by bringing an Arabic speaker to their home or by living in an Arabic-speaking country for some period of time. In the summer of 2012, this desire became a reality, as the family set off for a trip that would include a long stay visiting family in Malaysia followed by five weeks living in a Middle Eastern village. The Brooks family would help to teach sustainable farming techniques, as David frequently did in other parts of the world, but he explained that their primary purpose in planning this trip was to allow the children to immerse themselves in the local variety of spoken Arabic.

By this time, Justin had finished another year at Mawaarith and a year in a high school that offered Turkish as a foreign language. He explained that he had been much more dedicated to learning Arabic during his eighth grade year. From his perspective, this shift in his level of investment was not due to any particular experience or change in his long-term goals, but rather that he had simply decided to make the most of the opportunity. Although he admitted that Turkish had been easier than Arabic, especially in that the orthographic system was more similar to English, he said that he wanted to continue with Arabic since he had already spent six years learning the language. The plan for the family's summer presented an exceptional opportunity to proceed toward greater proficiency in the language, though he was nervous about the words he had forgotten, his (in)ability to understand the spoken variety used there, and the possibilities for continuing Arabic once he returned. Since no local public high schools are currently offering the language as a course, he will have to find a way to study independently and seek other extracurricular opportunities for studying the language.

### **5.6 The Kimball Family**

The Kimball family, like the Zaki and Brooks families, had been involved with Mawaarith since the school opened. Their three children all began studying Arabic there: their older son had graduated from Mawaarith and was in high school, their daughter was in eighth grade when I began interviewing her, and their younger son was in third grade. They, like their parents, had grown up in an English-speaking home, though both parents had some proficiency in foreign languages.

From the time that I began to visit Mawaarith and negotiate access for research purposes, the teachers pointed to Anna Kimball as a prime example of a successful non-heritage learner in their program. She had entered Mawaarith with no prior exposure to Arabic, but when she entered sixth grade and the learners were divided by proficiency levels, she was placed in the highest level. When I met her, she was the only learner in the advanced level who had not learned some Arabic prior to entering the school, either through family or in religious contexts.



In the interviews and in her classes, Anna came across as modest but enthusiastic, eager to please her teachers and willing to cooperate with me. She knew that she had had a unique experience in learning Arabic at Mawaarith, and for her the uniqueness of the experience was one of the reasons that she valued it. Her mother, Tanya, had observed that Anna thrived in Arabic in a way that her older brother had not, though her younger brother seemed to be progressing well. Tanya herself made a point over the years to participate in the Mawaarith community as much as possible, though this diminished when she began taking university courses herself. Both Anna and Tanya have tried to make friends among the Arab and Muslim students and their parents, and have had some success.

While Anna Kimball and Justin Brooks both had the benefit of parents who were supportive of their language learning, Anna exhibited a level of self-directed investment that was not apparent in Justin until he was older. Maturity may have been one of the differences between them, but Anna's greater commitment to learning seems to involve a combination of initial interest, positive learning experiences, and awareness of the long-term value of the language.

**5.6.1 Family background.** The Kimball parents were both born and raised in the South (the southeastern U.S.) in monolingual English-speaking families. Tanya explained that, like their own parents, she and her husband had not had reason or opportunity to encounter and get to know Arabs or Muslims on a personal basis before they enrolled their children in Mawaarith: "it wasn't until we moved here that we really were so inundated with all of the cultural differences" (Interview 2). Describing her parents as well-educated but prejudiced toward minority groups including Arabs and Muslims, Tanya emphasized that she and her husband did not share their views and had made deliberate decisions to inculcate broader worldviews in their children.

Although the Kimballs saw themselves as "inundated" with cultural differences when they moved to this area from a relatively homogeneous small town in a neighboring state, both parents had studied foreign languages in school and used them for a variety of purposes in their lives. Both parents spoke Spanish well enough to have served as translators at a large Christian gathering, Tanya had taught Spanish at a private school briefly, and Rev. Kimball had learned some German while living in Germany

in his childhood. Though Tanya admitted that she and her husband were not necessarily fluent in Spanish, Anna pointed out that they did use it at home when they wanted to speak privately together, and, as experienced language learners, they were supportive of their children's language learning.

Although they may have been overwhelmed at first by the cultural differences associated with their new home and school, the Kimballs had made an effort to build connections and understanding with Muslims in their local community. Tanya became friends with other parents of Mawaarith students through serving together on committees and was later invited to join in large gatherings of Muslim women. Whereas she expected them to seem "frustrated" when she could not follow their conversations in Arabic or "guarded," she found that they welcomed her, took off their headscarves in her presence<sup>28</sup>, and were "just as open, like I was one of the ladies in the group" (Interview 2).

The family also developed intercultural relationships through the children's classmates. Their older son developed a close friendship with a classmate from a Syrian family, and through this friendship Tanya came to share visits and meals with this boy's family. Anna claimed to be friends with all the girls in her class, and she rarely mentioned ethnic differences among her classmates. According to her mother, "she talks about her best friends... and she never distinguishes by race" (Interview 2). As for their father, a pastor at a local Christian church, his role as a religious leader had led him to help organize and participate in interfaith dialogues with an imam and a rabbi that were intended to promote understanding among followers of these different religions. Asked about her own interfaith dialogues, Anna said that she felt comfortable asking her classmates questions about Islam:

Amanda: So you feel comfortable asking them questions about what they do, or what they believe?

Anna: Yeah, some questions. I'm very flexible with religion, so I don't wanna ask them a

<sup>28</sup> Though Muslim women often take off their *hijab* garments when they are in an all-female group, Tanya seemed to interpret these women's actions as a gesture of friendship and trust and a privileged opportunity to see behind the veil of privacy that *hijab* represents.

question that they might get offended by or anything, and they know the same with me... I honestly don't know a lot, and if I honestly just didn't know then they won't get offended. (Interview 1)

Like the Brooks family, the Kimballs had strong ties to a Christian community and belief system, and these beliefs helped to underpin their interest in Arabic as a foreign language and the community of Mawaarith. Both Tanya and Anna seemed to see their family as exceptions in the Mawaarith community and also as exceptions among members of the wider public. They presented their views of Muslims in contrast with what Tanya saw as prejudice in her family and the misrepresentations that Anna had heard among her peers at church. For Tanya, the emphasis on modesty and family values among other families at Mawaarith was appealing in comparison with public schools, and would be similar to the Christian private schools where they had also considered sending their children. However, she distinguished herself from other Christians whom she sees as particularly “conservative” (Interview 2).

From Anna's perspective, Arabic was valuable specifically because it is a unique skill, and because she could, both in the present and in the future, work to dispel others' misconceptions about speakers of Arabic and about Muslims:

Well a lot of people - they think that if you know Arabic, like you're a bad person, and like - I remember I was in my Sunday school class, and they thought that you know if you believe in Allah you're different because you know that's against their religion, and just different things - I'm like, “Oh no, it's actually - you know - quite the same,” so I like going and defining what it's about. (Interview 1)

Anna expressed the belief here and at other times that Allah, literally “the God”, revered by her classmates and the God she has been raised to revere in her own Christian tradition were the same entity. While a Muslim or Christian theologian might view this as a drastic simplification of the differences in

perceptions of these two entities and the separate religious communities that pray to them, in Anna's mind their unity seems to strengthen her sense of commonality with her classmates. In turn, she is aware of modeling this perspective to her peers in other communities. Her perception that Christians and Muslims worship the same deity may have played a role in reducing the barriers she perceived between herself and the Muslims in her school community as well as barriers between herself and the Arabic language. The language is not part of her heritage, but it is accessible.

Other than the occasional Spanish that Anna had heard her parents use at home, she and her brothers had no foreign language learning experience before they arrived at Mawaarith. She explained how rare it was for her to encounter Arabic outside school:

Like I might see an Arabic restaurant, and I might can read that [sign], but other than that, I really don't typically see a whole lot of Arabic, or something I can associate Arabic with? Because - unless I'm hanging out with Arabic friends, I really can't associate anything Arabic... a lot of people don't really know Arabic, so if I speak Arabic, they won't really know what I'm saying.  
(Interview 4)

Her own siblings were an exception to this rule. The fact that Anna's older brother had also studied Arabic and her younger brother was following in the same footsteps may have played an important role in her comfort with the language. Her mother reported that Anna and her brothers sometimes spoke Arabic to each other at home like a secret code, just as their parents used Spanish in front of the children, and they had made a game of always using Arabic numbers when they counted. Also, Anna's younger brother could and sometimes did come to her when he needed help with his Arabic homework, which may have given her a sense of expertise and authority in regard to the language, at least in her own home. Although the actual frequency and level of Arabic use in the Kimballs' home may not have been very extensive, perhaps it nevertheless reflected a level of comfort with and support for the children's language learning that helped them to maintain confidence in the process.

**5.6.2 Value of Arabic, the Arabic program, and language learning.** When the Kimballs decided to move to this area, they immediately began researching the schools nearby. They turned to members of the church where Rev. Kimball would be working for information and opinions on local public schools, but they were dissatisfied with the answers. When they learned that Mawaarith would be open in time for their children to enroll that fall, they arranged to meet with the curriculum director and were immediately impressed with “the philosophy of it. The ecological and environmental aspect of it as well. Expeditionary learning. And then the fact they were going to be learning Arabic and not just the normal stuff. All of those things” (Interview 1). They valued the educational model, the focus on environmental awareness, and the uniqueness of the foreign language that would be taught.

Once their children began to study there, and as the years went by, “we loved it, so we stayed” (Interview 1). As time went on, the Kimballs came to enjoy features of the school that had little to do with Arabic. Anna liked the simplicity of wearing a uniform and enjoyed the practice of gender separation, believing that it was “less distracting” to have only girls in her classes. Although Tanya agreed, she worried about Anna’s transition to the less sheltered environment of a public high school the following year. Tanya appreciated the emphasis on parents’ involvement in the school, which meant that she had had opportunities to get to know many other parents. She stated that she was glad her children would be able to interact with Middle Eastern families in particular, but she also pointed to the general diversity of the population at this school. This interaction with other parents and emphasis on the value of family would be meaningful to her in any community, it seems, but took on particular meaning in this community:

And then the fact that it was such a - like I said, the Arabic would draw a lot of the Middle Eastern families, so it was a complete culture-wrapping experience...then... come to find out when we got here, there were several South American families and European families, some from Germany, some from England, and it just fit - the culture was just fabulous. And something that my children would only have been exposed to if some little kid were in their class... and you

[wouldn't] interact as the families, to understand their cultures and traditions. It was great.

(Interview 2)

Nevertheless, the feature of the school that Anna mentioned first and most frequently as a reason that she enjoyed going there was the opportunity to learn Arabic. When I asked her why she liked Arabic so much, she responded that she liked the differences between languages; she believed these were much greater than those between English and French, which many of her peers were learning. Also, she explained that she hoped to put the language to use in her career by working as a translator or in U.S. intelligence. She explained that she assumed other people would have little knowledge about Arabic, and she enjoyed introducing them to its features:

I kind of like the Arabic because a lot of people that I know - well, besides people at Mawaarith but - not a lot of people outside of Mawaarith know what Arabic even is. So I think that's cool... I mean, they know where it's from, but then that's like all they know. (Interview 1)

When I encouraged Anna to elaborate on the kinds of conversations she had had about Arabic, though, she quickly moved beyond the language itself and focused on the cultural and religious differences and misunderstandings. Anna never suggested that she saw herself as a gifted language learner, though her teachers pointed to her repeatedly as an example of outstanding success. Instead, she said that she had benefitted from the learning process, in that it would probably be easier to learn other languages in the future, including Farsi, which was the heritage language of a close friend and shares a writing system with Arabic. Also, she thought that the challenges of learning Arabic had made her a better student in general. She differentiated herself from learners who did not seem to be invested in Arabic, though she understands their stance. Despite her success, she said, "I think of learning a foreign language – like it's going to be hard. And I know a lot of – today a lot of people don't have time or just don't want to take that effort" (Interview 4).

For her, however, the effort to learn a foreign language was worthwhile. She wanted to continue studying Arabic in school if possible, saying not only that she enjoyed learning but also that she thought she needed a class in school to push her to study. While her mother mentioned many of the same reasons for studying Arabic that the Brooks parents did, the difference between Anna and Justin in the interviews was that Anna articulated reasons for learning Arabic that were different from her mother's reasons and presented them in different terms. She listed ambassador, missionary, immigration worker, and businessperson as career roles that would use Arabic, adding that she knows "there's a lot of trade and commerce going on between countries" (Interview 4). Furthermore, she expressed the benefits of foreign language learning for American students and the world at large in ways that resonated with the national discourse on increasing the foreign language capacity of American students (Jackson & Malone, 2009), stating that she thought teaching more foreign languages would bring down "communication barriers" and "build alliances between countries" (Interview 4).

Whereas the Zaki, El-Gendy, and Rowther families valued the Arabic language because it helped to provide access to and strengthen bonds within their own families and communities, the Kimballs, like the Brooks family, seemed to see Arabic as a means of reaching outside their own communities and building relationships across linguistic, cultural, and religious boundaries. Both Tanya and Anna presented these interests in their own ways, and they both expressed a desire to counteract others' stereotypes and cross boundaries by interacting with Muslims in their immediate communities. Anna extended these interests further by discussing the use of Arabic in her further schooling and career. While the Arabic language is not the only prerequisite for fostering these kinds of interactions with people from the Middle East, studying Arabic has brought Anna fulfillment and confidence as a language learner as well as opportunities to participate in communities that include native speakers of Arabic that she would not otherwise have had.

**5.6.3 Current investment in Arabic learning.** Like Justin Brooks, and perhaps to an even greater extent, the sole source of exposure to Arabic for Anna has been her classes at Mawaarith. The section below highlight the experiences of language learning in the classroom that she described, while the

section following it outlines the few ways that she has encountered and used Arabic outside the classroom.

*5.6.3.1 Language and literacy in the classroom.* Whereas Justin Brooks went into the Intermediate class at the beginning of middle school and stayed there for three years, Anna Kimball went into the Advanced class in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and continued there until she graduated and left for high school. In classes that I observed, she was nearly always engaged and on task. She was eager to raise her hand when the teacher directed questions to the whole class, and if she finished a task and had free time, she tended to fill it by reading an Arabic book or a similar activity while her classmates preferred to chat with each other.

She described many of the same activities from her class that the Zaki boys mentioned. The girls spent much more time on the creation and editing of their collective story than the boys had, and at one point they planned to present this story to the rest of the school during the Friday assembly. She also provided more detail on the project that involved designing and selling a house than the Zaki boys had. In fact, for her this project was an opportunity not only to put vocabulary into use but also to learn about cultural norms in Egypt that would have already been familiar to many of her classmates. She found the images her teacher showed of typical houses interesting, along with the custom of allowing the wife to make all the decisions about the furnishing and decoration of the house.

Though Anna reported that their teacher provided paragraphs for the Advanced students to read on a fairly regular basis, she said that the class spent little time on explicit grammar. She knew how to recognize verbs conjugated in third-person masculine or feminine by their *ya-* and *ta-* prefixes respectively, she knew that adjectives should follow nouns, and at one point her teacher had shown her a full verb paradigm, writing it in her notebook for her. Other than these features, she seemed largely unaware of Arabic structure, though this level of linguistic knowledge might be sufficient for the ACTFL level that middle school learners were expected to achieve.

Learners in the Advanced class at Mawaarith, all of whom except Anna were heritage learners by one definition or another, could achieve much more than the middle school foreign language standards for



our state mandated, however. She described the members of her class this way, searching for a label to place on her classmates and instead settling for a description: “In my Arabic class, I'm advanced, and I'm the only pers - like non-nat - pers - like I'm the only person who doesn't speak Arabic at home, everybody else does” (Interview 1). Apparently she grouped all of the other learners in her class together, whether they used Arabic for communication at home or only for religious purposes. However, she pointed out that the members of her 8th grade class, spread across all three Arabic levels, included people who followed other religions and atheists.

Although Anna was aware that nearly all of her Arabic classmates were Muslim, she explained that teachers preferred not to talk about religion in school. A notable exception to this rule was the unit in their social studies class on world religions that seventh graders completed every spring, and for which they produced a series of intriguing visuals using a mixture of English and Arabic script (see Appendix X). In this class, which was coincidentally taught by a Jewish woman, “they're not preaching it as a religion, they're just informing you as fact, that this exists” (Interview 1).

With a bit of prompting, Anna described the ways in which she differed from her classmates in the Advanced group and from her other classmates who were studying Arabic in the Beginner and Intermediate classes. She acknowledged that many of her Advanced classmates spoke Arabic at home, but she felt that in some ways the learning process was easier for her than for them:

For me, it's kind of hard, but not really, because I've learned it for a while, but for some people who speak Arabic at home, I've noticed that a lot of the people who do speak Arabic at home, they don't speak - they don't speak the proper Arabic that we're - they're teaching us, like they kind of speak the slang? And ... it's kind of the same, but then again there are some things that're different.... I've learned proper Arabic this whole time, and so then they've spoken slang Arabic at home, and then learning the proper Arabic, so I think it's kind of in a way it'd be the same.

(Interview 1)

Because Anna had only studied Arabic in school, she had only been exposed to one variety of the language: MSA. As Farah explained from the opposite perspective, her classmates had to negotiate the differences between the varieties used at home and at school. On one occasion, for example, Anna and a classmate from an Arabic-speaking home were disputing which of two words with the same meaning could be used in MSA. When they consulted their teacher, Miss Majida confirmed that Anna was right. While she seemed able to hold her own with her heritage learner classmates, I saw her working independently more than other girls did. This relative isolation may have been a choice on her part, but she may also have felt excluded when they were able to converse with each other in Arabic.

Asked about her advantages as a learner, and why she was the only learner with no prior exposure to Arabic in the Advanced class, at first she stated simply that she had been at Mawaarith for a long time. In fact, she said the only learners who had been at Mawaarith as long as she had were students who spoke Arabic at home. She had a sense that advancement in the Arabic levels was a fixed progression in which the student spent one year in the Beginner class, two years at the Intermediate level, and then could move on to Advanced, but I could not see evidence of this. Justin Brooks provides a counterexample: he had been at Mawaarith even longer than she had by the beginning of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but he was in the Intermediate class throughout middle school.

Beyond the length of time that she had been studying Arabic, Anna also pointed out differences from her middle school peers that had to do with her own individual traits and their lack of commitment. From her perspective and based on what they had told her, she had multiple advantages:

Anna: Like in Beginners class some of my friends, they find it hard. And - a lot of them just don't like paying attention. They don't even pay attention like in normal class... so it's hard, especially when you're learning a new language... I think they would just probably want something easier to learn. (Interview 1)

Amanda: So you think that's part of why you're different? Is that you pay attention and you –

Anna: And I learn things really quickly? Like I can memorize things really quick, so I think that's also it. (Interview 1)

It is possible that Anna was right about the advantage of beginning to learn Arabic at a younger age and before the learners were differentiated into different levels. At the same time, it is possible that her initial success bred confidence in her language-learning abilities and allowed her to establish herself as a good learner in the context of Mawaarith's Arabic program. Her mother seemed to believe that Anna was a strong learner as well, admitting that "it looks like a bunch of loops and lines to me... but she learned it so fast" (Interview 1). However, they also both claimed that the teachers had made it easy for her at the beginning, particularly in that they had taken the time to teach the alphabet letter by letter. Anna's older brother was less enthusiastic about Arabic than she proved to be, but her younger brother also rarely had trouble; if he did, he could go to Anna for help.

Although Anna and her siblings seemed to be able to manage their Arabic studies without help from their parents, Tanya found it frustrating that she could not be more involved in this aspect of their academic careers:

I really feel it's very important to be as involved in my kids' education as possible. That way - you know I can encourage them where they need to - when they get discouraged, or I can help em when they need help, or even learn new things that I maybe didn't learn. So - Arabic's the one area that I feel - completely - inept. @@ I I know nothing about it. ... They come home and teach me a few things, but by and large, I feel like I'm completely - that I'm on the outskirts of that part of the education. And I would really like to be - to be a part of that more. (Interview 1)

While Anna was able to participate in the Advanced class, surrounded by peers from families that used Arabic at home, her mother felt completely marginalized in relation to the Arabic program. At one point the school considered offering a course for parents who were not familiar with Arabic that Tanya

characterized as “Arabic for Dummies and Parents”, but she said that the course never “got off the ground” (Interview 1). As she expressed her desire to participate more in the Arabic learning process, Tanya alternated between self-deprecating chuckles and actual tears.

Apparently Tanya’s sense of marginalization extended beyond Arabic language learning to her interactions with other families at the school. Whereas she had always valued Mawaarith’s commitment to families and parent involvement at the school and tried to participate as much as possible, recently she had been less involved at school because she herself was enrolled in school again. As a result, she now found it difficult to interact with many of the mothers of her children’s classmates:

Well with families that I don't know yet around here, I do feel a little bit excluded ... the ladies that are around here don't try to engage me... it just seems like if they see another Muslim woman, they're all friends. Already. Even if they don't really know each other. It's like all-encompassing. That's not like - in Christian culture. So that's kind of bothersome. (Interview 2)

As subjective as this perception may be, there is a striking contrast between this description and her stories about accompanying Arab women to gatherings where they removed their headscarves and treated her like a member of their group. While Tanya and Anna both expressed interest in Arabic and claimed that they wanted to avoid and even combat stereotypes of Muslims, it seems that it was not always easy for them to cross cultural boundaries within the school population in order to build and maintain strong relationships with other families.

*5.6.3.2 Language and literacy outside the classroom.* Anna’s dedication to learning Arabic in school is perhaps all the more remarkable because she had so few opportunities to use Arabic outside school. All the people she knew who spoke Arabic were associated with the school, not to mention the fact that they all spoke English as well as Arabic. While she could potentially, and occasionally did, speak Arabic with classmates outside structured classroom activities, her closest friend in the advanced class

actually spoke Farsi at home, not Arabic. This friendship had inspired some interest in learning Farsi, which she knew uses a similar writing system.

Although Anna had little contact with native speakers of Arabic outside school, she and her brothers did use Arabic playfully in their home. Though the Brooks children could do the same, and perhaps received more explicit encouragement to use Arabic from their parents than the Kimballs did, it was the Kimballs who had made a game of counting in Arabic or speaking Arabic to each other in front of their “clueless” parents (Tanya, Interview 1). Just as their parents sometimes spoke Spanish to each other in front of the children, the children seemed to enjoy using Arabic like a secret code that their parents could not access.

From Tanya’s perspective, her children’s abilities to communicate in Arabic were not extensive, but they were impressive. She felt proud when her younger son could read and translate the Arabic words and phrases that appeared on walls and doors all over the school and when Anna could identify Arabic when she heard it spoken among strangers at the grocery store. Nevertheless, she would have liked to see more opportunities for her children to work with Arabic outside the classroom, particularly in the form of reading material that they could bring home. She envisioned this reading material in the form of paragraphs accompanying the weekly lists of vocabulary words that would show the words in context and in the form of Arabic-language books that the children would be able to check out from the Arabic teachers or the school library.

Anna, meanwhile, recognized that both for her development and for building and maintaining interest in foreign languages among other students, opportunities to use Arabic authentically would be important. She mentioned repeatedly that she would enjoy studying Arabic in an Arabic-speaking country. However, at that time she did not know of an opportunity to study abroad that she would be able to access.

As a result, Anna was finishing eighth grade with five years of Arabic language classes behind her, able to read and write the alphabet fluently, to read and write paragraphs accurately, and to start basic conversations, but she could not be certain that she would have any opportunity at all to continue studying

Arabic after she left Mawaarith. The possibility of studying Arabic at the high school her older brother was attending was still only a vague discussion, there was no other local or state-run virtual program offering articulation from Mawaarith through high school to the university level, and other possibilities would require considerable investment of time, energy, and funds over and above the resources that would be committed to Anna's public school studies.

Anna's investment in Arabic language and literacy was afforded and encouraged by her family, but it seemed to be rooted in her own self-directed dedication to learning. Her relatively lengthy and positive experiences of learning at Mawaarith seemed to have supported the development of her identity as a good learner of Arabic, and she also enjoyed constructing an identity beyond the context of Mawaarith as someone who was outside the norm, engaging with a unique challenge. While her investment in learning through her classes at Mawaarith had allowed her to reach a level of proficiency that was exceptional for FLLs at her school, this achievement stood to become irrelevant when she entered her high school, where Arabic classes were not available.

These five case studies trace five different trajectories in regard to Arabic language learning, from the parents' engagement with language learning to their use of languages other than English at home to their decision to enroll their children in Mawaarith to the multiple contexts in which their children were engaging with Arabic in their current lives. The chapter that follows draws out patterns that emerged across these different trajectories that relate to the literature on Arabic learning and heritage learners, though the cases described here suggest that prior assumptions and expectations in each of these areas need to be reconsidered.

## 6 CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In these five case studies and the overview of the Mawaarith Academy population that preceded them, I have attempted to describe the learners and families who come to Mawaarith, the values and desires that have led them to invest in Arabic language learning, and the various contexts and practices that characterize their ongoing investment in Arabic. The initial coding process led to a fine-grained map of the preoccupations that drove each of the interviews and interviewees. As my understanding of these learners and their families developed, it became clear that there was an overarching set of key issues that each family was working out in their own way. These issues were apparent in beliefs, in values, in practices; in learners and in parents; and in areas of concern and areas of pride. While they intersected with the literature on Arabic language learning, the ways that each family was working these issues out differed considerably from predictions that I might have made from the literature. Comparison of these issues across families ultimately suggested that there were important parallels among them and also that understanding Arabic learning in these cases would call into question widely-held assumptions not only about heritage learners or Arabic but also about language learning and literacy more generally.

While currently prevalent definitions of heritage learners would only identify two, and perhaps three, of these children as heritage learners, in fact all five of these families were engaged in complex, constantly changing processes of constructing heritage: transmitting their own personal, cultural, and intellectual heritage and providing their children with valuable cultural capital through their investment in Arabic language learning. In this chapter, I focus on the four key issues that emerged as I returned repeatedly to the case studies and to the literature and drew out these parallels:

1. Families *construct* Arabic as heritage as they invest in language learning.
2. Arabic is not a monolithic target, but represents a multiplicity of varieties and skills that can be, and are, viewed, valued, and negotiated separately.
3. Religion serves as a powerful influence on investment in Arabic language learning.

4. Investment in Arabic language learning at Mawaarith takes place in the midst of local, national, and international policies and priorities for language learning.

First, *families construct Arabic as heritage as they invest in language learning*. As a researcher, I have transitioned over a period of years from viewing these learners through the lens of prevailing categories to the realization that “heritage learner” is not an emic category, that the HLL/non-HLL distinction may have limited utility, particularly in the case of Arabic, and that each of these families defines their relationship to Arabic and the meaning of Arabic for their own identity construction differently. Thus, I will focus here on the influences that have led each of these families to attribute value to Arabic language learning, highlighting divergences and convergences.

Furthermore, it is important to note that *families construct Arabic as heritage*. While the individual language learner is almost never isolated from contextual influences that affect investment, in these cases investment in Arabic is mediated through and powerfully influenced by the parents’ priorities, values, and decisions in regard to the target language. In each of these cases, the children’s understanding of the value of learning Arabic echoes and aligns with the parents’ perspectives. However, in some cases a shift toward independence in the child’s own desire and effort to learn is beginning to emerge; this shift is also an important element of investment in language learning.

Second, *Arabic is not a monolithic target, but represents a multiplicity of varieties and skills that can be viewed, valued, and negotiated separately*. The boundaries between these varieties and skills are constructed discursively, and they do not necessarily align with theoretical perspectives on these varieties and skills from the linguistics and applied linguistics literature. I will focus on language varieties and literacy in this context, pointing out that the learners vary not only in the reasons for their investment but also in the aspects of the language that they see as valuable.

Third, *religion serves as a powerful influence on investment in Arabic language learning*. The importance of Arabic in Islam leads easily to the inference that religion influences Arabic learning for Muslim families and children, but the findings of this study help to illuminate the nature of religious



literacy and the ways that families strive to achieve it. Furthermore, the data here suggest that religion also plays a meaningful role in language learning investment for the two Christian families in this study.

Fourth and finally, *investment in Arabic language learning at Mawaarith takes place in the midst of local, national, and international policies and priorities for language learning*. Language learning at Mawaarith is only one element of the larger Arabic learning process for these families; it may co-occur with other practices in the present, and it may constitute one link in a long chain of past and future learning contexts. In the present and over time, the larger policies and priorities that impact the opportunity to learn do not necessarily align with each other or with the values and practices that have led these families to invest in Arabic. Furthermore, these learners' and parents' understandings of the value of Arabic extend beyond the immediate reality of their current communities to the sociopolitical context of Arabic learning and use across international boundaries. I will discuss Arabic language learning in the context of the local educational system and a global society, linking investment in the immediate context to the ways that parents and children envision spanning national, cultural, religious, and political divides through greater linguistic and intercultural competence.

### 6.1 Construction of Arabic as Heritage

*Families construct Arabic as heritage through investment in language learning*. Based on proficiency and sociocultural identification with speakers of Arabic, many Arabic learners at Mawaarith could be identified unambiguously as HLLs because they have learned Arabic by speaking it at home with their families. Likewise, Muslim learners from non-Arabic speaking backgrounds may also consider themselves to be heritage learners (Husseinali, 2006; Lee, 2005). For the most part, however, the term *heritage learner* was not part of the discourse of the community that I studied here; I introduced it by using it on the initial survey, and afterward it emerged in interviews.

What does the term *heritage learner* usually say about a particular student, and how do the assumptions inherent in the term align with the learners in this context? In most of the existing literature that uses this term to identify groups of learners, it signals sets of assumptions that serve to distinguish

these learners from native speakers of the target language, on one hand, and from foreign language learners on the other. Heritage learners are similar to native speakers in that they are learning the language of their family and their family's cultural and national heritage. However, they are different from native speakers in that they are acquiring their language skills in a place where it is not the dominant language of their society, they are usually receiving the majority of their education in another language, and they are unlikely to reach the same level of proficiency and balance of skills as their peers in regions where the language is widely used.

At the same time, HLLs may be similar to second/foreign language learners in that their knowledge of the language, both in its linguistic features and in its sociolinguistic variations, is limited; they are learners, not fully proficient users. They are different from second/foreign language learners in that they perceive the language as part of their cultural and national heritage, which is assumed to be a motivating factor, and what proficiency they have has been developed in informal settings; thus their speaking and listening skills tend to be stronger than their literacy skills (Montrul, 2010).

These designations can be useful in that they draw attention to the idea that heritage learners may have different linguistic and psychosocial needs from other learner groups (He, 2010) and may prompt educators to seek ways of differentiating instruction. Husseinali (2006) found differences in HLLs' and non-HLLs' intentions for using Arabic; Noels (2005) usefully pointed out that HLLs of German not only valued German for cultural reasons but also had access to German-speaking communities that non-HLL peers did not; and Kondo-Brown's (2005) study offers one approach to differentiating instruction, tracking learners into different courses based on heritage status. However, such studies offer little insight into the ways that learners interpret their national and cultural heritage in relation to the language or their actual experiences with and intentions for the language.

In analyzing the survey data for this study in order to provide a broad overview of the Mawaarith learners and their parents, it seemed appropriate to categorize these learners into three groups: AHLs, or learners from Arabic-speaking backgrounds (all of whom happened to be Muslim); RHLs, or non-Arab Muslims who valued Arabic for religious purposes; and FLLs, learners with no connection to Arabic

through their families. This use of three categories to describe heritage learners of Arabic was a novel approach, and it acknowledged the complexity of Arabic as a heritage language more fully than a simple binary classification would have done. The risk involved in applying categories to a community such as this, however, is that it reduces a complex phenomenon to an appealingly accessible but perhaps overly simple system.

As the theoretical framework for this study, the construct of investment (Norton, 2000) emphasizes that individuals negotiate complex, multi-faceted identities through the process of language learning and use, and that these identities are constantly in flux. As learners develop and exercise their skills in their target language,

they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity, an identity that is constantly changing across time and space. (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 75)

Thus, any use of categories to describe the learners in this study has significant limitations. The designations AHL, RHL, and FLL are not emic identities sought by the participants, they suppress the heterogeneity within these categories, and they may impose an understanding of these learners that is more static than the concept of investment would guide us to seek. As a result, these categories are only valuable to the extent that they serve as a heuristic guiding us to ask appropriate further questions of these learners as we seek to understand how they invest in their own identities through language learning.

It is important that we view heritage learner identity not as clusters of labels that can be applied or as static sets of motivators and competencies but rather as a process. Heritage is not a label that can be applied to a learner based on demographic data; instead, heritage is actively constructed through the ways that families articulate and realize their beliefs, values, decisions, and practices related to language learning in the same way that identity in general is constantly negotiated through language learning and

use (Norton, 2000; Wenger, 1998). Focusing on the construction of heritage rather than categories of learners allows a deeper understanding of the cultural affiliations that underlie the definition of heritage learner.

In each of the focal families, we can see the features that differentiate investment from more static understandings of motivation: their concepts of Arabic as heritage are subject to the influences of context; these concepts and their implications have changed over time and space; and these changes are subject to, as McKay & Wong (1996) phrased it, an economic calculus that relies not on money exclusively but on all resources that are limited and that might be exchanged for cultural capital. Furthermore, we can see that investment in language learning, identity construction, and the construction of Arabic as heritage are not individual processes for the learners but collective processes that involve the parents' decisions and encouragement for their children and that reflect back on the parents.

In the case of the Zakis, when the oldest boys were young, family communication in their family's spoken variety of Arabic was both a high priority and a necessity, as Rahim's Arabic-speaking mother was living in their home. As time went on, the loss of the Arab grandmother's influence, the increase in the number of children, the "nervousness" about speaking Arabic in public after 9/11, the older boys' increasingly busy schedules, and the addition of Noura's English-speaking mother to the household all decreased the use of Arabic for communication. At the same time, however, the Zakis ensured that their children attended classes in Muslim religious literacy at the *masjid*, they took the opportunity to invest in the creation of Mawaarith as a context for learning Arabic (MSA), and they made deliberate decisions to focus on formal Arabic literacy as opposed to family oral communication as the most appropriate use of their limited time. In view of current and potential future uses of Arabic and competing pressures, the Zakis wanted the boys to be on par with their peers and to have access to the language of the Qur'an and also to be able to pursue careers that would make use of Arabic. Thus, they maintained a wide range of practices in Arabic and a high level of investment, but their priorities in terms of the Arabic varieties and skills that they valued and the practices associated with promoting proficiency in those varieties and skills varied considerably over time.

The same complexity is apparent in each of the other families. The El-Gendys used Egyptian Arabic as the language of family communication before they moved to the U.S., and they continued to do so as they stayed and increased the size of their family. Shireen used a different approach with each of her daughters as she searched for effective ways to promote their literacy. She struggled with the changes in perception of her religious and national identity and her language after 9/11, and Farah also faced discrimination in regular public schools. These forces were significant in the family's decision to enroll in Mawaarith, and perhaps more significant than the Arabic language program. Nevertheless, they later moved Farah to a school that they viewed as more academically challenging. Although Farah was happy at Mawaarith, the family believed that they would have a greater "return on investment" (Norton, 2000, p.10) if they prioritized academic excellence over the Arabic program and supportive atmosphere at Mawaarith. At the same time, Shireen considered it an essential part of her identity as a capable and righteous mother to pass on Arabic, including communicative skills and religious literacy, to her children, and she seemed confident that she was succeeding in fulfilling this mandate.

For the Rowthers, the balance of investment in their multiple languages shifted over time depending on whether they were based in the U.S. or in India. They invested in Tamil both at home and through school instruction when they were residing in the parents' hometown, but since their return to the U.S. they had allowed Arabic to take priority to the extent that Hassan was inclined to try to write the Tamil alphabet from right to left like Arabic. While the parents had been exposed to Arabic for religious purposes in India, Maryam explained that she was limited in her ability to understand the text of the Qur'an. She and her husband both experienced changes in their religious devotion and practices as a result of moving to the U.S., and with it their commitment to Hassan's skills in Arabic. While Hassan and his mother seemed to believe that he was benefitting from instruction in Arabic both in school and at the *masjid* and that additional ability to comprehend the text of the Qur'an would be valuable, they also believed that striving for a higher level of achievement in MSA at school (by moving to the Advanced class) would not justify pulling time and energy away from Hassan's other academic subjects.

At the time of this study, Justin Brooks was exhibiting the greatest resistance to Arabic learning and use, though this resistance was largely passive. His family's investment in his Arabic language learning was rooted in their belief that speaking another language was a valuable skill and worth considerable commitment. They spoke of broadening their children's perspectives on other cultures, and they also expressed the hope that their children would be able to fulfill what they perceived as God's will by reaching out to other groups and promoting peace. Justin's own investment, however, was limited by his inability to imagine using Arabic beyond his school and by his waning interest in his Arabic class. David reported that he had tried to motivate Justin by assuring him that the cultural capital represented by skills in Arabic could be exchanged for admission to the school of his choice or for the job of his choice, but at the time this message was not affecting Justin's investment. He was still reluctant to study much at home or to try to use Arabic outside school. The differences he recognized between the MSA that he was learning in school and the Arabic varieties that would facilitate communication with native speakers of Arabic outside school only added to his frustration and inhibitions. In the years after I first interviewed him, however, Justin experienced a major shift in his own desire and effort to learn, and eventually his family was able to arrange an opportunity to spend several weeks in an Arabic-speaking country. While bilingualism was always part of the heritage that Justin's parents wanted to construct for him, his own sense of agency in his learning process seemed to emerge when he realized that he would have real opportunities to put the language to use.

Meanwhile, the Kimballs were the least proactive parents in terms of their children's learning of Arabic, though, like the Brooks, they viewed communicative skills in a language other than English as an important part of the heritage they were constructing for their children. Tanya would have liked to be more involved in her children's language learning, and in fact this type of direct investment in her children's education could be viewed as another aspect of her own identity and her family heritage as a child of educators. However, she felt excluded by her lack of access to Arabic as a parent. Early in her children's time at Mawaarith, she had been able to build relationships with Arabic-speaking and Muslim parents, but this access devolved over time as she became busier with her own school and work. Anna

seemed to exhibit the greatest sense of agency in her language learning process among all the focal learners, managing to keep up with the Advanced level though she had much less prior and current exposure to Arabic than her classmates. While Arabic was not an inherent part of her family's heritage, they had built practices that involved using small amounts of Arabic at home, and she was enthusiastic about studying Arabic further and using it in her career. However, she did not have the agency to change the educational context in which she was studying. Without a high school program that would provide articulation from her elementary and middle school language learning to opportunities at a college or university, she lost the only source of Arabic development that she had at the end of eighth grade. As a result, her exceptional investment in MSA up to the point when she graduated from Mawaarith may not leave her with much cultural capital to exchange when it comes time to report academic achievements and language skills on college applications. Nevertheless, she had constructed an ambassadorial role for herself in her immediate context as she attempted to explain her perspective on religion and Arabs to her Christian peers, and this effort could continue beyond Mawaarith.

Each learner and each family in this study has exhibited a different set of trajectories in and out of valued communities in which Arabic represents cultural capital. These trajectories may have similar starting points for learners who could be placed in the same category, but they have far different paths depending on language learning experience, relationships with family members, interests, religious devotion, individual traits, and other considerations. If we want to understand what heritage means for the learning process, then we need to focus on these trajectories, these identity construction processes, the construction of heritage in each family, rather than on applying static categories.

## 6.2 Literacy and Language Varieties in Arabic

*Arabic is not a monolithic target, but represents a multiplicity of varieties and skills that can be viewed, valued, and negotiated separately.* Arabic language educators and scholars seem to have reached consensus on the assertion that learning Arabic is greatly complicated by the need to learn multiple varieties of the language in order to reach a high level of competence (Ryding, 1991, 2006; Al-Batal &

Belnap, 2006). However, there is less consensus on the nature of these varieties, whether they are distinct forms or a continuum, and how they should be combined in an effective Arabic curriculum that seeks to balance the four language skills and take a communicative approach (Wahba, 2006; Wilmsen, 2006; Younes, 2006). Over the course of this study, it has become clear that one of the fundamental concerns in a sociocultural, constructivist perspective is the consideration of which Arabic and what skills in Arabic are actually valued in a given context, by a given community, and by a given learner.

**6.2.1 *Emic perceptions of the varieties of Arabic.*** The learners and parents in this study all describe multiple varieties of Arabic, but they do not draw the boundaries between them in the same ways that scholars do. Their interests in different language skills vary depending on their priorities for using Arabic. In this section, I will draw out patterns and comparisons in the ways that the participants in this study engaged with literacy in Arabic and also how they perceived literacy in comparison with oracy in relation to their goals for language learning and their contexts for language use.

The survey questionnaires generally referred to Arabic as one monolithic form, only specifying a variety of Arabic when they asked why parents had chosen to send their children to Mawaarith. When the focal parents and children spoke of different varieties of Arabic, they never mentioned MSA by that designation; only I brought up this term in the interviews. Shireen El-Gendy created a clear distinction among varieties of Arabic, speaking of “my regular Arabic” and “the revelation one, the one that has the teachings” (Interview 1), but the other parents also identified multiple varieties of Arabic. Noura Zaki spoke of reading the Qur’an as “a different skill” from reading “regular Arabic” and suggested that “it’s kind of independent of just language” but has to do with additional rules that make the reading smooth (Interview 2). Grace Brooks, Justin Brooks, and Anna Kimball all mentioned that the Arabic the children were learning in school was not sufficient for day-to-day spoken communication. Some learners at the school referred to the Arabic that families speak at home as “slang” Arabic, a practice that Anna seemed to have learned and adopted from her Arabic-speaking classmates. Rahim Zaki came the closest to the scholarly description of diglossia when he compared the Syrian way of speaking and “Modern Written Arabic” (Interview 3). The participants who were most familiar with Arabic (Shireen and Rahim as L1



users, Farah as a bilingual child, and Noura as a L2 user) spoke much less of the differences between spoken and written Arabic that are normally labeled *diglossia* (Abu-Rabia, 2000; Ayari, 1996; Maamouri, 1999) than they did of the differences between the Arabic they used for communication and the Arabic of the Qur'an. Likewise, they did not distinguish the Arabic of the Qur'an from MSA explicitly. However, they did attempt to describe the "different skill" of reading the Qur'an, which related to several aspects of the language and the reading process. Rahim and Imran Zaki pointed to the differing lexicon as a challenge. Expecting that the presence of diacritics in the Qur'an would ease the reading process, I often asked informants about their preferences for reading with *tashkiil* (diacritics) or without. However, no one expressed the opinion that reading the text of the Qur'an was easier than reading without *tashkiil* in the much less transparent orthography of MSA. Instead, reading the Qur'an was perceived as harder, apparently due to the strong emphasis on accuracy in pronouncing the words of the Qur'an, in terms of the individual words and linking words into phrases. At the same time, Shireen, Noura, and Rahim also spoke lyrically of the beauty and importance of the language of the Qur'an. Thus, they primarily differentiated the language of the Qur'an from "regular" Arabic not in its orthographic features, grammar, or lexicon but in the reverence that they attach to it.

While the parents and children did demonstrate in these ways that they were aware of multiple varieties of Arabic, they rarely differentiated between these varieties when explaining the value of Arabic or their practices. Instead, they focused on differences in modality, distinguishing oral communication from literacy. From their discussion of current and future uses of Arabic, however, it is possible to infer which varieties of Arabic might be of greatest use to these learners.

The Zakis wanted their children to be able to engage in family communication, both at home and with extended family, which suggests that they would value spoken varieties over formal Arabic. Recognizing the limits of time and energy, however, they have deliberately chosen to emphasize literacy in Qur'an Arabic. MSA at school may in some ways contribute to both of these targets, in that school MSA could be used communicatively and school Arabic classes focus on literacy development, but the objectives for oral communication and literacy development at school are by no means directly aligned

with either of these purposes. MSA may, however, serve the children well if, as Malik mentioned, they want to use Arabic in a professional communicative setting. Rahim did seem concerned with the boys' ability to distinguish formal Arabic from *‘ammiyya*, as evidenced by his concern with an online translation program that provided translations sounding too *‘ammi*, or colloquial.

The El-Gendys, like the Zakis, seemed to be investing deliberately in literacy skills over oral communication. Based on Farah's examples from her home interactions, her family used their spoken variety of Arabic freely for communication, while she and her sisters were learning formal grammar gradually on a schedule defined more by their mother than by their school Arabic teachers. Fluency in Arabic for her family would entail high levels of competence in both spoken Arabic and formal written Arabic. Shireen did not seem to view the Arabic in school as misaligned with her daughters' needs, perhaps because she had used MSA herself in her schooling and because she, more than the other mothers, thought that her children might need to be able to function in the Egyptian educational system at some point in the future. Rather than concerning herself with the exclusive use of MSA, she worried that the language was not being taught systematically. As a result, she was reluctant to rely on the school to advance Farah's skills. Farah in turn was aware that the variety she spoke at home aligned more closely with that of her teacher than other students' home varieties did. She noted differences between her home variety and MSA, but seemed to think of these differences as a matter of register, with different terms appropriate for different contexts, than viewing MSA as a foreign variety that she had to learn separately from the variety that she already spoke.

The Rowthers were aware of diglossia as a feature of Tamil and spoke of it often and at length, but they seemed unconcerned with diglossia in Arabic. Hassan had already achieved a certain level of valued skill in Arabic in that he could read the text of the Qur'an fluently, pronounce it accurately, and memorize it, whether he could comprehend this text or not. The school-based Arabic instruction, then, provided the opportunity to learn more language, including vocabulary and grammar, which he believed would help him understand his readings in the Qur'an. Looking back on her own efforts to understand the Qur'an by transliterating the text and referring to an English-language translation, Maryam also valued

this ability to read and comprehend Arabic directly. To some extent Hassan and Maryam also envisioned a career trajectory that would involve doing business with countries in the Middle East, and for this purpose MSA would likely be a useful foundation. Just as the surveyed RHLs were more likely to select *My parents want me to learn it*, *My religion tells me that I should know it*, and *I enjoy learning languages* than AHLs or FLLs, the Rowthers may have perceived a greater alignment between the language learning opportunity at school and their goals for Arabic than did the other families. As will be discussed further below, Hassan's established literacy in Arabic, developed in religious contexts, provided a solid foundation for learning at school, and the Rowthers perceived the MSA skills developed at school as a complement to the literacy skills in Qur'an Arabic developed at the *masjid*.

While the Brooks and Kimball families were much less informed about the linguistic or sociolinguistic features of Arabic than the Zakis or El-Gendys and even the Rowthers, their experience with language learning shaped their priorities for Arabic learning and use. They believed that Arabic should be taught communicatively. Grace Brooks, who frequently made the effort to learn words and phrases from speakers of other languages whom she encountered, did not seem to be aware of the extent of diglossia or how spoken Arabic might differ from formal Arabic. However, she had realized that the language skills her children had acquired in school tended to be of little use when her family encountered native speakers of Arabic, particularly refugees who may not have been highly educated in Arabic. While she and David seemed to take it for granted that reading and writing would be components of a language learning program along with speaking and listening, they were primarily concerned that their children would be able to communicate with native speakers and thus wanted them to develop more oral communication skills and general language skills than they had learned up to that point. In addition, they hoped that intercultural awareness would come with the language and the learning experience.

As for the Kimballs, it was Anna more than Tanya who was able to articulate what she could and could not do and what she hoped to be able to do in Arabic. Given that she imagined working for the CIA, she would be likely to need a balance of language skills. She was aware that the Arabic she knew from school differed from what would be spoken on the street in the Middle East, but she did not seem to

perceive learning a spoken variety as a significant goal. Anna alone among the interviewed learners articulated that achieving a high level of communicative competence would involve learning to communicate in multiple varieties of the language, but she seemed satisfied with MSA. As she had learned from her classmates to refer to the form of Arabic that they used at home as “slang”<sup>29</sup>, she may not have realized that a spoken variety would be useful to her in her future Arabic communication.

In summary, the learners and parents did not tend to distinguish varieties of Arabic in the same way that scholars do. Muslim parents were more concerned with the distinction between communicative, usually spoken, Arabic and the Arabic of the Qur’an. To the extent that the parents who had been educated in Arabic, Shireen and Rahim, were concerned with differences between the language used at home and the language taught in school, they may have assumed that MSA would be the appropriate medium of instruction. They may have seen fluency in a spoken variety as an ability that belonged to the domain of home and family, not as an academic target. Those participants who had not been educated in Arabic were less aware of diglossic differences, though they wanted, or wanted their children, to be able to communicate effectively.

**6.2.2 Literacy and oracy in Arabic.** In analyzing the relationship between the language skills that the children were learning in school and the intentions for language development that characterized their and their parents’ investment, it may be more important to focus on the relative roles of oracy and literacy than on the perceived differences between varieties of Arabic. Both in the community of Mawaarith and in other communities in which the parents and children were members, literacy was associated with greater cultural capital than oracy. The language learned in school at Mawaarith is the variety of the language most associated with literacy, and literacy in Arabic was the primary determining factor for placement in the three middle school proficiency levels. Literacy seemed to be a more valued target than oracy for the parents from Arab and Muslim backgrounds, while literacy was the greatest perceived hurdle for learners from non-Arab, non-Muslim backgrounds. Hassan’s repeated references to the

<sup>29</sup> It seems reasonable to expect that the use of a derogatory term to refer to one’s way of speaking at home would make it more difficult to construct a satisfactory identity in the heritage community and in the larger society. I do not dwell on this point in this paper, but it is worthy of further consideration.

frustrations of classmates in the intermediate level who still could not read fluently at the end of the school year highlights the dramatic contrast between learners who learned to read outside Mawarith, beginning at a young age and continuing intensively for many years, and the many students who began as novices and were expected to develop literacy through less than four hours a week of classroom time.

The skills these learners have developed in reading Arabic for religious purposes may not be entirely transferable to the task of reading MSA in school. From an etic perspective, reading the Qur'an and reading most MSA texts make quite different cognitive demands. Arabic without diacritics marking vowels, as it usually appears in texts including news articles and non-religious books, is a deep orthography that requires the reader to infer grammatical information, and thus accurate pronunciation, from context (Abu-Rabia, 2002; Cook & Bassetti, 2005). Arabic as it appears in the Qur'an, with far more diacritical marks than appear in textbooks for Arabic L1 children and Arabic L2 learners, is such a shallow orthography that readers can, and often do, learn to pronounce it accurately with no further knowledge of the language (Esposito, 2004); hence Farah's observation that her Pakistani imam could read so fluently that it was "like the words go through him," though he could not communicate in Arabic (El-Gendy, Interview 1).

While Saiegh-Haddad (2005) has considered the influence of voweled or unvoweled texts on the reading fluency of Arabic L1 children, I am not aware of studies that consider the specific cognitive challenges of reading the Arabic of the Qur'an. Although such studies would be instructive, I would argue that any analysis of literacy in regard to the Qur'an must take into account not only the relative difficulty of reading this voweled text with additional rules but also the sociocultural importance of this text to the readers. Muslim readers may place much greater importance on pronouncing the text perfectly when the text has religious meaning, and they may value this meaning highly even if they cannot decipher it from the text itself. Instead, they may store the meaning as a separate, linked item in their memory. Moreover, I can only imagine that it would be very difficult to find a population of non-Muslim children who could read without speaking Arabic with which to compare Muslim children who have learned to read.

While literacy can be viewed in the cognitive sense as skills of reading and writing residing in the mind, these learners use multiple definitions of reading and interact with text in different ways in their multiple communities. Their differing abilities in reading and writing relate to the sociocultural contexts in which they have learned. In regard to HLLs and non-HLLs of Arabic, it is therefore particularly important to investigate literacy as a set of sociocultural practices in a given context and community (Barton, 1994; Street, 2000). The Golden Triangle of Reading proposed by Perfetti (2010) is representative of the vast body of research on reading in a first or second language in that it focuses decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension as the components of reading ability. The children in this study, however, often speak of reading separately from knowledge of Arabic. They particularly tended to distinguish reading from the ability to speak Arabic, suggesting that they are working with a different definition of reading. They often mean that they are reading to pronounce without comprehension, which aligns with the corner of the triangle that is labeled decoding. This tendency may be a direct result of the fact that these children, all of whom have received the majority of their education in English, have had to acquire an additional alphabet in order to read Arabic. Thus there is a stage in the development of reading ability among English-dominant learners of Arabic that can be clearly delineated as the ability to look at Arabic script on the page and pronounce it accurately, with or without identifying the meaning of the words pronounced.

At times learners claimed that they could read when they could not even decode. Low-level learners at Mawaarith sometimes used the term reading when they could identify sight words. Beginners who did not know the letters were sometimes able to distinguish words within a limited set of vocabulary assigned for a given week, though their ability to identify these words seemed to dissipate quickly when they were assigned a new list of words. Even more advanced learners, including my focal participants, were slow to identify words that I expected to be familiar from their classes when I presented them on flashcards and mixed various categories together.

The ability to read in the sense of associating sounds with letters equates to the construct *phonological awareness* in the reading literature, which is usually believed to build on language

knowledge and serve as a precursor to reading. Many learners of Arabic, both for practical reasons related to the orthographic system and as a result of Muslim religious practices, learn to read Arabic directly, without first developing a coherent knowledge of the Arabic language. In this way, they provide a significant contrast to the general assumption that reading builds on language knowledge. The diglossic distance between the variety of Arabic that children learn to speak and the variety that they later learn to read in school only complicates this picture. While it may not be necessary therefore to pull apart theories of literacy development that assume that learning to read means building phonological awareness on the basis of one's existing knowledge of the language, this pattern does suggest that we need to be hesitant about generalizing theories of reading in a second language from other target languages, including other target languages that also use non-Roman writing systems, to reading development in Arabic.

The distinction between reading as the ability to decode text and reading as the ability to comprehend text one takes on even more complexity if we look at it from the perspective of Muslim literacy practices. As the learners in this study described it, religious literacy involves a complex array of practices and competencies, which will be described further in Section 6.3.1. Learners in the Advanced class at Mawaarith, however, had an even wider range of literacy skills than would learners who had only been educated through a *masjid*. As the interview and survey data show, the term “reading” in the context of Arabic at Mawaarith is used, at minimum, to mean that a learner knows the Arabic letters and can decode text, with or without comprehension. At the same time, “reading” in the higher levels of Arabic and in the English language arts classes refers to comprehending texts and working with them in various ways, including recycling the vocabulary from an Arabic-language book into a new story, following the form of a text to write a similar one, or writing and performing a dramatization of a story. Meanwhile, reading in the context of the *masjid* seems to be tightly connected to memorizing and reciting. “Reading” in this context nearly always means reading out loud with accurate pronunciation. Malik's apparent slip of the tongue when he used “read” for the practice of reciting a sura he had memorized during prayer suggests that reading and reciting are closely connected in his mind. Thus when talking to Arabic users,

particularly young learners, about their abilities in Arabic, it may be necessary to distinguish explicitly between reading-to-pronounce, reading-to-comprehend, and reciting.

Literacy also takes on particular significance in analyzing investment among Arabic language learners and their families in that these families claimed to value literacy in Arabic over and above and even to the exclusion of oral communication in Arabic. The El-Gendys used Arabic for day-to-day communication and the Zakis were striving for a greater balance of English and Arabic in the home, but both Shireen and Noura were more concerned with developing their children's literacy in Arabic than their oral skills. Maryam Rowther and her family were investing in Arabic literacy to the exclusion of literacy in Tamil, which led to the incident when she was shocked to see Hassan start, almost unconsciously, to write Tamil from right to left. In all three of these families, literacy was a valued skill, but they were largely focused on religious literacy rather than on the ability to read secular texts, such as storybooks or news articles. The Brooks and Kimball parents valued literacy in Arabic and hoped that their children would develop these skills along with oral communication, but Justin and Anna were relatively unusual among FLLs in that they could read-to-pronounce fluently. By the time I met them, with each in their fifth year of Arabic study, their ability to read-to-comprehend was limited more by their language knowledge than by the effort required to decode.

What, then, are the implications of these perceptions of the different varieties of Arabic and the relative importance of literacy over oracy? It is important to note that in this context learning to decode Arabic script was a meaningful achievement. Not all AHLs could decode Arabic script before they entered Mawaarith, but those who had learned to speak Arabic fairly fluently seemed to be hindered more in their school lessons by interference from the variety they spoke at home than by low literacy in Arabic. For the RHL children who, prior to entering Mawaarith, could read-to-pronounce and recite texts from memory but could not communicate in Arabic, their religious literacy seemed to provide a foundation and ongoing support for learning Arabic language (vocabulary and oral communication). Meanwhile, many FLLs struggled to reach this milestone, and their inability to decode would keep them in the beginning level of Arabic, not to mention slow their learning in general.



While this characterization of the three groups' skills and progress may seem obvious, it conflicts with assumptions about heritage learners in that all children who did not speak Arabic at home would typically be grouped together as non-heritage learners. Thus, RHLs would be considered equivalent to FLLs. Alternatively, a placement test that focused on literacy skills with no oral component might place children with decoding skills and no language (like many RHLs) in a more advanced class and children with advanced oral communication skills and little literacy (like many AHLs) in a less advanced class than would be appropriate for their needs and interests.

There were profound differences in classroom participation between learners who could read-to-pronounce when they entered Mawaarith and learners who started as absolute beginners, many of whom could not decode unknown words without considerable effort even in their second year of study or later. These differences were most apparent in the intermediate class, where Hassan Rowther and his classmates who had also attended *masjid* lessons, all of whom happened to be sixth graders, were able to move much faster than their sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade classmates with less-developed reading skills. As the year went on, the older boys who were less fluent in reading resorted to cheating, sleeping through class, and showing other signs of resistance, and finally began to fail tests when their teacher stopped providing transliteration.

While one could easily argue that these boys (the problem was more apparent among the boys than the girls) were responsible for their own learning and should have made the effort to learn the alphabet by that point, I believe that the struggles of many non-HLLs at Mawaarith were co-constructed. Compared to classmates who had learned Arabic at home and in religious contexts, they began at a disadvantage. The alphabet was rarely taught in a linear, systematic fashion suited to early adolescent learners with well-established literacy skills in English but little metalinguistic awareness or motivation. The teachers initially expected quick progress, but met resistance, partly because the learners found the language difficult and partly, based on my observations, because the learners were confused by the language and by the materials they were given. As a result of this confusion and resistance, I believe, the teachers reduced their expectations and continued to use transliteration in combination with Arabic script.

Then, when the intermediate teacher in particular attempted to push her students to improve their reading fluency by removing the transliteration, many learners did not motivate themselves to learn the alphabet better, but rather began performing worse on assessments, grew more frustrated, and sometimes resorted to subversion including cheating. Confusion and frustration then intermingled with the teachers' less-developed skills in classroom management, so that the learning environment became less conducive to focused effort over time, particularly among the beginners. It seems that the non-heritage learners found it more difficult to learn and also to negotiate and sustain identities as good learners than did their peers. Learners from Arabic-speaking and/or Muslim backgrounds who had lower levels of literacy than their peers also appeared to face some frustration, but in general they were nevertheless more focused, faster learners than the FLLs.

Literacy and identity construction are thus closely tied in Arabic language learning. At the same time, the differences between a learner with no language and no literacy versus a learner with literacy but no language offer support for the importance of looking at language learning from a sociocognitive perspective. Atkinson (2011) includes literacy among “the multitude of adaptive tools invented by humans” that “organize and support cognition - by affording sociocognitive activities that would be difficult or impossible without them” (p. 144). Due to their sociocultural backgrounds, RHLs who began studying Arabic at Mawaarith with developed literacy skills but no communicative language skills not only began at a point farther along in the journey toward proficiency than their FLL classmates, but they also began with a tool for learning that allowed them to move much faster and more efficiently along that journey. If, as Goswami (2006) argues, phonological awareness is often an outgrowth of developing literacy rather than a precursor to literacy, then these learners are already aware of the phonology of Arabic as well as grapheme-phoneme correspondence. When the teacher wrote on the board in Arabic or gave them worksheets or flashcard activities with words in Arabic script, they could attend to meaning rather than focusing first on the highly-effortful process of early decoding. When they were presented with new words, they could write them and retain their spellings more easily. Rather than developing their knowledge of Arabic phonology from an open system of all possible sounds, they began with knowledge

of the letters, and thus the phonemes, of Arabic. Rather than beginning with the impression that Arabic words are complex squiggles and then slowly learning to identify the meaningful components of those words, they could immediately begin to assign meaning to those words. Their existing literacy helped them to organize the input that they received in class in such a way that they could learn more efficiently and effectively than their classmates. Thus I would argue that the sociocognitive process of language learning for those who could read but had no appreciable communicative skills was entirely different from the sociocognitive process of language learning for absolute beginners. It might have been predicted that FLL learners would benefit from proximity to proficient users of the target language in this environment. Faced with these sociocognitive challenges along with the challenge of negotiating identity in a community in which Arabic language and literacy conferred greater cultural capital and power on AHLs and RHLs, however, FLLs in this environment actually seemed to struggle more than they might if they were in the majority.

The normal state of affairs in a foreign language class is that learners begin with little or no knowledge of the language and progress, as do most Arabic learners in the Marhaba! Project in Boston, for example (Berbeco, 2011; personal communication, April 2010). They may proceed at varying rates depending on effort and some natural abilities, though these are likely mediated by other aspects of the learner's context, but they begin together at the starting line. Both AHLs and RHLs, then, complicate this state of affairs by bringing some level of skill, though it varies widely across learners. Due to the religious literacy practices of Islam, therefore, heritage learners of Arabic often have well-developed reading skills that serve not only to provide cultural capital in the communities of their *masjid* and school, but also to support their ongoing learning processes as they develop vocabulary and communicative skills.

### 6.3 Role of Religion in the Desire to Learn Arabic

*Religion serves as a powerful influence on investment in Arabic language learning.* The role of Arabic as the lingua franca of Islam complicates any analysis of a population of Arabic language learners and of Arabic as a heritage language. The importance of considering the role of Islam in perceptions of

Arabic as related to a learner's heritage was expected, but the implications of this relationship between language learning and religion for the learners in this study were unexpectedly complex. The religious importance of Arabic affects not only self-identification as heritage learners, as Lee (2005) found, but also the reasons for and intensity of parents' desire for Arabic, the competencies that learners and their parents strive to develop, the history of learning experiences that many children bring to the public-school setting, the communities in which children learn and may use Arabic, and even the fundamental understanding of what it means to read, as well as the relationship between Arabic language and literacy and identity. At the same time, religion played a nuanced and unpredicted role in investment for the non-Muslim families in this study. Having observed the learners at Mawaarith as well as my university classmates who were raised in non-Arab Muslim homes, it also seems clear that the role of religion in Arabic language learning takes on different forms in young learners than for these university students, who had greater autonomy and maturity.

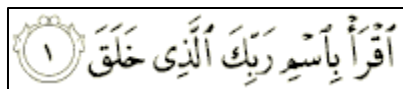
In studies of heritage learners, it is not uncommon to find that a learner associates a language with his or her heritage that is not actually spoken by his or her parents, extended family, or ancestors. Children of Chinese immigrants may consider themselves heritage learners of Mandarin although their family speaks Cantonese (Kelleher, 2010), and learners who trace their roots to Africa may choose to study Swahili as a heritage language regardless of the languages their parents speak (Lee, 2005). Thus it is not entirely exceptional that children of immigrants from Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Turkey, or another predominantly Muslim country might consider a language other than the primary language of their parents' home country to be a heritage language. However, to my knowledge the only other widely-studied ancient or modern language that might be viewed as a heritage language for religious reasons would be Hebrew for Jewish learners whose parents are not Israeli. Modern Hebrew is not as widely studied in the U.S. as MSA, and certainly these languages carry very different sociopolitical significance in the world today. Beyond that, I leave any further comparison between Arabic and Hebrew to other scholars and focus here on Arabic.

Religious beliefs and practices influence which learners may consider themselves to be heritage learners, but they have several additional implications for the study of Arabic. As discussed above, many learners in this study could read but not speak the language. Whereas scholars have observed that heritage learners can often speak but not read, or speak better than they read, their family's language (Montrul, 2010), this phenomenon of literacy without oracy, or literacy greater than oracy, seems to be a particular feature of Arabic as a target language. Due to practices associated with their religion, children like Hassan Rowther learn to decode Arabic text from the age of four or five. Only rarely do they have an opportunity, as Hassan has had, to study Arabic as a medium of communication before they enter college. Many non-Arab Muslim learners first encounter Arabic in a non-religious setting at the university level. I have sat in classes with many of them, including beginners who were frustrated and apparently embarrassed that they had not even learned to read at a young age and also more proficient learners who were able to draw on their religious literacy skills in order to learn faster and make more associations with new material than their peers.

**6.3.1 Religious institutions supporting heritage language maintenance.** Another implication of religion is that religious institutions make it possible for Arabic-speaking parents like the Zakis and El-Gendys to promote language maintenance by sending their children to classes where they can learn literacy in their home language. While such community-based schools are available around the U.S. for a number of different languages and are often supported by religious institutions (Fishman, 2001), these languages are not necessarily taught as a means of accessing religious texts. Such schools may increase the likelihood that learners will develop literacy in heritage languages that do not share a writing system with English, including Chinese, Japanese, and Korean as well as Arabic. However, parents who send their children to such schools do not face the same dilemma that Noura and Rahim Zaki did when they began to focus on developing their children's religious literacy skills over communication in the home. Likewise, non-Muslim parents would not face the dilemma faced by families like the Rowthers, who had to choose one heritage language over another. They gladly sent their children to a public school and to religious classes where they could learn Arabic, but in the U.S. they did not have a comparable

opportunity to invest outside the home in the study of Tamil, the language that their family uses for communicative purposes.

**6.3.2 Components of religious literacy.** The distinctions between religious literacy and simply learning to decode Arabic are also features that are specific to this target language. The actual competencies that are valued and acquired through studying Arabic at a *masjid* are not the same competencies that are evaluated at school, though they do overlap. In the *masjid* setting, learning to *read* seems to be almost synonymous with learning to *recite*. This connection in the minds of learners may be no coincidence. The first sura of the Qur'an chronologically, Sura 96, is believed to be the first words of the revelations that the Prophet Mohammed received from Allah. This sura begins with the command, *Iqra' bi-ismi rabbika al-ladhi khalaqa*, shown in the original Qur'anic script in Figure 6.1. Pickthall (1930/1996) translated this text as, "Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth." In contrast, Esposito (2005) cites this aya as, "Recite in the name of your Lord who has created."<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 6.1 The first aya (verse) of Sura 96 in the Qur'an** (Retrieved from <http://www.quran4theworld.com/transliteration/96.html>).

The first word of this earliest sura, the imperative form of the verb *qara'a*, can be translated either as "Read!" or as "Recite!" (Cowan, 1994). Likewise, the religious literacy practices that Muslim children in this study described create close links between reading and reciting the text of the Qur'an. At the same time, they distinguish reading from comprehending. From their earliest lessons with tutors, learners develop the ability to decode the letters and diacritical marks accurately when they read out loud and when they recite a text that they have memorized. According to children I interviewed, rather than learning to comprehend a text as they read it in a bottom-up process (Grabe, 2009), they are taught the

<sup>30</sup> Esposito (2005) lists several translations of the Qur'an in his bibliography, but does not state which translation was the source of this quote.

meaning of the text in a separate but related lesson. Moreover, developing strategies and skills for memorizing lengthy texts accurately and retaining them over long periods of time is part of developing religious literacy. The actual store of memorized texts thus acquired is yet another aspect of religious literacy, one that began for the El-Gendy girls before they learned to decode text and that worried the Zaki parents when they compared their children to peers in Syria.

In this memorization process, the children need to retain not only the words of each text in the appropriate order, whether they know what those words mean or not, but also should remember the overall meaning of the text, the name of the sura it comes from, and the location of the sura in the Qur'an. Learning to recite these suras at the appropriate time, in the appropriate manner, and in the appropriate order (as they appear in the Qur'an) should also be considered components of religious literacy.

While pronouncing texts correctly and memorizing them are key elements of religious literacy, learners were also trained to analyze meaning in the text. Malik, Imran, and Hassan explained that they would learn the meanings of some words from the sura of the day in their *masjid* classes, and they would also learn aspects of grammar that would allow them to recognize the nuances of meaning, such as the way that two subtly different derived forms from the same verb root might have opposite meanings (one passive and one active, for example). In this way, the children were exposed to features of Arabic grammar in their *masjid* classes that they never encountered in their classes at Mawaarith. In fact, the children claimed that their Mawaarith teachers never taught them about the three-consonant roots that form the basis of Arabic morphology, knowledge that can expand an Arabic learner's vocabulary exponentially (Al-Batal, 2006), but Hassan understood these to some extent from his *masjid* classes<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> In my own learning process, I did not really begin to develop the ability to identify the root consonants of a verb, noun, adjective, or adverb, much less the role of derived forms, until I reached the Intermediate level at my university, when our instructor gave us authentic news articles from Al-Jazeera Online and expected us to use the *Hans Wehr* dictionary to decipher them. Without the ability to recognize verb roots, making use of the *Hans Wehr* is nearly impossible; learners can only use (less available and less informative) dictionaries in which entries are in alphabetical order. I do not intend to make any claim about whether it would be developmentally appropriate to introduce roots to middle school learners at a certain level of proficiency, but I would argue that the decision to teach them or not should be made based on empirical evidence, including action research, rather than intuition.

In addition to introducing the children to features of Arabic as a linguistic system that they would not encounter at school, the *masjid* classes also presented the texts and their meanings in a way that emphasized layers of meaning beyond what a text encountered in school would entail. In the *masjid* classes, the meaning of the texts was presented not only as the conglomeration of word meanings, syntax, and semantics, but as a “teaching” or “revelation”, to borrow Shireen’s words (Interview 1). The children were expected not only to learn and understand the text itself but also to begin to engage in religious exegesis, looking for meanings below the surface and considering how they could apply the text to their lives. Thus the process of developing literacy at the *masjid* involved learning to decode, to memorize, to recite, to analyze grammatical subtleties, and to build a mental map of the Qur’an and its contents, but, at the same time, this process provided a means of socializing the children into the beliefs and practices of their religious community in a structured manner. In this way, the *masjid* classes provided the children with opportunities to negotiate membership in their local Muslim community and the larger imagined community of Muslims and provided them with cultural capital that would carry value in communities associated with Islam around the world.

Desire to learn the language for religious purposes complicates theories of heritage language acquisition, but it also complicates analysis of investment in language learning. While it seems entirely appropriate to say that these learners are constructing identity through language learning and that the competencies they gain will serve as cultural capital in current and future communities, the learners themselves and their parents rarely spoke of pleasing other members of their Muslim community. Shireen and Noura compared their families’ decisions about family language policy and their progress in maintaining Arabic with other Muslim families, but they did not seem concerned that they would be judged harshly by other parents for any failure to learn on the part of their children. While they may not have feared this judgment because they were relatively satisfied with their children’s existing literacy (although they both spoke often of the need to improve), they, along with Maryam and Rahim, seemed more concerned with helping their children to engage with the richness of their religious tradition.

Knowledge of Arabic, knowledge of the Qur’an, and overt signs of devotion could serve as symbolic



capital, but it did not seem clear that learners or their parents expected to convert these competencies into other forms of social capital.

**6.3.3 Religion and language learning among non-Muslim families.** Unexpectedly, the focal families in this study showed that religion can play a role in investment for some learners who are not Muslim. This element of learners' desire to acquire languages and their learning processes is rarely discussed in applied linguistics literature, but as scholars including Heidi Byrnes asserted at a recent colloquium on identity research at the American Association of Applied Linguistics conference, religion needs to be considered further as an influence on learners and their language (Dervin & Kramsch, 2010). For these parents, enrolling their children in a school in which they would associate with a large number of Arabs and Muslims and study Arabic was perceived as a means of acting out their beliefs. Just as the Muslim parents insisted that their children learn to read Arabic as an important means of consolidating their existing religious identity, the Brooks and Kimball families seemed to view their participation in Mawaarith as a way of constructing religious identity.

These Christian families did not consider Arabic to be essential to the practice of their religion in the way that Muslim parents did. However, their belief systems did influence their investment in Arabic. They discursively constructed their relationship with Arabic in three predominant ways. First, their pursuit of Arabic proficiency for their children and their association with Arabs and Muslims distinguished them from other Christians and allowed them, as they developed greater understanding of these groups, to convey this understanding back to others in their communities. Second, they saw parallels between their faith and Muslim faith and sought to use these to build bridges. Anna's explanation that God and Allah were the same entity seems to reflect an effort to find common theological ground. Grace used the parallel stories of Isaac and Ishmael in the Bible and the Qur'an, which are sometimes used to justify the ongoing discord between Muslims and Christians, to assert that this discord is not divinely sanctioned or inevitable. David's lengthy conversation with the father of his daughter's classmate, who was a leader in the mosque, about common misinterpretations of Christian and Muslim theology also serves as an example of this effort to decrease misunderstandings and increase

unity. Third, they acknowledged the discord among Muslims and non-Muslims in the contemporary political landscape, and they spoke of their desire to diminish this discord by encouraging their children to grow in cultural awareness and to use their linguistic skills for diplomatic purposes. While many non-Christian families might voice the same desire, Grace phrased it in religious terms: “God could use us as an ambassador of good will and bridge-building and peace-making” (Interview 1). Likewise, David had gone to the *masjid* to pray with local Muslims, and Anna’s father had helped to sponsor interfaith dialogues involving Christian and Muslim leaders.

Arabic language learning thus took on both a symbolic and a practical role for these families. Its symbolic role lay in the message that they sent to members of their own community by choosing to invest in Arabic language learning and to participate in a school community that was predominantly Muslim. By reaching out to members of a minority that they believed was deeply misunderstood and misrepresented, these families hoped to build bridges from this predominantly Muslim community to their Christian communities. Their investment in Arabic would carry this symbolic value whether their children achieved a high level of proficiency or not.

The practical role of Arabic, however, depended on the children developing a level of Arabic that they could use to “break the ice” and perhaps even to participate in professional interactions. If Grace envisioned her children promoting peace by working in transnational settings, then they would need advanced communicative skills. Grace and David as well as Tanya Kimball hoped that their children would, at minimum, build intercultural awareness along with their language skills through studying at Mawaarith. This awareness would include tolerance of difference as well as greater understanding of Muslim practices. Though David did not imply that his children would be able to help him in his work, his contacts in the Middle East could, and later did, open up opportunities to learn Arabic while serving people in Arabic-speaking communities. In this way, the Brooks and Kimball children could develop cultural capital that they might use to broker between between Muslim and Christian communities both locally and in international contexts.

In explaining the relationship between Christian religious beliefs and investment in Arabic language learning for the Brooks and Kimball families, I certainly do not mean to imply that their perspectives would necessarily be shared widely by non-Arab Christian learners of Arabic. However, their views are an important aspect of their investment. As stated earlier, Arabic itself is not considered essential to the practice of their religion, but through encouraging their children to learn Arabic and to engage with Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities, they hoped to pass on values involving intercultural tolerance and service to God and other people that were part of their family heritage. In this way, these families' construction of Arabic as heritage belies the typical characterization of FLLs.

The implication here is that religion can play a role in investment for learners from many different backgrounds. Moreover, the idea that learning language could be a means of decreasing discord between speakers of the target language and a non-HLL's own religious community seems to be another feature that distinguishes investment in Arabic from other languages. In the contemporary sociopolitical context, which will be discussed further below, in which Christian-Muslim interactions are so fraught, Arabic language learning may be inseparable from religion. Christian families like those in this study may not be the only non-Arabs or non-Muslims who wish to promote peace, but they may be inclined to frame this discord and their efforts to diminish it in religious terms, as do many Muslims.

#### **6.4 Learning Language in the Local and Global Context**

*Investment in Arabic language learning at Mawaarith takes place in the midst of local, national, and international policies and priorities for language learning.* As discussed in the introduction and review of literature (Section 2.1), Arabic is both a heritage language and a critical language. Many families consider the language an essential part of their national and cultural identity as well as their religious practices, but at the same time the U.S. government has determined that Arabic language learning deserves particular support due to the international sociopolitical environment, which is growing increasingly complex at the the time of this writing. In terms of language policy, Ricento (2005) has asserted that the promotion of heritage languages at many institutions around the country actually serves

national interests more than those of the local communities: “the values attached to the asset (languages) and the purposes for which the assets will be used are pertinent only to the needs of the state” (p. 361). In other words, the arguments for promoting Arabic as a heritage language and the arguments for promoting Arabic as a critical language in the larger national discourse are interlocked: the U.S. needs more individuals who can use Arabic at a high level of proficiency, and the skills that HLLs bring to the language classroom, often in programs sponsored by the government, are believed to provide a foundation for reaching this level of proficiency (Allen, 2007; Jackson & Malone, 2009; Ricento, 2005).

These concepts of heritage language and critical language, as powerful as they are in the scholarly discourse about Arabic language learning, virtually never appear in the discourse of this school and the learners and families associated with it. The language program at Mawaarith is funded by the government, given that it is housed in a public school. However, it was founded by and continues to be strongly supported by a local community of parents who value Arabic as a heritage language. On one hand, the language program has to meet standards for foreign language education set by the state, while on the other hand parents hope that it will meet their expectations, which vary considerably.

In this investigation of learner and parent investment in Arabic language learning, the question to be asked is not how Arabic’s status as a critical language affects learners but rather how the learning context, both at the local school level and the larger geopolitical level, impacts investment for these learners. The sections that follow deal with each of these levels in turn and begin to address implications for the ongoing learning trajectories of these learners, although implications will be discussed more thoroughly in the final chapter.

**6.4.1 Studying Arabic in the context of a U.S. public school.** The meaning of Arabic language learning at Mawaarith largely derives from the value that learners and their families attribute to it based on their language background and religious affiliations. However, teaching Arabic is also part of this charter school’s official mandate, and as such the methods and content of Mawaarith language classes must align with the state and national standards for primary foreign language education. Within that framework, the teachers had to determine how to translate those standards into lessons and units, how to

differentiate instruction and what objectives would be set for each group of learners, and how to assess progress in Arabic proficiency. Given the still-limited range of materials available for teaching Arabic to young learners, these teachers had to put considerable time and effort into the planning and execution of Arabic lessons for students from kindergarten to eighth grade. Many of the parents' and children's reflective comments on instruction at Mawaarith, however, pointed to disconnections between the teachers' efforts and the learners' understanding of the content, tasks, and objectives. Thus, I would argue that the teachers' pedagogical choices, as well as the parents' and children's responses to these choices, impacted these learners' investment over time.

Some informants suggested that they wanted a greater sense of growth in proficiency over time. According to the relevant state standards for elementary foreign language education, learners in middle school at Mawaarith were expected to reach the ACTFL standards for Novice-Low and Novice-Mid learners (ACTFL, 2012). The state standards also included a list of topics, from which the teachers constructed lessons for the various classes and levels. Although the teachers strove to teach these topics in meaningful categories that applied to specific areas of day-to-day life, several informants, including Shireen, Farah, Imran, and Grace, expressed the impression that the Arabic classes tended to revolve around vocabulary to the exclusion of grammar. Shireen El-Gendy, who had the greatest knowledge of Arabic among all the mothers, believed that the language was not being presented systematically in such a way that learners could build on prior learning to gain control of increasingly complex structures in Arabic. As a result, she felt more personally responsible for explaining such structures to her daughters. Justin Brooks observed that he had studied the same topics over and over. Though he acknowledged that the teachers built on the content of various units including family, animals, self and body, home and furnishings, and weather each time he saw them, this repetition seemed to make him skeptical that his proficiency was really growing.

Some units were more popular than others, including the soccer unit in the Advanced classes and the unit on parties and invitations in the Intermediate classes. In general, the Advanced group was able to engage more deeply and communicatively in each topic, often reaching beyond the required standard for

their grade level. In all the classes, the students were exposed to the culture and geography of the Middle East in English, though Hassan admitted that he did not understand how these lessons were related to learning Arabic. While all the parents expressed the hope that their children would be able to communicate effectively in Arabic, the instruction at Mawaarith did not necessarily serve this purpose in that these classes focused on MSA, a variety associated with literacy, not spoken communication, and in that they did not follow the principles of communicative language teaching to a great extent. I say this not to criticize the teachers, who were often aware of these issues but hindered by the limits of time and resources, but rather to emphasize that the content and methods of the language classes did not always align with the learners' and their parents' expectations for the long-term outcomes of language instruction.

The increased emphasis on literacy in the middle school years added to the complexity of the pedagogical challenges. As mentioned above, the FLLs, who entered Mawaarith with no prior exposure to Arabic literacy, were expected to learn to decode text within a year. While this is no great challenge for university students, these younger learners were less self-directed and seemed unlikely to devote the time outside class to practicing reading and writing letters and words. Justin and Anna had managed to develop competent reading skills, but they were more the exception than the rule among FLLs. Meanwhile most of the AHLs and RHLs, most of whom could read Arabic prior to entering Mawaarith, were able to learn at a faster pace and make use of literacy as a tool to support learning in a way that the FLL beginners were not. When these learners entered school, then, the texts and literacy practices of their language classes could and sometimes did build on their existing abilities in the language. However, these texts were not identical to the texts they were reading in their religious classes, in that the lexicon of their school materials may not have overlapped much with that of their Qur'an readings and also in that the MSA texts in school appeared without diacritics. Thus, the learners were developing literacy skills both in and out of school, but their practices in these different contexts did not make the same cognitive or social demands. AHL and RHL learners who hoped that their classes at Mawaarith would contribute to the development of their religious literacy skills might have been disappointed. While Malik, Imran, and Hassan did not often

speak metalinguistically of the differences between the Arabic of the Qur'an and the Arabic they were learning in school, they did note the differences.

In terms of content, literacy, and commitment to learning, the learners in each of the classes at Mawaarith differed considerably from each other. The three levels of instruction in the middle school grades separated the learners by proficiency, but they also effectively separated learners based on their heritage status. With only two exceptions, the AHLs were in the Advanced class, and Anna was the only FLL in that class. The Beginners were almost all FLLs with a few RHLs, and the Intermediate class was made up of a combination of older FLLs who had been studying at Mawaarith for a year or more and younger RHLs who had little language proficiency. This separation made it possible for Miss Majida to create lessons for her Advanced learners that not only required a higher level of competence but were also more engaging, while it allowed Miss Nadira to focus on basic literacy with the Beginners. However, it also meant that FLLs had fewer opportunities to share the learning experience with learners who had higher levels of investment in Arabic learning and to benefit from the cross-cultural experience of studying with learners who came from Arabic-speaking Muslim families. While the learners in this study were all in the Intermediate or Advanced classes and were invested in learning Arabic to some extent, there were Beginners who said that they did not see why they should have to study Arabic and even that their parents had discouraged them from putting time and effort into their foreign language class. The implication is that, just as the learners in this study tended to echo their parents' priorities for language learning, the learners who had less parent support needed ongoing encouragement to envision themselves as users of Arabic and to put effort into learning.

Articulation is another very important aspect of the immediate school context that may have impacted investment. The learners in this study had all been studying Arabic in school, and some of them outside school, for several years. From what I observed, the learners in the Advanced class (Malik, Imran, Farah, and Anna) had exceeded the standards for middle school foreign language learning, and Hassan and Justin likely reached that point by the end of eighth grade. However, as mentioned above, the school

system in which their charter school was located did not have a high school Arabic program into which the Mawaarith learners could progress.

In my interactions with these learners, I sensed that the extent of their investment in Arabic had much to do with imagination as Wenger (1998) uses it, in the sense that they could envision themselves as part of a community of Arabic language users beyond their immediate contexts of engagement. In the case of the AHLs, these imagined communities might be their families' national communities in Egypt or Syria. All the learners, however, spoke of the possibility of using Arabic in their careers, any of which would involve an imagined community of professionals using Arabic as a medium of communication. However, without the opportunity to study the language in high school, it would be difficult for them to earn a credential that would verify their language skills to colleges and after that to potential employers. The AHLs and RHLs might continue studying Arabic in religious contexts, but, as I have explained, this type of study would not hone the same skills that would be valued in secular settings. Meanwhile, Anna and Justin had few options available to them. The Arabic skills all of these learners had gained at Mawaarith could serve as valuable cultural capital, to be exchanged for other benefits, and demonstrating this value may be a key means of inspiring greater investment. Without a planned means of articulation in the school system from middle school to college, however, these learners would find it difficult to transfer this cultural capital to future institutions.

Overall, the learners themselves, including the focal participants as well as their classmates who participated in the surveys, seemed much less concerned with the ways that they might use their developing language skills beyond Mawaarith than they were about the immediate context of their classes. They did not seem overly concerned about the lack of a high school program in which they could continue learning Arabic. If they expressed any frustration with the learning process, they rarely brought up concerns about their (lack of) opportunities to use the language in the future, as might be the case for older learners; rather, they explained that they could not see an immediate use for their language skills. This more concrete perspective on the part of these eleven-, twelve-, and thirteen-year-old students was not unexpected, but it suggests that opportunities to apply their Arabic skills in the present are key to



constructing the value of Arabic for these young learners; promises about the future are not enough. In Justin's case, as he grew older he took a more long-term perspective on the value of Arabic in his life. In fact, Justin told me when I followed up with him and his family two years after this data was initially collected that he had become much more focused and dedicated to his Arabic studies in eighth grade. While he struggled to articulate a reason for this shift, he explained that he wanted to make use of the Arabic he had learned, and with increasing maturity he was more able to see how his knowledge of Arabic would benefit him in his future studies and beyond.

**6.4.2 Studying Arabic in the larger geopolitical context.** In the immediate contexts of family and religious groups in which the AHL and RHL families are involved, Arabic serves as a means of communication, a means of demonstrating devotion, and a means of accessing religious texts. For all of the focal families, including parents and learners that already belong to those communities and outsiders who wish to build bridges into those communities, Arabic serves as a means of conveying concern for and alignment with Arab and Muslim communities. These purposes are framed within the larger sociopolitical context of Arabic learning, however.

Arabic literary scholar and program director Allen (2007) proposes that “beyond direct incentives by the government and the religious motivations of adherents to the religion of Islam, discussion of reasons for studying Arabic rapidly turns political” (p. 259). Any discussion of Arabic as a target language in regard to older learners is likely to move quickly toward ways that their language proficiency might be put to use in diplomatic, commercial, military, or security contexts. While the informants in this study rarely referred to Arabic as a critical language, and thus to its political positioning, the role of Arabic as a world language, as the language of the Middle East, and as the lingua franca of Islam did apparently influence their use of and perspectives on the language. The global status of Arabic impacted how they interacted with neighbors and schoolmates, affected the opportunities that they and their parents believed Arabic abilities would afford, and particularly influenced the way they positioned Arabic study as a means of building intercultural awareness and tolerance.

As Allen (2007), Al-Batal (2007), and others have asserted, it is discord between the Middle East and the West, between the Muslim world and the Christian world, that drives up the value of Arabic. If not for the position of Arabic as the primary language of the Middle East, and if not for the U.S.'s extensive involvement in Middle Eastern politics today, then Arabic would not have the same potential to provide increased access to universities and careers; hence, Allen's (2007) concern that changes in the sociopolitical picture will decrease support for Arabic programs. At the same time, the intercultural conflicts and misunderstandings that have been prevalent in the U.S., particularly in the last decade, play a role in Arab and Muslim families' decisions to send their children to Mawaarith. Children at Mawaarith were unlikely to be teased about carrying bombs in their backpacks or about wearing a headscarf to hide an ugly bald head, both of which happened to Muslim children who had left Mawaarith for other local schools and later returned. Likewise, religious traditions including daily prayer and fasting during Ramadan went unquestioned at Mawaarith. For AHLs and RHLs, then, Mawaarith could provide shelter from the intolerance they might encounter at other public schools. Both FLL families believed that Mawaarith was a more sheltered environment, as well, where parents would be more likely to monitor and govern their children's behavior than at a typical public middle school.

When they spoke of their vision for the opportunities that their children would have beyond Mawaarith as a result of learning Arabic, parents from different backgrounds gave similar responses, while mothers and fathers differed somewhat in their expectations. Though my sense from this data in general was that gender differences were much less meaningful for investment in Arabic language learning than other aspects of these individuals and their context, there was a subtle difference between the mothers and the fathers when it came to discussing their children's futures. All the mothers were concerned with their children having to the freedom to pursue careers that would suit their strengths and be fulfilling for them; Arabic might therefore broaden their children's options. Shireen and Grace added this element of hope that their children could serve as intercultural brokers, though it was not clear whether this would occur through their professional roles or through other types of engagement. The fathers, however, gave the impression that they were somewhat more concerned with career prospects and

saw Arabic as an important instrumental advantage. Rahim expressed his belief that it was almost imperative for children from his home country to learn more than one language if they wanted to participate in business or a profession and implied that his sons, growing up in the U.S., would also benefit professionally from the increased communication abilities and also intercultural awareness to be gained through language learning. David, meanwhile, explained that he had repeatedly attempted to encourage Justin in his studies by reminding him that proficiency in Arabic would help him when he applied to colleges and jobs.

In Dagenais' (2003) study of immigrant parents' decisions about multilingual education in Canada, the parents believed that learning English and French would maximize the learning potential and earning potential of their children within Canada, while learning the family's heritage language in addition to these two would expand the children's opportunities outside Canada. Dagenais saw these parents' desire to cultivate multilingualism not only through the lens of Bourdieu's economic metaphors, but also in literally economic terms: "Parents... invest in their children's acquisition of more linguistic capital, imagining that it will enable them to secure a place in a competitive world" and thus to secure jobs and income (p. 272). While it is also true for the families in this study that they hoped their children would receive sufficient education to pursue the jobs they would enjoy, these families seemed less motivated by pursuing economic competitiveness than with inculcating certain values and encouraging children to act on those values. Beyond the scope of family, religion, and school language requirements, these parents seemed to envision their children's emergent bilingualism and biliteracy not as essential skills for the labor market but as valuable abilities that would enable these children to contribute to society on a global level.

Similarly, the desire to raise bilingual, bicultural children who would be able to contribute to our increasingly global society seemed to be shared by all of the focal participants in this study. However, that ambition was not necessarily shared by all the families whose children attend Mawaarith, and would not necessarily be shared by parents in another school or in regard to another target language. However,

imagining this outcome is an important part of investment for these parents, and this vision takes on particular nuances due to the countries and the contexts in which Arabic might potentially be used.

Presumably the sociopolitical context of Arabic also plays a role in other families' decisions *not* to send their children to Mawaarith. The Brooks and Kimball parents and children all articulated ways that outsiders perceive Mawaarith and their participation in Mawaarith. Grace explained that, "I think a lot of people, the first thing they're concerned about, is there any religious indoctrination, and I will say, No, it's publicly funded, they're learning Arabic but ... they're not being taught religion" (Interview 2). Nevertheless, they seem satisfied with their own children's education at Mawaarith, of which Arabic is only one component, and they are willing to be informal ambassadors for the school to other families who might identify with the Brooks and Kimballs more easily than with the Arab and other Muslim members of the Mawaarith community.

More so than the Muslim mothers in this study, the Christian mothers spoke of a desire to negotiate membership in the community of Mawaarith and also stated that they had found this negotiation to be increasingly difficult. At the same time that these parents were interested in the community of this school, however, they were also interested in accessing and helping children access larger imagined communities. They spoke of building intercultural awareness through learning Arabic and through interacting with Arabs and Muslims, and believed that this increased awareness of other cultures and tolerance of cultural difference would help them in their personal and professional lives.

Strikingly, Grace and Shireen spoke of their children as potential "bridges" and seemed to envision their children playing unique transnational roles in promoting world peace. For Grace, this desire came from a Christian perspective on peace and unity, while for Shireen this vision seemed to emerge from her own experience and her perspective from the U.S. looking at the changes in Egyptian society over the last several years. They seemed to share the belief that their children, through their learning experience involving two languages, would be "strong," "open-minded," and "balanced," and would be able to draw "from both cultures" (El-Gendy, Interview 1), and thus would be able to participate in efforts

to bring those cultures together in a way that their more monolingual, monocultural predecessors could not.

Ideally, even if the children are more concerned with their immediate context than the global importance of Arabic, the learning experience ought to benefit them. To the extent that intercultural communication within the context of the school could be a microcosm of intercultural communication on a larger scale, participation in this local community could prepare them for participation in the global community of Arabic speakers. That said, only 13.2% of the students said on the initial survey that they were taking Arabic in order to communicate with native speakers, while only 31.3% said on the final survey that they would be willing to speak to a native speaker of Arabic that they did not know, and two-thirds of both of these groups were children from Arabic-speaking homes. To say the least, the remaining learners may need help imagining their future participation in communities that use Arabic, as well as opportunities to use Arabic in their more immediate context. If parents and administrators want these children to develop skills that will allow them to participate in and contribute to a global society, they need to take steps to help learners engage more fully in the community of Mawaarith, engage in learning communities that can bridge them from Mawaarith to other opportunities to develop proficiency, and imagine legitimate participation in the larger world of Arabic users. This and other possible implications of this research for encouraging greater investment in Arabic language learning will be discussed in the final chapter.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In the past ten to fifteen years, the literature on identity in language learners has evolved considerably, shifting from a reliance on comparisons across fixed categories to nuanced descriptions of the process of identity construction. In the relatively young body of literature on heritage languages, however, researchers have drawn categorical boundaries between heritage and non-heritage learners and have not fully engaged with the heterogeneity within HLLs and the similarities among heritage and non-heritage learners. Moreover, they have not interrogated the concept of heritage, which is an etic term applied to learners who may or may not be actively or primarily concerned with the role of ethnic identity in their language learning processes. This study has endeavored to describe investment in language learning for five young learners of Arabic and their families, highlighting the complex decisions that they have made and practices they have taken up and developed in order to support the language learning process as well as the complexity of Arabic as a target language. At the same time, this study has endeavored to break down the accepted boundaries between HLLs and non-HLLs as categories of learners and to replace them with a focus on the construction of heritage, and the role of language in concepts of heritage, among families that are striving to raise multilingual children.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences, values, beliefs, and practices of learners and families who choose to invest in the learning of Arabic at a young age in the U.S. This investigation was grounded in the existing definitions of heritage learners and in the construct of motivation, but it has drawn on the construct of investment in order to understand the multiple contextual factors that may influence learners and the ways that commitment to learning may change over time in response to these influences. Through language learning, individuals can construct identities as members of valued communities and gain cultural capital in those communities. To the extent that language learning is a process of identity construction, heritage learners and non-heritage learners who wish to learn Arabic can be distinguished on the basis of the community memberships that they desire to negotiate and consolidate.

From this perspective, heritage learners are those who seek to develop greater capacity in Arabic in order to strengthen, increase, or consolidate membership in communities to which they already belong. In the case of Arabic, this category includes religious heritage learners as well as traditional (Arab) heritage learners. Non-heritage learners, if and when they are in fact invested in learning the language, are seeking to develop greater capacity in Arabic in order to gain skills and legitimacy that will allow them to broker across communities, reaching outside their own cultural, linguistic, and religious boundaries in order to engage with members of other communities. Through this brokering, they may build larger multilingual, transnational, trans-religious, trans-cultural communities.

In both of these cases, prior proficiency and current support for learning can vary considerably. The relationship between parents' desires for their children in deepening or extending membership and the children's own desires may also vary considerably. We can expect that prior proficiency, current support, and alignment between parents' and children's desires will be directly correlated with gains in proficiency and with persistence, as will the child's own self-perception as a good learner, although this relationship deserves further empirical research.

In analyzing the features that may distinguish some learners from others, however, we must not ignore the many instances in which learners and their families may express and exhibit values that would be associated with both groups. Arab parents such as the El-Gendys may also see their children as potential brokers, bridging from Arab to non-Arab and from Egyptian to American communities in order to promote understanding and peace. For Christian parents like those in the Brooks and Kimball families, attempting to extend their reach, their interactions, and their inclusiveness beyond their own linguistic, cultural, and religious communities is in fact also a means of deepening membership in their own religious community. For them, this reaching out is a central practice of their own faith, not necessarily valued by all Christians in their local or imagined communities, but nevertheless valuable in their own family's interpretation.

What, then, might these inclinations to deepen or extend membership in communities through Arabic language learning mean for the construction of heritage? What purposes might this identification serve in terms of meeting the psychosocial and pedagogical needs of Arabic learners?

First, by focusing on the construction of heritage, we can avoid relying on categories that diminish the complexity of different learners' relationships with the target language and those who speak it. Second, identifying learners based on valued communities rather than on proficiency assessments leads us to investigate and understand a richer picture of learners' relationships with the language and may suggest ways to support their development over time. A group of learners at the same level of proficiency might include Arab HLLs with parents who did not or could not invest in their language development; religious HLLs who have only been exposed to one variety of the language with limited domains of use; or FLLs with years of instructed classroom experience. While measuring proficiency may serve important purposes in placing learners in the appropriate level in programs with one track, it does not speak to the commitment to learning that may drive learners, the ways that their learning processes might vary, or to the ways in which teachers and other stakeholders may strive to increase the investment of learners who are not deeply committed to learning.

### **7.1 Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of this study have implications for the teaching of Arabic, but these implications apply not only to the classroom practices of teachers but also to the support that families can provide for young learners and ways that language learning can be integrated into the school community as a whole. Further, these findings highlight the importance of establishing routes to proficiency that meet the needs of diverse learners and of the society that stands to gain from their proficiency. In the previous chapter, I discussed four patterns from the collected data, each of which may powerfully influence learners' investment in Arabic language learning: construction of Arabic as heritage in families, language and literacy in the learning of Arabic, the role of religion in Arabic language learning, and learning Arabic in



local and global context. I will follow these themes in suggesting implications for the findings of this study.

**7.1.1 Identification of heritage learners.** As I have discussed above, this study takes the perspective that it is beneficial to view, investigate, and support heritage and non-heritage learners in terms of the valued communities in which they would like to participate. Most communities that value Arabic can agree that learners and their communities benefit if the learners reach a high level of proficiency. Understanding learners from the perspective of the communities to which they belong and wish to belong may serve as a rubric for addressing and supporting their investment in language learning. In each heritage status group, the learners may benefit from greater awareness of the capital to be gained in their own community and in other communities to which they might have access as their proficiency increases. For example, AHLs may be focused on the value of the language in their personal relationships, but not their potential professional life. AHLs who are Muslim and RHLs may be focused on the value of the Qur'anic variety of Arabic and religious literacy over spoken Arabic, and RHLs may not expect to use Arabic for meaningful interpersonal communication or realize how their existing proficiency may support their development of communicative competence. FLLs, if they are invested, may benefit greatly from increased access to communities of people who actively use the language in various domains. If they are not invested, they may need to become aware of the significance of the language to members of other communities and the cultural capital that it may afford them as they seek educational and professional opportunities.

**7.1.1.1 Involve parents in the learning process.** In the context of an Arabic language program, particularly a program for young learners who are still living with their parents and whose educational decisions are primarily made by their parents, parents from all language backgrounds can and should be viewed as resources in their children's learning processes. These parents may share various community memberships with each other, but they can all make contributions to the school community as a whole. Tanya Kimball's perspective on the school community may provide the clearest picture of what effective development of a school community might entail, and what it might enable. She threw herself into a range

of school activities when her children began studying at Mawaarith, and through helping to sell uniforms and other activities, she developed relationships with parents whom she otherwise would not know and might not otherwise consider to be fellow members of a valued community. Through these relationships and through her children's friendships with classmates, then, she had opportunities to share experiences with Arab and non-Arab Muslim mothers that helped her to understand their perspectives. Although the activities in which these mothers were involved when they met through Mawaarith seemed to be unrelated to the language learning process, they opened doors for parents who spoke Arabic and who did not, parents who were Muslim and who were not, to form a community. Such community could provide a basis for making broad-minded decisions about the teaching of Arabic that would support a wider range of learners.

Also, Tanya spoke of the class that Mawaarith attempted to offer for non-Arabic-speaking parents. Although this class did not, as she said, "get off the ground" at Mawaarith (Interview 1), I sense that such a class would be logistically feasible. The Arabic teachers in any given program are likely too busy to teach such a class, but I met multiple mothers who spoke Arabic and would have had the time, expertise, and willingness to teach such a class. Although the FLL parents would have limited time, many of them would likely recognize, as Tanya did, that learning more about Arabic would help them to support their child's learning process. Grace and Maryam both expressed interest in learning more Arabic.

Such a class, if taught effectively, could fulfill two important purposes for parents and students. First, it would help FLL parents and RHL parents to learn about Arabic on a linguistic level so that they could help their children to understand and study the materials that teachers provided. These parents might not commit to learning to read, write, or converse fluently in Arabic, but they would benefit from learning a few key concepts that they could then use to work with their children. These key concepts would include features of the orthography including the letters and sounds, the right-to-left orientation, how words connect, and so on. Also, the teachers should use a consistent, accessible transliteration system (more on this below) and parents should learn how to interpret it. A brief summary of recommended content for such a course is included in Appendix H.

It goes almost without saying that these parents should also learn basic phrases that learners will encounter and that let the parents also begin to communicate with users of Arabic. Just as Grace Brooks said that a few words in another's language can break the ice, these parents should learn, at minimum, phrases for greetings and politeness and how to ask and answer basic questions. Furthermore, FLL and RHL parents need to understand some of the major differences in features and in use between MSA and spoken varieties of Arabic. Without this awareness, they might seek out opportunities to use Arabic, as the Brooks family did, and then become discouraged when they are constantly told that the formal way of asking "How are you?" that they have learned every year in school (*kaifa Haluka?*) is not the same as the phrase that their new acquaintances use (perhaps *kiifak*, *izzayyak*, or *shloonak*, depending on their region)<sup>32</sup> (Brustad, Al-Batal, & Al-Tonsi, 2004a).

The second purpose for such a class would grow out of the first. Bringing together AHL parents (as teachers) and FLL and RHL parents (as learners) in such a class could model ways of drawing on each other's strengths in order to promote the joint purpose of maintaining a thriving Arabic program. While the AHL parents teaching the course might still be positioned as trustees of language knowledge with greater ownership of the language, this interaction could help parents to begin viewing each other as fellow members of one community rather than as insiders and outsiders. AHL, RHL, and FLL parents and students need to understand how and why the language is important and useful to other groups so that they can feel that there is a legitimate place for them in the imagined community of Arabic users. If executed well, this type of parent education and promotion of the language program would help to prevent situations like the one in Miss Nadira's Beginner class in which a number of boys had actively decided, with their parents' approval, to stop expending effort to learn Arabic because it was not "their" language.

#### 7.1.1.2 Integrate learners of all backgrounds and proficiency levels for certain school activities.

Identifying heritage learners, however, is only useful to the extent that it helps learners and members of disparate communities to recognize and understand that others' investment has different sources, different

<sup>32</sup> The examples given here are masculine forms typically used in MSA, Beirut, Cairo, and Baghdad.

goals, and different rewards. Though it certainly makes sense to teach learners who are at different proficiency levels separately, schools should consider locally-appropriate ways of integrating groups of AHL, RHL, and FLL learners on some occasions. Such occasions might include anything from peer tutoring to collaborating in groups of mixed heritage status (and mixed proficiency) on presentations for open-house nights and other exhibitions for the school community. In short, I believe that Arabic programs will benefit to the extent that they recognize differences in the learners' desires for learning and using Arabic, but also seek to bridge differences so that as many learners as possible feel that they are legitimate and supported in their efforts to learn and use Arabic.

**7.1.2 Language and literacy in the learning of Arabic.** As for learners' understanding of the target language, students from all language backgrounds may benefit from a greater understanding of Arabic sociolinguistics as well as support in developing biliteracy gradually and systematically. What varieties are there? How much do they differ from each other? What varieties of Arabic do I know? In what domains do I use Arabic? What varieties do I need to know in order to function in other domains? What variety or varieties am I going to learn in this course, and what can I expect to be able to do with those skills? How and how much can I expect the skills that I already have in certain varieties and domains to help me when I want to learn to function in other varieties and domains? What literacy skills do I have, and do I need, in each of these varieties and domains? I believe that, along with high-quality, clear, engaging pedagogy, understanding the answers to these questions may prevent a great deal of frustration and attrition on the part of learners and help educators in various settings to tailor their programs more closely to the needs and intentions of their learners.

**7.1.2.1 Teach a spoken variety.** There are a number of justifiable arguments for teaching MSA in schools, though I have not seen them laid out in a coherent list elsewhere:

- MSA is used as a lingua franca among Arabic-speaking countries, and therefore should be similarly familiar and similarly unfamiliar for AHLs with differing home dialects.

- MSA is also relatively region-neutral, so learners can choose later to specialize by learning the spoken variety of the region where they actually have opportunities to interact with native speakers.
- MSA is associated with literacy and provides the appropriate foundation for learning to read and write at a professional level.
- MSA may be perceived as more complex than spoken varieties in regard to phonology, morphology, and syntax, and therefore it may make sense to teach the more complex form before the less complex.
- MSA is formal but is not directly associated with religion.

On the other hand, the choice to teach MSA exclusively may have negative implications for learners who come from Arabic-speaking backgrounds and those who do not as well as their teachers. For learners whose families use Arabic, insisting that they use MSA only in the classroom may align with their parents' expectations regarding the language of formal education, but it may also convey to a young learner that his or her home language is less valid than the target variety or that it only interferes with learning. Considering that learners in this study already referred to their home variety as "slang," teachers may want to strive to send exactly the opposite message: spoken varieties are valid forms of the Arabic language that serve specific, valuable purposes in specific contexts.

For learners whose families use Arabic only for religious purposes or not at all, teaching MSA exclusively may mean that they are mastering a variety of the language that is not necessarily useful for day-to-day communication with native speakers of Arabic, either currently or in the future. On one hand, it may be a reasonable simplification to promote the illusion that studying MSA alone can provide a learner with full communicative competence, particularly when the performance standards demand a relatively low level of Arabic proficiency. On the other hand, learners who want to invest in Arabic in order to use the language communicatively will be limited in their efforts to reach this goal without

exposure to a spoken variety. At the very least, they should understand that diglossia exists and that they will very likely need to learn varieties of Arabic other than MSA if they want to use it in the future.

The effort to focus on MSA alone may also impact teachers' ability to teach language communicatively, though this issue needs empirical research. If they are expected to design curricula that teach learners to carry out various day-to-day communicative tasks, then they must improvise ways to execute these tasks in MSA, when they would very rarely use MSA for these tasks in the real world and thus cannot draw on their experience for the appropriate linguistic forms. For example, young learners of foreign languages might be taught to order in restaurants, to buy items in a shop, to make or accept invitations, or to ask directions. While it is possible to do these things in MSA, doing so would lend a level of artificiality both to the language lesson and to the real-life encounter (Wilmsen, 2006). Furthermore, even teachers who grew up speaking Arabic must use a variety of Arabic in the classroom that they do not normally use for interpersonal communication, which might place additional cognitive load on their teaching processes and create unnecessary distance between teachers and learners who wish to communicate in Arabic.

In recent years Arabic teachers at the university level have proposed various approaches to combining formal and spoken Arabic. Teachers might choose to teach reading and writing in MSA while presenting audio and video materials and carrying out oral communication activities in "the vernacular of the educated," as Younes (2006) proposes. Alternatively, they might follow the precedent of the most recent editions of the *Alif Baa* and *Al-Kitaab* textbooks, which now present new vocabulary and grammar in MSA and varieties designated as Egyptian Arabic and Levantine Arabic. These three varieties appear side-by-side on the page, and the books now come with video material in both of these spoken varieties. Nevertheless, presenting multiple spoken varieties at once, asking teachers to introduce spoken varieties that may differ from their own, and teaching spoken varieties through writing might also lead to confusion. Thus, teachers need to make careful, principled decisions about how to incorporate multiple varieties of Arabic, no matter what materials they choose to use.

Based on their own priorities and preferences, teachers and administrators may well decide that it is nevertheless appropriate to teach MSA to the exclusion of spoken varieties. At minimum, I believe it is neither distracting nor demotivating but rather very important for learners to understand that diglossia exists and to begin forming a sense of when and how they might be expected to use MSA or a local spoken variety of Arabic in the real and imagined communities in which they might participate. In the case of young learners, parents should also have a clear understanding of the divergent contexts of use for the different varieties and the ways that different varieties might serve as cultural capital in different communities.

At a more administrative level, educators should establish target competencies for language teaching in public settings that aim for the intersections of learners' and policymakers' priorities, and they should determine ways to assess and provide qualifications when these competencies have been achieved that will serve learners' purposes in their valued communities. For example, if the domains in which a learner intends to use the language are domains in which a spoken variety has far greater utility than *fuSHa*, then learners should have a clearly charted path to proficiency and qualifications (e.g., meeting university language requirements or receiving an OPI score) in that spoken variety. In contrast, if a learner's goals for the using the language involve communities that value a high level of literacy, then the learner should focus on MSA and receive qualifications in MSA, while also coming to understand how MSA relates to other varieties that may also be useful.

*7.1.2.2 Use an appropriate and consistent system of transliteration.* I have discussed my main concerns in regard to language varieties; in regard to literacy, I believe that one important step that teachers of young learners can take is to agree on a consistent system of transliteration that reflects the sound system of Arabic accurately. Many educators, including the teachers at Mawaarith, might argue that transliteration is a crutch, that it slows the learners' progress toward true literacy in Arabic, and that it should be avoided or eliminated as soon as possible. I would argue that this is not necessarily the case, from a cognitive perspective and a social perspective.

The choice to incorporate transliteration and how to make use of it in an Arabic program must take into account, at minimum, the learners' ages and autonomy, differences between learning Arabic as L1 and L2, and the importance of literacy as a tool for learning. Older, more autonomous, more self-directed learners of Arabic might be expected to learn the Arabic alphabet and begin using it very early in their learning process. Younger learners, however, particularly those who have not been exposed to Arabic before and who have received the majority of their education in English, will likely take much longer to master reading and writing in the orthographic system of Arabic. Likewise, children who grow up in the Arab world learn to read by drawing on a well-developed base of proficiency in oral Arabic language, although their spoken variety differs from the variety in which they are learning to read (Abu-Rabia, 2000), while FLLs in the U.S. are learning language and literacy simultaneously. Using a reliable system of transliteration ought to help these learners to develop an awareness of the sound system of Arabic and also provide them with a tool with which to record new words and phrases that they learn. Focusing on the alphabet (abjad) exclusively without using Arabic communicatively for long periods of time is likely to be demotivating. Teaching through the oral modality alone for a long period of time would also limit learners. Probably only the most talented of aural learners would be able to retain new material without the tool of literacy, in some form. Thus, I would argue that learners should work on reading Arabic script and gaining vocabulary in Arabic at the same time, initially relying on transliteration to read and write the new words.

That said, the system of transliteration that is used needs to be a consistent system and one that accurately reflects the sound system of Arabic. Teachers may decide to devise their own system for transliteration that can be easily explained in simple terms. Nevertheless, the system needs to be consistent with itself, and this system needs to contain one and only one letter, symbol, or combination of letters in the Roman alphabet for each letter in the Arabic alphabet. For example, if a *kaaf* (a voiceless velar stop) is transliterated as a *k*, then a *qaaf* (a voiceless uvular stop that also rounds the following vowel) should always be spelled with a *q* and never with a *k*. Since the differences between emphatic letters and regular letters are phonemic, they should have distinct representations in the transliteration



system; capital letters should probably be used consistently to represent emphatic letters while their non-emphatic counterparts appear in lower-case letters (e.g., *Daad* as *D* and *daal* as *d*). Also, the same vocabulary words should always appear with the same spelling (house may be *bait* or *bayt*, but not both). Furthermore, improvised spellings for sounds that do not occur or are not written in English also need to follow the same guidelines: an apostrophe cannot be used for both *ayn* (a voiced uvular fricative) and *hamza* (a glottal stop). Finally, this system may be unique to the program, but it needs to be the same from teacher to teacher, so that learners do not need to re-learn a system from year to year and materials can be borrowed across classes.

While transliteration may serve early in the learning process as a means of recording new material, it is not necessarily true that transliteration should be taken away entirely as learners become more proficient. The main reason why it might be useful to continue using transliteration is that it provides a way to convey the vowel patterns, and thus the grammatical patterns, of new words. While students might learn to use diacritics for this purpose, it could be helpful for teachers to continue providing new vocabulary in transliteration even when they inform students that they will be tested without it. Alternatively, teachers might also choose to phase out the use of transliteration by mixing the writing systems. For example, they could begin to eliminate short vowels in transcribed words, possibly replacing them with the diacritical marks.

These suggestions for the process of teaching early literacy take into account the cognitive process of learning to read while learning language at the same time as well as social factors. Transliteration can ease the cognitive burden during the early stages of the learning phase, it can continue to support pronunciation and grammar learning by providing the missing information in the deep orthography of MSA, and it can provide a tool for teaching the sound system of Arabic and helping learners retain words and phrases long before they are reading Arabic script fluently.

At the same time, there are important social arguments for using transliteration effectively in Arabic programs. Using a system of transliteration inconsistently or using a system that does not reflect the sound system of Arabic accurately may diminish learners' investment in Arabic as it leads to

confusion and frustration. Also, the teachers in this program consistently send lists of new vocabulary and phrases home to parents, under the assumption that parents will be interested in what their children are learning and that they will encourage and help them to learn. Using an appropriate system of transliteration when providing this material will make it easier for parents who do not wish to learn the writing system of Arabic for themselves nevertheless to help their children learn and practice new vocabulary. The course for parents that I have described above should teach the transliteration system and offer suggestions for ways that parents can make use of it, helping learners to make use of it but gradually rely on it less. Finally, the ability to read and write Arabic, with or without understanding or speaking the language, is a major dividing line between learners from different heritage backgrounds. Allowing FLLs to rely on transliteration while learning language at the beginning might help them to become more invested in the language learning process and decrease the differences between them and their RHL counterparts. As a way of allowing them to move at a more similar, engaging pace while also differentiating instruction appropriately, teachers might choose to allow FLLs to use transliteration longer than RHLs who learned to read in other contexts.

**7.1.3 The role of religion in language learning.** For many of the learners at Mawaarith, religious literacy, including fluent reading, accurate pronunciation, memorization skills, and knowledge of large portions of the Qur'an, is a more highly-valued target than communicative competence in Arabic. However, Arabic is taught at Mawaarith in a way that avoids religion, though middle schoolers learn about Islam in the unit on world religions in their social studies class. While it is entirely logical, given the separation of church and state in the U.S. education system, to teach Arabic without discussion of Islam, it may be appropriate to discuss religion at certain points. For example, just as learners can benefit from learning about the differences between MSA and spoken varieties, they may also benefit from learning about the relationship of the Arabic in the Qur'an to MSA. Acknowledging the similarities and differences between these varieties and uses of Arabic and how they appear in print may help AHLs and particularly RHLs to understand how they can draw on their existing knowledge to support the objectives of their public school class. Also, a class that avoids religion entirely may also avoid features of the

language that are very frequently used but have religious connotations. For example, the Mawaarith learners did not learn to say *inshallah* (ان شاء الله) when referring to future events, which native speakers often do to acknowledge that these events are not entirely subject to their human control. Also, they did not learn that *hamdulillah* (الحمد لله), “Praise God”, is an appropriate response to the question, “How are you?” My university class, in contrast, taught both of these phrases in the first week. Making learners aware that these phrases are widely used would not be equivalent to indoctrinating them with Muslim beliefs, particularly given that many non-Muslim Arabs use the same phrases.

This last point brings up the other major issue that needs to be considered in regard to religion and Arabic pedagogy. Because of the sociopolitical situation in the world today, schools like Mawaarith Academy run the risk of facing opposition in their communities and beyond if they give any impression that they are using the Arabic language program as a platform for teaching values related to Islam or promoting Islam. I have already argued that schools should make an effort to include parents of all language backgrounds in the community of the school and the language learning process, which may be more difficult with FLL parents than AHL and RHL parents. However, FLL parents who understand and value the language program can, by virtue of their status as outsiders to the Arab and Muslim communities and insiders to the school community, perhaps become the most effective ambassadors and advocates for the program to other parents, to district administrators, and to the surrounding community. As the Brooks and Kimball families often did, they can explain the intentions and the nature of the program and its benefits for their children to those who might hold skeptical or even antagonistic attitudes toward the school and its Arabic program like those Pipes (2007) describes in regard to a New York City charter school.

**7.1.4 Learning language in local and global contexts.** Finally, learners from all heritage backgrounds can benefit from opportunities to develop a greater understanding of the imagined communities beyond their immediate school, family, and social networks in which Arabic may provide valuable cultural capital. Discussing concrete ways in which they might put Arabic to use in the future and helping learners understand what kinds of competencies might be useful or needed for their own

goals offers one way of achieving this objective. An even more effective way to increase young learners' investment might be to bring individuals into the classroom who are studying Arabic at higher levels, such as university students, as the teachers in this program had done in the past, and ask them to describe their learning experience and their intentions for Arabic. Also, the teachers should invite adults who are using Arabic professionally, both native speakers and non-native speakers, to speak to the class about their professions, the ways they use Arabic, and the varieties and skills that are most useful to them. While FLLs in particular may benefit from meeting successful learners at higher levels of proficiency so that they can envision reaching those levels themselves, AHLs, RHLs, and FLLs alike can benefit from learning about the value of Arabic in a global society from those who are actively using it in transnational contexts.

Furthermore, developing greater intercultural awareness and competence may serve members of all three groups. The starting places for developing this awareness and competence may vary considerably, but intercultural awareness is another area in which learners can benefit from greater integration between learners from various backgrounds. FLLs can learn about Arab culture and customs from their AHL classmates and about Muslim beliefs and practices from AHL and RHL classmates. At the same time, the process of sharing these features of their own communities' practices could help AHLs and RHLs learn intercultural competence as they reflect on and compare practices in different communities. While these goals may seem lofty in regard to young learners, occasions for engaging in such exchanges might stem from highly accessible stimuli such as films, stories, or celebrations. Particularly if young learners like those at Mawaarith do not have opportunities to continue studying Arabic between middle school and university, the intercultural awareness and competence that they develop through studying Arabic and participating in a diverse community that includes Arabs and Muslims may be the most enduring legacy of their Arabic language learning experience.

The suggestions that I have provided here are not intended to provide a complete or coherent set of guidelines for teaching Arabic. Instead, I have attempted to address issues that may stem from and impact learners' and their families' investment in Arabic. Ideally, I hope that applying some of these

suggestions would increase the possibility that young learners like those in the program at Mawaarith would have a positive learning experience that supports their identities as members of their heritage communities, that helps them construct identities as good learners in the context of their school community, and that helps them to strive for and move toward a high level of proficiency so that they can participate in valued communities beyond their school.

## 7.2 Further Research

This study has used ethnographic, exploratory methods to investigate the needs, desires, expectations, and values that drive learners and their parents to invest in Arabic language learning. As this study has focused on the perspectives of young learners and their parents in an Arabic language program in a U.S. public school, I believe that the appropriate next step is to focus on other contexts and on other stakeholders in the language learning process. A similar exploratory approach might be taken among learners of Arabic at another comparable school, among university learners, or among learners in a community *masjid* language program. Likewise, it would be fruitful to carry out a similar investigation in regard to young learners of other critical LCTLs. The findings of such a study would help to identify areas of commonality across languages that would support teacher training and program design.

Following this research, it seems particularly important to focus on the Arabic language learning process from the perspective of teachers. The methods of teacher cognition research (Borg, 2006), which involve investigating teachers' beliefs about their practices, investigating their actual practices in the classroom, and then comparing the two, could be easily applied to teachers of Arabic and other less-commonly-taught languages. In this case, a teacher cognition investigation would consider teachers' preparation to teach Arabic, their beliefs about their students, their intentions in regard to their pedagogical choices, and the ways that these choices play out in the classroom.

In addition, the field needs further studies that focus on the effectiveness of specific teaching practices in Arabic language classrooms, comparing pedagogical choices with student progress. However, I would argue that efforts to measure progress must take into account the varying balance of skills that

learners from different backgrounds might bring to the classroom as well as the different varieties of the language and skills in the language that they might value and desire over others. Also, students' experiences in the classroom and self-perception as good learners should be considered both as catalysts for learning and as outcomes of the learning process. If researchers wanted to produce generalizable results regarding the effectiveness of various approaches, these studies would take on considerable statistical complexity. Assuming that researchers could identify large enough numbers of learners in comparable program, methods such as factor analysis, multiple regression, growth curve analysis, and dynamic assessment might be able to cope with the range of relevant variables.

Nevertheless, researchers should not lose sight of the complex individual process of identity construction that takes place for individual learners who are seeking membership in valued communities. Tracing the learning trajectories of learners who reach high levels of proficiency over time with this perspective in mind might help to illuminate ways of supporting other learners. Based on the insight that this study has provided into learners' prior, current, and desired involvement with Arabic, further research should delve more deeply into the relationships between community participation and development in language and literacy abilities as well as intercultural competence over time. Also, these insights should be applied to programmatic decisions and pedagogical approaches as educators make decisions about the varieties of Arabic to teach and how to teach them.

If the overarching goal of teaching Arabic in public institutions in the U.S. is to increase the language capacity of U.S. citizens and thus to improve the ability of the U.S. and its people to participate in a global society and economy, then all Arabic language learners, from all heritage backgrounds, may possess valuable resources that can and should be cultivated. Heritage learner groups, no matter how they are defined, will be heterogeneous, and the long-term intentions of invested learners may be surprisingly homogeneous. By engaging with this complexity, we may be able to promote ways of learning that help these learners to identify and achieve their goals while also promoting a more peaceful and interconnected global society.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Guides

#### Parents

##### Discuss questionnaire answers

##### Parent family and language background

Where were you born? Where else have you lived?

If you were not born in the U.S., how did you end up here?

What languages do you use? How well do you use them? When and how do you use them?

What languages do/did your parents speak? Were they literate in these languages?

##### Attitudes to education, Mawaarith Academy, and Arabic

Why did you decide to send your child to Mawaarith Academy?

What is available there that is not available at other schools?

What do you think of the community of students, parents, teachers, and administrators at Mawaarith Academy?

How has being at Mawaarith Academy helped your child?

What could be done more/differently to help her learn more/better?

What are your hopes for her in terms of further education and career?

How important was it to you that your child could study Arabic at Mawaarith Academy? Why?

How does the type of Arabic your child is learning at school compare to the type of spoken Arabic you use with your family? (*if applicable*)

How would you describe his or her progress in learning Arabic?

How does learning Arabic help him or her now? How will learning Arabic help in the future?

How would you feel if your son or daughter decided not to learn or speak Arabic anymore?

##### Family language policy and practices

What language(s) do you speak at home? Do you speak differently to different family members?

Who do you or your child speak to in languages other than English?

What advice have you given your child about learning Arabic?

Do you help your child learn Arabic? How?

How important is it to you that she becomes bilingual? Why?

Have you made any conscious efforts to speak one language or another at home?

Do you think that your child needs to improve her English? How have you helped her develop in both languages?

What do you read at home? What do you write? Do you read to or with your children?

What does your child read and write at home? Do you encourage this? Why or why not? How?

##### History of language and literacy

What do you consider your first language? Do you consider yourself bi/multilingual?

What does it or would it mean to you to be bilingual? Biliterate?

Describe your educational background in regard to each language that you speak.

When did you start speaking? Reading? Writing?

Where did you study and for how long?

Describe your educational background in general. What are your memories of school from the age that your child is now?

Which language(s) do you use most for reading and writing?

What kinds of texts do you read / write in each language?

How is reading and writing in each of your languages different?

## **Students**

### **Discuss questionnaire answers**

#### **General questions**

Where were you born? Where else have you lived?  
 Why did your family decide to send you to Mawaarith Academy?  
 What are you studying now, what do you like best, why?

#### **Family and language background**

What languages do you know? Describe your skills in each language you know.  
 What language(s) do you speak most often with your parents? Why?  
 What language(s) do you speak most often with your brothers and/or sisters? Why?  
 What language(s) do you prefer to use? Why?  
 Do your parents help you learn Arabic? How? What advice have they given you?

#### **Studying Arabic now**

When did you start speaking Arabic? When did you start reading and writing Arabic?  
 How long have you been studying Arabic in school?  
 Do you study or have you studied Arabic outside Mawaarith Academy? Where and when?  
 Are you good at learning Arabic? Explain.  
 What kinds of activities do you do in Arabic class at Mawaarith?  
 How well do you speak Arabic? Read it? Write it?  
 What is the hardest part about learning Arabic?  
 How does the type of Arabic you are learning at school compare to the type of Arabic you use with your family? (*if applicable*)

#### **Using Arabic in the future**

Why do you think your parents want you to learn Arabic?  
 Why do you want to learn Arabic?  
 What do you hope to be able to do in Arabic? In school, career, personal relationships, etc.  
 Do you consider yourself bilingual in Arabic? If not, do you expect to become bilingual?  
 How do you think it helps/would help you to be bilingual in Arabic?  
 What would happen if you didn't want to or couldn't study Arabic anymore? How would you feel about that?  
 How would that affect your relationships with your family, your friends, and other people you and your parents know?

#### **Arabic Literacy and Bilingual**

How important is it to be able to read and write (not just speak) in Arabic? Explain.  
 In a typical week, how much do you read in Arabic? How much do you write?  
 What do you read and write in Arabic?  
 In a typical week, how much do you read in English? How much do you write?  
 What do you read and write in English?  
 How is learning to read and write in Arabic different from learning to read and write in English?  
 Do you think there is any connection between reading and writing in Arabic and in English for you?  
 How do they affect each other?



**Teachers****Teacher language background**

Place of birth

Educational background

Languages

- spoken/written, active/passive
- what do you consider your first language? do you consider yourself bi/multilingual?
- used in which circumstances/contexts
- self-assessment of fluency
- do you remember learning any of your languages?

**Attitudes to education and Mawaarith Academy**

Why did you decide to come to work at Mawaarith?

What is available there that is not available at other schools?

What do you think of the community of students, parents, teachers, and administrators at Mawaarith?

How do you think the students benefit from studying Arabic at Mawaarith?

How much are the parents involved in their students' study of Arabic? (keeping up with assignments and grades, advising or motivating students, using certain practices at home)

**Teaching Arabic in the U.S./at Mawaarith**

Describe the Arabic language curriculum at Mawaarith

- What are the learning targets?
- What methods and materials do you use?

Is the Arabic language curriculum integrated with other content areas at Mawaarith?

Describe the composition of your classes as Arabic language learners – family and language background, length of study, etc.

How would you define a heritage learner of Arabic? How many of your students are HLLs?

How many of the HLLs were literate in Arabic when they came to Mawaarith?

How do the HLLs and FLLs compare in proficiency and motivation?

What challenges have you encountered in teaching Arabic?

What aspects of the language do you think are most challenging for your students? Heritage vs. non-heritage learners?

What role does culture play in your teaching of Arabic?

What would you like the students to be able to do with their Arabic language?

What would you like to be able to do as a teacher of Arabic that you have not or cannot (yet)?

How do you motivate your students, of all language backgrounds, to progress in their study of Arabic?

**Classroom Literacy Practices**

What kinds of texts do your students read in your classes? What do they write?

In your opinion, what are the steps to learning to read in Arabic?

In your opinion, what are the steps to learning to read in Arabic?

How do you connect speaking with reading and writing in your classes?

How would you compare reading and writing in Arabic to reading and writing in English?

What have you noticed about how your students progress toward reading and writing?

How do heritage language learners compare to foreign language learners with reading and writing?

## Appendix B. Transcription Conventions for Interview Data

Symbol		Meaning
Initials	A.B.:	Identifies speaker
Period	.	Terminal falling intonation
Question mark	?	High rising intonation
Comma	,	Rising, continuing intonation
Internal dash	uh-oh	Short pause in middle of line or glottal stop
Final dash	Well—	Stop due to interruption, if at end of line
Left bracket	[	Beginning of speech overlap, with subsequent turn beginning at position of bracket
Right bracket	]	End of overlap
Single parentheses	(xx)	Unintelligible words, marked with one x for each apparent word
@ symbol	@@	Laughter. Number of @ symbols suggests length of laughter
Colons	lo::ng	Sound or syllable is unusually lengthened, e.g. rea::lly lo::ng
Plus sign	+	Researcher non-verbal backchannelling (sound such as “Mhm” occurring at position of +)
Double parentheses	((gestur e))	Researcher note as to ((sound)) or ((gesture))
Italics	<i>word</i>	Word or phrase said in Arabic
Underline	<u>word</u>	Word or phrase emphasized

## Appendix C: Questionnaires

### Initial Student Survey

Please read the questions carefully and answer them as well as you can. Some of the questions may not apply to you. You can skip those. If you are not sure how to answer a question, you can ask your teacher for help, but you should make your own decisions about what to answer. By completing this questionnaire, you are agreeing to let the researchers use your answers (but not your real name) in the study.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Advisory Crew Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

(1) Age: \_\_\_\_\_ (2) Grade in school: 6<sup>th</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> (3) Gender: Male Female

(4) Year you began studying at Mawaarith Academy: \_\_\_\_\_

(5) What country were you born in? \_\_\_\_\_

(6) If you were not born in the U.S., when did you arrive in the U.S.? Year: \_\_\_\_\_

(7) What other countries have you lived in? \_\_\_\_\_

(8) What languages do you speak? Please list **all languages** you use or have used, including dialects.

(9) Which of these languages did you learn first? \_\_\_\_\_

(10) Which of these languages is the strongest or the most fluent? \_\_\_\_\_

(11) Which languages do you use with your family?

(12) Where have you studied your languages? (Put a check (✓) in any box that applies)

Languages (Add others below)	At home	In school	Private tutors	Religious school	Language school	Other: _____
English		✓				
Arabic		✓				

(13) How often do you use your languages outside school and what do you do with them?

Languages (Add others below)	How often do you use it? (circle one)	What do you do with it outside school? (List activities: e.g. talk to friends, write emails)
English	Rarely Sometimes Often Usually	
Arabic	Rarely Sometimes Often Usually	
	Rarely Sometimes Often Usually	
	Rarely Sometimes Often Usually	

- (14) If you could start studying another language now, what would it be? \_\_\_\_\_
- (15) Do you think it is a good idea to study a language other than English in middle school? **Yes** **No**  
Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

### Language Use at Home

If you use **a language other than English** with your family, please answer the following questions for this language. If your family uses only English at home, you can skip down to question 24.

- (15) What language **other than English** do you use **at home** the most? \_\_\_\_\_
- (16) How much of the time do you speak this language with **your parents**? (put a check (✓) next to one)  
\_\_\_ **Never** \_\_\_ **Sometimes** \_\_\_ **Half the time** \_\_\_ **Most of the time** \_\_\_ **All the time**
- (17) How much of the time do you speak this language with **your brothers and/or sisters**?  
(check (✓) one)  
\_\_\_ **Never** \_\_\_ **Sometimes** \_\_\_ **Half the time** \_\_\_ **Most of the time** \_\_\_ **All the time**
- (18) Do you speak this language with **other relatives**? **Yes** **No** If yes, who? (check (✓) all that apply) \_\_\_ **Mother's parents** \_\_\_ **Father's parents** \_\_\_ **Aunts/Uncles** \_\_\_ **Cousins**
- (19) How often do you speak this language with these **other relatives**? (check (✓) one)  
\_\_\_ **Every day** \_\_\_ **A few times a week** \_\_\_ **A few times a month** \_\_\_ **A few times a year** \_\_\_ **Rarely**
- (21) Did your parents teach you to **read** in this language? **Yes** **No**
- (21) Did your parents teach you to **write** in this language? **Yes** **No**
- (22) In what other ways do you use **your family language**? (circle all that apply)

**Television**      **Books**      **Magazines**      **Games**      **Internet**      **Religious purposes**

**Other ways:** \_\_\_\_\_

- (23) In your **family language** (not English), how well do you: (circle one)

	Not at all			Very well	
<b>Understand what you hear?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Speak?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Read?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Write?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

### Arabic Language in School

- (24) **How long** have you been taking Arabic in school? \_\_\_\_\_ **years**
- (25) How much Arabic have you learned at Mawaarith? \_\_\_ **None (I'm new)** \_\_\_ **A little** \_\_\_ **A lot**
- (26) How well did you know Arabic **before** you started studying it at Mawaarith?  
(put a check (✓) next to one)  
\_\_\_ I didn't know Arabic at all      \_\_\_ I could speak but not read or write Arabic  
\_\_\_ I could read the alphabet but not speak      \_\_\_ I could speak, read, and write Arabic

(27) What are the **reasons** you are studying Arabic in school? (*put a check (✓) next to all that apply*)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I enjoy learning languages                   | <input type="checkbox"/> It's required by my school                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My parents want me to learn it               | <input type="checkbox"/> It will help me communicate with my relatives  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My religion tells me that I should know it   | <input type="checkbox"/> I want to understand Arabic on TV or Internet  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I want to speak to native speakers of Arabic | <input type="checkbox"/> I want to travel to an Arabic-speaking country |
| <input type="checkbox"/> It will help me get into a good college      | <input type="checkbox"/> It will help me get a good job                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>please explain</i> ): _____       |   |

### **Parent Questionnaire**

**Instructions:** *These questionnaires are part of a larger study about language learning and literacy at Mawaarith Academy. If possible, both parents or guardians should fill in questionnaires. It does not matter which parent completes the "Parent 1" or "Parent 2" questions.*

#### **Parent 1 Your name** \_\_\_\_\_

*Please read these questions carefully and answer them as completely and honestly as possible. The questions ask you to circle or check (✓) the most appropriate answer, to complete a chart, or to write a short answer. If some questions do not apply to you or you prefer not to answer them, you can leave them blank. Write your answers in English. By completing and returning the survey, you are agreeing to participate in the study.*

Your middle school **student's name** \_\_\_\_\_

- (1) **Relationship** to student (*circle one*): **Mother** **Father** **Other:** \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) What country were you **born** in? \_\_\_\_\_
- (3) If you were not born in the U.S., when did you **arrive** in the U.S.? **Year:** \_\_\_\_\_
- (4) What **other** countries have you lived in? \_\_\_\_\_
- (5) What languages do you speak? *Please list **all languages** you use or have used, including dialects.*  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- (6) Which of these languages did you learn **first**?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- (7) Which language was the primary **language of schooling** for you?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- (8) Which of these languages is the **strongest** or the most fluent?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- (9) What is your **occupation**? \_\_\_\_\_
- (10) Which languages do you use **in your occupation**? \_\_\_\_\_

(11) How strong are your skills in each language? *Please circle one: 0=None, 1=Limited, 2=Good, 3=Fluent.*

Languages	Understand what you hear	Speak	Read	Write
English	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3

(12) Where did you learn your languages? *Please put a check (✓) in each box that applies.*

Languages	At home (parents)	Grade school	College or university	Religious school	Private tutors	Self-taught	Other: _____
English							

### Family Language Use

*If you use a language other than English with your family, please answer the following questions for this language. If your family uses only English at home, please go on to question 19.*

(13) What language other than English do you use **the most** at home? \_\_\_\_\_

(14) Do you speak this language with **other adults** in your household? **Yes** **No**  
If yes, how much of the time? \_\_\_ **Rarely** \_\_\_ **Sometimes** \_\_\_ **Often** \_\_\_ **Usually** \_\_\_ **Always**

(15) Do you speak this language with **your child or children**? **Yes** **No**  
If yes, how much of the time? \_\_\_ **Rarely** \_\_\_ **Sometimes** \_\_\_ **Often** \_\_\_ **Usually** \_\_\_ **Always**

(16) How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_ What are their **ages**? \_\_\_\_\_

(17) If you have more than one child, do you use this language with some more than others? **Yes** **No**  
If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

(18) What are you doing at home to **help** your child or children **learn or maintain** this language?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Studying a Language at Mawaarith Academy

(19) Why did you decide to send your child (or children) to Mawaarith Academy? (*check (✓) all that apply*)

\_\_\_ I thought my child would benefit from Mawaarith's teachers, philosophy, and methods

\_\_\_ I wanted my child to study a language other than English (any language)

\_\_\_ I wanted my child to study Modern Standard Arabic

\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

(20) What do you think is the best age to start learning a language? \_\_\_\_\_ **years old**

(21) Do you consider Arabic your native language? **Yes** **No**

(22) Do you consider Arabic a heritage language for your children? **Yes** **No** **I don't know**

(23) How do you think learning Modern Standard Arabic in school will help your child? Decide how important each reason below is **to you**.

Circle one number for each item: 1=Not important, 5=Extremely important

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Importance</b>				
a. Learning another language is good for the development of my child's mind	1	2	3	4	5
b. Learning another language will help my child communicate with more people	1	2	3	4	5
c. Learning another language will help my child understand other cultures	1	2	3	4	5
d. Knowing another language will help my child get into a good college	1	2	3	4	5
e. Knowing another language will help my child get a good job	1	2	3	4	5
f. Knowing Arabic will allow my child to communicate with our relatives and friends	1	2	3	4	5
g. Knowing Arabic will allow my child to travel to the Middle East	1	2	3	4	5
h. Knowing Arabic will allow my child to participate in our religious activities	1	2	3	4	5
i. Knowing Arabic will allow my child to access Arabic-language media including books, television, and Internet	1	2	3	4	5
j. Other (please explain): _____	1	2	3	4	5

### **Final Student Questionnaire**

Please read these questions carefully and answer them as completely and honestly as you can. Some of the questions may not apply to you. You can skip those. If you are not sure how to answer a question, you can ask for help, but you should make your own decisions about how to answer.

#### **Section 1: Language Background**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade in school: 6<sup>th</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> 8<sup>th</sup>

Gender: **Male**

#### **Female**

When did you start studying at Mawaarith Academy? Write the **year** when you started here: \_\_\_\_\_

What country were you **born** in? \_\_\_\_\_

If you were **not** born in the U.S., when did you **come to** the U.S.? **Year:** \_\_\_\_\_

Have you **lived** in another country? (circle one) **Yes** **No**

If you said yes, write the name of each country and the amount of time you lived there: (Ex: Canada, 3 months) \_\_\_\_\_

Have you **visited** another country? (circle one) **Yes** **No**

If you said yes, write the name of each country and how long you spent there: (Ex: Mexico, 2 weeks) \_\_\_\_\_

What languages do you speak? Please list **all languages** you use or have used. (Don't forget English!) \_\_\_\_\_

Which of these languages did you learn **first**? \_\_\_\_\_

Which of these languages is the **strongest** or the most fluent? \_\_\_\_\_

Which languages have you studied in **school**? \_\_\_\_\_

Which language(s) do you use to communicate **with your family**? \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2: Language Learning Contexts**

Are you taking Arabic in school now? (circle one) **Yes** **No**

If you said yes, what level of Arabic are you taking now? \_\_\_\_\_

**How long** have you been taking Arabic **at Mawaarith**? \_\_\_\_\_

How much time do you spend on **homework** for your Arabic class **each week**? (circle one)

**Less than 1 hour**      **1-2 hours**      **3-4 hours**      **4-5 hours**      **More than 5 hours**

Are you taking lessons or classes in Arabic **outside Mawaarith**? (circle one) **Yes** **No**

If you said yes, where or how are you studying it? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been studying Arabic **outside Mawaarith**? \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours do you spend in **Arabic lessons outside Mawaarith** each week? (circle one)

**Less than 1 hour**      **1-2 hours**      **3-4 hours**      **4-5 hours**      **More than 5 hours**

Are **you** studying a **language other than English or Arabic** outside school? (circle one) **Yes** **No**

If you said yes, what language(s) are you studying?

\_\_\_\_\_

How many hours do you spend on it (them) per week?

\_\_\_\_\_

Where and how are you studying it (them)? (self, computer, language school, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_

Do your parents help you with your language learning? **Yes** **No**

If you said yes, how? \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 3: Arabic Language Proficiency**

*In this section, put a check (✓) next to any statement that is true for you.*

How well did you know Arabic before you started studying it at Mawaarith?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I didn't know any Arabic at all.     | <input type="checkbox"/> I knew a few words in Arabic.                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I could speak but not read or write. | <input type="checkbox"/> I could read the alphabet but not speak.            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I could speak, read, and write.      | <input type="checkbox"/> I knew Arabic, but not formal Arabic (MSA or فصحي). |

How much Arabic do you know now?

- I understand some words in Arabic when I hear them.
- I know all the letters in Arabic and the sounds they make.
- I can have a basic conversation in Arabic.
- I can read and write a lot of words on different topics in Arabic.
- I know how to say a lot of words on different topics in Arabic.
- I can read and write sentences on different topics in Arabic.
- I can read a simple book in Arabic and understand the meaning.
- I can write a paragraph about myself, my family, or my school in Arabic.
- I can give a presentation to my class in Arabic.
- I can express what I am thinking or how I feel in Arabic.
- In English, I can talk about some differences among Arabic-speaking countries.

**Section 4: Language Learning Confidence**

*Read each statement, and then circle the answer that is true for you. This is what the letters mean:*

**SD** = Strongly Disagree / **D** = Disagree / **N** = Neither agree nor disagree / **A** = Agree / **SA** = Strongly Agree



I get nervous when I am supposed to speak Arabic in class.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I'm not afraid of making mistakes when I read out loud in Arabic.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I feel frustrated when I don't understand every word my Arabic teacher says.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I often get bored or distracted in Arabic class.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I feel a lot of pressure to do well when I have a test or project in Arabic.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I like the way that Arabic is taught in my school.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I think Arabic is easier for me than other students in my class.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I feel overwhelmed by the number of Arabic words we have to remember.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I don't worry about getting bad grades in Arabic.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I would be willing to speak Arabic with a native speaker I didn't know.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I feel more confident about learning Arabic than my other subjects.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I think I am good at learning languages.	SD / D / N / A / SA
I enjoy studying Arabic in school.	SD / D / N / A / SA
> Please explain this answer. What do you like or not like about it? Write 1-2 sentences:	
<hr/>	
<hr/>	

**Section 5: Plans for the Future** Circle one answer for each question.

If you had a choice, would you choose to take Arabic in school next year?	Yes	No	Maybe
Would you like to keep studying Arabic in high school or college?	Yes	No	Maybe
Are you fluent in Arabic now?	Yes	No	Almost
If you are not fluent now, do you expect to become fluent in Arabic someday?	Yes	No	Maybe
Do you hope to use Arabic in your job or career?	Yes	No	Maybe
Do you think it will be easier to learn another language after studying Arabic?	Yes	No	Maybe
What other language or languages would you like to study?	_____		
Why this/these languages?	_____		

### **Section 6: Arabic Reading and Writing**

In this table, some of the cells are filled in and some are not. Complete the table by writing the missing words in the empty cells. One example has been done for you. Even if you only know some letters, write what you can.

	Arabic	Transliteration	English
Ex.	واحد	waahed	one
1	مرحبا		hello
2	اسمي		my name is
3	العربية	al-'arabiya	
4		jadi	my grandfather
5	البيت	al-bayt	
6	حفلة		party
7		uriid	I want
8	يحب	yoheb	
9	برتقالي		orange
10		latiifah	nice (fem)

### **Section 7: The End!**

Would you like to add anything to your answers to any of these questions? You can use this space to write more about anything on this survey:

>> Thank you so much for helping with this research. Your participation is really important! If you want to know more about this project or the results, please feel free to ask me. *Shukran!* <<

## Appendix D: Participant recruitment letter

### Dear Parents and Students,

This year Mawaarith Academy will be the focus of a research study on **language learning and literacy in two languages**. I will be looking at family language backgrounds, attitudes toward learning Arabic at Mawaarith, literacy practices in different languages, and the connections between parents, students, and teachers in middle school language learning. **Here is what that means for you:**

**Step 1) Language Background Questionnaires.** I am attaching two questionnaires – one for each parent or guardian. Please complete them and return them to your/your child’s Advisory Crew Leader. It is important for **both parents or guardians** to answer the questions. Middle school students will also be completing a questionnaire during Crew.

**Step 2) Call for Participants.** I am looking for at least **six families** who would like to be primary participants in this study. Your family can have **any national, cultural, or linguistic background** for this study, though I am looking for a variety of participants. If you are **interested and willing to be interviewed** this semester, please fill out the contact information form below and return it so that I can get in touch with you.

**Step 3) Class Observations and Interviews.** I will be observing classes and conducting interviews throughout the fall semester. During the study, there will be no changes to normal class routines. Identities of students and parents will be kept confidential when I present and publish the results.

If you have **any questions**, before or after deciding to participate, please do not hesitate to contact me at [amandatemples@gmail.com](mailto:amandatemples@gmail.com). You can also talk to Jelena Naim, your child’s Arabic teacher, or my husband, John Temples (5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade science). I look forward to hearing from you!

- Approved by Mawaarith Academy administrators
- Funded by the Language & Literacy Initiative at GSU
- Conducted by a trained qualitative researcher

**Amanda Lanier Temples**  
PhD Student, Applied Linguistics  
Language & Literacy Fellow  
Georgia State University

## CONTACT INFORMATION FORM

## LANGUAGE & LITERACY STUDY

*If you and your family would like to participate in this study or you would like more information, please fill out this form and return it to your child’s Advisory Crew leader.*

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Parent Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Daytime Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Parent email address \_\_\_\_\_ Alternate email \_\_\_\_\_  
 How would you prefer to be contacted? (*put a check mark (✓) next to one or more*)  
     \_\_\_ Daytime phone    \_\_\_ Evening phone    \_\_\_ Email    \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

*If you have any questions now, please write them here:*

## Appendix E: Consent Forms

Georgia State University

Department of Applied Linguistics and ESL  
**Parent Informed Consent and Permission Form**

Title: Arabic Language and Literacy in a U.S. Public School:  
 Perceptions, Practices, and Progress

Principal Investigator: Gayle L. Nelson, Ph.D.  
 Student Principal Investigator: Amanda Lanier Temples, Ph.D. Student

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to look at some of the factors that affect your child's progress in learning Arabic. We will consider the role of language background, language attitudes, and literacy practices in the family and at school. We have asked you to participate because you are the parent of a child who is in middle school at Mawaarith Academy. We are interested in families that speak Arabic outside school and families that do not. About six students, their parents or guardians, their siblings, and their teachers will be recruited for this study. Participation will require about 3 hours of your time and 3 hours of your child's time for a series of interviews. The study will also include class observations and questionnaires.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to take part, one of the researchers, Amanda Temples, will interview you 3 times during the semester. You will be interviewed about the languages you speak, when you use them, your thoughts about your child's language learning, and your family's literacy practices. Literacy practices include reading and writing for different purposes and in different languages.

Each interview will last 45-60 minutes. They will occur at a place and time that you will choose. The researcher will also meet with your child up to 3 times to talk about his or her experiences with speaking, reading, and writing Arabic. These interviews will also take place at a time and place that you and your child choose. For the first interview, the researcher will meet with you and your child together. For the next two interviews, the researcher will meet with each of you separately.

Interviews will be recorded using a digital audio (sound only) recorder. After the third parent interview, you will receive a \$20 gift card for a popular book store. Your middle schooler will also receive a \$20 gift card at the end of the third interview. If a second parent also participates in the interviews, he or she will receive a \$10 gift card for each interview.

In addition, the researcher will observe your child's Arabic and Humanities classes at Mawaarith Academy several times during the semester. She will also interview your child's Arabic teacher and Humanities teacher about language use and literacy practices in their classrooms. The teachers will not know which students are participating in this study.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

#### IV. Benefits:

Taking part in this study may not benefit you directly. However, this study may contribute to expanding the limited body of research on learning and using Arabic in a U.S. public school and its value to students and families. This increased understanding may inform teachers, administrators, and researchers, and thus benefit you and your child indirectly.

#### V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Taking part in this research is your choice. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip interview questions or stop taking part in the study at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits that you would get otherwise. The same is true for your child. There will be no negative effects on grades or school reports if you decide or if your child decides to stop.

#### VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the primary investigators will be able to use the information you provide. Information may also be shared with authorities at Georgia State University who oversee research involving humans, including the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP). We will use a pseudonym (a code name) rather than your name on study records. All recordings of interviews, research notes, and documents you provide will be stored on a password-protected computer with an active firewall. Consent forms and paper copies of other documents will be kept in a locked cabinet in the home office of Amanda Temples. The list of participants' names and pseudonyms will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of a different researcher, Gayle Nelson. This list will be destroyed after we collect and record all the data. Even after the study ends, we will still keep the data private. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

#### VII. Contact Persons:

If you have questions about this study, contact Amanda Temples (call 770-490-3953 or email [amandatemples@gmail.com](mailto:amandatemples@gmail.com)) or Dr. Gayle Nelson (call 404-413-5190 or [gaylenelson@gsu.edu](mailto:gaylenelson@gsu.edu)). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or [svogtner1@gsu.edu](mailto:svogtner1@gsu.edu).

#### VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep. If you are willing to volunteer for this research and for your child to participate, and you agree for all interviews to be audiotaped, please sign below.

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Participant (*signature*)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Georgia State University  
Department of Applied Linguistics and ESL  
**Student Consent Form**

Title: Arabic Language and Literacy in a U.S. Public School:  
Perceptions, Practices, and Progress

Principal Investigator: Gayle L. Nelson, Ph.D.  
Student Principal Investigator: Amanda Lanier Temples, Ph.D. Student

You are invited to participate in a research study. We want to find out about learning Arabic at Mawaarith Academy. We want to know why you are learning Arabic, how you feel about it, and what you are doing in and out of school to help you read and write better. About six students, their parents or guardians, their siblings, and their teachers will be asked to take part in this study. We will interview you up to 3 times, one or both of your parents 3 times, and your sister or brother up to 3 times. Each interview will last 45-60 minutes. You and your parents can choose when and where we will meet.

Interviews will be recorded using a digital audio (sound only) recorder. You will get a gift card for a popular book store at the end of the third interview. If they take part in interviews, your parents and brother or sister will get gift cards too.

In addition, the researcher will watch your Arabic and Humanities classes at school several times. Your teachers will be interviewed, too, but they will not know which students are participating in this study.

Taking part in this study is completely your choice. No one can make you do it. Your parents, your teachers, and the researchers can not choose for you. If you decide to take part and then you change your mind, you can stop. Nothing bad will happen. You will not get in trouble, and your grades will not change.

If you decide to be interviewed, though, it might help you. You might have a chance to think more about why you are learning Arabic, how you are learning the language, and how using Arabic might help you. The information you give us about your experiences might also help other students who are learning this language and other languages that are unusual in U.S. schools.

The only people who will know if you are participating in this study are your parents, the researchers, and you. Administrators at Georgia State University who oversee research, including the Institutional Review Board and the Office of Human Research Protections, might see the results. When the researchers tell other people about the results of the study, they will use a code name for you instead of your real name.

If you have questions about this study, contact Amanda Temples (call 770-490-3953 or email [amandatemples@gmail.com](mailto:amandatemples@gmail.com)) or Dr. Gayle Nelson (call 404-413-5190 or [gaylenelson@gsu.edu](mailto:gaylenelson@gsu.edu)). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or [svogtner1@gsu.edu](mailto:svogtner1@gsu.edu).

If you are willing to participate in this study and agree to be audiotaped, please sign below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Participant (*signature*)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Georgia State University  
Department of Applied Linguistics and ESL  
**Teacher Informed Consent**

Title: Arabic Language and Literacy in a U.S. Public School:  
Perceptions, Practices, and Progress

Principal Investigator: Gayle L. Nelson, Ph.D.  
Student Principal Investigator: Amanda Lanier Temples, Ph.D. Candidate

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate some of the factors that affect students' progress in learning Arabic at Mawaarith Academy. We will consider the role of language background, language attitudes, and literacy practices in the family and at school. You have been asked to participate because you teach middle school students at Mawaarith Academy. After a survey of the middle school population, a total of 6 students, their parents or guardians, and their teachers will be recruited for this study. For you, participation will involve granting your permission for class observations a minimum of 3 times over the course of the semester and allowing 1-2 hours outside class for interviews and informal conversations. This time will be allocated to one primary interview of 45-60 minutes and a few informal conversations, to last no more than a total of 60 minutes over the semester. The study will also include a survey of the middle school parents and students. The survey includes questions about language backgrounds and language use.

II. Procedures:

If you agree to take part, one of the researchers will observe your classes and interview you during the semester. You will be interviewed about language use and literacy practices in your class as well as your general observations about student engagement in the Arabic language program. Literacy practices include reading and writing for different purposes and in different languages.

Each primary interview will last 45-60 minutes. They will occur at a time and place that you will choose. Interviews will be recorded using a digital audio (sound only) recorder. Observations will not be recorded. The researchers may also have questions for you during the semester that can be answered in informal conversations. These will require a total of no more than 60 minutes during the semester.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Taking part in this study may not benefit you directly. However, this study may contribute to expanding the limited body of research on learning and using Arabic in a U.S. public school and its value to students and families.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Taking part in this research is your choice. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may decide not to allow

observations or choose to skip interview questions at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits that you would get otherwise, and there will be no penalties.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Although it will be difficult to maintain anonymity perfectly in the small community of your school, only the primary investigators will be able to use the information you provide. Information may also be shared with authorities at Georgia State University who oversee research involving humans, including the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP). We will use a pseudonym (a code name) rather than your name on study records. All recordings of interviews, research notes, and documents you provide will be stored on a password-protected computer with an active firewall. Consent forms and paper copies of other documents will be kept in a locked cabinet in the home office of Amanda Temples. The list of participants' names and pseudonyms will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of a different researcher, Gayle Nelson. This list will be destroyed after we collect and record all the data. Even after the study ends, we will still keep the data private. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

VII. Contact Persons:

If you have questions about this study, contact Amanda Temples (call 770-490-3953 or email [amandatemples@gmail.com](mailto:amandatemples@gmail.com)) or Dr. Gayle Nelson (call 404-413-5190 or [gaylenelson@gsu.edu](mailto:gaylenelson@gsu.edu)). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or [svogtner1@gsu.edu](mailto:svogtner1@gsu.edu).

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep. If you are willing to volunteer for this research and agree to be audiotaped, please sign below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher Participant (*signature*)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## Appendix F: Codes and Code Families

<p><b><u>Family Background:</u></b>          Biodata          Cultural Heritage          Immigration/Transition          Life in U.S.          Life Overseas          Names          National Identity          Other Langs-Parent          Parent Background          Parent Career          Parent Ed          Parent Literacy-Arabic          Parent SLA-Arabic          Parent SLA-Other          Proficiency-Parent</p>	<p><b><u>Motivators:</u></b>          Amotivation          Better college - Arb          Better LL Ability          Bridge Building          Career - Child Future          Cognitive Benefits          Global Society          Individual Traits          Love of Learning          More Langs More Human          Mtvn-Middle East Travel          Mtvn-Parents want          Mtvn-Personal Comm          Mtvn-Political Context          Mtvn-Required          Religious Motn – Child          Religious Motn – Parent          Survey Motivators          Value Arabic - Child          Value Arabic - Parent          Value Other Langs - Child          Value Other Langs - Parent</p>	<p><b><u>Value Mawaarith:</u></b>          Any Lang Appeal          Arabic Lang Appeal          Arrival Story          Diversity          ELOB          Features Kids Value          Features Parents Value          Founding School          School Comparison</p>	<p><b><u>Investment:</u></b>          Change in motivation          Future study          Invest Money          Invest Time/Energy          Investment - general          Investment as term          Logistics of LL</p>
<p><b><u>Social Network:</u></b>          Arabic-Speaking Family          Arabic-speaking Friends  <i>Masjid</i> Social          Social Networks          Transnational Ties</p>	<p><b><u>Arabic at School:</u></b>          Arabic Alphabet - School          Arabic Class          Classmates          Classroom Practices          English Literacy          Extending Arabic          Grammar at school          Involvement-Parent          Levels of Arb          Opinion of School Arb          Parent-Teacher              Communication          Progress at School          Religion in school          Suggestions for School          Values &amp; Atmosphere</p>	<p><b><u>Role of Religion:</u></b>          Christian Compare          Hijab          Islam Trad &amp; Belief          Islamic School  <i>Masjid</i>          Prayer          Qur'an Arabic          Religious Literacy          Religious Purposes</p>	<p><b><u>Beliefs &amp; Attitudes:</u></b>          Age Effects          American Schooling          Arab-U.S. Comparison          Attitude &amp; Confidence          Birth Order          Compare HLLs          Compare L1 Arabic          Family Values          Heritage Language          India-U.S. Comparison          More Langs More          Human          Mother Tongue          Parent LL Beliefs          Political Context          Value of Education</p>
<p><b><u>Family Practices:</u></b>          Family Arabic Literacy          Family Oral Arabic          Family Rules          Family Traditions (0)          Father Role          Home Features          Home Media Policy          Homework          Intentional Home Arabic          Mother Role          Other Lang Use          Parent Pedagogy          Role of Media          Tamil Use &amp; Policy          Use of Arabic – Child          Use of Arabic – Family          Use of Arabic – Parent          Use of English</p>		<p><b><u>Language Awareness</u></b>          Accent          Advice Learn Arb          Describe Arabic          Dialect          Fluency          Intercultural Awareness          Language Awareness          Modern Arabic          Oral-Literate Divide          Oral Proficiency -          Child          Other Langs - Child          Pronunciation – Arabic</p>	<p><b><u>Literacy Development</u></b>          Arabic Alphabet          Diacritics          Early Arb Literacy          Early English          Grammar          Handwriting - Arabic          LL Resources - Arabic          Prior Arabic          Read/Write          Proficiency - Child          Reading Process          Transliteration          Writing</p>

## Appendix G. Characteristics of Heritage Learner Status Groups

	AHLs	RHLs	FLLs
<b>Family language background</b>	At least one parent speaks Arabic fluently; family uses Arabic at home, but proportion varies; may or may not use Arabic for religious purposes	Family uses Arabic for religious purposes; family often uses another HL at home (e.g., Urdu, Tamil)	Neither parent speaks Arabic or uses it for religious purposes; family may be monolingual (English) or use another HL
<b>Exposure to Arabic outside public school</b>	Communication with parents and other relatives; media including TV and books; often tutors and religious school as well as religious practices	Tutors and religious school as well as religious practices; written material primarily religious; may hear Arabic for communication in religious community	Little or none
<b>Prior proficiency in Arabic</b>	According to survey: 100% some proficiency; 84% could speak; 57.9% could read; 45% could do both	88.2% some proficiency; 76.5% could read; only 35.3% could speak at all	Little or none
<b>Varieties of Arabic</b>	Both Spoken and Formal Arabic - Prior: 42.9% said had some prior skill, but not Formal Arabic - Current: 3 varieties – Spoken variety, Qur’an Arabic, MSA at school – NSs usually refer to only two varieties	Most know Formal Arabic (only) - Prior: Qur’an Arabic only - Current: 2 varieties – Qur’an Arabic, MSA at school - View school Arabic as contributing to Qur’an Arabic competence	Prior: None Current: MSA at school  May or may not be aware of multiple varieties of Arabic or differences in their features and use (diglossia)
<b>Student reasons for learning</b>	Highest motivations (over 40% selected) were <i>school requirement, parents, extended family, and travel; enjoyment</i> lower than HLRs or FLLs	Highest motivations were <i>school requirement, enjoyment, parents, and religion</i> (all higher than HLLs)	Highest motivations were <i>school requirement and enjoyment</i> ; everything else 30% or less. Ratings for <i>college</i> and <i>job</i> higher than HLLs or HLRs
<b>Parent reasons for choosing this school</b>	School philosophy, FL program, and Arabic specifically; cultural tolerance also seems relevant	School philosophy and Arabic program more than FL in general; rely on school for Arabic more than HLLs	100% school philosophy; less than half FL program; almost none influenced by Arabic specifically
<b>Parent reasons for child Arabic acquisition</b>	All reasons rated <i>Important</i> to <i>Extremely Important</i> (4.4 or higher on average) - General FL benefits and Arabic-specific benefits all rated important - Communication with <i>extended family</i> only 4.6, perhaps due to diglossia	All said religion was <i>Extremely Important</i> (5.0) - Importance of <i>job</i> and <i>college</i> lower than HLL parents - All ratings except <i>extended family</i> average above 3.6	Rated general FL benefits at average of 4.2 - Rated Arabic-specific benefits much less important – average 1.8 - Some parents encourage, others discourage kids from investing in Arabic

## Appendix H: Suggested Content for Parent Arabic Orientation Course

### A few linguistic concepts that their children will encounter:

- Arabic is written from right to left,
- the letters nearly always make the same sounds,
- many sounds differ considerably from English and will take practice to hear and pronounce accurately,
- the letters always connect (with the exception of “selfish” letters),
- the letters change shape depending on their position in the word,
- Arabic nouns and adjectives are marked for gender,
- verb conjugations work in similar ways to other languages they might have studied such as Spanish and French,
- adjectives follow nouns, also like Spanish and French,
- possessive particles attach to the end of nouns,
- Arabic has no “be” verb in the present tense, and
- *al-* equates to “the,” and the difference between a definite noun phrase and a simple sentence.

### A few sociolinguistic concepts:

- Modern Standard Arabic is the language of literacy and the modern lingua franca of the Middle East.
- No one is a native speaker of MSA – everyone speaks a local spoken variety of Arabic first, and then acquires the more formal MSA, usually through schooling. This pattern is similar to American and British children learning the more standard varieties of English that are associated with formal education, but not the same.
- There is no standardized written form for the spoken varieties.
- The Qur’an was originally written in formal Arabic, and most practicing Muslims make an effort to learn to read it in the original.
- Arabic is considered a Superhard language by the Foreign Service Institute – but Georgetown program director Karen Ryding thinks the main reason for this classification is that learners need to master two varieties to have a full complement of skills.

### Language learning strategies:

- Supplement the exposure to Arabic that kids get at school in any way you can - fifty minutes a day, four days a week, is not enough exposure to get really good at Arabic
- Encourage your children to study and practice at home on a regular basis
- If you value Arabic for your child, then make sure your child knows that and why
- Help kids use the transliteration – and then help them wean off it
- Use flashcards – but use them in a variety of ways
- Language learning is more effective if it is associated with real-world experience
- Seek out and take advantage of opportunities to see, hear, and use Arabic, either with native speakers or with people who have also learned it
- Help kids envision making use of Arabic for meaningful purposes in their current and future lives.