



ARABIC LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE IN MULTICULTURAL COUNTRIES AND IN THE REGIONAL CITY OF TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

This paper reviews the previous studies relevant to the maintenance of Arabic language globally as well as in Australia, and specifically in the regional Queensland city of Toowoomba. This literature review serves to frame the study and compare it with other studies. The purpose of this inquiry was to identify issues that might have contributed to or prevented the maintenance of Arabic language among the Arabic-speaking community. The conclusions of this research are envisaged to enrich the knowledge and theories of language maintenance and raise awareness of the Arabic speakers and the community about the importance of maintaining their language.

Keywords: Language Maintenance, Arabic Language, Arabic-speaking Community.

1. Global Arabic Language Maintenance

Several studies have investigated the maintenance of minority languages all over the globe, notably in multilingual and multicultural societies (Clyne, 2005; Rubino, 2010). The aim of these studies is linked to the advocacy for, and preservation of, ethnic minority and immigrant languages to protect them from an unexpected shift or loss (García, 2003). However, little research has been undertaken on the maintenance of Arabic language among Arabic-speaking immigrants (Abdalla, 2006; Martin, 2009; Sehlaoui, 2008). Region-based studies are reviewed to get comprehensive perspectives on Arabic language maintenance, as well as to position the current study and check its congruence with language maintenance findings.

1.1 Europe

Research has been conducted in many bilingual and multilingual countries in Europe to explore the maintenance of the Arabic language within different Arab ethnolinguistic groups (Gomaa, 2011; Othman, 2006; Abu-Haidar, 1994). Gomaa, (2011) has investigated the Arabic language among the Egyptian community in Durham, England. The analysis of the data revealed the factors contributing to the maintenance of the Arabic language. Among these factors were the educational level of participants, access to Arab media through satellite channels, religion, and identity. According to Gomaa, the most effective factor was the home where the Arabic language was used continuously between parents and children in their daily life.

Similarly, Othman, (2006) examined language choice among different families from five Arab countries in Manchester, Britain. The results revealed that children maintain the Arabic language through the support of many factors. These factors include elements such as: (1) accessibility of satellite channels which allow them to watch Arabic movies and TV series, (2) expansion of mosques to learn the Qur'an in Arabic, (3) the role of Arabic schools in maintaining Arabic literacy, (4) the ease of travel to their homeland, and (5) the positive attitude of the family in encouraging children to use Arabic at home.

In another study, Abu-Haidar, (1994) studied language loyalty among Algerian immigrants' children in France. She found that Algerian immigrants in France had shown loyalty by maintaining their Arabic language within the community. Abu-Haidar concluded that children proved their loyalty in the maintenance of their Arabic outside the community, giving it a greater prestige. Moreover, the results indicated that the maintenance of Arabic for French-born Algerians is primarily a matter of identification and loyalty to their mother tongue rather than for its communicative use. Language loyalty as introduced by Fishman, (1966), suggests that community motivations and constant exposure to the community language are very important factors for language maintenance.

1.2 The USA

In the US context, the English language has dominated the Indigenous languages and other European immigrant languages(Baker, 2011) because of its status as the language of the majority. In this respect, only a few studies have dealt with Arabic language maintenance efforts among Arab-American communities (Bale, 2010; Martin, 2009; Rouchdy, 2013; Sehlaoui, 2008; Seymour-Jorn, 2004). Martin, (2009) conducted research on the Arabic-speaking community in America. She found that Arab-American parents' attitudes were positive towards the maintenance of their original language. The parents encouraged their children to speak Arabic at home to maintain their Arabic cultural heritage. The results indicated that the Arabic language was used for socialization among Arabic speakers as well as in their religious practices. The results also showed the role of religious school classes in teaching the language and the Qur'an.

Rouchdy, (2013) examined the spoken Arabic among the Arab community in Detroit, US. She reported that there had been an increase in the use of Arabic within this community and an enhancement of the quality of Arabic language use. The reasons for this improvement in Arabic language use related to several factors. These factors included the availability of Arabic newspapers, the expansion of many television programs in Arabic, and the satellite cables that broadcasted from the entire Arab world. The findings also indicated that there was a noticeable establishment of national religious institutions and private schools that could offer Arabic and Islamic studies to the community.

Another study was carried out by Sehlaoui, (2008) about Arabic as a heritage language in the USA. He reported that the role of the family at home, the central role of culture, literacy, and the positive attitudes to learning the community language were important factors for intergenerational language maintenance and transmission. Similarly, Seymour-Jorn, (2004) investigated the Arabic language within the Arab-American community in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. The results showed that Arabic language education, connectedness and alignment of language use with the homeland, through regular visits and communication with relatives using the phone, contributed effectively to the maintenance of Arabic language within this community. Additionally, Seymour-Jorn contended that the Arab-Americans' motivation to read the Qur'an in Arabic, their cultural identity and attachment to the parents' country were among the strongest factors that led to intergenerational language transmission.

1.3 Canada

Many studies have been conducted on the minority languages of Canada as a feature of a multilingual and multicultural society (Dweik, et al., 2014). Dweik, et al., (2014) investigated the maintenance of the Arabic language among the Muslim Arabs of Vancouver in Canada. The results indicated that the Muslim Arabs maintained their Arabic language through multiple factors. These factors related to the use of the Arabic language in different domains such as the home, friendship, the workplace, and the neighbourhood. Besides, language maintenance factors such as the use of Arabic in religious activities, the status of the

Arabic language, cultural identity, attending Arabic schools and the role of the Arab mass media (TV, radio, and newspapers) were seen to be essential for the maintenance and transmission of Arabic within this Arab-Canadian community. Furthermore, the results also revealed that the positive attitude held by the Muslim Arabs towards their Arabic language contributed effectively to its maintenance and transmission to the second generation. Qawar, (2014) explored the maintenance of the Arabic language among the Arabic-speaking community of Quebec in Canada. She found that the Arabic language had been maintained in many domains besides the use of English and French for different purposes. Additionally, she also reported that the Arabic language was well-maintained because of the presence of diverse factors. These factors included the use of Arabic at home among family members, the role of the mass media in Arabic, religious activities in Arabic, the role of educational institutions, regular visits to the home country, and communication with family and relatives overseas. The results also indicated that the connections between Arabic and heritage culture such as Arabic food and dance, contributed to the maintenance of the Arabic language and culture. Furthermore, the results revealed that the Arabs of Quebec were positive not only towards the maintenance of the Arabic language and culture, but also towards the maintenance of French and English. Their positive attitudes were reflected in their ethnic pride in their language and heritage culture.

1.4 Asia

In the Asian context, Abdalla, (2006) investigated the maintenance of the Arabic language amongst Malaysian citizens who were born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia and who had moved to settle permanently in their homeland Malaysia. The author referred to them as Arabized Malays because they adopted Arabic as their first language before they returned to their home country. The results indicated that the majority of the Arabized Malays were successful in maintaining their Arabic language in Malaysia. Such success was due to many factors related to the media, such as listening to Arabic radio, watching Arabic television channels, and reading Arabic newspapers. Additionally, the results also indicated that the positive attitudes towards Arabic, the role of literacy in Arabic and the significant impact of religion were among the crucial factors that contributed to the maintenance of Arabic language among Arabized Malays. The findings further revealed Arabized Malays' loyalty to the Arabic language as well as their enthusiasm to transmit it to their children.

Another study, conducted by Vaish, (2008), focused on the impact of religion on language use in Singapore. The results indicated that Malays maintained the Arabic language in their religious practices for its exalted status as the language of the Qur'an. All Malay children learned the Arabic language outside of school because it represented their identity as Malay Muslims and it is the language that can connect them with other Muslims all over the world. Children had positive attitudes towards learning the Arabic language, knowing more about their religion, and reading about the history of Islam.

Both examples revealed that the Arabic language was best maintained by Malaysians, who used to live in Saudi Arabia and Malays of Singapore because of its connection to their religion. Positive attitudes, literacy in Arabic and the role of the religion were the common factors influencing the maintenance of the Arabic language among Malays.

1.5 New Zealand

Some research has been done on the Arabic language maintenance in the English-speaking country of New Zealand. Al-Sahafi, (2015) explored the role of Arabic-speaking fathers in regards to the maintenance of their Arabic language. The Arab parents had positive attitudes towards the maintenance of their original language and culture. All the parents reported that Arabic is important in preserving their cultural and religious identity as Arab Muslims. The Arabic language is considered a core value for the Arabic-speaking fathers because of its

connection with the religion. Furthermore, the results indicated the presence of several factors that seem to be conducive to Arabic language maintenance such as the use of Arabic at home within the family, communication with friends and relatives using the Internet, and teaching children at home, using Arabic books, videos and DVDs. The results also revealed that the use of digital media such as reading newspapers and magazines via the Internet is very important for the parents and their children as a way of having access to the written form of Arabic. In the same context, another study was conducted by Al-Sahafi & Barkhuizen, (2006) about the use of Arabic among 63 adult Arabic speakers from Iraq and Palestine, who reside in Auckland, New Zealand. The results revealed that the Arabic language was maintained in the home domain between parents, children and siblings. Arabic speakers also used the Arabic language in their social gatherings, with friends at school and university, and with their fellow bilingual workers. The results also demonstrated the use of satellite dishes among the Arabic speakers to get access to Arabic media channels. Furthermore, the authors referred to the critical role of religion in the maintenance of the Arabic language. The religious status of Arabic as being the language of the Holy Qur'an contributed effectively to its maintenance by the Arabic speakers of New Zealand.

2 Language Maintenance in Australia

The right to maintain community languages in Australia came into effect with the acceptance of multiculturalism and the abolition of the White Australia Policy as well as Australia's restrictive assimilation and integration laws. The White Australia Policy restricted immigration to only British and later only to white European immigrants (Batrouney, 2006). Subsequently, the assimilation laws were adopted throughout Australia. These laws put restrictions on people from non-English speaking backgrounds to abandon their languages and cultures and to accept the host country's values, cultural practices and language (Hatoss, 2013).

The implementation of multicultural policies in Australia by 1970 had significant benefits for many immigrants. Saeed (2006, p. 76) pointed out that "the idea of multiculturalism, giving a voice to various ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious minorities and assisting them by providing an opportunity to retain their distinct identities within an Australian context". The right to maintain community languages, cultures and religions in this multicultural society were undeniable and protected by the law (Koleth, 2010). Language maintenance has been investigated with the aim to advocate for minority languages and to protect them from extinction (Baker, 2011; Clyne, 2005; Hatoss, 2013). It is important to note that language maintenance runs parallel with language shift as not all minority groups are fortunate enough to be able to maintain their original language.

Statistics show that the majority of the world's languages are not maintained, and their speakers are using the dominant language (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In Australia, many European languages, excluding Italian, Greek, and Spanish, lost ground to the dominant language, for example Dutch, German and Hungarian (Clyne, 2005). The speakers of these languages have been shifted to use English in their everyday communication. That is not the case for Arabic in the concentrated urban cities where it is mostly spoken (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

In the Australian context, the most common pioneering work in the field of language maintenance has been provided by Clyne and associates (Clyne, 2005; Clyne & Kipp, 1999; Fernandez & Clyne, 2007), who have been investigating the phenomenon for more than four decades. For example, the Arabic language was investigated by Clyne & Kipp, (1999) in their focus group study about two Arabic-speaking communities in Australia: Lebanese and Egyptians. They found that these two Arabic-speaking groups had a positive attitude towards their language and they had a great interest in retaining their identity and participating effectively in the culture of their country of origin.

Clyne and Kipp identified some of the factors that contributed to the maintenance of the Arabic language among the Egyptians and Lebanese. These factors included media use, TV and radio programs, school programs and literacy, the requirement of religious affiliation to achieve language proficiency, the role of the mosque and church, the role of the internet in learning the community language, reading books in the Arabic language, and communication with friends and relatives via the phone. The results indicated that the Arabic language was maintained and used at home by the Egyptians more so than Lebanese, including the first and second generations. The results also displayed that identity and religion were the strongest inspiring factors for the Egyptians to maintain their Arabic language. However, the communication with friends and family was seen to be the most important motivating factor for the next Lebanese generation.

Bahhari, (2014) investigated the maintenance of the Arabic language among Saudi children in Melbourne. The children's parents are international students and the author referred to them as sojourners who have to go home after they finish their studies in Australia. The results indicated that the Saudi Arabic-speaking children maintained their Arabic language through many language maintenance factors. Among these factors were the commitment of the parents to transmit their original language to their children, teaching children at home, and the use of Arabic only at home. The communication with the extended family back home via video call, watching Arabic shows and the use of new technology to access Arabic video games were also among the significant factors in maintaining the Arabic language. The results further revealed that literacy in Arabic, through Arabic schools, and the role of the religion by teaching the Qur'an were found to be crucial for intergenerational language transmission. The author reported that Saudi international students were more successful in maintaining their Arabic language than Arabic-speaking immigrants due to their temporary stay in Australia for the purpose of study, and their obligation to return home.

It is noticeable from the aforementioned literature in the Australian context that most of the studies were based on the minority language groups in the urban cities rather than rural areas. This is also the case for Arabic language as illustrated in both studies presented by (Bahhari, 2014; Clyne & Kipp, 1999) about the maintenance of Arabic among the Arabic speakers. Both studies took place in large urban centres where the language maintenance institutions and resources were available to benefit the community language unlike in the rural areas.

3 Arabic language Maintenance in Toowoomba

Unlike urban contexts where most studies have been carried out, little research has been done on ethnolinguistic minority groups in regional areas. In the regional Queensland city of Toowoomba, Hatoss and associates (Hatoss, 2006; Hatoss & Sheely, 2009; Hatoss, et al., 2011) are among the few researchers who have given attention to rural minority groups such as the South Sudanese, Germans and South Africans. With regards to the Arabic-speaking minority groups in the city of Toowoomba, there has been some research by some research students (Muftah, 2013; Almansouri, 2014).

Almansouri, (2014) conducted research about the social and academic experiences of international Arabic-speaking students in Australian tertiary education. He included in his sample that some Arab students from the regional city of Toowoomba to explore their challenges in regards to the transition in their learning. However, his research focus was on the differences between their home country's education and the Australian educational system rather than the maintenance of their native language.

In the same context, Muftah, (2013) conducted a case study about the bilingual journey of a Libyan child in the city of Toowoomba. He found that the socio-psychological factors had a great impact on the maintenance of the Arabic language as well as the host country language. He

discovered that the Libyan child was more proficient in the English language than in Arabic because of the influence of the English schools and the environment. Muftah was interested in finding out how socio-psychological factors contributed to promoting or hampering the bilingualism of this child. Both of these two studies about the Arabic speakers in Toowoomba did not focus on the maintenance of the community language as a main issue confronting the second generation children. Moreover, these studies seem to have certain methodological limitations. For example, Almansouri included only male participants in his qualitative selection of the sample and he was not able to listen to the voice of female participants due to religious and cultural constraints. Muftah investigated the journey of only one child which may not be reflective of other children of the community. Despite the large body of literature about the maintenance of the minority languages, there is no single study that has deeply focused on the maintenance of the Arabic language among the Arabic-speaking community in the regional city of Toowoomba. This study attempts to fill this gap by focusing on Arabic language maintenance and addressing different factors influencing the maintenance of Arabic among this community.

Conclusion

The maintenance of community languages has always been a challenging field for investigation. The majority of these languages, including Arabic of course, live under the cultural power of the host country language. This literature review serves to get comprehensive perspectives on Arabic language maintenance, as well as to position the current study and check its congruence with other language maintenance findings. The lack of research and literature regarding the maintenance of Arabic language among the Arabic-speaking community in Australia, notably in rural and remote areas is visible. Based on the existing literature in the field of applied linguistics, this is the first research to address the issue of Arabic language maintenance within the small Arabic-speaking community in the regional city of Toowoomba, Australia. The author believes that all small minority communities over the globe deserves much support and greater attention from linguists and educators in terms of language maintenance.

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