

Ethnic mother-tongue maintenance among Arabic-speaking immigrants in New Zealand

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Maintenance of the ethnic mother tongue represents one of the major challenges faced by immigrant minority groups in their host country. This paper reports on a study which investigated patterns of language maintenance and shift among Arabic-speaking immigrants living in Auckland, New Zealand. The focus is on the participants' reported levels of language proficiency, patterns of language use in a range of contexts, and attitudes towards Arabic (L1) and English (L2). Data were collected from the participants (N = 63) by means of a self-report questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The findings show that although the participants rated their proficiency in Arabic and English highly, younger respondents (under 35) were less confident in their Arabic skills, particularly in the areas of reading and writing. Arabic is reported to enjoy a high frequency use in such private domains as the home and religion whereas English is more widely used in the public domain. With respect to language attitudes, the respondents reported high positive attitudes towards both Arabic and English. Based on the findings, a number of factors influencing Arabic maintenance in the context of Auckland are discussed.

Introduction

Research on linguistic minorities in many places around the world has consistently shown that an immigrant group language, as a minority means of communication and also as a lower status language compared to the dominant language in the host society, becomes gradually influenced either linguistically, sociolinguistically or both by the dominant language (see, for example, Fishman, 1989; Romaine, 1994; Thomason, 2001). In such language contact settings, language shift to the L2 (the language of the majority group) becomes inevitable (Starks, 2005) and therefore the maintenance of the L1 becomes one of the major challenges faced by immigrant minorities in their host country (Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002; Zhang, 2004). The term 'language maintenance' refers to the situation when members of a minority group "continue to use their language in some or all spheres of life despite competition with the dominant or majority language to become the main/sole language in these spheres" (Pauwels, 2004: 719). Language maintenance, therefore, requires a continuous use of the L1 in a range of functional domains in order to ensure its intergenerational transmission (Edwards, 1997, 2006; Fishman, 1964; Tannenbaum, 2003). Previous research into immigrant language contact and language maintenance has documented that the dominant language gradually displaces the minority one in many of these functional domains (e.g. Fishman, 2001; Holmes *et al.*, 1993, Veltman, 2000). Such gradual displacement of immigrant languages results in language shift, which involves a linguistic community giving up its identity "as an identifiable sociocultural group in favour of an identity as a part of some other community" (Fasold, 1984: 240).

Researchers in the field of language maintenance and shift have attempted to investigate why some minority groups appear to be more successful in maintaining their ethnic mother tongue than others (e.g. Holmes *et al.*, 1993). In so doing, a number of factors, responsible for either promoting or impeding ethnic mother tongue maintenance, have been identified. For example, in the New Zealand context, Holmes *et al.* (1993) reported on three studies undertaken to examine language maintenance among three ethnic minorities in New Zealand, namely the Tongan, Greek and Chinese speech communities. They identified a number of factors which contributed to language maintenance, including, regular social interaction between community members; use of the community language in the home; positive attitudes to the language and a high value placed on it in relation to ethnic identity; resistance to inter-ethnic marriage; support for community language schools; community identified religious organization; and a positive orientation to the homeland.

A similar range of factors has been found within Arabic-speaking communities in the United States and Australia, both English-dominated Western

societies. Although Arabic has a large numbers of speakers in these two countries, there are few comprehensive investigations of its sociolinguistics status (Clyne & Kipp, 1999; Dweik, 1992; Elkholy, 1966; Sawaie & Fishman, 1985). In the United States, Sawaie and Fishman (1985) investigated Arabic use in three institutions established by Arab immigrants: (1) the periodical press; (2) places of worship; and (3) ethnic schools. In general, they found that Arabic was gradually displaced by English in all these institutional domains. Three factors were suggested by the researchers as being responsible for the reported gradual disappearance of Arabic in all of these settings: (1) the size of the Arabic-speaking communities; (2) the social power associated with English and the resultant pressure toward Americanization and assimilation; and (3) the lack of conscious national identity among early Arab immigrants. It is to be noted, however, that the size of the ethnic minority group (or numerical strength) has been identified by Kloss (1966) as an ambivalent factor that can promote either language maintenance or shift. Similarly, numerical strength has been found to have little impact on the language maintenance/shift differential between Australian ethnolinguistic groups (Clyne, 1991). Although large groups can afford extensive language maintenance efforts, closely-knit smaller groups are more likely to avoid multiple contacts with the dominant language and consequently can maintain their language more than larger ethnic groups.

Based on a questionnaire designed to gauge Arabic maintenance amongst fifty Christian Lebanese immigrants, Dweik (1992) discovered two major factors that led Lebanese immigrants in Buffalo to shift almost completely to English. These are: (1) communal factors such as length of residence in the foreign country, intermarriages, high educational and economic status, and weak contacts and ties with the home country; and (2) psychological factors including attitudinal changes towards Arabic and a change in language functional use.

In Australia, Clyne and Kipp (1999) investigated patterns of language maintenance and shift among two adult Arabic-speaking groups, namely Egyptian and Lebanese. According to their age, the participants in each group comprised two main sub-groups: first generation group (over the age of thirty-five), and second generation group (under the age of thirty-five). Findings were based on data collected by using questionnaires and focus group discussions. In general, some intergenerational differences were noticed in both groups with regard to language use and language proficiency. For example, older participants (and especially the first generation) tended to use more Arabic than their younger second generation counterparts. Regarding reported Arabic proficiency, older first generation informants (over the age of

35) appeared to be more confident in all language skills than second-generation respondents who reported less proficiency for all skills and particularly for literacy skills (reading and writing). Attitudes towards Arabic maintenance were positive in most of the informants who demonstrated high support for the maintenance of Arabic and ethnic identity. However, such support was slightly weaker amongst the second generation.

Although Clyne and Kipp's (1999) study has reported some degree of intergenerational language loss (shift), the process does not appear to be as rapid as that witnessed in the United States (Owens, 2000). Reasons for a slower rate of shift might be attributed to some of the immigration and educational policies embraced in Australia, which encourage immigrant communities to preserve and promote their home language as well as their cultural heritage, as opposed to the situation in the United States where the "melting pot" phenomenon has led to Americanization and assimilation of early Arab immigrants (Sawaie, 1992). It should be noted, however, that in both contexts the studies show that gradual intergenerational loss nevertheless occurs.

In spite of the considerable body of literature on New Zealand immigrant languages (e.g. 'Aipolo, 1989; Barkhuizen & Knoch, 2005; Hulsén *et al.*, 2002; Nakanishi, 2000; Shameem, 1995; Starks, 2005), Arabic maintenance has not been the subject of any in-depth analysis in this country. It is the aim of this article to report on a study which investigated, with regard to both Arabic and English, levels of language proficiency, patterns of language use in different domains, and language attitudes among Arabic-speaking immigrants in Auckland.

Arab Immigrants in New Zealand

Arab immigrants represent a relatively recent immigrant community in New Zealand. Their number increased considerably during the mid 1990s, particularly after the Second Gulf War which took place in 1991. In the 2001 Census, 2856 respondents identified their ethnic group as "Arab" (Statistics New Zealand). Indeed, Arabs were ranked the second fastest growing of the top 50 ethnic groups in 2001, after Korean. However, it is difficult to determine exactly the number of Arab immigrants in New Zealand because the given options on the census survey do not include "Arab" as a separate ethnic category, and therefore Arab immigrants may choose not to write "Arab." Instead, they may choose to classify themselves under the broad umbrella of "other." This data, therefore, must be treated with caution, providing only a rough indication of the population of the Arabic-speaking community in New Zealand.

Arabic, the first language of New Zealand Arab immigrants, is spoken as a first language by more than 300,000,000 people in the world (Suleiman, 2003). The Arab world, where Arabic is spoken as an ethnic mother tongue,

occupies a vast geographical area extending from Morocco to Bahrain including Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Algeria. Therefore, as a pluricentric language¹, Arabic has been brought to New Zealand by Arabic-speaking immigrants from different Arab countries. In New Zealand, a question about language spoken was first asked in the 1996 Census. The same question was asked in the 2001 Census. Counts of Arabic-speaking claimants almost doubled between these two census years. The 2001 Census shows (see Table 1) that 7959 respondents claimed that they could “have a conversation about a lot of everyday things” in Arabic (Statistics New Zealand). The next section provides an overview of the Arabic situation in New Zealand.

**Table 1. Number of Arabic-speaking claimants
by sex shown in 1996 and 2001 Census data, New Zealand**

Language spoken (Total Response)	1996			2001		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Arabic	2397	1737	4134	4308	3648	7959

Source: Census data (Statistics New Zealand)

The Arabic situation in New Zealand: Diglossia or triglossia

Any discussion of the language situation in Arabic-speaking communities in Middle Eastern and North African countries and elsewhere cannot overlook the existence of diglossia (Clyne & Kipp, 1999; Ferguson, 1959; Zughoul, 1980). Arabic represents one of the four languages identified by Ferguson (1959) as being diglossic due to the co-existence, side by side, of the Classical Literary variety, called “al-lugah al-fusha,” (H-variety) and the Colloquial variety, called “al-lugah al-a:mmiyya,” (L-variety) in Arabic-speaking communities. It is to be noted, however, that Ferguson’s classification of Arabic varieties into high and low does not really correspond to the linguistic situation in the Arabic-speaking community in New Zealand, where there co-exist three distinct varieties which are in a triglossic relation: Classical Arabic, Colloquial Arabic and English. Classical Arabic is the Arabic literacy variety and also the language of the Qur’an and Islam. Colloquial Arabic refers to a wide-range of national spoken Arabic varieties (e.g. Palestinian, Iraqi, Egyptian) used for informal settings. English is the majority language in New Zealand employed in a large number of public domains such as education, media and government.

Schiffman (1997), among others, states that maintaining the functional compartmentalization of the first (L1) and second (L2) language varieties

(Arabic and English in this case) under this type of extended diglossia (or societal bilingualism) is difficult because the majority language (L2) will gradually be spoken by an increasing number of members of the minority group (L1 speakers). The prediction is that the majority language will start displacing the minority one in many of its functional domains and consequently the minority language (L1) becomes in danger of shift. For this reason, Fishman (1972) emphasizes the importance of the compartmentalization between the majority and minority languages to maintain stability. In this connection, Fishman warns that

[I]f the roles were not kept separate (compartmentalized) by the power of their association with quite separate though complementary values, domains of activity and everyday situations, one language or variety would displace the other as role and value distinctions became blurred or merged. (p. 140)

In the next section, we provide a description of those Arabic speakers who participated in this study.

The Study

Participants

Social networking (first and second order contacts) was used to locate and select a sample of 63 adult Arabic-speaking immigrants (33 females and 30 males) living in Auckland, New Zealand. The participants had common religio-ethnic backgrounds to the extent that both groups were exclusively Muslims and Middle Eastern Arabs. All participants were foreign-born from Iraqi ($n = 33$) and Palestinian ($n = 30$) backgrounds. Although Arabic has been brought to New Zealand by Arabic-speaking immigrants from different Arab countries, we chose to focus data collection on these two immigrant groups because they constitute two of the largest Arabic-speaking communities in New Zealand. Because of the relatively small sample size, we cannot claim that the participants are representative of these two Middle Eastern groups in Auckland, and because we have focused on only these national groups, we cannot claim that the sample represents all Arabic speakers in Auckland. Nevertheless, the data gathered from these participants do begin to paint the sociolinguistic picture of Arabic in Auckland, and certainly contribute to the mapping of the developing multilingual context in New Zealand.

The participants ranged in age from 16 to 80 years (see Table 2). With respect to their generational group, they can be divided into two groups: first generation ($n = 44$) and 1b generation² ($n = 19$). At the time of the study, the participants had been permanent residents of New Zealand for an average of

8 years, ranging from 2 to 12 years. Although, the self-report question relating to nationality resulted in four major separate terms (“New Zealander, Iraqi, Palestinian, Iraqi- New Zealander”), the term “New Zealander” accounted for the highest percentage (34.9%; $n = 22$) of the total response. 35 (or 55.6%) of the respondents reported being married. Arabic was the first language of 32 of the 35 spouses. Of the remaining three, one was English, one was Kurdish, and the third did not respond. Only one of the respondent reported his wife had no Arabic ability. The rest of the spouses had the ability to understand and speak Arabic. The educational and occupational distributions of the sample are provided in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Table 2. Respondents by age and gender

Age group	Female	Male	Total
16-24	16	13	29
25-34	5	4	9
35-44	6	3	9
45-54	4	8	12
55-46	2	-	2
65 +	-	2	2
Total	33	30	63

Table 3. Educational level of respondents

Educational attainment	Number	%
High school(still studying)	14	22
University (still studying)	10	16
Tertiary (non-university)	9	14
Undergraduate	21	33
Postgraduate	8	13
No response	1	2
Total	63	100

Table 4. Occupation composition of respondents

Occupation	Number	%
Student	27	44.4
Housewife	7	11.1
Teacher	4	6.3
Self-employed	4	6.3
Doctor	3	4.8
No occupation	5	7.9
Retired	3	4.8
Pharmacist	1	1.6
Barber	1	1.6
Engineer	3	3.2
Field worker	5	7.9
Total	63	100

Instruments

An integrated approach was adopted to collect both quantitative and qualitative data (see Pauwels, 2004), in this case a self-report questionnaire and semi-structured, narrative interviews respectively. Language maintenance studies employing such a combination (e.g. Brook, 1988; Roberts, 1999) have reported its effectiveness in gathering a “rich data base of qualitative material in the form of interpretive comment to illuminate the quantitative data which forms its backdrop” (Holmes, 1996: 16).

Self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire, developed after consultation with a number of local (Aipolo, 1989; Shameem, 1995) and international (Brook, 1988; Clyne and Kipp, 1999) language maintenance studies, was originally designed in English and then translated into Arabic in order to offer each participant the choice of selecting whatever version she or he preferred. Both versions of the questionnaire were piloted to ensure validity. The questionnaire, comprising 67 questions, consisted of four main parts: in the first part, respondents were required to self-rate their levels of proficiency in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing both Arabic and English. In the second part, respondents were asked to self-report their use of Arabic and English in different domains (e.g. the home, for religious purposes, and when

engaging with the media) in order to assess which of the two languages was more actively used by whom and in which domains. The third part asked respondents to react to a number of attitudinal statements relating to Arabic and English by choosing one item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” In the last part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide demographic data such as their sex, age, length of stay in New Zealand, occupation, education, religion, and language background.

Semi-structured interviews. In order to generate qualitative data for the investigation, semi-structured interviews (see Cohen et al., 2000) were conducted with a representative sample ($n = 10$) of the participants (see Table 5 for details of the study’s interviewees). The interviews took on a narrative quality (see Barkhuizen & de Klerk, 2006) and allowed individual participants some latitude and freedom to articulate their experiences of using both Arabic and English in their lives in Auckland, and to talk about what is of interest or important to them.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to the 63 participants in a variety of settings (e.g. their homes, the Arabic Sunday school, and the Arabic library). Most of the respondents chose to complete the questionnaire in their homes. In addition, some questionnaires were administered and collected with the help of four key members of the Arabic-speaking community. While older participants tended to prefer the Arabic version, almost all the younger ones (generation 1b) chose the English questionnaire. The data collected in response to the questionnaire were then coded and analyzed to provide basic descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages so that descriptive comparisons between the different categories of the questionnaire could be made.

The interviews were conducted with 10 of the questionnaire respondents. They were selected on the basis of availability and representativeness. The interviews were conducted either in Arabic or English, depending on the participants’ preferences³. Whereas most of the older participants (80%) were interviewed in Arabic, younger participants were interviewed in English. The participants were encouraged to choose locations that were convenient for them, such as their homes, the weekend school, the Arabic Library, and the mosque. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and the Arabic transcripts were translated into English. The data were then analyzed following typical qualitative data analysis procedures (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Themes evident in the interview transcripts were first

coded and categorized and then grouped under three headings, corresponding to the three major sections of the questionnaire: language proficiency, use, and attitudes. The results of both the interview and questionnaire analyses are presented in the next section.

Table 5. Details of the study's interviewees

Name*	Gender	Age	Generational group	Occupation	Length of stay in NZ
Nora	Female	18	G1b	Student	10 years
Umar	Male	35	G1	Manager	4 years
Sarah	Female	22	G1b	Student	9 years
Ali	Male	16	G1b	Student	8 years
Abdullah	Male	52	G1	Unemployed	10 years
Ibrahim	Male	25	G1b	Pharmacist	8 years
Fatima	Female	52	G1	Housewife	7 years
Layla	Female	39	G1	Housewife	10 years
Samia	Female	17	G1b	Student	9 years
Hassan	Male	60	G1	Retired	10 years

* All names are pseudonyms.

Language Proficiency

Participants were asked to rate both their Arabic and English proficiency in the four major skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Data obtained (see Table 6) show that most of the participants rated their proficiency in both languages highly, with fairly similar levels of proficiency reported across all skills (though Arabic writing skills clearly rank the lowest). However, some differences emerged across the two generational groups. G1 respondents reported higher proficiency levels across all Arabic skills than the G1b generation group, who reported lower levels, particularly in their literacy skills. Compared to 81.8% of older respondents, for example, only 21.1% of the G1b group chose "very well" to rate their Arabic writing ability (and 42.1% opted for "not well"). In their Arabic maintenance study in Australia, Clyne and Kipp (1999) reported similar tendencies among their respondents. There is supportive evidence for these findings from our interview data. For example, Nora,

an 18-year-old university student, explains that her decreasing use of Arabic literacy skills has led to some language loss in these areas:

Listening and speaking are actually fine. Reading and writing went down because Arabic is used less. I mean most of my time (more than 75% of it) I use English in reading and writing. So Arabic has a very small percentage. I only find time to read in Arabic in the holidays, especially in the summer holiday. Other than that I don't use Arabic. So it went down. Reading is better than writing. But writing is a bit slow. Writing I think is pretty lower.

A number of the G1b participants reported that their declining Arabic literacy skills were due in part to diminishing opportunities for Arabic use in Auckland (see media language use in the next section) and also due to the absence of both bilingual education and formal L1-based instruction (see May, 2005). This finding, therefore, supports Garc a's (2003: 27) claim that "without overt instruction, the development of speaking and literacy skills in the immigrant language has usually been severely limited and even curtailed entirely."

Data obtained on self-rated English skills also reflect the participants' educational circumstances, particularly the fact that English is the primary language of instruction in New Zealand public schools. With very few exceptions, the respondents chose either "well" or "very well" to rate their English skills. There was a lower level of confidence in English skills among the G1 group than among the G1b respondents. In some cases, Arab children start to acquire English at a very early age when they join kindergarten. Umar, a father of a four-year-old child who recently joined kindergarten, is aware of how this has begun to affect his son's mother tongue:

As I told you we are facing a big problem; a problem that I don't know how to solve or how to deal with. My son has joined his kindergarten and he has started to learn English very fast. Even in our home, I and his mother have started to use the word 'school' instead of *Madrasa* [Arabic word for school] and thus 'school' has become an Arabic word. I've noticed that he's started to use a lot of English words and even his mom sometimes uses English with him because she finds it easier and quicker. I'm thinking of leaving New Zealand and going back to my home country to stay even for a short period of time until my child develops and establishes his Arabic skills.

Thus, for Umar's child as well as for many other Arab children, the English-only-schooling practices appear to lead to a "subtractive process" (Fillmore, 2000), with English gradually displacing their ethnic mother tongue.

Table 6. Self-ratings of language proficiency

Language proficiency		“not at all”		“not well”		“well”		“very well”	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>Arabic</i>									
listening	G1	0	-	0	-	8	18.2	36	81.8
	G1b	0	-	3	15.9	9	47.3	7	36.8
speaking	G1	0	-	1	2.3	7	15.9	36	81.8
	G1b	0	-	3	15.9	11	57.9	5	26.3
reading	G1	0	-	1	2.3	5	11.4	38	86.4
	G1b	0	-	5	26.3	9	47.4	5	26.3
writing	G1	0	-	1	2.3	7	15.9	36	81.8
	G1b	1	5.3	8	42.1	6	31.6	4	21.1
<i>English</i>									
listening	G1	0	-	0	-	24	54.5	20	45.5
	G1b	0	-	0	-	4	21.1	15	78.9
speaking	G1	0	-	1	2.3	22	50	21	47.7
	G1b	0	-	0	-	3	15.8	16	84.2
reading	G1	0	-	2	4.5	18	40.9	24	54.5
	G1b	0	-	0	-	3	15.8	16	84.2
writing	G1	0	-	4	9.1	26	59.1	14	31.8
	G1b	0	-	0	-	6	31.6	13	68.4

Patterns of language use

Respondents were asked to rate their language use in the following two crucial language maintenance domains: in the home and engagement with the media. They did so on a five point scale, ranging from (1) “only English” to (5) “only Arabic.” It is to be noted that the number of answers obtained for the questions on language use vary, since the patterns investigated did not always apply to all of the participants. For example, some of the participants did not have children or migrated without their parents. In this section, we provide an overview of participants’ use of both Arabic and English in these two focus domains.

Home language use

Table 7 shows a summary of the respondents' choice of language spoken with family members; i.e. spouse, children, father, mother, and siblings. Arabic is clearly the language used for most familial interactions among older participants. Younger participants, particularly those from the G1b group, show a preference to use more English particularly among their siblings. The category "both equally" was reported by younger respondents (G1b) more often for communicating with siblings (42.1%) than when interacting with other family members. Similarly, "Mostly English" was used by G1b group with siblings (26%) more than with any other family members. Another interesting finding is that "Mostly English" was reported by G1b group more often for interacting with father (15.8) than with mother (10.5). In addition, results reported in Table 7 indicate that most of those who responded to this question use either "only Arabic" (54.4%) or "mostly Arabic" (36.3%) with other relatives in the home.

Although most of the participants reported using mainly Arabic at home, English was sometimes used, especially among G1b siblings. For example, in her interview, Sarah, a 22 years old participant, outlines some of her family's language decisions:

We have to speak Arabic at home. We have to because there are two kids at home and we don't want them to just hear English. I mean there is English on the TV, there is English in the radio, and there is English spoken between me, my sister and my brother. Mom doesn't speak English very well. So she wants Arabic to run in the house. So when I talk to dad I speak to him in English and he knows English better than anyone in the family and when I make a mistake he corrects me but I had to speak to mom in Arabic. There's only Arabic when mom's around.

A similar family language policy is practised in Ali's house. Ali, a high school student who has lived in Auckland for eight years, says that the home is the only domain where he uses Arabic most of the time, particularly with his parents:

I use Arabic mostly at home with my mom and dad and my sister and my brother. My mom and dad are very strict about speaking Arabic and that's why we have to speak Arabic at home most of the time. With my brother and sister we use half-half; half Arabic and half English. With my brother and sister I speak English or Arabic, no one cares but with mom and dad we have to use Arabic. And I'm glad that mom and dad did that because now I can speak both languages.

Table 7. Home language use (%)

Language spoken at home		Only English	Mostly English	Both Equally	Mostly Arabic	Only Arabic	Not Applicable
Spouse	G1	-	2.3	2.3	15.9	61.4	18.2
	G1b	-	-	-	10.5	-	89.5
Children	G1	-	2.3	6.8	36.4	25	29.5
	G1b	-	-	-	5.3	-	94.7
Father	G1	-	2.3	-	15.9	22.7	59
	G1b	5.3	15.8	10.5	52.6	10.5	5.3
Mother	G1	-	-	-	20.5	25	54.5
	G1b	5.3	10.5	15.8	63.2	5.3	-
Siblings	G1	-	2.3	6.8	20.5	15.9	54.5
	G1b	10.5	26.3	42.1	15.9	-	5.3
Relatives	G1	-	-	9.1	20.5	38.6	31.8
	G1b	5.3	-	15.8	15.8	15.8	47.4

In sum, it seems that Arabic is predominantly used in the home domain by most of the respondents particularly among the older ones. English is used to a certain extent with children and more often with siblings because communicating in English becomes more convenient and easier for the younger members of the community whose education embraces an English-only agenda.

Media use

Since “each medium that uses a particular language permits access to and experience of that language, and enhances its status” (Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004: 84), inquiries were made in this study concerning language use in some print and electronic media. Figures on media use (see Table 8) show that English dominates the media input of the respondents and therefore it becomes quite obvious that the respondents had less exposure, if any, to Arabic-language media. By and large, respondents (from both generational groups) reported watching more English television, listening to more English radio, reading more English newspapers/magazines, and browsing more English material on the internet than they did in Arabic.

Interviewees' comments concerning the availability of various Arabic media in Auckland support the questionnaire findings on patterns of media language use. A number of comments were made confirming the unavailability of any local Arabic-language radio or television stations in Auckland. For example, Abdullah, who has lived in Auckland for almost 10 years, says that currently there is no Arabic radio broadcast: “There was an Arabic transmission on radio here for only half an hour during the years 1997-1999. It stopped in 2000. It was only between 2.30 and 3 pm; very short.” A similar comment was made by Ibrahim, a 25-year-old pharmacist, with regard to the existence of any Arabic television transmission: “There used to be a channel that shows once a week for an hour but more for elderly people, not for kids; it was not suitable for kids or people under 20.” Nevertheless, some Arabic satellite channels are available in Auckland. These channels are not free; a monthly or annual fee needs to be paid in order to receive these channels, as explained by Umar: “If you are financially capable, you can subscribe to some satellite Arabic televisions.” A positive effect of such satellite Arabic television on oral Arabic proficiency was reported by some users. Sarah says, for example:

There is no Arabic television station [in New Zealand]. If you have a satellite dish [that receives Arabic transmission] then you're lucky. We do and I think we're lucky. Because mom is always watching Arabic TV and I think dad is now watching the news like in Al-Jazeera [an Arabic TV station broadcasting from Qatar]. I think

Table 8. Language use in the media (%)

Type of media	Only English	Mostly English	Both Equally	Mostly Arabic	Only Arabic	Not Applicable
Television	9.1 15.8	20.5 26.3	45.5 36.8	20.5 21.1	4.5 -	- -
Radio	18.2 42.1	31.8 26.3	25 26.3	6.8 -	9.1 -	- 5.3
Newspapers/ magazines	20.5 42.1	36.4 31.6	36.4 26.3	4.5 -	2.3 -	- -
Internet	15.9 52.6	45.5 26.3	18.2 21.1	11.4 -	2.3 -	6.8 -

Arabic spoken in our house has become better after we've got the Arabic TV because the kids are now watching more and learning more. They're getting more vocabulary into their system. They start to understand the Arabic language just like when we watch English TV and then we understand the English language. I think that's how it works.

As far as the Arabic print media is concerned, some interviewees said that regular and accessible ethnic periodical press such as dailies, weeklies, or even monthlies do not yet exist in New Zealand. Only two Arabic-medium periodicals were mentioned: *Al-Manar*⁴ and *Al-Mujaddid*⁵. With reference to Arabic literacy resources, many of the participants referred to the lack of Arabic books both in Auckland bookstores and community libraries. Nevertheless, in her interview, Samia referred to *Al-Ma'rifa* (knowledge) Arabic Library⁶ as being the only available source of Arabic books where she can borrow Arabic materials. Other participants reported asking friends back home or in other Arab countries to send them Arabic books.

It is clear then from both the statistics and the qualitative data concerning media use presented above that English is by far the dominant medium through which respondents access the media. This was particularly marked when using the Internet, radio and the print media. Overall, respondents reported having very little access to Arabic-language media and therefore it might be safe to conclude that it is difficult for the younger generation to develop Arabic skills, particularly literacy skills, in the absence of local Arabic media (Taft & Cahill, 1989). Arabic maintenance in Auckland, therefore, seems to lack the support of the media, one of the important institutional support factors (Giles et al., 1977).

Language use in religion

One would expect that religion is a key supporting factor in the maintenance of Arabic because of the strong link between Islam and Arabic. In fact, Arabic is the language that must be used in performing Muslim daily prayers. Numerous comments were made by the participants that illustrate the importance of Arabic as the language of Islam. Indeed, being able to access the Qur'an and also to better understand the teachings of Islam were reported to be among the main factors that support and strengthen the motivation for preserving and learning Arabic. Fatima, a 52-year-old parent, had the following to say about the importance of maintaining a good knowledge of Arabic:

We are Arabs and the Qur'an was given to Mohammed (peace be upon him) in Arabic and thus it is extremely important for our

children to be able not only to read the Qur'an but also to understand its teachings. Otherwise, they will end up like some of our non-Arab Muslim brothers and sisters who can sometimes read and recite the Holy Qur'an quite well without knowing the exact meanings of the verses.

Emphasizing the importance of adequate Arabic proficiency, Nora believes that "if you do not know Arabic you will find it very hard to read the Qur'an, to understand the Qur'an, apply the Qur'an."

Language attitudes

It is a widely held belief that language attitudes play an important role in either supporting or impeding the maintenance of minority immigrant languages (Garc a, 2003; Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004; Holmes et al., 1993). Overall, there is strong evidence from our data that the respondents (both G1 and G1b) hold very positive attitudes towards Arabic and its maintenance. As can be seen from Table 9, the majority agree or strongly agree with positive statements about Arabic affect (item 1), usefulness (items 4, 6, and 8), pride (item 9), importance as a marker of Arab identity (items 3 and 10), and its maintenance (items 8, 11, and 12). In their interviews, many of the participants claimed that Arabic was more beautiful than English. The following are three of the most frequently referred to aesthetic aspects of the Arabic language: (1) Arabic enjoys high expressive qualities; (2) Arabic is lexically rich; and (3) Arabic is the language of the Qur'an. To illustrate, Nora, who has lived in Auckland for 10 years, had the following to say about the aesthetic dimensions of the Arabic language:

Arabic [is more beautiful than English] because it's more expressive. It's richer in words and words that have very specific meanings. Unlike English where some words like expressive words such as 'cheerful', 'fantastic', and 'great', don't really have specific meanings. They're sort of used generally. But in Arabic, I think words have more specific meanings. Also, there are a lot of words in Arabic that just do not have a translation in English.

The participants regarded Arabic as an inseparable component of their cultural and ethnic identity. For them, Arabic is considered a core cultural value (Smolicz, 1981) and therefore they value both the language and its maintenance. Stressing the importance of the maintenance of Arabic not merely for communicative purposes but also for ethnic group membership, Sarah says:

[Arabic is] me. It's me. It's us. It's where we are from. It is who we are... I mean I know a lot of Indians who can speak only English so I

Table 9. Frequencies of response to language attitudes (%)

Attitude statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Uncertain		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	G1	G1b	G1	G1b	G1	G1b	G1	G1b	G1	G1b
1. Arabic is a beautiful language	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	36.8	75	63.2
2. English is a beautiful language	-	-	11.4	10.5	11.4	42.1	65.9	42.1	11.4	5.4
3. Arabic is a unifying element amongst Arabs	-	-	4.8	-	9.5	5.3	19	63.2	66.7	31.5
4. Arabic is a useful language internationally	2.3	-	18.2	10.5	22.7	21.1	27.3	42.1	29.5	26.3
5. English is a useful language internationally	2.3	-	-	-	-	5.3	34.1	47.4	63.6	47.4
6. It is important for me to speak Arabic	-	-	2.3	-	2.3	5.2	27.3	42.1	68.2	52.6
7. It is important for me to speak English	-	-	2.3	-	-	-	50	27.8	47.7	72.3
8. It is more important for our children to learn English well than spend time teaching them Arabic.	40.9	42.1	47.7	52.6	2.3	-	4.6	5.3	4.6	-
9. I am proud of the Arabic language	-	-	2.3	-	-	-	25	36.8	72.7	63.2
10. I cannot be an Arab if I cannot speak Arabic	4.5	5.3	22.7	21.1	6.8	15.8	22.7	31.6	43.2	26.3
11. In Auckland, Arabs should speak Arabic at home regularly.	-	-	-	-	2.3	5.3	31.7	57.9	65.9	36.8
12. In Auckland, Arab children should join the Arabic Weekend School to learn Arabic.	-	5.2	5.3	5.3	9.1	15.8	31.8	42.1	54.5	31.6
13. Learning Arabic will be useful to Arab New Zealand children.	-	-	-	-	2.3	10.5	31.8	47.4	65.9	42.1

say I don't count you as Indians. So, if I say I am an Iraqi and I can't speak Arabic so you say 'really, you don't count; you don't know the culture.' They associate language with the culture and religion. If you don't know the language they say 'oh you don't know the culture, you don't know the religion.'

Abdullah expresses a similar view:

Arabic is a very essential component of the Arab identity and avoiding the use of Arabic among ourselves means that we're killing a very important component of our identity. Yes we came here and we became part of this wider community of this country, but as an Arabic community we should not let go of the basic component of the Arabic identity of our community. Because each community has its own identity that reflects on their background, their culture, their heritage and history and the Arabic language is a very important component of that. So we shouldn't let it go and we should try to preserve it as much as we can. And the children will grow up bilingual and that will help them and give them the strength of communicating with different cultures.

At the same time, participants express a high instrumentally-motivated valuation of English (items 5, and 7). The overwhelming majority believe that it is important for them to speak English. Internationally, they consider English to be more useful than Arabic. Two of the most frequently given reasons for the value of English are related to its international usefulness as the language of international communication and to its socio-economic value in New Zealand. The qualitative data illustrate quite clearly these findings. Ibrahim had the following to say about the economic value of English: "For me English is important for my work because it's very important to get a job and earn my living. But Arabic has both religious and cultural importance." Taking a different stance, Nora stresses the social and communicative value of English as the main lingua franca in New Zealand: "English is useful because you need to communicate in English with the rest of the society in New Zealand and that is very very important to express your views, to understand them and for them to understand you."

Hassan, among others, uses the following metaphor to depict his positive attitude towards bilingualism in Arabic and English in the context of New Zealand: "In my view, both languages [Arabic and English] are important for New Zealand Arab immigrants because Arabic and English resemble two wings of the same bird and thus this bird cannot perfectly fly by relying on only one of his wings."

In sum, whereas Arabic as the ethnic mother tongue is maintained and promoted for religious and cultural reasons and for the retention of the cultural values and social identity of the Muslim Arabic-speaking community, English as the language of the majority group is valued for its socio-economic value and also for its important function as the language of interethnic communication.

Factors influencing the maintenance of Arabic

Like other New Zealand immigrant languages, the maintenance of Arabic in the context of Auckland, at least in the lives of the participants in this study, seems to be determined by a number of factors.

1. Habitual use of Arabic in the home. First language use in the home represents one of the most critical factors, if not the most critical, in predicting whether a language will be maintained intergenerationally (Fishman, 1991; Garc a, 2003; Pauwels, 2005): "It is in the family that the peculiar bond with language and language activities (conversation, games, stories, songs, proverbs...) is fostered, shared and fashioned into personal and social identity" (Fishman, 1991: 409). The home appears to be the main domain for Arabic use because, as noted earlier, Arabic is the language used for most familial interactions. The respondents emphasize the importance of using their mother tongue in the home and they regard Arabic use in the home as the major pillar for its maintenance in their English-dominated society.

However, once Arab children start kindergarten or school, a number of parent interviewees reported a change in their children's language behaviour. That is, children start to use more English when communicating not only among themselves but also sometimes with their parents because it becomes easier for children to do so. Such increasing preference for English use among Arab school children sometimes leads to the development of unreciprocal communication patterns (Kaufman, 2001) among parents and children. For example, Layla, a 39-year-old parent, describes her children's language behaviour with the following words: "Arabic is most often used at home but what I've noticed is that when I speak to my kids in Arabic they answer in English and I think this a direct effect of their schooling and the environment in general." As a reaction to this shift to English and in an effort to ensure the continuity of L1 use in the home domain, some participants reported having an explicit family language policy (see also Barkhuizen & Knoch, 2005) in order to ensure a secure place for Arabic use in the home.

2. Arabic as a religious language and the role of *Al-Masjid* (the Mosque). As suggested by Giles et al. (1977), religion represents an important institutional support factor in establishing the ethnolinguistic vitality of communities. In the case of the current study, Islam appears to be an important institutional

support factor operating in favour of the maintenance of Arabic. As shown earlier, Arabic is strongly linked to religion in the Islamic communities, since the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic. Therefore, knowledge of Arabic is essential for any individual Muslim, regardless of his/her ethnic background, to access the Qur'an, perform daily prayers and understand the teachings of Islam. Undoubtedly, with the rise of Islam, Arabic acquired "the highest, most permanent prestige and stability a human language can acquire" (Abd-el-Jawad, 1992: 263). For the participants in this study, Islam and Arabism represent two important components of their cultural identity and collective unity.

As reported by Dweik (1980: 106), the relationship between Arabic and Islam "is embodied in the mosque which serves as a place of worship and a place of teaching and disseminating Arabic." In Auckland, there are nine mosques where Arab Muslims and Muslims of different tongues and various backgrounds meet both on a daily basis to perform their daily prayers and on a weekly basis to attend Friday noon prayer (the biggest weekly religious gathering). Arabic is the liturgical language used in prayer and also used by the *Imam* (the leader of the prayer) to deliver the Friday *Kutba* (the sermon). Such regular meetings at the Mosque enhance social interactions between community members and generate more opportunities for L1 use. Not to be overlooked is the other important function of the mosque as an educational centre where Arabic is taught for the purpose of memorization and reading the Qur'an. Some weekend Arabic classes are also held at the mosque.

3. Positive attitudes towards Arabic language and culture: Arabic as a *core cultural value*. The positive attitude of any ethnolinguistic group towards its ethnic mother tongue has been identified in a number of studies as a crucial support factor for ethnic mother tongue maintenance (e.g. Holmes *et al.*, 1993; Smolicz, 1981). Arabic has long been regarded as a unifying element for all Arabs and particularly for Arab Muslims for whom Arabic and Islam represent two indispensable components of their cultural identity. Although the respondents differ in their countries of origin, Arabic as a pluricentric language seems to be a core cultural value that is essential for group membership. A similar role of the Arabic language as a unifying element among the different groups of Australian Arab immigrants has been reported by Clyne and Kipp (1999: 332), who find that "the absence of people with exactly the same background entails going further down the hierarchy to establish your networks and this affords a greater role to the unifying force of language."

Overall, the study's participants showed very positive attitudes towards Arabic; its aesthetic dimensions, usefulness and its relatedness to their

cultural identity. It is this positive valuation of Arabic that has led some active members of the community, in spite of the limited resources, to establish institutions which promote Arabic maintenance, such as the weekend ethnic mother tongue school and the Arabic library. Similarly, it is such positive orientation towards the importance of Arabic that has led parent immigrants to enrol their children at the weekend school, to make regular visits to the Arabic library, and to ensure regular social interaction with community group members.

4. Cultural and linguistic distance from the majority group. Kloss (1966) considers cultural and/or linguistic dissimilarity between minority and majority to be an ambivalent factor in language maintenance; i.e. a two-way factor that works either for or against language maintenance. In the Australian context, cultural distance has been identified in a number of studies as a clear-cut factor promoting language maintenance (Clyne & Kipp, 1999). In New Zealand, the cultural and linguistic similarity between the Dutch community and the English language and culture has been identified by Hulsen (2000, cited in de Bres, 2004) as one of the major factors that has led to a fast rate of language shift among Dutch immigrants.

In the case of the present study, the respondents differ in culture, religion and language from the majority group. Such differences seem to raise Arab immigrants' awareness of their distinctiveness as a collective unity. For example, one of the participants explains that when she joined her secondary school, she looked very different, in her *Hijab* (the headscarf) and long skirt, from other girls. She found it culturally inappropriate and religiously unacceptable to wear a short skirt like all other girls in her school. Linguistically, Arabic, a Semitic language with its right-to-left alphabet, differs greatly from English in its grammatical and orthographical systems. Such great cultural and linguistic distance seems to operate as opposing forces in the face of language shift and cultural assimilation.

5. Strong ties to the homeland. As reported by Holmes *et al.* (1993: 19), "a positive orientation to the homeland" represents an additional motivator for home language maintenance among some immigrant groups such as Greek New Zealanders. Participants in this study show very positive orientation towards the Arab homeland. They express and indeed long for a return to the homeland either permanently to their countries of origin or even temporarily to other Arab states through job contracts. Strong ties to their homeland play an important role in strengthening language maintenance efforts in order to ensure that their children preserve and develop Arabic skills. Such language maintenance efforts are evident in the arrangements of a number of language and culture maintenance activities such as Arabic public lectures, social

gatherings, camping and picnics. Regular meetings of community members provide opportunities for them to meet, exchange greetings, share their concerns and discuss news from the Arab world.

Conclusion

The picture drawn in this report offers scant consolation indeed to those concerned about the intergenerational maintenance and transmission of Arabic in the context of Auckland. True, Arabic is still very much alive in Auckland, whether judged in terms of current ability or use in the home domain. Yet maintaining the complementary distribution (allocation) of Arabic and English intergenerationally seems to be a difficult challenge for New Zealand Arab immigrants, in spite of the previously identified factors conducive to Arabic maintenance. This is especially so in the absence of an explicit national language policy that ensures the maintenance and learning of minority-languages (Barkhuizen & Knoch, 2006; Hulsen *et al.*, 2002). In addition, such a task cannot be successfully accomplished without having an effective system of L1-based institutions such as ethnic mother tongue schools and media that supplement the maintenance efforts of the family (Sawaie & Fishman, 1985). Acknowledging the difficulty of the transmission of Arabic to future generations, one of the participants, Nora, draws a rather pessimistic, yet to a certain extent realistic, picture of the future of Arabic in Auckland:

For the people who are already living here, I think Arabic is in the decline because the Arabic of the first generation and our generation that came [to New Zealand] went down a little bit, like overall. And then their children's Arabic would be either as good as theirs or would be less. And their chances will be less. So, their children's children and you go down the line somewhere down the line Arabic will be very very weak, if not lost altogether.

Nora's view reflects the real challenge faced by Arabic-speaking immigrants; that of maintaining a balance between the promotion and development of both Arabic (L1) and English (L2) for future generations. However, developing Arabic proficiency is difficult to achieve without having more overt and formal L1 instruction. As shown by the findings of the study, the absence of both effective Arabic-based formal education and L1 media use have resulted in sure signs of language attrition in the areas of reading and writing among younger members of the community. Overt steps need to be taken, therefore, towards more effective L1 literacy-based maintenance activities. In this regard, ethnic mother tongue weekend schools should, in addition to younger school children, target teenagers, particularly those over 16, by creating a suitable and motivating teaching and learning environment for them. Further-

more, families should keep a good collection of Arabic books, magazines, and other forms of L1 printed material. Such printed material can be sourced from other countries, if not locally available.

This study also has implications for New Zealand language policy-makers, particularly those in the education system. Although governmental policies seem to encourage passively the linguistic and cultural maintenance of various immigrant groups (see May, 2005), such policies need to state more forcefully plans and strategies for providing tangible and effective channels of support, not limited to providing financial support for community-based organizations, offering community language schools access to mainstream schools' resources and facilities, and designing suitable and affordable training programmes for community language teachers. In addition, due to the absence of Arabic-English bilingual education programmes, bridges of co-operation and partnership need to be built between ethnic mother tongue weekend schools and mainstream schools so that each learning context supports the other and operate jointly as an integrated system.

A number of researchers (e.g. Holmes, 1997; Hulsén et al., 2002) have emphasized the importance of having adequate information pertinent to language proficiency, language use, and language attitudes of various ethno-linguistic minorities in New Zealand in order to develop a coherent national language policy. The findings of the current study are perhaps unsurprising. However, we hope that they contribute towards achieving this goal.

Notes

- 1 - See Abd-el-Jawad (1992) for a discussion of the pluricentricity of the Arabic language.
- 2 - The label 1b generation has been used in a number of language maintenance studies (see for example Smolicz & Harris, 1976) to refer to those foreign-born immigrants who were under the age of 12 years when brought to the country of immigration. They are thus distinguished from both the first generation whose L1 system was well established prior to immigration and the second generation who were born in the country of immigration and thus had not been exposed to their L1 in its natural environment.
- 3 - All interviews were conducted by Al-Sahafi.
- 4 - Al-Manar (the Landmark), an all-Arabic quarterly, addresses religious and social issues of interest to New Zealand Arab immigrants. It is circulated free of charge.
- 5 - Al-Mujaddid (the Reformer), a quarterly newspaper, provides news for various New Zealand Muslim groups. It is circulated free of charge to main Islamic centers in New Zealand. Although this newspaper is published mainly in English, it contains one Arabic page headed *Arabic Community News*.
- 6 - Al-Ma'rifa Library is the only Arabic library in Auckland. It contains a good selection of Arabic books, magazines, videotapes and CDs. It is also the place where some ethnic-related activities take place including public lectures, seminars and computer workshops.

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ظاهرة الاستبقاء اللغوي لدى المهاجرين العرب في نيوزيلندا

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إن عملية الاستبقاء اللغوي (المحافظة على اللغة الأم) تمثل أحد أبرز التحديات التي تواجه الأقليات العرقية المهاجرة في البلد المضيف. هذا البحث يسلط الضوء على نتائج دراسة أجريت حول ظاهرة التحول أو الاستبقاء اللغوي لدى المهاجرين العرب القاطنين بمدينة أوكلاند بنيوزيلندا. تهدف الدراسة إلى رسم صورة عن مستويات الكفاءة اللغوية، وأنماط الاستخدام اللغوي في عدد من المجالات، وكذا الاتجاهات اللغوية لدى أفراد عينة الدراسة (63 مشاركاً) نحو اللغة العربية (اللغة الأم)، واللغة الإنجليزية (اللغة الثانية).

جمعت المعلومات باستخدام استبانة لغوية ومقابلات شخصية شبه مقننة. أظهرت النتائج أنه على الرغم من أن المشاركين أعطوا تقييماً عالياً لقدراتهم اللغوية، فإن المشاركين الأصغر سناً (دون الخامسة والثلاثين) كانوا أقل ثقة في قدراتهم اللغوية العربية، لا سيما في مهاراتي القراءة والكتابة. كما أظهرت النتائج أن العربية تستخدم بصورة أوسع في المجالات الخاصة بالمنزل وللأغراض الدينية، على حين تستخدم الإنجليزية على نطاق أوسع في المجالات العامة. أما بالنسبة للاتجاهات اللغوية فكانت إيجابية نحو كلتا اللغتين.

على ضوء هذه النتائج، تناقش الدراسة عدداً من العوامل المؤثرة في ظاهرة الاستبقاء اللغوي بالنسبة للغة العربية في مدينة أوكلاند.

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