Family Language Policies in a Libyan Immigrant Family in the U.S.: Language and Religious Identity

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ABSTRACT
Addressing the paucity of research on the experiences of Arabic-speaking Muslim immigrant families, this study investigated the family language policy (FLP) of a Libyan family currently residing in the Southeast United States. More specifically, it focused on the impact of the parents’ language ideologies and ethnolinguistic aspirations on their language planning decisions about their daughter’s maintenance of Arabic. It drew upon the theoretical constructs of language ideologies (Woolard, 1998) and capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Part of a larger study, the data in this paper are gleaned from two sources: a questionnaire and two rounds of semi-structured individual interviews. The findings suggested that the Abdel-Aziz family’s FLP is driven by the parents’ vision and expectations for their children’s language use, which include (a) aspirations to develop bilingualism and maintain ethnolinguistic identity, (b) aspirations to develop biculturalism and resist cultural colonization, (c) participating in religious practices and communities, and (d) maintaining relationships with family and Libyan society. In light of the findings, this paper discusses the complex interplay between “linguistic and non-linguistic forces” (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016) in parental language ideologies that influence the emergence and enactment of FLPs. This interplay involves the intertwined nature of language and religious identity, the family’s responses to the dominant societal ideologies in the U.S., and the understanding of linguistic, cultural, and social capital (Ferguson, 2013; Gomaa, 2011; Mills, 2004).

KEYWORDS: family language policy; language ideologies; identity; Islam; language maintenance

INTRODUCTION
The role of family language policies (FLPs) in children’s language practices and socialization has been a topic of research on language policy and second language learning (King, 2016; Schwartz, 2010), especially because family is a critical domain of language management (Spolsky, 2004; 2012). With its “complex dimensions” (Lanza & Wei, 2016, p. 654), this burgeoning strand of research relies on the theoretical frameworks of child language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and anthropology (King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008). Focusing on the interplay between family and the larger societal ideologies, FLP research additionally draws on language maintenance and planning (Fishman, 1991) to understand immigrant families’ language decisions and practices that impact the maintenance of heritage languages (HLs) (Caldas, 2012; Schwartz, 2010). This growing body of research has examined parents’ language ideologies shaping FLPs (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; King & Fogle, 2006), the impact of external factors in the construction and implementation of FLPs (Bezcioğlu-Goktolga & Yagmur, 2018; Xia, 2016), maintenance of ethnolinguistic identity (Hua & Wei, 2016; Schecter & Bayley, 1997), parents’ and children’s continual negotiation of FLPs over time (King, 2013; Fogle & King, 2013), and contradictions and tensions between parental ideologies and FLPs (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Fogle, 2013). These prior studies focused on immigrant families’ FLPs in various sociocultural contexts, yet there is a paucity of
research on the experiences of immigrant families who identify as Muslim and live in a context in which sociocultural and political discourses largely value the ideologies associated with monolingual English-speaking and Judeo-Christian culture. Addressing this gap becomes pressing as the flow of Arabic-speaking Muslim immigrants has been changing the fabric of communities in European and North American contexts.

Family as a Domain of Language Policy
Spolsky (2004) theorized the dynamics and issues of language policy and planning within domains (e.g., family, workplace, city, nation) which could be any social, political, professional, or religious community. He argues that family is a critical domain for understanding the interplay between language use and language planning. Language policy in the family domain concern language practices, ideologies, and efforts of language management (Spolsky, 2004). Parents’ language ideologies inform and orient their efforts to manage their children’s language practices among family and considerably influence the formation of values and the status children attach to each of their languages. Although children can assert agency in responding to their parents’ language management efforts (Fogle, 2013; Fogle & King, 2013; He, 2016), the more powerful agents of language policy in family are mostly parents, grandparents, and other caregivers who make strategic and deliberate decisions and attempts to influence the children’s language practices (Caldas, 2012; Hua & Wei, 2016). These decisions often become more significant and explicit in immigrant families (Bezcigolu-Goktolga & Yagmur, 2018) or when governmental language planning efforts oppose the linguistic and cultural interests of families (Caldas, 2012; López, Frawley, & Peyton, 2010; Oriyama, 2010). As a response to majority language pressures, families engage in “explicit and overt planning in relation to language use within the home among family members,” (King, et al., 2008, p. 907), which is referred to as “family language policies” (FLPs). However, their implicit and explicit endeavors to manage their children’s language use and development might change as, for example, families see the results of these endeavors, adopt new strategies, interact with and learn from other families, and consider their children’s academic and professional success in relation to the majority language. In other words, parents revisit, negotiate, and modify their language policies over time. FLPs do not guarantee the preservation of the HL in family, but when there is no explicit FLP implemented, the majority language generally takes over children’s linguistic repertoire (Fogle & King, 2013).

Because family is situated in macro-social institutions and power structures, intergenerational HL maintenance is an arduous job for immigrant families (Fishman, 1991). The societally dominant culture and ideologies influence language attitudes and behaviors in immigrant families, and children’s socialization is not isolated from what socially and culturally surrounds the family. “The family is porous, open to influences and interests from other broader social forces and institutions” (Canagarajah, 2008, p. 171). Therefore, no matter how adamant and consistent parents are in their FLPs, their efforts to maintain their children’s HLs could be impeded at varying degrees by contextual factors, the most important of which is majority culture and language. Trying to thwart the intergenerational language shift (Fishman, 1991; 2001), parents usually find themselves in competition with the dominant social, cultural, and linguistic values that promote the majority language and demote the family’s home language (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009). Also, parents may not be able to attend to the language priorities for their children as they deal with the legalities of their immigrant status, economic subsistence, and educational access for their children (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009). This competition affects the degree of explicitness and consistency of FLPs.
over time. Such contextual factors might lead parents either to become more resolved and consistent in their FLPs to ensure language continuity, or - to succumb to sociocultural and economic pressures, because families respond variously to external challenges (Canagarajah, 2008; Hua & Wei, 2016; King & Fogle, 2006).

The effects of the dominant culture and language usually become more salient for minority immigrant families. Their children learn the utility and dominating power of the majority language as they socialize into communities that do not involve or value the use and users of their HL. Such communities, the most powerful of which is school, tend to afford little discursive space for HLs, and might neglect or marginalize their speakers’ ethnolinguistic identities. Because social and academic spaces in schools reflect the surrounding sociopolitical context that mostly favors the majority language, children from immigrant families do not see their language(s) represented or valued at school and tend to socialize into the ideologies of the majority language and culture. Furthermore, monolingual discourses often have stereotypes attached to those “othered” identities. Because of these coercive external factors (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009), parents have a daunting task to strategize and implement FLPs consistently (Caldas, 2012; Canagarajah, 2008).

**Theoretical Framework: Language Ideologies and Capital**

The construction of FLPs is fueled and driven by parents’ language ideologies, which justify the ethnolinguistic aspirations they have for their children (Hua & Wei, 2016; King, 2000). According to Silverstein (1979), at the nexus of the individual and the group, language ideologies refer to “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (p. 193). Heath (1989) argues that language ideologies concern “roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of the group” (p. 53). Woolard (1998) unpacks the non-linguistic dimensions of language policies:

… ideologies of language are not about language alone. Rather, they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religious ritual, child socialization, gender relation, the nation-state, schooling, and law. (p. 3)

These linkages affect the formation and implementation of language policies in any domain (family to nation) of language use. If a language policy enforces a certain language structure, variety, or use, this policy is never about language only, because the ideologies fueling the policy tether linguistic decisions to non-linguistic values and beliefs that are part of language users’ identities (e.g., Blum, 2017; Dressler, 2010; Engman, 2015; Oriyama, 2010; Otcu, 2010). Curdt-Christiansen (2009) characterizes FLPs in the case of immigrant families as mainly based on parents’ ideologies about “the perceived value, power, and utility of” the HL and the dominant language (pp. 354-355); Dumanig, David, & Shanmuganathan (2013), Hua and Wei (2016) and Schecter and Bayley (1997) stress the importance of parents’ ethnolinguistic aspirations for their children.

The language ideologies underlying FLPs include parents’ and children’s beliefs about the different “forms of capital” that the users of home and majority languages could gain (Bourdieu,
The valuing of these languages is influenced by their existing and potential capital in different “fields,” or “sites of struggle” (Bourdieu, 1986). Capital refers to “accumulated labor” that is acquired individually or collectively and “enables [agents] to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” (p. 46). Bourdieu (1991) defines three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. Economic capital is money or its equivalent; cultural capital refers to “knowledge, skills, and other cultural acquisitions” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 14); Social capital refers to membership in and contribution to a group with an established network that makes available the support of these resources (Bourdieu, 1986). These forms of capital are each convertible to the other forms. Individuals’ linguistic capital is closely related to the quantities of their cultural, social, and economic capital which determine their position in a particular “field.” Also, the exchange between linguistic and other forms of capital is possible. For example, individuals can use their economic capital to gain more linguistic capital or they can cash their linguistic capital in for more social capital in various social spaces.

**Literature Review**

The analysis of language ideologies provides insights into the interplay between parents’ beliefs about the dominant and minority language, as well as social, cultural, and political discourses. King (2000) argues that language ideologies serve as “the mediating link between language use and social organization” (p. 169). Earlier studies have explored this link in immigrant families’ FLPs within various contexts. Focusing on the language socialization practices of four families, Schecter and Bayley (1997) found that the relationship between family and dominant ideologies about Spanish language in the U.S. impacted the families’ decisions about their children’s use of Spanish language and cultural identity. In their study that targeted 24 families of Spanish-English bilingual children, King and Fogle (2006) examined the goals these families had set for their children. Their study found that parents form language ideologies based on the popular press, parenting literature, and family networks as well as their experience as language learners and users. King’s (2013) study about three daughters from a Spanish-speaking family of Ecuadorian descent in the U.S. investigated their discursive positionings as language learners and users. King’s findings demonstrated the effect that dominant ideologies have on the sisters’ language and language learning. Focusing on the data from King (2013), Fogle and King (2013) suggested that in this Ecuadorian-descent family, children contributed to the formation and negotiation of language ideologies in the family as they became older and brought external ideologies of language and race into the home. A similar contribution of external ideologies to children’s identities was evident in Kheirkhah and Cekaite’s (2015) study of a Persian-Kurdish family in Sweden. In this study, language practices and the negotiation of cultural and linguistic identities were influenced by broader societal ideologies that favored the use of Swedish.

Other studies have addressed the language ideologies that underlie FLPs in immigrant families. Curdt-Christiansen (2009) found that the formation of Chinese-origin parents’ ideologies in Quebec was influenced by their immigration experiences and Confucianism. The parents stressed the importance of Chinese in their children’s development of cultural knowledge, values, and identities. Parents’ high educational expectations and aspirations for their children largely contributed to FLPs. In another North American setting, Xia (2016) investigated the language practices, ideologies, and management in five Chinese-descent immigrant families in the U.S. Xia found four priorities that families considered for their children’s language and education: “English
as the priority language, testing as the priority, both English and Chinese as the priority languages, and Chinese as the priority language” (p. 103).

Some studies have discovered families’ conflicting priorities in the formation of their FLPs. For example, Curdt-Christiansen (2016) studied the relationship between language ideologies and practices of three families (Chinese, Malay, Indian) in Singapore. Her analysis pointed to three kinds of conflicts for these families: conflicting ideologies, contradictions between ideologies and practice, and contradictions between practices and expectations. In the Greek context, Gkaintartzi, Chatzidaki, & Tsokalidou (2014) analyzed data from 19 Albanian parents regarding their children’s language development, uncovering three ideological stances: those who were “fighters” (i.e., staunch supporters of their children’s bilingualism), those who favored “probilingualism” (i.e., they were eager to preserve the HL but acquiesced to its exclusion from schooling), and those who appeared “indifferent” (i.e., valuing Greek as a tool for success in the given sociopolitical context). In the Netherlands, Bezcioğlu-Goktolga and Yagmur (2018) stressed the complexity and diversity of factors that influenced family language ideologies in 20 Turkish immigrant families. Although the parents wanted to keep their linguistic ideology and pass it on to their children, they also felt pressure from “the expectations of mainstream institutions” (p. 54) and became uncomfortable to “use their mother tongue freely outside the home context with the fear it opposes the societal ideology” (p. 55).

There is also a growing research interest in the development of Arabic in immigrant families’ home settings. Mills (2004) examined the language perceptions of 10 bilingual Pakistani mothers’ their children in the U.K. She observed a close relationship between religion, identity, dress, and language. Arabic literacy for reading the Qur’an was an important component of their identities, even more than Punjabi or Urdu parents in several cases. In another study in the U.K. context, Gomaa (2011) investigated the maintenance of Egyptian Arabic in five Egyptian immigrant families and found that they viewed Arabic as part of cultural and religious identity. Their language maintenance efforts included an Arabic-only language policy in the home, enrollment of their children in an Egyptian school following the Egyptian curriculum, participation in a local Egyptian society’s activities, celebration of religious holidays and family visits, and subscription to Egyptian television channels. Focusing on language ideologies and language planning in a Yemeni Muslim community in the U.K, Ferguson (2013) collected data from teachers, administrators, students, and parents at a complementary Arabic school. His analysis demonstrated the practices of language management in the Yemeni community that are guided by language ideologies about the Yemeni variety of Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is accorded higher status. Related to these ideologies, frequent references to religious intentions for learning Arabic were prominent in Ferguson’s data, because MSA is a vital part of Islamic cultural heritage and identity.

In New Zealand, Al-Sahafi and Barkhuizen (2006) reported that 63 adult Arabic-speaking immigrants in Auckland mostly or only used Arabic in the home, and some participants specifically noted the importance of explicit FLPs to maintain Arabic. Additionally, the participants discussed the connection between Islam and Arabic as a significant reason for the maintenance of Arabic. In an ethnographic study on biliteracy development in Arabic-speaking immigrant families in the U.S., Alshaboul (2004) examined Arabic literacy efforts in six families, including his own. His study found that these families’ literacy efforts were driven by the role of Arabic in understanding the Qur’an and Hadith and practicing Islam, in addition to the families’
future plans to return to their home countries. Callaway (2012) examined the home literacy practices in two English-Arabic bilingual families in the U.S. and also found religious literacy practices to be an important motivation.

These earlier studies on FLPs suggest that: (a) parents’ endeavors to pass their cultural heritage on to their children are inseparable from their FLPs; (b) the broader dominant culture impacts their ideologies about the HL and the majority language; (c) parents’ language learning and immigrant experiences also impact their language ideologies; (d) the instrumental utility of the majority language in the school and beyond tends to overshadow the HL; and (e) parents do not always consistently enforce their FLPs. Specifically, in the cases of Arabic language and literacy development in immigrant families, the role of Arabic as the language of Islam stands out as an important motivating factor for the families. Immigrant families stress the utility and power of Arabic language competence in their children’s cultural identity development as they want their children to learn Arabic to access Islamic cultural heritage and to participate in religious communities and practices.

**Arabic as a World Language**

As a world language, the sociolinguistic landscape of Arabic involves a large number of national and regional varieties and Arabic is not native to any one specific country (Albirini, 2016; Suleiman, 2003). While some regional Arabic varieties (e.g., Moroccan and Yemeni) may not be mutually intelligible, all varieties are considered part of the Arabic language because of the shared history and wide array of common linguistic features (Albirini, 2016). These varieties are mainly divided into two: Standard Arabic and Colloquial Arabic, which may represent a diglossic situation. Covering Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Classical Arabic, Standard Arabic is the variety taught through formal education. It holds official status across the Arab World and “represents the ‘High’ and ‘superposed’ variety” (Albirini, 2016, p. 3). On the other hand, Colloquial Arabic includes the Arabic dialects that are spoken in varying regions. These varieties “do not have an official status or standardized orthography,” and “represent ‘Low’ and ‘local’ variety” speakers’ use in informal interactions (p. 3). Moreover, to complicate the sociolinguistics of Arabic, millions of people beyond the Arab World learn and use Arabic mostly for purposes of religious worship, reciting Quranic verses, and accessing and studying the scholarship in Quranic sciences, Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence (Albirini, 2016; Bale, 2010; Suleiman, 2003). However, at the same time, many Arabic speakers do not identify as Muslims. Granted its complex sociolinguistic characteristics, Arabic is a uniquely “multinational, multidialectal, multifaith” language, which attests to the multiplicity of its speakers’ identities (Bale, 2010, p. 127).

The place of Arabic in the U.S. sociopolitical context has been shaped by the waves of immigration from the Arab World and other Muslim-majority countries, as well as the political and economic “interests” of the U.S. in the Middle East (Bale, 2010). After September 11, 2001, national security concerns in the U.S. led to increased federal government funding for Arabic language programs across the country (Allen, 2004; Pratt, 2004; Wiley, 2007). At the same time, the Arabic language and its speakers have suffered harsh stigmatization and even demonization as a result of “profiling and targeting of Arab and Muslim Americans, and those assumed to be such” (Bale, 2010, p. 127), which have been exacerbated in the last two years by increasingly polarizing and divisive cultural and political discourses. More specifically, such stigmatization took place in the political conversations about the admission of Syrian refugees to the country during the presidential
campaign for the 2016 elections, and Donald Trump’s executive order in January 2017 to ban the citizens of predominantly Muslim countries from entering the U.S. These developments have profoundly impacted public discourses, even though the President’s polarizing discourse has garnered a sizeable political and public backlash. Therefore, the xenophobic and Islamophobic ideological equation “Arab = Muslim = jihadist” (Bale, 2010, p. 126) has been intensified in the current U.S. sociopolitical milieu and maintained its influence on dominant ideologies about the value and threat of the Arabic language, its users and (HL) learners, as well as government funding for Arabic language programs across the country. Along with the de facto English-only policies in the U.S., these pervasive ideologies about Arabic add to the challenges facing immigrant parents in their efforts to raise children in their HL.

**The Study**

Recognizing the complexity and uniqueness of each family and its associated sociocultural context, we respond to Curdt-Christiansen’s (2016) call for more research on language ideologies in the home domain “to illuminate the specific processes or mechanisms whereby [linguistic and non-linguistic] forces come into play and relate to each other” (p. 697). Therefore, the present case study contributes to the FLP research by examining this topic in an Arabic-speaking Muslim immigrant family living in the U.S. More specifically, it addresses the following research question: What language ideologies and ethnolinguistic aspirations influence self-identified Arabic-speaking Muslim parents’ language planning decisions regarding their daughter’s maintenance of Arabic?

**Participating Family**

We recruited the Abdel-Aziz family (all names are pseudonyms) for this study through our personal contact. Consisting of two parents (Leyla and Mohamed), a 7-year-old daughter (Selma), and a 3-year-old son (Kareem), the Abdel-Aziz family lived in a college town in the Southeast U.S. at the time of the study. Leyla and Mohamed had moved from Benghazi, Libya to the U.S. as a newly-married couple in 2008 to pursue graduate education on a Libyan government-sponsored scholarship. They had also previously lived in another Southern state on the Gulf Coast. Both Selma and Kareem were born in the U.S. and held U.S. citizenship. Selma had gone to Benghazi once for an unexpected and urgent visit when she was two years old, and had stayed there for two months. Kareem had never visited Libya. Holding a doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics, Leyla worked as a professor of Arabic at a large research university in the Southeast U.S. Mohamed had a Master’s degree in Engineering, and he was transitioning between jobs when the present data were collected. Sponsored by Leyla’s employer (a large state university), Leyla and her husband applied and were granted permanent residency in the U.S. They planned to apply for U.S. citizenship when they became eligible. Identifying themselves as practicing Muslims, both parents had been members of the local Muslim community in their area and frequently joined prayers and events held at the local mosque.

Leyla and Mohamed saw their FLP as an attempt to correct what they thought of as an earlier “mistake” in the upbringing of Selma. The initial strategy both parents adopted was to talk to Selma in Arabic only in the home. However, when they decided to send her to daycare at the age of 1.5, they thought it would be best to talk to her in English in order to prepare her for the daycare experience. After she had been in daycare for a year, they noticed that her Arabic linguistic skills had declined greatly, and she spoke predominantly in English. This realization prompted a shift in
FLP, leading them back to Arabic-only. Both parents were so adamant about this decision at the time of the data collection that Leyla noted: “we learned our mistake and then we said okay, we’re not doing this with [Kareem]” (Interview 2, February 25, 2017). They had invested much time, energy, and money to support Selma’s Arabic language development with the hope that she could speak to them in Arabic again. That is, they had started to teach her the Arabic alphabet, organize playdates with Arabic-speaking children in the community, and watch Arabic children’s television programs. As a result, they had started to observe positive outcomes of their Arabic-only strategy in their daughter’s language performance. However, we acknowledge that Leyla’s doctoral degree in applied linguistics and extensive knowledge in language acquisition could have had some bearing on her language ideologies and the Abdel-Aziz family’s FLP.

Data Collection and Analysis
The present study stems from a larger data collection process that included multiple families with different countries of origin and additional data from audio-recorded family conversations. To address the research question in this study, we drew on two sources: a questionnaire and two rounds of semi-structured individual interviews (see Table 1). With their consent, Leyla and Mohamed were emailed the link to our electronic questionnaire, which they completed individually. This questionnaire was adapted from Xia’s (2016) study, and included questions about demographics and language practices at home. We used both parents’ responses as a basis for preparing interview questions. Ilham, author 2, conducted both rounds of interviews in Abdel-Aziz family’s house. She had gotten to know Leyla through a university course Leyla taught and through their involvement in the local Muslim community. Her rapport with the family and her competence in Arabic and English facilitated the completion of this task. The interviews with Leyla and Mohamed focused on questions about their children’s language development, what they did to support it, their beliefs about Arabic and English, language policies and practices at home, and future aspirations for their children. The interviews with Selma mostly addressed topics about her time at school and al-jama’a (the mosque), her friends, and her favorite Arabic and English cartoons. At the time of the data collection, she was in Grade 2 and attending Arabic classes (learning the alphabet and various surahs from Qur’an) at al-jama’a on Sundays.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed immediately afterwards, and Ilham translated the parts of the conversations that were in Arabic. Mirroring her usual conversations with these family members, all interviews included brief instances of code-switching between English and Arabic. The quotes shared in this paper were uttered predominantly in English with several short Arabic phrases such as al-hamdulillah (thanks be to Allah), al-jama’a (the mosque), and Keif halik? (how’re you?) and longer sentences when Leyla was reporting her parents’ reaction to Selma’s quietness when talking with them on the phone.

Table 1.

Data Collection Instruments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>Leyla</th>
<th>Mohamed</th>
<th>Selma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>October 20, 2016</td>
<td>October 22, 2016</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>November 16, 2016 (35 minutes)</td>
<td>November 16, 2016 (53 minutes)</td>
<td>November 16, 2016 (12 minutes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We utilized a constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in the data analysis that included open, axial, and selective coding. In open coding, we read the entire data set several times and assigned tentative initial codes to chunks of data “remaining open to all possible theoretical directions” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 100). This phase of the analysis yielded 51 codes such as “exposing culture and language through Qur’an,” “learning Arabic in the playground,” “maintaining relationships with Arabic speaking families,” “learning Arabic for praying,” “learning Arabic to talk with family,” “celebrating Islamic holidays,” “learning Arabic in al-jama’a,” and “seeing Arabic as part of identity.” In the axial coding, we re-read the data to identify the relationships between the initial codes by comparing them against each other and accounting for redundancies. Then, based on the relationships identified, we placed the initial codes into categories such as “understanding dominance of English in Selma’s socialization,” “framing culture and language as inseparable,” “viewing Arabic as cultural capital,” “noticing impact of majority culture,” “parents’ contradictory tentative plans to move back to Libya,” “feeling pressure from grandparents about children’s Arabic,” etc. Lastly, in the selective coding process, we focused on the relationships between these categories and identified major categories “condensed into a few words” that constituted the themes related to the research question, i.e., aspirations to bilingualism and maintaining ethnolinguistic identity (Saldaña, 2013, p. 163). We present and discuss the four recurrent themes in the remainder of this article.

**Findings and Discussion**

Our data analysis suggests that the Abdel-Aziz family’s FLPS were driven by the parents’ vision and expectations for their children’s language use which included: (a) aspirations to bilingualism and maintaining ethnolinguistic identity; (b) aspirations to biculturalism and resisting cultural colonization; (c) participating in religious practices and communities; and (d) maintaining relationship with family and Libyan society.

**Aspirations to Bilingualism and Maintaining Ethnolinguistic Identity**

Leyla and Mohamed valued their children’s potential bilingual and intercultural development, but they were cognizant of the “coercive” (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009) impacts of the monolingual English-dominant U.S. culture in which being an Arabic speaker and Muslim is socially, culturally, and politically marginalized. They aspired for Selma and Kareem to become Arabic-English bilingual speakers and socialize into the Islamic religious culture despite the pressure of the mainstream Judeo-Christian culture of the U.S. To pursue this aspiration, their FLP required Arabic-only language use among family members, supported by literacy lessons managed by Leyla, playdates with Muslim children who spoke only Arabic, subscription to Arabic children’s television programming, and attendance in the Sunday classes at al-jama’a.

Both Leyla and Mohamed were inspired by Ilham’s bilingual language competence, and expressed that they wanted Selma to be able to have the same competence. Leyla explained:

> I’m living in a two-way system, as well. I don’t mind her. …That makes her an interesting person. Just like you now. You can flip to English, you can flip back to Arabic. I mean, when you speak Arabic, it sounds like you just came from
Sudan right now. And when you switch to English it’s like you were born and raised in the United States. So I want her to have the same thing. (Interview 1, November 16)

Leyla aspired for Selma to develop relatively balanced bilingual competence in Arabic and English, reflecting a very ambitious “native” speaker model and “Standard” language proficiency. Leyla seemed to believe that by being a bilingual Arabic and English speaker, Selma would be able to use her linguistic capital to gain social capital as “an interesting person.”

Mohamed also viewed Ilham’s bilingual competence as the most desirable model for their daughter, but his expectation was not as high as Leyla’s. He explained:

> Yeah, I still don’t know, like I told you, what it’s going to look like. Especially since for them everything is going to be in English. Surroundings, their study, their friends. But, I hope … I would be very happy, if they turned out to be like you, for example. They know both, even if their life is all in English. But when they meet Arabs or Muslims, they can switch anytime, you know. So I wish, really, for [Selma] at some point to be able to speak like you. It’s really great. So I don’t know. We are trying, but I prefer for her to speak Arabic. Even if it’s not fluently. At least for her to understand well and to know how to respond. I consider it a gain. I feel like it’s an accomplishment, a big accomplishment. (Interview 1, November 16)

Mohamed described the role of English as the most valued language in the social “fields” into which their children were socializing. Aware of the ideological structures of the U.S., Mohamed highlighted the value of English for its potential for conversion to social and cultural capital. However, imagining for Selma a future that involved interaction with Arabs or Muslims, he believed that being able to communicate in Arabic would also be a type of linguistic capital that could accrue social capital in Muslim social spaces.

Both parents seemed to assume that their children would have no difficulty learning English through formal schooling, but they were concerned about Selma’s diminishing Arabic language competence. This language-related concern was also significant for Selma’s cultural identity since her linguistic capital as an Arabic speaker could be turned into cultural capital, i.e., the utility of Arabic as the language of Islamic teachings and practices. Both parents envisioned a Muslim identity for both of their children, and they viewed Arabic as an essential part of that identity as well as for socialization into Islamic culture. For example, talking about Selma, Leyla explained why she believed Arabic was important in their children’s lives:

> So Islam is all about Arabic. … She has to learn Arabic so that she will learn the Qur’an. Because in her age now, she’s supposed to know how to pray. And she has to know a couple of verses, surahs (passages) like al fatiha, al felaq. (Interview 2, February 25, 2017)
Leyla aspired for Selma to build up a certain cultural capital, including the knowledge and skills required to become a practicing Muslim. She stressed that such cultural capital entailed certain linguistic capital, i.e., Arabic language proficiency.

Additionally, when explaining the importance of Arabic for Selma’s identity as a Muslim, Leyla’s comment provided the “justification” and “rationalization” (Silverstein, 1979) for her ideology about the value and utility of Arabic in the social “field” of Muslims:

… to me Arabic has a relation to identity. And I think that Arab language, Arab culture is something really beautiful, and I think it’s a privilege. And I want her to have it. I want her to know that, and I want her to be proud that she’s Arab and that she’s Muslim and that our Arab culture is a rich culture. And that Arabic and Islamic civilization is something for her to be proud of… She can represent [the] Arab community. So it’s a matter about identity, more than about just a language. … Me and [Mohamed] are aware of it, and we’re trying to make sure that we pass it on to them. … No matter how hard it is, it needs patience. It’ll come with time. And we, al-hamdulillah [thanks be to Allah], as long as we’re breathing, we’ll keep on teaching her Arabic until she gets it. (Interview 1, November 16, 2016)

Leyla’s comments point to the relationship between different forms of capital. She explained the aspired cultural and social capital that Selma could gain thanks to her potential Arabic language competence.

Similarly, Mohamed highlighted the place of Arabic in their children’s growth as Muslims and access to cultural heritage. He commented:

Yes. Yes, it’s very, very important. Because we, first as Muslims, have to - the kids at a certain age have to start learning and reading the Sunnah and the Qur’an. …it is very important because we have books, historical books and Qur’an. It is necessary to read and try to understand. (Interview 1, November 16, 2016)

Mohamed portrayed Islam and its associated cultural heritage as the most important component of his and his family members’ identities “first as Muslims,” and the construction of these identities hinges on Arabic language competence. Similarly to Leyla, he underscored that Arabic linguistic capital is essential for the desired cultural capital, i.e., access to the Qur’an and other textual sources explaining Islamic teachings that they expected their children to learn.

**Aspirations to Biculturalism and Resisting Cultural Colonization**

Although the parents wanted their daughter to be able to function in both cultures and languages, Leyla particularly worried about the pressure of the dominant culture in the U.S. In several examples, her language ideologies were demonstrated as she explained that they were in “a major war” against the surrounding dominant culture to transmit their home culture to their daughter. For example, she described the challenges that they encountered in this “war”:
I mean she’s even very Westernized, she is American. But I make sure that it’s fine, that this is your culture. You’re also an American citizen. If you want to embrace the American culture, fine, you know, you want to celebrate whatever they’re celebrating fine, learn about it. She’s an American citizen. But I also make sure they don’t forget they are also a Muslim. And she knows very well that she’s not supposed to eat meat outside the house. She’s not supposed to do this, not supposed to do that. This is not a Muslim thing. Even when she wants to watch like so many Christmasy things, like no, I mean it’s okay if they want to give you a gift, you want to give them a gift like out of *al tasamuh al deeni* (religious tolerance) and just to give a good picture about Islam, but this is not our religion. So when *Eid al Adha* or *Eid al Fitr* comes, we make it celebratory. We have balloons, and we take them out, buy [a] new dress, you know ‘it’s Eid, it’s Eid.’ So she understands these things. And it is a major war here. You’re trying to implant a culture that is thousands of miles away from here. Inside the United States it’s all about Christmas and then there’s Thanksgiving, then Halloween. Everything is so colorful, and we can’t escape it. So that’s what I’m kind of struggling with. (Interview 2, February 25, 2017)

By “major war,” Leyla tried to express how formidable and arduous their job was to resist the cultural colonization in a society with an ideological structure which does not value her home culture. Metaphorically, she directed attention to the competition between the majority and minority cultures and the challenges involved in their efforts to raise their children with a Muslim identity and protect their home culture. We attribute her word choice (i.e. “major war”) to her fear and concern about her children’s losing their home culture as they socialize into mainstream U.S. culture. Although Leyla positioned their daughter culturally as “American” due to her citizenship, she drew the boundaries that define the cultural practices of Muslims in the U.S. context. These boundaries define what a “Muslim-American” should/can do, and she believed they needed to raise their children within these boundaries. Unlike her desire for relatively balanced bilingual competence for Selma, Leyla’s hope for their children’s potential biculturalism was particularly and intentionally asymmetrical.

Leyla maintained the same asymmetry when she gave examples from her own cultural experiences and identity in the U.S., which reflected her resistance to cultural colonization. She remarked:

…Me and [Mohamed] attempt to maintain the cultural things. I don’t want to be Americanized even if we turned out living here the rest of our lives. …I like my culture, I like to be Libyan. And I will talk, be friends with Americans, but don’t ask me to bring this to my house. No, I won’t, I won’t. …I came here twenty-seven years old, so I can’t change that. And I want to pass it on to my kids. And I think they’re going to be fine. On the contrary, I think that’s going to make them very, very interesting people. Like they have two cultures that they own. …That makes their lives more interesting. You can be both. And it makes you a very, very interesting, nice mix. …Like that’s what makes you an Arab-American. So she’s basically an Arab-American. And I want to raise her as Arab-American, Muslim-American. There are those things that you have to preserve. (Interview 1, November 16)
Leyla’s comment was marked by her desire to protect their home culture and transmit it to their children. She viewed her home setting as an important space in which her family could preserve their culture. Therefore, when she says “don’t ask me to bring this to my house,” she stresses that she will not let an American way of living dominate her home life. She believes that their children will learn to function in the dominant U.S. culture anyway, but their home culture and religion need extra attention and effort to be “preserved.” She believes that the Arab and Muslim components of their children’s hyphenated identities will be significant cultural capital, which they can use to gain further social capital. However, despite this hyphenated identity Leyla envisions for her children, she would expect the Arab and Muslim cultures to be more dominant in their lives and would not like her children to practice the mainstream “American” holidays and engage in other “American” cultural practices.

**Participating in Religious Practices and Communities**

For the purpose of raising Selma as an Arabic speaker, Leyla and Mohamed promoted Selma’s socialization into the language, religion, and culture through participation in religious practices and communities. They believed that such participation contributes to the accumulation of her cultural capital. For example, Leyla described the religious practices in their house and daily commute:

In the house, it’s 100% Libyan. Like I cook Libyan food. She knows all the Libyan food. TV is Arabic, food is Arabic. All the celebrations - Eid al-Adha, Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid Al-Muwlid al-Nabawi - everything, everything that has to do with the Arabic culture. We decorate the house and buy her a new dress for the Eid, and show her ‘this is Eid, [Selma]. Eid, [Selma].’ you know. And now that we just got into the Arabic [TV] system and cartoons and things like that and channels, on the first Eid that comes I will just let her watch everything. Even in the car, I will play like Qur’an, so that she can get used to the Qur’an. …Like in the morning we like to play Qur’an in the car, and I tell her you know, ‘Don’t talk while you listen to Qur’an. It’s not polite. You have to listen with focus.’ And she stays quiet. So yeah, I plant in her the traditions, the culture, and religious things. (Interview 1, November 16, 2016)

Aligned with their Arabic-only policy, they exposed Selma to the language, culture, and religion concomitantly in the house and during car rides. Leyla and Mohamed used their economic capital buying a subscription to the children’s TV channels. Additionally, listening to Qur’an in the car, Leyla tried to make a purposeful impact on her daughter’s identity and this practice points out the embeddedness of Arabic in Muslim religious practices.

Another way in which Leyla and Mohamed promoted Selma’s participation in religious communities and practices was her attendance to weekend courses at al-jama’a. She associated her liking and learning Arabic with going to al-jama’a:

Ilham: Do you like it [Arabic]?
Selma: Uh-hum. So tomorrow I’m going to al-jama’a because on Sundays we go to the jama’a. And we learn Arabic there and we have snack. And after our snack, we get to go play outside. (Interview 2, February 25, 2017)

Selma’s image of al-jama’a included learning and socializing activities that immersed her in Islamic language and culture, although it is a complex translingual space shaped by both majority and minority languages and cultures. Mohamed also noted that he and Leyla encouraged Selma to go to al-jama’a specifically to gain cultural capital:

We want her to know the mosque. We want her to know the clothing of it. This is what she wears before she goes in. Sometimes they put the scarf on her. Not all the time because she plays and loses track of it. And sometimes she goes without it. But yeah, overall she enjoys it. (Interview 2, February 25, 2017)

Mohamed viewed al-jama’a attendance as conducive to his daughter’s socialization into the Islamic culture. Apart from teaching her that the mosque was a community space for Muslims, he emphasized her learning to dress like a Muslim girl going to al-jama’a. His attention to the headscarf demonstrated how he viewed it as part of appropriate female Muslim dressing.

Further, Selma observed her mother wearing hijab and loose dress, long sleeves, and pants all the time outside the home. Leyla described how they teach their daughter what it means to be a Muslim and engage in Islamic-cultural practices in everyday life. She recounted:

She sees it in the way I dress… Just this morning, we’re training her brother to go potty-training and she’s standing there, staring at his, you know, private part. And I was like, ‘No, you don’t do that.’ And she’s like, ‘well you do it.’ ‘But I’m his mommy. This is not polite. You’re not supposed to look. You’re a Muslim.’ So it’s in everything we do. Even when she starts eating and she burps, we say al-hamdulillah [thanks be to Allah]. When you sneeze say al-hamdulillah. So she knows all this stuff. We teach her everything… ‘You say this, you should say that.’ (Interview 2, February 25, 2017)

This example demonstrates that Leyla wants their daughter’s socialization to be oriented by Muslim cultural values and practices, as opposed to the mainstream American ones. She wants her Muslim identity to be present “in everything” she does. The last example specifically indicates again how Selma could convert her Arabic linguistic capital (i.e., knowing what to say when sneezing) to cultural capital, which reflects her Muslim identity.

Lastly, Leyla gave another example of the ways in which they helped their children gain Muslim cultural capital, remarkably when asked about the benefits of their children’s bilingualism:

English is of course a very international language, and second of all, because we’re living in it, it’s just the language of her school, language of communication with the society. Arabic, because it’s her identity, who she really is. It’s the language of her parents. And I know a lot of Arabic families who their kids are like oh, they eat burgers, they eat sausages. Even from the food. You
know, they eat pancakes every Sunday and bacon. Uhm, no. No. …I want her to eat couscous on Friday like we do in Libya. Like ‘couscous on Friday.’ We do aseeda (a sweet food) in al mawlid al nebawi (celebration of the prophet’s birth)… For me, in our case, Arabic is to know her identity and to know her religion. (Interview 2, February 25, 2017)

While she framed English as the language of necessity, she believed Arabic is part of “who [their daughter] really is.” Then, she exemplified how food represents their culture and what food they do not want to be part of their diet because of the Islamic prohibitions against pork and non-halal meats. It is striking that she transitioned from talking about language to religious eating practices and then went back to language, underscoring her ideology that assigns value to language in relation to religious identity.

Maintaining Relationships with Family and Libyan Society
Leyla and Mohamed’s FLPs for their children’s Arabic language development was also driven by their desire to maintain relationships with family members in Libya and tentative plans to move back there. Leyla noted this as the second reason why they wanted their children to learn Arabic: “…so that they can communicate with their grandparents when they see them. Like my brothers, most of them live abroad, you know. My mother and father understand a bit of English, but we have to teach [the kids] Arabic” (Interview 1, November 16, 2016). Leyla and Mohamed regularly spoke on the phone with their parents in Libya, but Selma was quiet on the phone. When asked if their children spoke on the phone with their family in Libya, Mohamed described it as shyness in general when speaking on the phone, and fear of making a mistake when speaking Arabic:

A little bit. They get very shy. And especially [Selma]. Her grandmother or grandfather or her aunts will talk to her, and she gets very quiet. Even when she says basic words. …Sometimes we help her to say something, but she says them very quiet. As if she’s afraid to say it wrong. …Even though they are always asking the same question. ‘[Girl], how are you?’ She starts to look at us and what do I say and I don’t know.’ We say, say ‘good’, say ‘al-hamdulillah [thanks be to Allah].’ She says it so softly. (Interview 1, November 16, 2016)

Leyla attributed Selma’s quietness to being put on the spot to speak Arabic, in which she does not feel competent and comfortable. She also mentioned her parents’ reaction to Selma’s not speaking to them in Arabic:

Oh, she doesn’t talk on the phone. When my siblings or my mom or dad or her aunts ask for her over the phone, she speaks really softly. …She barely says a word. …I tell her, ‘[Girl], say, ‘Keif halik?’ (How are you?) She whispers it. Then they say, ‘Keif halik, [girl]. Kweyesa?’ (Are you well?) She whispers, ‘al-hamdulillah.’ That’s it. …Like my parents keep yelling at me, like ‘why doesn’t she talk? You should teach her Arabic so we can talk to her. Like ‘ma’goola? Nih-na gidood-ha mis ga’deen nahko ma’aha.’ (Is it possible? We’re her grandparents, and we don’t speak to her.) …And I do know that when you put her on the spot like ‘speak Arabic,’ she lowers her voice. (Interview 1, November 16, 2016)
Selma’s grandparents expected her to speak to them in Arabic, and they were astonished and disappointed that they could not communicate with her in Arabic. Understanding this expectation, Leyla and Mohamed implemented Arabic-only FLPs.

Furthermore, Leyla and Mohamed sought to preserve their children’s HL since they still had a thought about returning to Libya. Although they considered the current political instability in Libya as the main reason to wait before making a definite plan, they were not in agreement about when they might move. For example, Leyla sounded certain about moving to Libya “if things get better.” She stated:

Oh, eventually yeah. …If things get better, and I pray it gets better, we will definitely go back home… Like nothing in the horizon tells us that we’re going to go back home now, but we don’t know. Maybe after a few years we’ll find that ‘oh, things are better in Libya. Why don’t we just go back home?’ So we have to prepare them in Arabic just in case… The situation in Libya is not stable, but when I think about family - their grandparents, their uncles, their aunts, and family love, I want [the kids] to be in Libya… So when it comes to family, it hurts. They want us to come home, but I have kids. I’m not putting them in the fire there… As soon as situation improves, even if I have the American citizenship, I will return to Libya. (Interview 1, November 16, 2016)

Leyla described Libya’s situation as unstable and precarious. She believed that returning there with their children would be “putting them in the fire.” Although living there was not an option at the moment, Leyla seemed determined to return when conditions improved. This determination was one of the motives for teaching Arabic to her children.

Mohamed was not as certain about returning to Libya and he thought the children should make their own decision to return or stay in the U.S. after graduating from college:

So we wish, truthfully. It’s our country and our people and our friends. And we wish to be with our family. But unfortunately, the conditions over there- there aren’t the basic and essential means of life… So, why I am going home, you know? I can’t. Especially since I now have kids… I would feel that it would be a form of injustice to them if I returned with them to Libya. Maybe after graduation [from college], just go there and they can know their relatives, and after that it is up to them if they want to stay or come back here. (Interview 1, November 16, 2016)

Both parents seemed to be facing a dilemma. They wished to live in their country and be close to family, relatives, and friends, but thinking about their children’s safety, they were delaying decision to return. However, this wish seemed to influence their FLPs to ensure that their children could speak Arabic, which was linguistic capital to be converted to social and cultural capital if they were to move to Libya.
CONCLUSIONS
This study examined the language ideologies and ethnolinguistic aspirations that influenced Leyla and Mohamed’s FLP regarding their daughter’s acquisition and use of Arabic. Our data demonstrated that these ideologies and aspirations point to the intersection between language and religious identity, which is an important aspect in Arabic HL development (Arshaboul, 2004; Engman, 2015; Gomaa, 2011). Both parents significantly valued Arabic as a gateway to becoming a practicing Muslim who could pray in Arabic, communicate with Arabic-speaking Muslims, and access religious texts. For these parents, HL maintenance was inseparable from religious identity maintenance. Therefore, they highlight the potential use of Arabic linguistic capital to gain cultural and social capital. Earlier FLP studies have found that HL use in immigrant families is required to maintain access to cultural heritage and identity formation (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; King, 2013; Dressler, 2010; López et al., 2010; Schwartz, 2010). Prior research on Arabic-speaking immigrant families has pointed to the utmost importance that families place on Arabic language maintenance, particularly for developing a cultural identity as Muslims (Alshaboul, 2004; Ferguson, 2013; Gomaa, 2011). Corroborating this finding, our study foregrounds religious identity as a significant part of parents’ language ideologies and ethnolinguistic aspirations, and examines families’ language maintenance adopting Bourdieu’s framework of capital. This study thus reveals the complex interplay between “linguistic and non-linguistic forces” (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016, p. 697) in parental ideologies that influence the emergence and enactment of FLPs.

Leyla and Mohamed’s FLPs for Selma’s acquisition and use of Arabic emerged as a response to the dominant ideologies in the U.S. and as resistance to cultural colonization, which points to the link between language use within family and broader social dynamics (King, 2000). Both parents were aware of the ideological structures and struggles (Bourdieu, 1986) in the U.S. that influenced Selma’s language practices through schooling and other modes of socialization in this context, and they saw their FLPs as part of the struggle against the powerful impact of external societal pressure. Immigrant families feel this pressure especially when they endeavor to maintain their ethnolinguistic identities and to “survive” in the dominant culture simultaneously (Ferguson, 2013; Otcu, 2010; Xia, 2016). This challenge leads parents to make conscious decisions to distance themselves from the mainstream culture but at the same time to encourage their children to develop skills to function within it. Such decisions were explicit in the case of this family, especially in the hope for their daughter to have a bicultural identity (i.e., Arab-American; Muslim-American) and intercultural competence with the preservation and prioritization of Muslim and Arab identity.

Leyla and Mohamed also justified their FLPs with the premise that Selma’s competence in two languages and cultures would afford her social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Oriyama, 2010) to participate and gain membership in the communities of Arabs or Muslims as well as “Americans.” They recognized the value of English in the U.S. sociocultural context, but they also wanted their children to view Arabic as instrumental to accessing their cultural and religious heritage (i.e. Sunnah, Qur’an) and belonging to the cultural communities of Arabs and Muslims. Therefore, they involved Selma in the activities of Arabic-speaking Muslim communities (i.e. al-jama’a, playing with Arabic-speaking children). This supports Hua and Wei’s (2016) argument that FLPs are “tied to the families’ and individuals’ sense of belonging and imagination” (p. 657). Leyla and Mohamed imagined their children socializing into and becoming part of the Arab and Muslim communities, which requires Arabic linguist capital to be converted to forms of social and cultural capital.
To conclude, the FLPs in Arabic-speaking immigrant families are an under-researched topic. This study addresses this topic and contributes to the growing strand of studies on the specific processes and mechanisms through which the linguistic and non-linguistic forces play out in FLPs (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). It shows how parents’ motivations to reverse intergenerational language shift (Fishman, 1991) are fueled by their commitments to preserve their children’s religious identity, and how religion connects the linguistic and non-linguistic forces in complex ways.

REFERENCES


