Case Study of Three Arab American Language Identity: Bilingual, Binational, or Both

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Growing applied linguistics research has discussed the upsurge of the usage of Arabic language among Arabic speakers in the United States (Bale, 2010; Sehlaoui, 2008); language contact and conflict among Arab Americans (AAs) (Rouchdy, 2002); and how mobility—both virtual and physical—influences their identities (Duff, 2015). This study researches how AAs define their affiliation to the Arabic language in the United States to understand their attitudes on language variety and ethnic diversity, religion and identity, and stereotypes of Arabs. After analyzing interviews, all three AA participants self-selected their identity based on linguistic and physical contexts. Thus, the findings suggest further research on AAs should consider cyber identity as a factor for bilingual speakers and compare it with Arabic speakers in their home country.

Keywords: bilingualism, language identity, nationalism, second language acquisition, second language ideology, transnationalism

Introduction

According to The Evangelical Alliance Mission (2016) website, 45 million people around the world live in diaspora. Also, Blommaert's (2010) emerging approach to sociolinguistics, *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*, has extensively discussed migration and mobility of people that covers many aspects of sociolinguistic research. Maintaining a native language significantly impacts how those immigrants define their language identity in the U.S. community. Some sociolinguistic studies, a growing field of research in applied linguistics, have discussed the upsurge of the usage of Arabic language among Arabic speakers in the United States (Bale, 2010; Sehlaoui, 2008); language contact and conflict among Arab Americans (Rouchdy, 2002); and how both virtual and physical mobility of people between space and place changes individuals' identities (Duff, 2015). Also, with these interconnected linguistic diversities in U.S. society, research in applied linguistics has become much more "fundamentally concerned with transnationalism, mobility, and multilingualism—the movement across cultural, linguistic, and (often) geopolitical or regional borders and boundaries" (Duff, 2015, p. 1). Thus, this research looks at how Arab Americans (AAs) perceive themselves in order to investigate the process of negotiating language identity in a foreign place. In addition to that, this paper examines how AAs define their affiliation to the Arabic language in the U.S. community to better understand their self-selection of identities, such as language ideology, nationality, cultural and social diversity, and religion, as well as their attitudes towards Arabs and the Arabic language. To further understand the demographic population of AAs in the United States, the author is including a brief section of the history of

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AAs. Then the author sheds some light on previous research on the language heritage and language identity of AAs in order to provide context for the new data.

Literature Review

Prior to probe in-depth into the AAs' language identity, transnationalism and/or negotiate ones' nationality in the U.S. community context, we first need to understand and define some related terms as to set the ground for clear rational of this papers' intention. This paper concerns about how AAs language identity, mobility—both virtual and physical—influence their identities with or without affiliation to the Arabic language in the United States.

Probably, understanding identity is the most intriguing topic that interconnect both language development and the establishment of ones' identity across different linguistic borders. According to Johnstone (2008), "identity refers to the outcome of processes by which people index their similarities to and differences from others, sometimes self-consciously and strategically and sometimes as a matter of habit" (p. 151). In applied linguistics research, identity's studies become one of the most central theme to discuss language use and development (Thorne, Sauro, & Smith, 2015) and the sociolinguistic factors that carry. Norton (2013) noted that theorists questioned the influence of the learners' identity on language learning and on the sociocultural development as well. Moreover, identity can play different roles which reflect on the learners being "motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited, without considering that such affective factors are frequently socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing across time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways within a single individual" (p. 3). Much influence of the changing of someone's identity can create what most second language acquisition theorists call it imagined communities and imagined identities, a term coined by Bendeict Anderson (1991). In this context of moving in and living in a different place other than the original or the primitive linguistics background, imagined communities are those new communities of the new place that shape and reconstruct previous "communities and historically constituted relationship, but also a community of the imagination, a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future (p. 3). The range of what could someone's' identity reshaped is model-free, which pertain several individual characteristics, such as language, literacy background, social class, culture norms, socioeconomic factors, and educational background.

In addition to that, a growing need to understand people's identity in applied linguistic research becomes very necessary due to an increase of language users from different backgrounds in schools and universities. Duff (2015) addressed this issue in applied linguistics by referring to the term *transnationalism* to understand identity. She emphasized the following:

> [T]ransnationalism is central to current understandings of identity in applied linguistics, which aims to understand increasingly flexible, often digitally mediated forms of citizenship (or non-citizenship) for migrants who may encounter a series of borders, languages, and interim homes, before settling temporarily or permanently in yet another location. (Duff, 2015, p. 76)

Languages, such as Arabic, English, and Spanish, are transnational (lingua franca) because of the higher number of their speakers around the world. In most parts of the world, including U.S., Arabic speakers for instance face linguistic and social challenges to maintain or retain their language heritage in the non-Arabic speaking countries. Those Arabic speakers (immigrants) may transfer and carry their language and/or social ideology in U.S. context for instance, and with that their identity being manifested or reconstructed according

to the new place linguistic and social policies. De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg (2006) explicated beliefs that play crucial role in the local identity as "categorization processes are central to understanding how the local identities expressed in interaction are both reflective and constitutive of wide social processes, including representations, beliefs and ideologies and social relations between individuals and groups" (p. 274).

Another concept and concentration of this paper entails multilingualism perspective. The term *multilingualism* applied to people in diaspora has been named differently yet refer to the same concept, such as "bilingualism" (Sridhar, 1996), "code-mixing" or "code-switching" (Kamwangamalu, 2010; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010), and "metrolingualism" (Otsuji & Penneycook, 2010). According to Sridhar (1996), the term *multilingual* means:

> Multilingualism can be, and has been, studied both as an individual and a societal phenomenon. As an individual phenomenon, issues such as how one acquires two or more languages in childhood or later, how these languages are represented in the mind and how they are accessed in on-line production and comprehension, become central. As a societal phenomenon, one is concerned with bilingualism in its institutional dimensions, i.e., with issues such as the status and roles of the languages in a given society, attitudes toward languages, determinants of language choice, the symbolic and practical uses of the languages, the correlations between language use and social factors such as ethnicity, religion, class, and others. (Sridhar, 1996, p. 47)

In today's multilingual era, living, learning, and/or acquiring a second language is becoming a communal practice for an ever-increasing number of people around the world (Doughty & Long, 2003; Long, 2015; Sharwood Smith, 1994). Thus, in this paper, a discussion of multilingual concept from individual and societal perspectives will be pondered to look at both development of AAs' language and cultural identities. According to recent studies, more than three million Arabic speakers in the United States speak Arabic as their native language (Arab American Institute, 2016; Sehlaoui, 2008). While these statistics are changing, Arabic language heritage and usage among AA speakers resumes its fact as yet more immigrants flee their home countries and "are forced to cross linguistic borders to escape wars, despotic regimes, disease, drought, famine, religious persecution, ethnic cleansing, abject poverty, and climate change" (Long, 2015, p. 4; Ferguson, 2013; Garcia-Sanchez, 2010; Nagel & Staeheli, 2004).

While it is very common for every native language user to crave his or her own language in a diaspora, there is also a certain need and motivation to continue practicing one's native language. In this particular population of immigrants, AAs have been in the United States since the 1880s when they arrived in huge numbers and continued to use the Arabic language (Sehlaoui, 2008). Adding to that, the major concentrations of AAs in the United States are mainly located in Detroit, MI; Los Angeles, CA; Washington, DC; New York, NY; and the San Francisco Bay area in California (Arab American Institute, 2016).

According to Arab American Institute Foundation, Arab Americans constitute an ethnicity made up of several waves of immigrants from the Arabic speaking countries of Southwestern Asia and North Africa that have been settling in the United States since the 1880s. The use of Arabic language in diaspora, more specifically in U.S. context, fluctuate to identify and claim language ideology and identity by first-, second-, and third-generation Arab Americans (Rouchdy, 2002). Additionally, Bale (2010) stated that a very significant change to maintain and cultivate Arabic language in the United States began after World War II. Hence, the early Arab migration to the United States began in the 19th century, and the majority of them came from "what was then called greater Syria" (Rouchdy, 2002, p. 133). According to Bale, very few comprehensive studies talk about Arabic language programs in terms of their contributions to Arabic as a medium of communication

in the United States. He proposed some general frameworks that might help to address many unanswered questions and fill research gaps to approach Arabic language in the United States and address some implications for further study. Such implications include the roles of Arabic language practices among learners, the extent to which these Arabic programs contribute to maintenance of the language in the United States, and "what community resources are available to aid in that project" (Bale, 2010, p. 148). Thus, in this paper, investigating AAs' language identity with the attachments of transnationalism and bilingualism issues surrounding it will fit and fill the research gap pertaining to language heritage studies in the U.S.

Method and Design

This qualitative paper gathered data using several instruments. The first instrument is the Language Heritage of Arab Americans Questionnaire (LHAAQ) that the author developed and designed for this research. It includes demographic survey items, educational and language background items, and language identity items. Second, the author conducted interviews to investigate how a certain group of AAs in the United States describe their Arabic language identity and examine what sociolinguistic features these groups practice. In other words, is the keeping of one's identity to a certain language of origin related to cultural, religions, social or is it tied to family and relatives' backgrounds? This paper is built on several studies, such as Rouchdy (2002), Bale's (2010) research, and Sehlaoui's (2008). Furthermore, a well-known publication by Suleiman (2003) will be considered to follow his description and framework in order to cover what has been studied about AAs.

Case Study of AAs

This paper collected interviews from three AAs who live in the United States, in order to investigate how AAs define themselves in terms of their language identity in the United States and to explore their social and cultural influences with regard to their Arabic nationality. This research tries to answer the following questions:

• How do AAs define their language identity in the U.S. community?

• What are their language practices and uses that shape their language identity?

• How does AAs' language identity differ to speak in Arabic between first- and second-generation immigrants in the United States?

• What is the role of the AAs' language they use?

• How does bilingualism/multilingualism shift or empower individuals' identities to choose a linguistic community in a foreign context?

• Lastly, to what extent AAs maintain or influence by the transnationalism, mobility, language heritage, identity, and/or multilingualism while interacting and living in the L2 environment?

In answering these questions, this paper will look at different interdisciplinary sociolinguistics areas, such as language heritage, identity, transnationalism, mobility, and multilingualism. Looking at these particular frameworks has directed the author's choice to choose certain studies that touch on language heritage and identity of AAs in particular and how they define their nationality in the United States.

Participants

This study had three participants, all of whom were native female Arabic speakers who had lived in the United States for over 10 years. They were interviewed, and the interviews were recorded. All participants descended from Jordan, where their family originally came from. The youngest participant was a sophomore student at the University of Memphis, and the other two were middle-aged women. They all spoke Arabic and

English fluently. All participants' language proficiency (Arabic and English) have been identified by self-selecting items from the questionnaire and the interviews' questions. The following sections will describe each participant separately based on the interview data that were gathered.

The first participant is called Yusra. Yusra considered herself to be a second-generation AA. She immigrated with her husband in the early 1980s. She is from Jordan, worked as a hairstylist for over 16 years, and has three children: one boy and two girls. Yusra stated that she speaks mixed Arabic and English at home with family members and sometimes at work with Arab customers—"whatever comes easier", she said. She reported that there is no certain language policy at home with her family, and she uses the two languages equally. When Yusra being asked about whether she defines herself as AA, she replied at first saying, "I never thought about that", but then she described her identity as having dual-identity and that it depends on her situation or the context of her interaction. For instance, she stated that she identifies more as Arabic at home whereas she wears an American identity outside of the home. She emphasized that she likes being both and not one or the other. Also, she related her changeable choice of identity because she likes being American, yet at the same time wanted to keep her own original (Arabic) identity that she grew up with. Yusra also wanted her children to learn Arabic, but she stated that two of her children can barely read Arabic text.

The second participant, Wesam (originally a Palestinian citizen), is a Ph.D. student at University of Memphis in the Instruction and Curriculum Leadership program. She has been in the United States since 1999 when she came with her husband to complete his academic studies. Wesam speaks Arabic fluently and completed high school in Jordan. In answering the question about how she would describe her identity in the United States, Wesam chose to be a "Muslim American". She related this term as when she moved earlier to the United States and how this identity ties to her social activity and gathering with other Muslim community members. She reported, "So I found myself directing my kids to be Muslim Americans and have American nationality". Wesam illustrated that she intentionally uses Arabic language a lot at home so that her kids listen to it more often. The Arabic language practices seem very active at home by enforcing a language policy with her kids. She also mentioned that her family usually travels to Jordan every summer to help her kids know their country of origin and to be exposed to the Arabic lifestyle. Wesam made a distinction between her kids and herself by stating, "they foregrounded their American identity first and the Arab identity being at the back of their mind". She believed that language identity comes from a religious tie and social practices that she usually prefers to describe herself with.

The third participant is Rand, a 20-year-old female originally from Jordan who speaks Arabic and English fluently. She is also learning Spanish. She was born in Amman, Jordan and then moved to the United States with her family when she was three years old. Rand studies biology as her major and minors in Arabic. She stated that her native language is Arabic and described her nationality as "I am Palestinian so that would be one and then Arab obviously". She had an Arabic tutor while she was in kindergarten and from there she continued learning Arabic. Also, Rand has some friends who speak Arabic and she communicates very often with them. In terms of her language identity, Rand said, "Well it is important because I want to keep my Arab identity along with my American identity, and I think they both play an important role—that way I don't lose one or the other". Rand believes that native language is the best indicator of one's identity. In general, Rand prefers being an Arab individual as she perceived it in the U.S. community. She thinks that being able to speak different languages is "a plus" and she is highly motivated to get a job in the Arabic sector or market. Furthermore, Rand suggests that U.S. schools should offer Arabic language as an option for students.

Findings and Discussion

In this discussion, the language identity of the AAs will be discussed in three phases or attachments. First, how AAs describe their language ideology based on the nationality of their origin. Second phase discusses what roles transnationalism and mobility (based on Duff, 2015) play in the case of the three participants in this study. Then the third phase will touch on bilingual identity factors that may or may not ratify the choice(s) of language identity among AAs. These linguistic connections among language and identity with other factors are strongly interwoven in multiple modern societies around the world, but this will not be covered in this article.

First, Arab nationality and the position of one's identity are usually claimed by referring to two major categories that individuals describe themselves. According to Suleiman (2003), there are two types of identity in which people keep classifying themselves to be part of a certain group. These two types are collective and/or personal or individual identity. Kanno (2003) defined identity as "a person's understanding of who they are" (p. 2). Hence, the description of identity falls differently based on people's social and cultural backgrounds and even at the individual level. Additionally, to identify Arabic language identity among Arabic speakers, for instance, we need to consider several nations and nationalities in order to classify the participants' language ideology; from there we can draw a conclusion about their language ideology. For instance, if you ask any Arab individual where he or she comes from, that individual will start marking his or her nationality (e.g., Egyptian, Jordanian, Saudi) first and then tie it to the general Arabic nationality (Arabian or Arabic). This way of expressing oneself has been clear in the case with Rand when answering the question about how she would describe her nationality and she replied, "I am Palestinian so that would be one and then Arab obviously". The reason Arabs tend to express themselves this way is that they first mark their nationality, ethnicity, language ideology, and sometimes sociopolitical position with their country of origin to state their belonging to a certain Arabic society. According to Suleiman, due to the past and current political conflicts and the shifting of economic power in the Arab world, the preference to mark a country nationality before Arab nationality is to differentiate between the Arab states or countries. More explanation and details of this Arab nationality era appeared in the pioneering work, *Al-Lugha bayn Al-qawmiyya wa-l-AAlamiyya* (The Language Between Nationality and Globalization), by the Egyptian linguist Ibrahim Anis (1970). Suleiman expounded on Anis's conclusion that Arab nationalism was constructed based on the Arabic language before Islam emerged. Then since Islam began, Islamic identity has been strongly tied to the Arabic language to mark their marriage as a distinct ideology and the identity of most Arab nations. However, Arab-Christians were also seen as having political position since the early times of the emergence of Islam. The construction of nationality then changed after a long history of political fights and shifts in the maps of Arabian regions.

Second, transnationalism, personal histories, and mobility of people in relation to identity research have focused on learners, sojourners, immigrants, diaspora members, and language users whether face-to-face or through virtual interaction among a real or imagined community (Duff, 2015). Attachments to a certain society can be signified by what language identity people carry and vice versa. The term *transnationalism* has been defined by Vertovec (2009) as "the crossing of cultural, ideological, linguistic, and geopolitical borders and boundaries of all types but especially those of nation-states" (Duff, 2015, p. 57). Speaking of the transnationalism of the participants in this research, all participants have been moving culturally, linguistically, socially, and even between borders of the two languages Arabic and English respectively. In this transition of place and space, AAs tend to visit their place of origin annually. For instance, Wesam stated that her family

usually visits Jordan once every year to educate her kids about their country of origin. The same case happens with Rand as she moves between the two linguistic boundaries occasionally. However, Yusra follows the normal habits of Arabic individuals except that she interacts more with native English speakers on a daily basis; she did not say whether she visits her country regularly. This type of transnationalism that Wesam and Rand do results in fluctuation of language identity based on "the place" of origin to maintain their native language. Hence, their actual daily language practices simultaneously represent dual-identity. There is a shred factor with all the participants which is referencing their future as Americans due to job hunting and lifestyle preference to them. The participants deploy of the American culture appeared in the essence of securing their future and be part of the U.S. community. For instance, Wesam and Yusra have obtained a job which entitle daily communication with native speakers, whereas Rand is still studying at U.S. college.

The findings also indicate that individuals tend to adjust their identity based on the language they use in a particular context. In the cases of Yusra and Wesam, for instance, they both play a role in educating their children to speak Arabic at home, and both have balanced the two languages socially. They are also concerned about keeping their Arabic identity as long as they can.

Third, carrying two identities makes much more sense when it comes to living in a second language environment. Kanno (2003) emphasized that bilingual speakers usually hold two identities where the two identities are determined by the surrounding environment. This triggers the importance of the society and the social practices that those participants are involved in. The participants have equal opportunities to socialize in Arabic and in English. Also, all three participants have equal and advanced proficiency in Arabic and English. For instance, Rand has many Arabic friends with whom she practices Arabic and also attends Friday prayer every week along with her family members. The reciprocal rapport between language and identity affects people's ideology and choices of who they are. However, in this study the participants present their national identity as Arabic as they focus on their sociolinguistic experience from a personal point of view while negotiating American identity based on the social context. In other words, analysis of the participants' data did not confirm what Kanno discussed as the two conflicting characteristics of the Japanese returnees are bilingual and bicultural. However, an emerging characteristic of identity seems obvious here: the religious identity that those participants adhere to since it is their background identity. For instance, both Yusra and Wesam relate to their family education at home in Arabic using Islamic characteristics to fulfill some proficiency in the Arabic language. Additionally, the findings of this study suggest further research on AAs should consider cyber identity as a factor for bilingual speakers and compare it with Arabic speakers in their home country. Thus, this intertextuality of ones' identity may reflect and impact bilingual speakers to shift their dual identities into different contexts.

The Table 1 illustrates the three participants' Arabic profile according to their language identity and transnationalism with closer scope to some linguistics features as elicited from the interviews.

Table 1

Profile of the Three Arabic Participants' Linguistic Community Outline

Linguistics feature	Specification	Linguistic analysis & findings
Language background/demographic info.	L1 Arabic language, L2 English	Language maintenance
Language ideology	Use of Arabic language during religious and cultural meeting/gathering	Restricted at home and with family, relatives (solidarity to group of the same L1 background) and ancestral ties. Participants meet in a weekly social gathering.
Language identity	Considered national identity as Arabic while negotiate American identity	Arabic-Muslim individuals and bilingual speakers.
Language policy	Maintain Arabic at certain community of practice and at home	Keep L1 spoken language at home. Also, two participants always retain Arabic language with their kids.
Social and cultural factors	Arabic culture and Arabian social community settings	Social & cultural background influence speaker's identity and linguistics affiliation. Arabic cultural norms and artifacts presented at home.
Group solidarity and belonging	Attending Arabic classes and community gathering weekly	Ties to; family heritage, religious practices, Arabic social affiliation, and nationality of origin.

Implications

Due to the fact that language, identity, culture, and nationality can be discussed in myriad ways, understanding one's language identity can be an enigmatic process. Also, further considerations, such as people's mobility in time and space, cannot be easily managed or configured due to cyber spaces that have created multiple societies that people can live in for a very short time. For instance, Lam (2014) argued that virtual connection can have impact on the literacy development of the immigrants which in turn establish the transnational context of both social and cultural capital. Cultural factors too factor heavily in choosing one's linguistic identity. Thus, this research suggests that Arabic language identity studies should be expanded to a bigger population since most of AAs try to preserve their language identity in the U.S. context. Also, due to increasing numbers of Arabic speakers and the varieties of Arabic nationalities who live in the United States, description and analysis of each national identity are needed to help schools, universities, educators, caregivers, and teachers to be aware of the sub-diversities of AAs.

Thus, she strongly recommends further investigation of language identity in relation to ideology, culture, religion, socioeconomic status, and education to better understand the new society members we live with today. This particular study specifically adhered to Arab (Jordanian) nationality, which could possibly be duplicated for other Arab nationalities to increase the research data on this particular issue.

Conclusion

This paper represents an eagerness to understand how certain immigrants define their language identity and ideology in a foreign place. The author has explored how AAs define and reflect on their language identity. Additionally, a key element of this project has been to look at how AA individuals maintain their Arabic identity from a linguistic standpoint. This paper's case studies were conducted on three female AAs. Furthermore, the author investigated how AAs define their affiliation to the Arabic language in the U.S. community to understand their self-selection of identities, such as language ideology, nationality, cultural and social diversity representations, and religion, as well as their attitudes toward Arabs and the Arabic language.

In conclusion, the findings and the analysis were dispersed into three phases or attachments to describe AAs' language identity. These attachments are nationality, transnationalism, and bilingualism. Each of these

attachments was seen as identity marker or selector in which participants clearly chose their language identity in multiple contexts. Lastly, adding these attachments to other related factors can increase the pool of sociolinguistic research data for future development.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

About the self and language background

Would you please introduce yourself?

What is your native language?

Where are you from?

What is your job?

What is your ethnicity?

What languages do you speak?

Do you speak Arabic fluently?

Do you speak Arabic at home and at work?

About language contact in US

How long have you lived in the United States?

How would you define your Identity as Arab American? Why?

Which AAs 'Generation' do you consider yourself?

Also, how do you view your language identity in US?

How do you perceive yourself within US society?

About language identity in US

Tell us where and why you want to keep practice your native language?

Do you think A.A. speakers should continue teach their kids Arabic?

Do you think, that Arabic language should be taught at school in US? How is it important to you to send your kids to Arabic school to learn Arabic?

Appendix B: Case Study's Questionnaire

The questionnaire of this study can be found by following this link https://goo.gl/7LyFrQ.