

Parents' First Language is Their Children's Second Language.

Language Loss: Arabic is a Case

Samir Al-Jumaily¹

¹ Department of English Language, College of Arts & Letters, Cihan University, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Correspondence: Samir Al-Jumaily, roellandsplaats 41/3813HS/Amersfoort/The Netherlands. E-mail: sbrother10@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study tackles the problem of heritage language loss or shift among immigrants' children. It is hypothesized that not only the heritage language which may shift, but the family values and sociocultural behaviours as well. The study tries to understand and further explain the process of language loss and maintenance. It drives at investigating how far the following statement true is: it is quite common among researchers and scholars that if children become fluent in L2, L1 consequently declines. The paper focuses on the Arabic language loss or attrition among the Arab immigrants' children. It begins with an introduction in order to provide the reader with a brief account to the process of language loss alongside with some definitions. In addition, it investigates the factors responsible for language loss, and simultaneously the negative consequences of this loss. Accordingly, the study attempts to explore whose responsibility the heritage language maintenance is- parents, schools, politicians, Arabic governments, or the Arab communities? Worthy to mention that the advantage of bilingualism is highly appreciated and considered in this study since it is a plus factor in this domain.

Keywords: language loss, language maintenance, heritage language, bilingualism, culture, values, circumspect parents, immigrants, dominant communities

1. Introduction

People may depart their homeland to live in foreign countries for different reasons such as war, economic, political, religious, or ethnic. These immigrants may encounter various difficulties and problems one of which is the loss or shift of their mother language. It is supposed that in such new dominant communities, it is not only the language that changes but the cultural and social behaviour as well. In many cultures, such a loss of social status or face is difficult to overcome.

Ada & Zubizarret (2001:229) believe that when children and their families cannot communicate fully, family values and culture may not develop a crucial sense of belonging and connectedness that comes through family relationships. Although parents use L1 (first language) in the home, their children may not be fluently proficient. "many of the familiesdid in fact choose to use the heritage language at home, and yet still found that their children were losing fluency", said Kondo (1998).

According to Kouritzin (1999:11), Verhoeven and Beschoten (1986) define language loss as the lack of L1 development, delay of L1 development, or a progressive loss of previously acquired language ability. Language loss and shift is increasing exponentially worldwide today as speakers shift from speaking their L1 to speaking the dominant language of the wider society in which they live. This process faces many minority language groups, particularly those who have migrated to a foreign country. It is a worrying and more serious issue when the heritage language (HL) is not used beyond home or within an isolated small group of speakers. Language loss is a true threat for the HL of parents, when their children use L2 (second language) on a daily basis inside or outside the family domain.

Being a father of two children – Qamar, a boy of 9 years, and Shushu, a girl of 8 years, the writer of this paper noticed that his children began to master L2 over L1, specifically the boy, 3 years ago. This means that when they

were 6 and 5 years old respectively. Therefore, he has taken the burden to carry out this study in order to investigate the reasons behind his children's HL attrition.

Since Arabic language is our concern, no research or study has been found that tackles this serious issue except a limited study carried out by Dr. A. El.Assiati, a Netherlander of Moroccan origin who has studied L1 (Moroccan Arabic variety-dialect) loss which is also limited in its scope. Because the researcher, the writer of this paper, is from the same sociolinguistic and cultural background, he enthusiastically has taken the onus, beyond being biased, to achieve this study.

Broader than the above mentioned study, this paper studies the problem of Arabic language loss, by the Arab immigrants in general, no matter which dialect is as well as to investigate whether parents is a helpful factor for the maintenance of the HL or the opposite. And, is it true that if children become fluent in L2, L1 consequently declines?

Language loss was a neglected issue in the field of research (Wong, 1991; Pan & Berko-Gleason, 1986; Merino, 1983; Oxford, 1982). Several theorists and researchers like Richard Lamber and Barbara Freed (1982), Oxford (1982), and Pan and Berko-Gleason (1986) assure that language skills loss as a field of research established and took place at the 1980 conference organized by Richard Lamber and Barbara Freed. Later on, many researchers did a great job investigating language shift or loss among language minority children. The momentum was to know how and why language shift occurs, what ages are most susceptible, the short and long term effects, and the significance of loss to those who experience it (Wong, 1991; Kouritzin, 1997).

Researchers use different terminology and categories to describe language loss, such as arrested development of L1, subtractive bilingualism, lack of development of L1, semilingualism or deficiency in both L1 and L2. On the contrary, the successful development of two languages is termed as additive bilingualism. Generally speaking, language loss is the familiar term used to refer to the lack of development or decline of ability in L1 (Schiff-Myers, 1992; Schiff-Myers et al., 1993; Cummins, 1994).

Conversely, a number of researchers prefer to focus on the success of language maintenance rather than on the failure. In the sense, identifying success determining factors can lead to promotion in other children. So, by assessing the underlying factors cause language loss, the minority language speakers in majority language environments might avoid those factors that contribute to L1 loss. Therefore, this paper addresses the vital linguistic link to their culture which children need and calls for sensitivity to the issue of HL maintenance. Further, the paper will give specific suggestions as to how to incorporate support for the children's HL into the daily life. Parents were required to answer the questions below before their participation in a discussion session.

1. Why and how does language loss occur?
2. What should Arabic community be doing to maintain their L1?
3. Can Arabic language be retained alongside with the national or dominant language of the host country?
4. Is it necessary and beneficial to maintain L1? If yes, why? How?
5. How do parents teach their children cultural and moral values?
6. How can parents negotiate with their children without access to high level language skills of either?
7. Which language do parents use in the home?
8. How do children respond to L1?
9. Which language do children speak to each other at home?
10. Which language do young adults use to speak to children?
11. Do parents really worry about L1 loss by their children?
12. What strategies do circumspect parents usually practice to maintain L1?
13. What does this loss mean for families when we know that language is a powerful carrier of values and being the vehicle for socialization?
14. What does it mean for them when language is also one of the most, if not the most, significant symbols of any culture?
15. What happens when young children are unable to communicate with their parents?

During the interviews held with the parents, individually, they gave the same answers to some of the above mentioned questions. The last question is the central one that made the researcher and a lot of keen parents do worry

about the identity, culture, and values of their children in the host countries. Definitely, there are crucial and serious reasons behind this loss of communication. Immigrant parents strongly assure that they have encountered a lot of pressures, whether governmental or social, to use at home, the national language of the host country which consequently undermines L1.

According to Wong (2000) language loss occurs in immigrants' children because of both internal and external pressures. External pressures emanate from a society that sees cultural and linguistic differences as a negative light and generally treats immigrants with hostility. Almost daily, newspapers and other media report that some people in the USA and European countries are against immigrants, bilingual education, affirmative action, and any other language but theirs. Consequently, this led to the designation of the immigrants' native language and those who speak it as "pariah" (Trueba, 2002). Practically, immigrants including the researcher have faced a lot of pressures to use the dominant majority language (L2) at home. Many of the children's teachers in different cities and classes under the pretext it is good and important for the development of the children's linguistic skills of L2, they persistently implored to use this language at home. In accordance, researchers confirm that many national teachers recommend and request that parents speak the majority language (L2) at home in order not to confuse their children and to save them from difficulties in school (Kouritzin, 1997, 1999, 2000; Schecter & Bayley, 1997). It is mistakenly believed that the ongoing use of parents' language at home and in school will lead to interference with the national language of the country where they live. This matches Portes & Hao perspectives when they confirm that "The influence of English-only advocates is increasing, perhaps partly due to the mistaken belief that continued use of the primary language at home and in schools will interfere with English language learning" (Portes & Hao, 1998).

Valenzuela (1999) powerfully illustrates the negative consequences of the USA educational system for many Mexican and Mexican American students. He concludes: "I came to locate the problem of achievement squarely in school-based relationships and organizational structures and policies designed to erase students' culture I became increasingly convinced that schooling is organized in ways that subtract resources from Mexican youth". This could be valid to Arabs as well.

Some researchers are greatly concerned owing to the huge pressures practiced to assimilate to the dominant culture and lead young children to stop learning the language of their own families (Wastie, 1994). Young children of a family newly arrived to a foreign country speak L1 to their parents whereas a toddler who is still not yet talking can understand simple words and directions in L1. The time children enter school and a toddler goes to an L2 speaking child care taker (ibid), both will be exposed to L2 rather than L1. This last remark regarding toddlers is not totally correct in case the mother takes care of her child and communicates with him/her using L1. According to Wastie, a toddler goes to an L2 speaking child care provider (national), L2 becomes his main means of communication due to spending hours with that child care provider. Meanwhile, young children are learning L2 at school, from their teachers, friends, and by watching television too.

The researcher's daughter, called Shushu, was speaking L1 efficiently before joining school compared with her brother, called Qamar, already joined school. It is familiar that immigrant children who attend school, socialize with other children, and become language brokers for their families. They begin to internalize pressures to assimilate and to speak the country's national language (Wong, 2000). "Many immigrant families arrive in countries where their L1 is not the dominant language; their children begin to learn L1 prior to starting school. As soon as they enter the school system; however, they begin to learn the dominant language and their L1 starts to erode" (Guardado, 2002).

Qamar has gradually shown better proficiency of L2 over L1. This really concerns the researcher a lot. Orellena et al. (2000) confirm that while children in the primary grades speak mostly the parents' L1 at school, at home, and in social situations, older children gradually begin to speak L2 and resist speaking their L1, and some even say they hate the HL of their parents. The writer of this paper heard the word hate of L1 from his children regularly. Accordingly, he made up his mind to support the HL and let not his children lose it. We will later mention the measures and actions taken by both parents. The above mentioned lines show clearly that school plays a great role in attrition or retention of L1. Worth (2003) assures that when most children attend the national governmental schools, it is potential that language loss happens enormously. Schools which make the chance available for using the minority language by children and adults will certainly assist in maintaining the minority language. In the sense, bilingual education is highly recommended for L1 maintenance (May, 2002). Due to the upsurge importance of bilingual education in HL maintenance, it will broadly be discussed later after knowing the factors responsible for HL attrition or loss.

2. Factors Responsible for L1 Loss or Attrition

Several factors are really anticipated to be responsible for language loss in migrant communities. Some of them go to the social climate of the host country and attribute toward minority languages and some others relate more specifically to family and minority community dynamics which, of course, are influenced in part by the larger social milieu. Children may face many challenges in maintaining their home language and culture. They are subject to tough assimilative pressures at school, mainly from their classmates and teachers, devaluation of the parents' mother tongue and heritage, and limited support for learning home language and literacy. They may get the feeling of being different, and their language or accent is ridiculed. Therefore, they begin to develop a sense of shame about their language and culture, and work on suppressing it. These challenges and barriers increase as children grow older and gradually get removed from their roots, and this can have devastating consequences for many of them. Apart from losing their home language and culture or having them diluted, children are becoming figuratively if not literally estranged from their families and communities (Wong, 2000:39) and hopefully to be entirely native speakers of the majority language. They likely face an increasing risk of school dropout as well.

Tse (1998a) gives David Mura, a person of Japanese origin living in the USA, as an example, particularly when he mentions David's words. "I certainly didn't want to be thought of Japanese-American, I was American, pure and simple. I was proud I didn't know Japanese that English was my sole tongue".

Some imperfect HL speakers (often a younger sibling) report that their efforts to speak the HL are met with corrections and even ridicule by more competent HL speakers, a reaction that discourages the use of the HL, and thus results in less input and even less competence. Krashen (1998a) presents the following example to show the linguistic shyness due to correction and ridicule which discourages the use of the HL. "I began to realize as I spoke Spanish to my relatives, they would constantly correct my grammar or pronunciation. Of course, since I was a fairly young child, the mistakes I made were 'cute' to them and they would giggle and correct me. This would annoy me to no end. I wasn't trying to be 'cute'; I was trying to be serious. My relatives would say, 'You would never know that you are the daughter of an Argentine'. Comments like these along with others are what I now believe shut me off to Spanish". Children may feel uncomfortable speaking their home language due to:

1. social and peer pressures;
2. family encouragement and influence, and
3. the influence of school (Worth, 2003).

Kouritzin agrees with Worth regarding the 3 above mentioned reasons, and he adds some more other reasons like the devaluating of the primary language in the community as well as the lack of prestige and/or rejection of the L1 culture by the dominant community. Conversely, some others feel pitiful and blame themselves for not speaking the HL better. In a kind of reverse shame, language rejection may also occur or be intensified as a result of discouragement over one's lack of knowledge of the HL; non-fluent child try not to speak L1 at all for fear being criticized. Frustrated, someone says: "My self-esteem reached an all-time low in college. Several of my peers made well-meaning, but harsh comments upon hearing my Spanish. This was the final blow. I was then I made the decision that I wouldn't speak unless I could speak fluently, grammatically correct, and with a proper native accent, I couldn't even feel comfortable describing myself as bilingual on my resume. It had to add limited proficiency in parentheses to easy my conscious ... I was ashamed of being Puerto Rican and living in a bilingual home and never learning Spanish the only conclusion I come to was that it was somehow my fault" (Krashen, 2000).

This stage leads to what is called Ethnic Emergence. In this stage minority group members get interested in their ethnic heritage. According to Tse (1998a) those in this stage may be quite motivated to develop their competence in the HL of which keen parents are extremely proud. It is popularly assumed that immigrants are resisting L2 acquisition in the host countries and are holding tight onto their 1st language and culture. This is not totally correct. Parents love that their children become highly efficient speaking L2 provided not to forget their HL. But unfortunately and disappointedly, parents cannot maintain this crux fully. Some parents show their great happiness to see their children speak L2 in the time their HL is getting eroded. Therefore, parents may not communicate efficiently on an intimate level with their children who may not have a good grasp of the HL to bridge this communication gap. In addition, children may not maintain their parental language due to little talks they practice with their parents because of not having enough vocabulary items to express themselves well.

Portes & Hao (1998) believe that this results out of the lack of input in the HL. A number of studies assures that HL competence is related to parental use, however; appears to be necessary but not sufficient. Moreover, Hinton (1999) is certain that once being isolated from other HL speakers, competence diminishes. Conversely, those who pay

regular visits to the country of origin or live close to other HL speakers, more often have higher HL competence (Demos, 1988).

It has been mentioned earlier that a lot of pressures often exercise by the majority community calling immigrants to make a sharp break with the past. Accordingly, some language minority group members go through a stage in which the desire to integrate into the target culture is so great and simultaneous there is apathy towards or even rejection of the HL (Tse, 1998a). Tse calls this stage Ethnic Ambivalence or Ethnic Evasion. This stage, typically, occurs during childhood and adolescence and may extend into adulthood. These people, particularly in this stage, have little interest in the HL and may even avoid using it. Tse (1998a) gives Marino Shao a student of Chinese origin living in the USA as an example to support his view. "Mario Shao, recounted how her knowledge of Chinese was a source of shame. She recalled that when she was in elementary school; 'if I had friends over, I purposefully speak English to my parents. Normally, we only spoke Chinese at home. Because of the presence of non-Chinese, I used purposefully speak English". Marino's words are highly similar and applicable to both, Qamar and Shushu. They were acting exactly the same.

May (2002) reports that Skutnabb describes the process of language decline and loss as a form of linguistic genocide. He also attributes language loss to three major reasons; some have been already mentioned in which he agrees with other researchers. In his view, the following are the major reasons responsible for HL loss:

1. the increasing pressure on minority language speakers to the majority language, particularly in formal language domains;
2. a period of bilingualism in which both languages continue to be spoken at the same time. Later on, the number of minority language speakers decreases particularly among the younger generation as well as a considerable decrease in the fluency of the speakers due to the less spoken minority language. May (ibid) finds that parents in this stage are responsible for this decrease because of speaking, continuously, their home language to each other and older relatives, but not to their children. Likewise, children will certainly get engaged in using the majority or dominant language to speak to their parents and to each other unless the L1 is actively maintained in the home;
3. the replacement of the minority language which may occur over the course of two or three generations, and sometimes less. "The majority language may be remembered by a small (almost always, older) group of language speakers, but it is no longer spoken as a wider means of communication. The end result of this process particularly the world over where there has been a transfer from the first (or minority) language to the second (or majority) language, rather than the ongoing maintenance of both" (ibid).

There are some other factors behind language loss or attrition which are no less important compared with the ones said before. Someone gets married with a woman/man from the host country. Consequently, this will certainly influence the children's linguistic skills development of the parent's L1. It happens a lot, Arab individuals get married with women of different ethnic, sociolinguistic, and cultural background. Children of such mixed marriages are definitely affected by loss or lack of development of language skills. Moreover, due to hard economic circumstances of immigrants in the host countries, both parents may get busy the whole day owing to the work environments. Inevitably, they send their children to schools or child care providers. In this case, children will have little communication with their parents. Therefore, they, almost all the day, use L2 at school or with the child care provider which will result in L1 attrition. Further, according to the regulations of some countries and in order to get naturalized, immigrants should meet one of the requirements called acculturation. Acculturation is the process in which members of one culture group adopt the beliefs and behaviours of another group. Although acculturation is usually in the direction of a minority group adopting habits and language patterns of the dominant group, acculturation can be reciprocal, that is, the dominant group also adopts patterns typical of the minority group. Assimilation of one culture group into another is realized by changes in language preference, adoption of common attitudes and values, membership in common social groups and institutions, and loss of separate political or ethnic identification (Web, 1997).

3. Bilingual Education

Parents are different in their perspectives regarding their children's academic education. Some prefer to have their children in monolingual education. Krashen (1999) confirms that some parents want children in English only programs in the USA because they want them to learn English (see Shannon, 2002). Unz states that these parents do not want their children to learn their 1st language while they are learning English (ibid). Conversely, other parents

not only support bilingual model of all available programs, but dual language or two-way immersion programs as well. There are different theories on the best way to teach a child to use two languages. Most researchers agree that a child who is exposed to two languages at an early age can naturally and simultaneously learn to use both languages. Bilingual education builds upon the students' cognitive development in his/her native language as a means to develop conceptual skills in two languages. Bilingualism is a social and linguistic phenomenon. Bilingualism is neither rare nor unusual. According to Web (1997), Harding & Riley (1990) assure that more than half of the world's population is bilingual. It is inextricably linked with the children's parents' values and culture which represent their personal identity, culture and ethnicity, biculturalism on a natural level, and multiculturalism. As the world becomes more divers, we find ourselves surrounded by numerous languages and cultural events of various ethnic backgrounds. Learning another language at any early age opens a window to diversity as well as cultural understanding and appreciation in this increasingly global society. The rise of bilingual education seems a giant step in the direction of valuating students' home language (Worth, 2003). Students who develop strong linguistic and academic skills in their language are better able to learn academic content in a 2nd language (Moll & Dworin, 1996) and to achieve academic success (Reyes, 2001b).

The bilingual education has its own proponents as well as opponents. Some others look at it as an assisting program getting children gradually approximate L2. Velazquez (1998) reports that most bilingual programs in the USA are transitional and gradually increase English language usage. Researchers report that proponents of bilingual education believe that the benefits of being bilingual are great, not only in terms of opportunities and increased cultural awareness but in terms of social cognitive development.

Circumspect parents are highly willing to have their children in dual language immersion programs because they want them to become bilingual. The English speaking Hispanic parents in the USA, for example, choose the dual programs for their children so that they could integrate into a culture that had been inaccessible at least linguistically to them (Craig, 1996). In some countries, international schools are available which consequently promote bilingualism in children. In the USA, children can be enrolled in bilingual classes if they are not proficient in the language of the host country. These schools often teach in a language other than the majority language, catering to students from all over the world as well as many host country nationals (Wakabayashi, 2002). In an individual class a teacher provides materials and instructions in both languages. Scholars assure that bilingual education is highly considered by many. It is the best way to assist students in grasping basic concepts and it is a step needed before immersion in the L2 curriculum (Velanzquez, 1998). These bilingual classes are generally geared to move children from their HL to the L2 simultaneously letting L1 not to be attrited (Wakabayashi, 2002). But still, schools, which make the chance available for using the majority language by children and adults, are considered as assisting factors in maintaining the minority language. In the sense, bilingual education is highly recommended for L1 maintenance. In the process of bilingual education and L2 development, it is believed that educating children in their 1st language can help their acquisition of another language. This is a counter intuitive aspect to some people. These people state – if we want children to acquire the L2, why not teach them L2? They report that using and developing L1 can help L2 development a great deal. Literacy developed in the primary language transfers to L2.

Arab children, living in the western countries, are deprived of the opportunity of having or joining bilingual schools. But, mosques, cultural and social societies could be very appropriate institutions to maintain the HL through managing special classes and activities wherein Arabic is the language of instruction. Practically, some immigrant parents in the Netherlands, for example, voluntarily and enthusiastically arranged Sunday classes for their children in which the medium of instruction is Arabic. They took this initiative and challenge which led successfully to expose their children to Arabic language input. Consequently, children were highly motivated to learn the HL. Children should have the opportunity to meet groups of friends of similar ethnic identity and sociolinguistic background, which awakened a new desire to improve their HL skills. When there are no limits to access, children acquire language naturally through exposure and interaction. They do not need to be explicitly taught (Krashen, 1981). The objective of Sunday classes was to group the children and to let them interact and communicate using Arabic language. Hornberger (1998) noted that individuals who practice literacy in their HL usually also work hard to learn L2 and express a general appreciation for all languages. Children who already speak more than one language seem to have a facility to learn other foreign languages without difficulty. Thus, learning additional languages has been shown to have no detrimental effects on a child. It is expected that in bilingual classes, teachers take the burden to help HL children succeed not only in learning the 2nd language but in maintaining their HL too and finding success in the educational environment as a whole.

Researchers have shown that there are a lot of cases which provide strong support for the principles underlying bilingual education and are confirmed by numerous empirical studies showing that those who have better education

in their primary language excel in L2 development (May, 2002).

When school support for bilingual development is lacking, maintenance and development of the HL are up to the family, and success is expected to be rare. It appears that HL retention is successful only if the language is used in multiple contexts. Parents highly value bilingualism, bicultural, biliterate, and identifying the future benefits their children will have by attending a dual language program. Society may get benefits of bilingualism as well, in term of business, diplomacy, and national security. According to Fishman (1990) some politicians claim that bilingualism and multiculturalism are the factors responsible for economic or social problems but of which no evidence is available. Some children feel proud of being bilingual. They also feel frustrated and embarrassed particularly when they play the part of language brokers for their families. Further, they express intense pride in their ability to speak both L1 and L2 and to help their families. Some children who are learning L2 undergo the phenomenon of language loss. As they learn L2, they lose skills and fluency in L1 if their L1 is not reinforced and maintained. This process is called 'subtractive bilingualism', and it can be cognitively and linguistically very detrimental to children's learning and their family lives, especially, if parents speak only L1. Ideally, children should experience additive bilingualism where they learn L2 while their L1 and culture are maintained and reinforced.

There are many advantages for L1 maintenance and additional bilingualism. Kouritzin (1997, 1999) and Wong (1991) agree that the most significant aspect is the ability to communicate with immediate and extended family, specifically, young children and adolescents who benefit from the support, advice, and nurturing given by parents who are not proficient in the L2. Additionally, some scholars like Cummins (1989) find bilingualism as increased intelligence and leads to economic advantages as well. In other words, it makes available many job opportunities for the immigrants. Despite decades of research findings, paradoxically, there is still a common belief that bilingual is bad for children and unpatriotic, and the only way to be a true American (citizen) is to leave behind any other language and allegiance that might be in your background (Hinton, 1999).

Articles have proclaimed that bilingual education simply doesn't work. In other words, children in bilingual programs do not learn the national (or majority) language. Accordingly, the opponents of bilingual education find the immersion monolingual program is the best solution. In a study conducted by Merino (1983) about the experience of growing up bilingual school children in the United States, she found more language loss than bilingualism among the participants. Consequently, she blames the government, educators, politicians, and parents for being concerned solely with the prompt integration of minority language children in the school system and their subsequent success in society in general. Officially speaking, there is a great tendency toward immersion programs rather than bilingual education, but people concerned believe that bilingual education has done well in the USA and it can do much better. Gersten (1985) denies this perspective and states that all monolingual immersion programs are better than bilingual education. Several critics agree with Gersten when recommending immersion program of the majority language over bilingual education (Krashen, 2000). In spite of all the privileges and valuable considerations of bilingualism mentioned before, some believe that this supportive environment is temporary. There are implicit and explicit pressures pushing the students toward becoming monolingual speakers and barriers to maintaining home language that are not on the surface. "There are several other students whose Spanish proficiency had eroded despite being in bilingual classrooms and living in Spanish-dominant homes. Indeed more than half of the parents interviewed commented that their children were forgetting or becoming less fluent in Spanish" (Cummins, 1986). This meets the hypothesis earlier mentioned in this study.

There are barriers to maintaining bilingualism. One of these obstacles is the pressures teachers receive from the governments even if the teacher is bilingual. They receive strict instructions for quick transition of students to the national language of the country. The other barrier is the limited support for bilingualism schools and teachers. The 3rd one is the lack of instructional materials of the children's home language or no bilingual class is available at all. Generally speaking, it is outlawed to have bilingual schools in some American states as well as in the most European countries. "Opponents of bilingual education claim that parents do not want it for their children, when faced with the possibility that bilingual education would be outlawed in Colorado as it had in California and Arizona, however, parents with children in dual language programs stepped forward and let their voices be heard" (Shannon, 2002).

Observers reported a number of reasons why students feel pressed not only to learn the national language (foreign language) quickly but to give up speaking the mother tongue as well. Some of these pressures are subtle, others are more explicit. Worth (2003) reports that the primary goal of most schools programs, worldwide whether bilingual or monolingual, is to develop proficiency in speaking the language of the majority. And for them maintaining the home language and culture is at best a secondary goal. From our analysis of the interviews and field notes, we found that there were ways in which bilingualism is valued in the classroom and students' homes. Students are explicitly and

implicitly supported and encouraged to maintain the HL and culture. It is felt necessary to mention that there are, beyond bilingualism, some cases in which children as well as, sometimes, their parents speak a mixture of their native language and the national language. This process is called code switching. It involves changing languages over phrases or sentences. It is a normal phenomenon worldwide. This mixture, sometimes, becomes the main language used at home (Hinton, 1999). Sociolinguists sometimes give a label to this language. Kouritzin (1997, 1999, 2000), and Schechter and Bayley (1997) mention that parents in spite of their very limited L2 proficiency often switch to L2 in order to match their children's preferences or believing that are helping their children practice the L2 and facilitating their integration in school. In the sense, parents are following their children's teachers' advice. For example, a mixture of Hindi and English is labeled Hinglish. Linguistically, this process is called blending. This term is found in the analysis of grammatical and lexical constructions, in which two elements which do not co-occur, according to the rules of the language, come together within a single linguistic unit (Crystal, 1987). This variety really consists of a mixture of two languages. It is involuntary code switching indeed exercise by people who command one language better than the other, and not the stylistic switching done by balanced bilinguals. Some children and adults report language mixing as the best they can do with their HL. This involuntary code-switching is often used with their home language dominant parents (Hinton, 1999). Throughout the experience of the writer of this article, this happens almost daily in his communication with his children.

3.1. Advantages of Bilingualism

Numerous studies have found strong cognitive, academic, linguistic, and social benefits in being bilingual. Recently, there is an increasing demand all over the world for multilingual work force. Due to a variety of social forces that negatively impact the maintenance of minority languages, language loss is a common sociolinguistic event that will affect bilingual children's language skills. Keen families faithfully support the dual language program for the following reasons:

1. it makes it easy for children to communicate with their family members who cannot speak the national language;
2. it is very important and highly appreciated that children know two languages;
3. to become fluent in a 2nd language and be in a more diverse environment;
4. bilingual people have more opportunities;
5. promote confidence in their children's abilities to learn other concepts in cultural acceptance;
6. to maintain the family traditions of which language is one since children are born or grown up in a host country;
7. there is a strong feeling that being bilingual and biliterate is not only a gift but necessary in today's world.

Researchers confirm that the benefits of being bilingual are great, not only in terms of opportunities and increased cultural awareness, but in terms of social cognitive development. Being bilingual is a privilege not only individually but to the whole society as well, namely, in term of business, diplomacy, national security, etc. It expands the possibility of job admission too. Individuals who maintain L1 get the ability to communicate with immediate and extended family members. After Orellana and others (2000) had interviewed some immigrant parents, they found that those parents believed that if children were proficient users of English as well as their HL in an English speaking community, they would be treated better and would gain satisfying employment in the future. The continuing development of the HL is of great advantages to the individual and society. On the individual level, researchers report that those who keep on developing the HL have certain cognitive advantages over their L2 only counterparts which may be some of the reasons why they do somewhat better in school as well as in the job market (Hakuta, 1986). In addition, better HL development means better communication with family members and with other members of HL community (Wong, 1991; Cho et al., 1997; Cho and Krashen, 1998). HL development may also help promote a healthy sense of multiculturalism- an acceptance of both the majority and minority cultures, and a resolution of identity conflicts, which Tse (1998a) has termed Ethnic Identity Incorporation.

4. Negative Consequences of HL Loss

Studies on children's first language loss report that there is a trend toward productive loss while receptive skills are still maintained, especially in conversational and informal contexts. Changes that occur in language as a result of loss affect aspect of semantics and grammar. This can be due to L2 transference as well as general or universe of principles of language environment.

Kouritzin (1997, 1999), in her study, found the following factors as the major negative consequences of L1 loss:

1. eroding family relations;
2. poor self-image and cultural identity;
3. compromised school relationship;
4. poor school performance.

She designates the first two factors as the most significant. Therefore, children are not to communicate with uncles, cousins, grandparents, or other relatives who do not speak L2. Some scholars believe that some children cannot communicate even with their parents. Wong (1991) sees it as a serious problem. This indicates the negative impact on communication in the family. Therefore, children find themselves embarrassed and frustrated for not being able to communicate effectively with relatives, alienate from peers in the old country, and humiliated in front of visitors to the home. Parents may not communicate efficiently on an intimate level with child, and the child in his turn, may not have a good enough grasp of the HL to bridge this communication gap. “what is lost is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children: when parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to learn their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experience” (ibid).

Some parents find it a shame for their children when a non-speaker (a foreigner) of the HL speaks their L1 while they don't.

5. HL & Culture Maintenance Responsibility

In her study, Kouritzin (1999) asked a key question about whose responsibility L1 maintenance is – families, schools, parents or the whole society. Families agree that L1 culture identity and family relationships are important factors for maintaining L1. Researchers believe that L1 cultural identity is crucial to HL maintenance in the context of a dominant L2. Although there is an agreement among some researchers, theorists, scholars, and intellectuals that language maintenance should be the responsibility of home, school, and community, families strongly place most of the responsibility on the parents (Merino, 1983).

Although mosques, churches and social as well as cultural societies play an important role in L1 maintenance, they cannot act as a substitute for the family. When parents see their children losing their HL, they often make strong efforts to remedy this situation. A remedial process for L1 retention is to keep continuously and regularly the L1 to be spoken in the home – not only among adults but between adults and children as well. According to May (2002), the influential sociolinguist, Joshua Fishman, reports that only when this intergenerational transmission of the language, as he calls it, continues to occur, language will survive or continue to be spoken over time. For many young adults, parental insistence on retaining the HL and values of the old country became the source of intergeneration.

The two most common means of trying to stem the loss are the increased insistence on use of the HL at home and enrolling children in a heritage language school, which is not always available as mentioned before. In these schools not only the HL taught but values and culture as well. Children usually go to these schools after the regular school or on Saturdays. For several reasons, some children are sometimes not willing to attend the Saturday school under the pretext that they do not benefit much from such classes while parents find it entirely the opposite. The best example is the Saturday school of Dordrecht in The Netherlands which is called Al.Hoda. Due to their obligations, parents let the school to be held on Saturdays. This school was managed by some keen volunteer Iraqi parents.

The results were unbelievable due to the unlimited encouragement, motivation, and support children received from their families. As being enthusiastic, parents should perceive the factors that facilitate the maintenance of the home language, and how they feel about their children's loss or maintenance of the L1.

Many children believe that their homeland television is a true helpful device in maintaining or improving their home language. Exposure to homeland television gives them the chance to refresh their home language. A student of Chinese origin in America, in a study conducted by a teacher called Hinto, says, “Television again came to the rescue. It was the medium that led me to become more fluent and confident with Mandarin since most

Chinese television shows on TV were spoken in Mandarin”(Hinton, 1999). Satellite Space Channels are outstandingly effective in L1 maintenance nowadays.

This is true and valid for the writer's children of this paper. He personally noticed the improvement and development of his children's capability of using L1 due to watching Arabic space channels and after being prohibited to use L2 at

home. They got interested to watch Arabic TV soap opera as well as knowing the programs schedules. Supported, the children got Iraqi school books written in Arabic. As being faithful parents, we tried our best to see our children maintain the home language. It is common that many children undergo intensive and poignant efforts to reconcile the conflicting forces in their lives and find a comfortable sense of identity. At the same time, there is a strong feeling among many immigrant families that it is important to preserve ties with the homeland to maintain their children's HL. There may be nothing better for family retention of the culture and HL than making return trips to the homeland, but this is probably impossible owing to different personal circumstances - economic, political, etc. One of the outlets for this problem is having regular visits to the homeland for all the family members. This last point is quite easy for families with good financial situations. However, families able to retain these close ties are those in which bilingualism is most likely to thrive. Thus, children will definitely be highly motivated to learn the HL.

In the area where the vast majority is immigrants, children consequently use their home language. We find that native language as well as culture are present in both the community and school. Thus, most employees in stores, restaurants, and other businesses are bilingual. In such environment, the native language will certainly maintain its prestige and used side by side with the national language. Potres and Hao (1998) confirm that schools and families play the most important role in fostering bilingualism. In such areas with a high concentration of immigrants, schools serving communities with high socioeconomic status are most conducive to additive linguistics outcomes.

Parents should regularly draw the attention of their children to the importance of L1 which certainly promote a positive attitude in the children and they should address their affective needs accordingly as well. Therefore, parents, in order to maintain L1, should know:

1. which languages used in the home;
2. which language used most frequently;
3. which language(s) do the adults in the home speak to each other;
4. which language(s) do the adults use to speak to the children;
5. which language(s) the older children use to speak to the younger children;
6. whether they worry about the young children losing the home language;
7. which language(s) do the parents want the children to speak when they are adults;
8. whether they want their children to keep their L1; and
9. what kinds of strategies to be practiced by parents to maintain L1.

6. Conclusion

It has been found that the maintenance of L1 is overwhelmingly important for the circumspect parents. Parents and their children are highly recommended to be encouraged to continue to communicate at all levels.

Worldwide, children are encouraged to speak more than one language from the time they are born because bilingualism and multilingualism are looked at as true assets. It is clear as children socialize with a wider circle outside the family (one that is dominant by a different language) that circle begins to force the children, without being aware, to make the shift. If children are not given the opportunity to learn their parents' language(s), their sense of personal identity and culture are at risk. As a result, on a national and global level, the opportunity to evolve into a truly multicultural society may be comprised. Although parents make serious efforts to ensure that children maintain the home language, the results are not completely positive unless children are willing to. Throughout our personal observations, we found the proportion of the immigrants' children who remain fluent in their native language is shockingly low and steadily decreasing. This matches the perspective mentioned earlier- **it is quite common among researchers and scholars that if children become fluent in L2, L1 consequently declines.** This should not be generalized since there are some other children who are happy to master and speak L1 and L2 efficiently. Apparently, it sounds that it is a relative affair. Anyway this issue of L1 maintenance and loss remains complex. Some researchers prefer to talk about language maintenance rather than language loss.

Children are lucky enough if they grow up in an atmosphere at school and at home in which bilingualism is valued and fostered. Contradictory messages about bilingualism have been found. One message says knowing two languages is an asset and important, but a louder message says that learning the foreign language is more important. We have concluded that keen parents highly value the maintenance of home language and some others are proactive in trying to ensure that their children maintain the mother tongue fluently. It has also been found that a good

proficiency in the home language serves as a foundation for learning the foreign language. Furthermore, children who retained fluency or near fluency in their native language came from homes where the HL was spoken by matter of policy. Conversely, although a lot of families choose to use the HL at home, they find their children are losing fluency. Children grow up in child care facilities have been explicitly discouraged from speaking their home language. Consequently, this leads to breaking down of communication between parents and their children. It has been proved that managing regular visits to the parents' homeland is highly effective and one of the most assisting factors for HL retention. We, the writer of this paper and his wife, observed the improvement of L1 in our children after paying regular visits to our home country. We made them the chance available to communicate with other members as well as non-members of the family in the homeland.

Mosques, churches, social and cultural societies as well as bilingual schools could play a positive role in L1 maintenance abroad. They can manage several enjoyable and interesting activities keeping children as well as their parents communicating with members of other families using L1. We hope that this crucial and serious issue of Arabic language loss receives a considerable and valuable attention and care of not only the parents but the whole Arab communities, League of Arab States, schools, policy makers, politicians and top people of all the Arabic governments.

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