

PhD Dissertation Booklet



**Language Maintenance and Language Shift among Algerian
Arabic Speakers in France**

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Veszprém, 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the problem

“France is the paradigmatic case for strong ideology and management”, highlights Spolsky (2004: 63) in his discussion about the preservation of the French identity over the centuries. Indeed, the promotion and acceptance of the “one state, one nation, one language” principle has been pervasive among the majority of the French populace since the 17th century (Judge, 2000). Nevertheless, minority languages have demonstrated resilience despite these overarching principles (Spolsky, 2004). When it comes to immigrant minorities, long-term language contact is likely to affect or reshape the language use, choice and practices of bilingual speakers who are constantly exposed to the language of the new environment. As such, it will most probably lead to various linguistic outcomes, including language maintenance and shift (LMLS). The majority of LMLS studies describe situations in which speakers of Language A move to a country where Language B is spoken by the majority of the population, and, due to the interaction of several factors (such as frequency of language use and attitudes), speakers of Language A will move on the LMLS continuum (see Hyltenstam & Stroud, 1996). However, cases where speakers of Language A had already gained experience with the culture and language of the new environment before moving to the country are rarely discussed.

The Algerian community in France constitutes an excellent example given their prior knowledge of and familiarity with the French language before moving to France. This is largely attributed to the prominent status that the French language occupies in Algerian society, which is the byproduct of 132 years of colonial presence in the country (Blanchard, 2018). France’s colonial past in Algeria created much more than just the usual historical footprints; rather, it profoundly reshaped the linguistic and cultural situation of the country, leaving a lasting impact which persists until today. Despite securing independence in 1962, Algeria was never able to completely detach itself from the French language (Queffélec et al., 2002). On the contrary, French continued to dominate critical sectors such as the media, administration, and education. The linguistic legacy left by the French occupation proved to be substantial given that the language preserved its prominent position even in the face of the Arabization movement seeking to replace it with Arabic in official domains (Bouherar & Ghafsi, 2021). While the movement succeeded in establishing a stronghold for Arabic in many official domains, it failed to eliminate the deeply-rooted presence of the French language in Algerian society. According to Rossillon (1995), 49% of Algerians in 1993 were considered to be francophones. Data from

the Abassa institute suggest that by 2004 the proportion had increased to 66% (see Maïche, 2004).

French colonisation of Algeria also resulted in numerous south-to-north migrations over the past century. From the first wave in the early twentieth century, driven by labour shortages in World Wars I and II, to post-independent migration surges, the Algerian community in France had risen to millions, forming the largest immigrant group in the country, and one of the largest in continental Europe (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987; Blanchard, 2018). Nowadays in France, numerous generations of Algerians can be found. Given the aforementioned prominent status of French in Algeria, first-generation Algerians in France arrive with a good proficiency in the majority language, which may serve to facilitate their integration into the French society and diminish the role of Arabic in their daily lives. In fact, this pre-existing linguistic competence may place them on a path towards L1 attrition, which in turn exerts a negative influence on heritage language transmission to subsequent generations (Schmid & Köpke, 2007). Furthermore, France's strict assimilationist policy, which centres around prioritizing French while excluding all other languages in every sphere of life may only exacerbate the status of immigrant minority languages in the country. In light of this, France constitutes a strong context for an accelerated shift towards French (Queffélec et al., 2002). This situation raises various concerns regarding the long-term preservation of Arabic among the Algerian community in France. The question arises whether the Algerian community maintains its heritage language despite the strict language policies imposed by France, or whether Algerian immigrants' pre-existing knowledge of French accelerates a language shift towards the majority language.

1.2. Aims of the study

Situations of language contact vary from one context to another, making each case a unique example. Therefore, conducting research into maintenance and shift will no doubt vary depending on the specific minority group being studied, which will contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomena. There is a clear shortage of sociolinguistic research on the Algerian community in France, particularly in relation to language maintenance and shift. Existing studies are extremely limited in number and scope. No study has examined this community through a detailed comparison between multiple generations using a mixed method approach. Drawing on questionnaire and interview data, this study aims to explore the language situation of the Algerian community in France. It particularly aims to investigate the extent to which Arabic is being maintained among Algerian group members, and to assess whether it is successfully transmitted from generation to generation by comparing language proficiency, use,

and attitudes across three generations of Algerians. In case of a shift away from Arabic, this study aims to identify the reasons behind this shift, and attempts to raise the Algerian community's awareness about the current language situation and the challenges that may threaten the preservation of their heritage language in the future.

1.3. Research questions and hypotheses

The present study has one main research question:

- To what extent Algerians in France maintain their mother tongue or shift to the majority language?

In order to answer the above research question, the following sub-questions have been formulated:

1. Is there a difference between first-, second- and third-generation Algerians in France in their Arabic and French proficiency levels, Arabic and French language use, and attitudes towards Arabic and French?
2. What is the relationship between heritage language proficiency, use, and attitudes?
3. Which factors contribute to the maintenance (or shift) of Arabic among Algerians in France?

In the light of the above research concerns and existing literature on language maintenance and shift among immigrant communities (see e.g., Baker, 2011; Clyne, 2005; Dagamseh, 2020; Dweik et al., 2014; Fishman, 1964; 1972a; 1991; Holmes, 2013; Sevinç, 2016), the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. The Algerian community in France will display heritage language shift towards the French language, especially among second- and third-generation bilinguals.
2. First-generation bilinguals will have higher and better Arabic proficiency level than second- and third-generation bilinguals.
3. Compared to second- and third-generation bilinguals, first-generation bilinguals are more likely to use Arabic, though their heritage language use will be limited to specific contexts (e.g., family).
4. First-generation bilinguals will have stronger positive attitudes towards Arabic than second- and third-generation bilinguals.
5. Participants from different generations will exhibit positive attitudes towards the majority language, French, as it plays an important role in facilitating their social and economic integration into the host country.

6. Different sociolinguistic and demographic factors will significantly predict Arabic language proficiency, language use in the family and friendship domains, and attitudes towards Arabic among the Algerian community in France across three generations.

2. Literature review

The study of language maintenance and language shift emerged as a separate field of enquiry in the mid-twentieth century and was, just like many other phenomena, considered to be the result of language-contact situations, especially those arising from migration (Pauwels, 2016). Joshua Fishman, together with other scholars from different disciplines, made significant contributions to the field of language maintenance and shift. However, Fishman's paper *Language maintenance and language shift as a field of enquiry. A definition of the field and suggestions for future development* (1964) has undoubtedly laid the groundwork for future scholarly investigations in the field. In his key text, Fishman mentioned that:

“The study of language maintenance and language shift is concerned with the relationship between change (or stability) in habitual language use, on the one hand, and ongoing psychological, social or cultural processes, on the other hand, when populations differing in language use are in contact with each other. That languages (or language variants) SOMETIMES replace each other, among SOME speakers, particularly in CERTAIN types or domains of language behaviour, under SOME conditions of intergroup contact, has long aroused curiosity and comment. However, it is only in quite recent years that this topic has been recognized as a field of systematic inquiry among professional students of language behaviour.” (Fishman, 1964: 35)

Besides Joshua Fishman, many other influential scholars shaped our understanding, in a way or another, of the field including Heinz Kloss, Einar Haugen, Uriel Weinreich and Charles Ferguson.

The phenomena of language maintenance and shift usually occur in communities where two or more languages (or varieties) are in contact with one another, especially when there is a clear difference in power relations between the groups (i.e., minority and majority groups) who are using these languages (see Hyltenstam & Stroud, 1996). Language maintenance reflects the ability of a speech community to keep the language they have always used in order to ensure its continuity (Hoffmann, 1991), while language shift is the gradual process by which a community replaces its own language with a more dominant one (Mesthrie et al., 2000).

According to Jaspaert and Kroon (1993: 298), language use is “the more fundamental element in the gradual disappearance of a language”. They maintain that speakers’ lack of proficiency in their L1 may lead to limited use of that language in different domains and may result in the use of the other language (L2) instead. According to the authors, changes in speakers’ patterns of language choice and use indicate language shift, while changes in language proficiency indicate language loss. Overall, both language use and language proficiency are essential for maintaining a language within a community (Fase et al., 1992).

Fishman (1991) argues that language shift is highly expected in case of an unsuccessful intergenerational language transfer, with fewer and fewer users (i.e., speakers, writers, readers, and understanders) in every generation. Based on Fishman’s predictive model of language shift (see Fishman, 1972b; 1980; 1991; Fishman et al., 1966), the first generation typically has a strong dominance of their primary language. They may be able to speak the majority language of the new country as well out of necessity, but they generally prefer to use their heritage language at home and sometimes in other domains too, with their friends or neighbours. The second generation (i.e., the children of the first generation) is typically bilingual, speaking both the heritage language and the majority language. However, this does not change the fact that many of them prefer to use the majority language even in their communication with their immigrant parents at home (Lopez, 1996). The third generation (i.e., the children of the second generation) has a strong command of the majority language, which is in this case their primary language. They grow up usually with very limited knowledge of the heritage language, and therefore, they only use the majority language in different contact situations. Fishman’s model has been tested and validated among different populations including the French-American community in France (Varro, 1998), the Hispanic-American community in the USA (Ortman & Stevens, 2008), and the Turkish immigrant community in the Netherlands (Sevinç, 2016). Of course, exceptional cases exist where language shift may extend over five generations, as demonstrated by the Boers of Patagonia (for an overview see Szpiech et al., 2020).

Researchers have introduced a variety of theories, models, and approaches to address the phenomena of language maintenance and shift within immigrant communities. *The Sociology of Language* approach (see Fishman 1964, 1965, 1972c, 1972d) is based on the idea that understanding the phenomena of language maintenance and shift can be more effectively accomplished through investigating the domains of language use (i.e., how much and in which domains the heritage and majority languages are used). Other theories to LMLS include *Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory* (Giles et al., 1977), which explains how a group’s status, demographic strength, and institutional support influence the survival of its language, and *Core*

Values Theory (Smolicz, 1981), which emphasises that immigrant communities maintain their language when it is closely tied to core cultural or religious values.

Research on minority and immigrant communities has attempted to identify several factors that may influence the process of language maintenance and shift (David et al., 2009). Based on the existing literature, there are many demographic, social, cultural, historical, linguistic, and economic factors that are said to be highly relevant when investigating various cases of language maintenance and shift (see Conklin & Lourie, 1983; Edwards, 1997; Gal, 1979). These factors do not exist in isolation, but they rather interact, influencing each other as well as the maintenance or shift of the heritage language. In this study, the maintenance of the Arabic language can be significantly affected either positively or negatively by the following factors:

- **Demographic factors:** they include age at immigration, length of residence, size and geographical concentration of immigrant communities, education, ...etc.
- **Domains of language use**
- **Language attitudes**
- **Religion**
- **Historical factors**
- **Code-switching**
- **Language proficiency**

3. Methodology

3.1. Instruments

In order to answer the research questions stated in the introduction, I used both the questionnaire and the interview as primary tools for collecting the data. The questionnaire was originally divided into five main sections with a total of 77 items: demographic information, language proficiency, language use in different domains, language attitudes and code-switching. Although the code-switching section may provide valuable data, I did not include it in the analysis. My focus was rather limited to the sections that aligned most closely with the main goals of my study (language proficiency, language use, and attitudes). Almost all items in the questionnaire were close-ended. The use of open-ended items was kept to a minimum because most participants either tend to skip such type of questions or offer irrelevant answers (Rasinger, 2013). Most of the items in the questionnaire are Likert-scale items.

In order to check the reliability of the questionnaire used in this study, the researcher opted for Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951). Considering that the Alpha coefficient (α) represents

a value ranging between 0 and 1, the more the items are correlated to each other, the closer Alpha gets to 1. De Vellis (2012) maintains that an ideal Cronbach Alpha should be above 0.7. Based on all what have been said above, the Cronbach's Alpha scores for the language proficiency, language use, and language attitudes scales range between 0.76, which is moderate, and 0.97 indicating excellent reliability and internal consistency.

semi-structured interviews were also used in order to validate and expand on the findings obtained from the questionnaires. By including more open-ended questions in the interview, the researcher is given the opportunity to dig deeper into specific areas that the questionnaire highlighted, thereby ensuring that the overall research findings are both thorough and reliable. The number and type of questions in the interview varied depending on the generation each participant belonged to. For instance, first-generation participants were asked questions such as "did you speak any French before coming to France?" or "can you describe your French proficiency level before and after coming to France?". On the other hand, second- and third-generation participants were asked questions including "when and how did you learn Arabic?" or "are there any rules at home you have to adhere to regarding speaking a language?".

3.2. Participants

The present research is based on data collected from 344 participants, 194 of whom are females whereas 150 are males. Participants were recruited from different cities across France. However, the majority were from Paris, Grenoble, and Marseille. Ninety-eight percent of the participants are Muslims. This is expected because Islam is the majority and state religion in Algeria. While the majority of participants were single (49.1%; N=169), 128 were married (37.2%). Besides, 23 were in a relationship, 18 were separated or divorced, and 6 were widowed. Among the group of couples, 45.1% had an Algerian spouse/partner, 26.3% had a Franco-Algerian spouse/partner, and 21.8% had a French spouse/partner. The remaining 6.8% had a spouse or a partner from other nationalities (e.g., Turkish, Italian, Egyptian, etc.). Most participants (96.5%) confirmed that they are still in contact with their family, friends and relatives in Algeria, noting that Arabic is the language they often use to communicate with them. According to the questionnaire, participants were divided into three groups: first-generation (N=221), second-generation (N=79) and third-generation (N=44). Table 2 provides further detailed information regarding participants' gender, age, age at immigration, LOR, and educational level.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information (N= 344)

	1 st generation (n= 221)		2 nd generation (n= 79)		3 rd generation (n= 44)	
	Female	male	Female	Male	Female	male
Gender (N)	113	108	53	26	28	16
Age (years)	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	36	14	29	13	20	5
Age at immigration (years)	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	25.3	8.3	–	–	–	–
LOR (years)	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	10.5	11.4	–	–	–	–
Education (%)						
Less than high school	21.3		16.5		6.8	
High school	17.6		45.6		52.3	
Vocational school	3.2		6.3		4.5	
Bachelor's	19		17.7		27.3	
Master's	34.4		13.9		9.1	
PhD	4.5					

Note: LOR= Length of residence, SD = Standard deviation

Interviews were conducted with 20 participants, including 12 females and 8 males who had previously completed the questionnaire. Most interviewees (N=9) belonged to the first generation. All of them were born in Algeria and then migrated to France for the purpose of study, work or marriage, and their age ranges between 26 and 58 years. Six interviewees were second generation, born and raised in France, with ages ranging from 19 to 49 years. The remaining 5 interviewees were third generation, also born and raised in France, and their age is between 17 and 25.

3.3. Procedures

The questionnaire was first designed to be administered online via Google Forms. The intention was to capitalise on the large social media presence of Algerians in France. Unfortunately, online responses were significantly less than what was initially anticipated. Despite the substantial numbers on social platforms, Algerians in France remained too hesitant and/or too distrustful to answer the questionnaire. As such, it became necessary to schedule several trips to France to collect the data in person. This way, the 'self-selection bias' was also addressed as I could approach participants (Dewaele, 2018).

The questionnaire was developed, by the researcher herself, in both Arabic and French given that these languages are the most commonly spoken among the Algerian community in France.

As such, the participants were given the choice to respond to the questionnaire in either language, depending on their linguistic preference (only 44 participants chose to answer the Arabic version), and it took them approximately twenty minutes to complete. In order to ensure the questionnaire's comprehensibility as well as guarantee that technical words were properly translated, both versions were subjected to rigorous checking by specialists in the Arabic and French language.

For a well-organised, ethical, and effective interview, I followed Robson's (2002) recommendations on interviewing. At the beginning of each interview, I inform the participants that they will be recorded during the process, explain the reason behind the interview, and answer any questions on the part of the interviewees. Concerning the language of the interview, the researcher often posed questions in Arabic. In some cases, however, it was necessary to switch to French whenever interviewees encounter unfamiliar words or when their proficiency in Arabic is very limited. Participants were free to answer the interview questions in the language of their choice (Arabic, French, or maybe both), depending on which language they feel most comfortable and spontaneous using. The duration of the interview varied from one interviewee to another as some offered more comprehensive, in-depth responses, while others preferred to only provide concise answers. On average, most interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. Moreover, the interview was conducted either online or through personal meetings in different settings including, the mosque, the public park, the cafeteria, or even at the interviewee's house.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Participants, in the present study, were asked for their consent to process the gathered-data before answering the questionnaire. Its purpose was to inform participants about the study aims, procedures, and rights. For instance, it was made clear to all respondents that their participation is totally voluntary involving no risks, and that they have the right to withdraw anytime later if they ever changed their mind. Respondents were informed that their participation will involve two parts: filling out a questionnaire as well as participating in an interview, at their wish. They were also informed that their responses will be anonymized and securely stored in order to maintain confidentiality. Moreover, it was promised that the data will only be accessible to the researcher and her supervisor, and will be kept for at least 5 years before being destroyed to allow for further detailed analysis.

3.5. Data analysis

After the data has been collected through both questionnaires and interviews, the data was

prepared and analysed. In order to analyse the obtained data quantitatively, I used IBM SPSS Statistics 26. The questionnaire analysis followed different steps (for an overview, see Kumar, 2018; Pallant, 2016). First, I used the Microsoft Excel program to prepare the data for a smooth import to SPSS. The next step was defining the variables and entering coded data (i.e., the numerical values obtained from each respondent for each variable) into SPSS. Finally, the dataset was carefully checked for any errors to be corrected before starting the actual analysis. Interviews on the other hand were analysed using a hybrid approach to thematic analysis (Swain, 2018).

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Discussion of questionnaire results

The first sub-question of this study addresses the differences between the first, second, and third generations pertaining to their Arabic and French proficiency levels, their language use across various domains and their attitudes towards Arabic and French. This allows for predicting whether or not the Arabic language is maintained across multiple generations of Algerian immigrants in France. Questionnaire data showed that the three generations of Algerian immigrants differ in their Arabic proficiency level and their language use across different domains. Compared to first-generation participants, second- and third-generation participants had a significantly lower level of Arabic proficiency. This can be due in part to second- and third-generation participants' self-reported low literacy skills in Arabic. The respondents affirmed having stronger skills in speaking and understanding, compared to reading or writing the language. This was also noticeable in the interviews in which second- and third-generation interviewees were far more inclined to speak the Algerian dialect than use any forms of standard Arabic. Previous studies (e.g., Alsaifi & Barkhuizen, 2006; Othman, 2011) indicate that the decline in heritage language literacy for second- and third-generation Algerians is usually attributed to their predominant use of the dialect acquired through interactions with their parents rather than engaging in formal instruction to improve their heritage language. Another possible reason contributing to second- and third-generation Algerians' declining proficiency in Arabic is France's strict assimilationist policy, which solely promotes French while excluding other minority languages. This can have an adverse effect on Algerians' heritage language proficiency due to the dominance of French in almost every sphere of life, rendering Arabic irrelevant.

The results also revealed a generational decline in the use of Arabic across most domains.

Compared to first-generation participants, the use of Arabic at home decreased among second- and third-generation participants. The use of Arabic for these generations is largely restricted to communication with their parents. Having been born and raised in France, later generations of Algerians may view French as more than just a useful language for garnering academic and professional opportunities, but also as an inherently important part of their identity. In the religion domain, Arabic appears to be the most frequently used language for all three generations. This result is consistent with previous findings of Gomaa (2011) and Tawalbeh (2017) who noted that religion plays a crucial role in the maintenance of Arabic among the Egyptian and Iraqi immigrant communities in the UK and New Zealand. This aligns with the core values theory, which argues that the heritage language is more likely to be maintained when it is closely linked to religion. Both Arabic and French are used by the second and third generations when studying the heritage language in weekend schools. The use of both languages is expected as most second- and third-generation Algerians lack basic skills in standard Arabic, and as such, using French becomes essential for instruction. Language use in other public domains (e.g., work) is largely dominated by French, whereas Arabic is rarely, if at all, used which may contribute to a rapid intergenerational shift to French. Overall, these findings indicate a gradual language shift is taking place from generation to generation as described by Fishman's predictive model of language shift (1972b). Most previous studies conducted in relation to language maintenance and shift, particularly in migration contexts (e.g., Michnowicz et al., 2023; Sevinç, 2016; Shabtaev et al., 2022) showed that language shift is inevitable and takes place within three generations.

Positive attitudes towards a heritage language are usually associated with its maintenance, while negative attitudes are often correlated with a shift to the dominant language. As such, inspecting participants' attitudes allows for gauging the possibility for either the maintenance or shift of the Arabic language among Algerian immigrants in France. Surprisingly, all three generations exhibited very positive attitudes towards the Arabic language, maintaining not only the importance of its use, but also the necessity of its transmission to later generations. This can be attributed to social and historical factors underlying Algerian identity. Algerians usually take immense pride in their history, religion, traditions, culture, identity, and origin, which keeps their attitudes positive towards the heritage language despite the passing of generations and the strong pressures of assimilation from the majority group. Usually, this bodes well for heritage language transmission and maintenance efforts. However, second- and third-generation Algerians' positive attitudes towards Arabic do not necessarily result in its frequent use and

maintenance, as they often rely on French in their daily lives. Similar results have been observed among Spanish-speakers in the United States (Potowski, 2004).

The second sub-question addressed the relationship between Arabic language proficiency, language use across different domains, and attitudes towards Arabic. Correlational analyses revealed a highly significant positive correlation between participants' Arabic proficiency and their attitudes towards Arabic, suggesting that the more their positive attitudes towards Arabic, the higher level of proficiency they maintain in that language. The analyses also revealed significant negative correlations between Arabic language proficiency, attitudes towards Arabic, and French language use across different domains including home, friends, mosque and heritage language schools. These findings highlight the idea that language choice is closely related to linguistic competence and emphasise the role of attitudes as a driver of language choice and use in non-official contexts. Overall, proficiency, use and attitudes seem to be closely linked, with each influencing the other in different ways.

The third sub-question of this study explored the factors that were claimed to predict Arabic language proficiency, Arabic language use in the family and friendship domains, and attitudes towards Arabic among three generations of Algerian immigrants in France. As expected, the regression analyses revealed notable generational differences in the factors affecting Arabic language maintenance. While more time spent in France (LOR), less use of Arabic at home, being single or having a partner negatively affect first generation's Arabic proficiency, French proficiency seems to be positively associated with their Arabic proficiency. This may indicate that having a good proficiency level in the French language does not impact first-generation participants' Arabic language proficiency. In contrast, the results suggested a negative association between French proficiency and Arabic proficiency among second- and third-generation Algerians, which means the higher their French proficiency level, the lower their Arabic proficiency. Results also showed that more frequent use of Arabic at home significantly enhanced second- and third generation Algerians' Arabic proficiency, highlighting the family domain as a crucial context supporting heritage language maintenance. Besides, using Arabic in the religion domain emerged as a key predictor for this group, which again refers to the important role of religion in improving Arabic proficiency (Baker, 2011). Positive attitudes towards Arabic also predicted higher Arabic proficiency among the second and third generations, which emphasise the importance of positive attitudes in the process of language maintenance.

The predictive model of home language use for the first generation revealed that higher French proficiency and having a French partner are associated with greater use of French at

home. According to Holmes (2013), marrying someone from the majority group can significantly impact language use at home, particularly for children. On the other hand, positive attitudes towards Arabic are linked to more use of Arabic at home. The regression model predicting home language use among second- and third-generation participants revealed that the higher their proficiency in Arabic, the more likely they use Arabic at home. Positive attitudes towards French were associated with increased use of French. Frequency of visits to Algeria was another significant predictor: participants who visited the country three to five times a year or more than 5 times were much more likely to use Arabic at home compared to those who never visited Algeria. Moreover, those living in neighbourhoods where both Arabic and French are spoken were more likely to maintain Arabic language use at home.

Home language use was found to be the most significant predictor of immigrants' language use with friends. This indicated that participants who use French at home are more likely to use French with their friends. Attitudes towards French and neighbourhood were also significant predictors for second- and third-generation participants. Overall, positive attitudes towards French and French language use at home indicated the use of French in the friendship domain. The results also showed that second- and third-generation participants tend to use French even in neighbourhood dominated by Arabs.

The regression model predicting attitudes towards Arabic among the first generation suggested that the more they use French at home, the more negative their attitudes towards Arabic become and that higher Arabic proficiency is associated with more positive attitudes towards Arabic. For the second and third generations, key predictors indicated that: 1) higher Arabic proficiency is associated with positive attitudes towards Arabic, 2) higher proficiency in French is associated with negative attitudes towards Arabic, and 3) having a Franco-Algerian partner is associated with positive attitudes towards Arabic.

4.2. Discussion of interview results

Semi-structured interviews were employed to complement, crosscheck, and expand on the findings obtained from the questionnaire. The interviews provide more depth on the language proficiency, language use, and language attitudes of three generations of Algerians in France. Moreover, interviews data offered a wealth of information which revealed additional themes beyond the initial scope, such as issues of identity, struggles of integration, and the efforts of heritage language transmission. In line with results from the questionnaire, the interviews indicate an intergenerational language shift of Arabic among Algerian immigrants.

Interview data suggest a gradual decline in Arabic language proficiency from one generation

to the next. Most second- and third-generation respondents demonstrated limited proficiency in Arabic and consistently struggled to express themselves in the language. As such the majority of them resorted to answering in French instead. This supports findings from the questionnaire whereby second- and third-generation participants reported a lower proficiency in Arabic (M = 2.6; 2.2, respectively) than their first-generation counterparts (M = 4.3). Multiple studies confirm similar results, suggesting a decline in heritage language proficiency among later generations of immigrants (Urzúa & Gómez, 2008; Sevinç, 2016). Nonetheless, second- and third-generation interviewees maintained having better comprehension despite their apparent difficulty with speaking standard Arabic, which highlights deficiencies with their literacy skills. Participants of the second and third generations attributed their low proficiency in Arabic to their lack of visits to Algeria. They argued that trips to Algeria where the heritage language is widely spoken would have provided them with the chance to practice and improve their proficiency.

Interview findings on participants' language use and choice indicate a decrease in Arabic use among the second and third generations in several domains, which aligns with results from the questionnaire. The interviewees maintained that language choice primarily depends upon the person as well as the context in which the conversation takes place, which showcases the multiple dimensions and domains in which languages can be used. In the home domain, the partner's nationality was found to be impactful. Interviewees married to non-Algerian spouses reported lower Arabic language use at home and with their children than participants married to Algerians. Furthermore, Algerian respondents married to different nationalities revealed negative outcomes concerning heritage language transmission to their children. These findings indicate that the likelihood of Arabic language maintenance decreases when one parent speaks a different language at home, affecting children's acquisition and use of the heritage language negatively.

The interviews also suggest that participants, regardless of the generation, use a great deal of French in the workplace, which is consistent with results from the questionnaire (M = 4.1; 4.6; 4.5 respectively). Accordingly, the constant and excessive use of French in the workplace may serve to push immigrants away from the heritage language and towards the majority language. The interviews also probed a significant domain of language use which was not quantitatively explored by the questionnaire. Media, whether traditional (e.g., TV, radio, magazines) or social (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube), represent an important space where immigrants encounter and engage with language. Although preferences vary across generations, with the second and third favouring social media and the first preferring traditional

media, the results reveal a consistent pattern of a declining use of the Arabic language. Whereas the first generation favour the Arabic language, the second and third generations appear to be inclined towards the use of French, which may underscore the gradual shift to the majority language among later generations. Findings on respondents' online language practices align with previous research suggesting that later generations tend to interact more with online content in the dominant language rather than that of the heritage language (see Chen et al., 2018; Torsh, 2025). The second and third generations attribute their lack of interaction using the heritage language on social media to their limited proficiency and cite difficulties to write and read the dialect, especially that most posts and comments are written in Latin script. Nonetheless, all interviewees affirm exploring Algerian content during the holy month of Ramadan, which indicates a continued connection with the heritage language and the Algerian cultural and religious traditions through media consumption.

Interview data unveiled interesting findings about participants' codeswitching whereby the phenomenon occurred in different patterns depending on the participants' generation. While first-generation respondents used Arabic and occasionally included French words and phrases, the second and third generations primarily spoke French and sometimes incorporated Arabic into their speech. This reversal of patterns showcases a shift towards French among later generations and a decline of Arabic use. Shabtaev et al. (2021) found that changes in codeswitching patterns can be indicative of a shift to the majority language, which aligns with the present results from the interview. Nevertheless, first-generation interviewees downplay the role of codeswitching to French, suggesting that the phenomenon is a legacy of French colonialism which became a habit in the Algerian society over time.

The interview data also covered participants' language attitudes. Participants across all generations appear to harbour positive attitudes towards the heritage language. For first-generation Algerians, Arabic denotes their native language and an indispensable link to their culture and identity. As such, Arabic holds an important place in their lives. Although the second and third generations may not possess as strong a link to Arabic as their parents and grandparents, they still show interest in learning and preserving the language of their ancestors given that it ties them back to their original culture and heritage. Attitudes towards French are also positive across all generations. Despite having a strong attachment to Arabic, first-generation Algerians recognize the value that French offers upon immigration. For them, French constitutes the key to economic stability, educational success, and social integration, and as such, it is not seen in opposition to the Arabic language, but rather as a useful tool in the new environment. Although the aforementioned socioeconomic benefits also hold true for the

second and third generations, the French language occupies an additional dimension for them. Born and raised in France, second- and third-generation interviewees reveal an emotional attachment to the French language, which also fuels their positive attitudes towards it.

In addition to the aforementioned three themes, the interviews unveiled valuable insights into the participants' struggles for integrations, experiences of stigmatization, feelings of identity and belonging as well as initiatives for heritage language transmission.

For immigrants, success in the new society can be synonymous with their degree of integration to it. Numerous interviewees reported great difficulty in trying to integrate into the French society, which impacts not only their economic stability, but also their heritage language. A large number of participants across all generations affirmed experiencing different forms of discrimination. For instance, many respondents report reoccurring incidents whereby the Arabic language is severely discouraged in public as well as in school, while women recount their experiences with hijab both professionally and academically. These incidents sometimes pressures immigrants to forcefully adopt the new culture and language in order to avoid stigmatization and achieve social integration, which hastens the shift towards the majority language.

Results from the interviews shed light on the struggle of later generations with navigating their identity. Unlike first-generation participants who possess a strong attachment to the Algerian identity, second-generation participants struggle between their affiliation to the French society, and their sense of belonging to their culture of origin. An interviewee used the term "the lost generation" to portray the identity conflict that many second-generation Algerians experience whereby they are neither fully Algerian nor fully French. Interview discussions also indicate that third-generations respondents experience a similar struggle, which challenges the prevailing view suggesting that later generations fully assimilate into the dominant culture. This conflict may impact heritage language maintenance as feelings of attachment to the culture and identity of origin could motivate second- and third-generation Algerians to take action promoting the acquisition and use of Arabic.

Heritage language transmission efforts can be the defining line between maintenance and shift. The interviews show that although the majority of respondents hold positive attitudes towards the Arabic language, not all of them exert efforts to transmit it to the following generation. As such, having positive attitudes without proactive involvement into the process of heritage language transmission will yield adverse outcomes as reported by a number of participants whose children are unable to speak Arabic. Admittedly, many interviewees affirmed going to great length to insure their children learning of the heritage language, which

is largely fuelled by their unshakeable positive view of the Arabic language and the Islamic religion. The findings from the interviews align with well-established literature highlighting the role of parents' efforts in heritage language transmission as well as the impact of their positive attitudes on driving such efforts forward (King & Fogle, 2006; Alafifi, 2025).

5. Conclusion

The present study investigated language maintenance and shift among the Algerian community residing in France. Drawing on cross-generational comparisons, this study aimed to answer whether the Algerian community in France is maintaining its L1 or shifting towards the majority language (L2). Questionnaire and interview data indicated that a possible shift from Arabic to French is taking place among second- and third-generation Algerians in France. This was evident in their self-reported language proficiency and their language use in different domains. While both second and third generations maintain positive attitudes towards Arabic, they seem to use more French than Arabic even in the family domain. The study revealed a complex relationship between Arabic language proficiency, language use across multiple domains, and attitudes towards Arabic. Key predictors contributing to Arabic language maintenance or shift include language use at home, language use at the mosque, partner nationality, visiting Algeria, attitudes towards both Arabic and French, Arabic and French proficiency. The interviews further highlighted the contributing factors behind immigrants' language shift which are related to: exposure to French prior migration, lack of exposure to Arabic, and experiences of stigmatization, discrimination and marginalization.

Drawing on some of the limitations of this study (i.e., the small sample representing both second- and third-generation Algerians and the lack of insights in relation to participants' code-switching), future research dealing with the Algerian diaspora in France must consider reaching more second- and third-generation participants since language shift become more pronounced and easier to detect among later generations. Previous studies conducted on the loss of dialects or languages (e.g., Nor Hisham, 1994; Smolicz, 1983) found that code-switching was significant in promoting language shift. According to David (1996: 58), code-switching is a "step in the process of language shift". As such, investigating patterns of code-switching can add to the understanding of the whole picture as it can be one of the reasons behind the language maintenance or the gradual language shift among the Algerian community in France. While the findings of this study are based on Algerian immigrants' self-reports, future researchers must consider analysing their actual speech (through interviews, narratives, etc) in order to identify structural and functional features that reflect their linguistic practices which would enhance our

understanding of language maintenance and shift among such immigrant community. Given the linguistic diversity within the Algerian diaspora, future research should consider investigating Tamazight language maintenance and shift in France. This would offer a basis for comparative analysis between the two groups.

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