Amplifying Arab American Heritage Language Students' Voices: A Multiple Case Study on Translanguaging Practices and Identity Negotiation in University Arabic Classrooms

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Amplifying Arab American Heritage Language Students’ Voices: A Multiple Case Study on Translanguaging Practices and Identity Negotiation in University Arabic Classrooms

by

Lina Gomaa

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction

Dissertation Committee:
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Abstract

Little research has been conducted on Arab American students at universities (Shoman, 2016) and specifically, in the heritage language studies field. The experiences of Arab American heritage language (AAHL) students are significantly less examined than those of other heritage language students (Hillman, 2019). Arabic language curricula and instructional practices in universities tend to privilege the teaching of Modern Standard Arabic over dialects (Al-Batal, 2018a; Younes, 2018), which marginalizes heritage learners’ prior knowledge of the Arabic culture and its language, specifically Arabic dialects used in their home communities. These phenomena can create a non-affirming learning experience for these students. As such, in this study, I addressed these questions:

- To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities?

- How did AAHL students perceive the impact of teaching Modern Standard Arabic on their development of linguistic skills, and their identities as Arab American multilingual speakers?

In this study, I used the frameworks of culturally responsive teaching and funds of identity to illuminate the experiences of AAHL students in the classroom, as well as in their homes and communities. I employed in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2019), together with classroom artifacts, and language samples.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to Dr. Anita Bright, Dr. Joanne Cooper, Dr. Keith Walters, and Dr. Steven Thorne. You are educators who change lives. I hope to follow your lead.

To my mother, your prayers and belief in me have carried me through the ups and downs of life and this research, one of the most important projects of my life.

To the Guistis for your kindness, love, and support.

To my Arab American students, your passion to learn Arabic continues to shape my thinking about education and learning.
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I dedicate this research to my family: mum, dad, Nick, Scott and Kim. My family and friends, who patiently accepted that I missed many of their social events to work on my writing, to attend class, or just to sleep. Their graciousness with my schedule made this research happen. I love you all, and I want to make you all proud.
Finally, there are many people whose names need to be here, who met me once or twice or even more, and shared ideas with me or encouraged me to continue my research. I send you kind thoughts wherever you are in the world. Last but not least, I thank God because He made the impossible possible.
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CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

At the end of my Arabic class, one of my Arab American heritage students, Ahmed, walked into the hallway with me, and shared with me that he decided to major in Arabic. After reflecting on it, he was happy with his decision. I asked him what his future career plans were; he answered he would like to go to his father’s home country in the Levant area to teach English to young children. Hearing this, I felt rewarded that Ahmed was closer to finding his purpose in life and getting an answer to why he was pursuing college in the first place. His spoken colloquial Arabic was clear, flowing more fluently than his peers. His presentations were not only easy to follow, but he always shared experiences from his travels to Palestine and Jordan. He was surely getting close to his calling, I felt.

A year later, after Ahmed finished his Arabic courses with me, and advanced to the next series of Arabic classes with a different instructor, we happened to run into one another in front of the student center. I asked when he would graduate. He said he changed his major to English and he would be finished in 2 years: “After all, my Arabic will never be as good as my English,” Ahmed said. I could hear a sense of defeat in his voice; a crushed dream replaced by a “realistic” goal. He added that although he understood the value of Modern Standard Arabic and its grammar, he felt he could not study Arabic any more. “I will continue reading Arabic poetry in colloquial Arabic, and in English translation,” he stressed. I nodded and did not say much. We bid farewell to each other, and ended the conversation with a promise to keep in touch.
I walked away with a heavy heart, knowing that all the effort he and I put into those 3 years of teaching and learning Arabic were now for naught. My student's story is not unique, and it is repeated with many Arab American heritage students who study Arabic. Although they may start off with enthusiasm and drive, many heritage students do not continue learning Arabic in advanced coursework, which can eventually lead to gradual language loss. With their language loss, many other losses follow; the loss is not only in their Arabic language skills, but also their identity as Arab Americans and confidence in who they are. Through my dissertation journey, this incident and many others like it have guided me to learn how instructors and curriculum developers can help Arab American heritage students thrive in Arabic classes in higher education and be active participants in their local Arab American communities.

**Background of the Problem**

**The Arabic Language and Its Complexity: Alˈfusˤha, Modern Standard Arabic, and Dialects**

The Arabic language is one of the most challenging languages for English speakers to learn. The Defense Language Institute categorized Arabic in category IV, among the highest and most difficult languages to learn, along with Chinese Mandarin, Pashto, and Japanese (Association of the United States Army, 2010). The complexity of Arabic is mainly due to its different forms used for various communication purposes, in that Arab speakers read and write one form but speak another (Ryding, 2018). The form called Alˈfusˤha is used in reading and formal settings like news outlets and political and religious speeches. Al-Batal (2018a) explained that the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language field in the U.S. developed a version of Alˈfusˤha and called it Modern Standard
Arabic (MSA). MSA is often also referred to as formal Arabic. Other forms of Arabic are dialects or colloquial Arabic, which are used in everyday transactions and in speaking. An example of how diverse colloquial Arabic is and to what extent it can differ from MSA—and sometimes transforms from original MSA forms—is the question word “where?” It becomes “ween” فين in the Levant area, Gulf countries, Tunisia and Algeria. However, “feen” فين is used in Morocco, Egypt and Sudan, and “Ayna” أين is used in Modern Standard and formal Arabic. As I explain later in this chapter, Arabic’s various forms have repercussions on teaching the language in higher education and on AAHL students.

**Identifying the Problem of AAHL Students and Its Boundaries**

Although a large and growing body of research exists related to language learners and specifically heritage language studies, little research has been conducted on Arab American students at universities (Shoman, 2016) and specifically, in the heritage language studies field. AAHL students are significantly less studied than other heritage language students (Hillman, 2019). Integrating dialects with teaching MSA is not agreed upon among Arabic instructors (Al-Mohsen, 2016; Trentman, 2017; Younes, 2018). In fact, Arabic language curricula and instructional practices tend to privilege the teaching of MSA over dialects in universities (Al-Batal, 2018a; Younes, 2018), which marginalizes heritage learners’ prior knowledge of the Arabic culture and its language, specifically Arabic dialects used in their home communities. These phenomena can create a non-affirming learning experience for these students.
In this study, I focused on exploring how some AAHL students in a public university on the West coast of the United States construct their learning experience in Arabic classrooms as connected to their Arabic language use in their communities, and in relation to their Arab American identity. For the purpose of this study, AAHL students refers to Arab American students who have some connection to the Arabic language and culture. Further, my use of the term AAHL in this study reflects individuals for whom Arabic is part of their lives in a direct or indirect way; they have experienced some interactions using Arabic outside of the Arabic classroom through relationships with family and friends inside and outside the U.S., or study abroad or travel.

**Context of the Problem**

Thanks to waves of immigration to the U.S. from all over the Arab world, there are multiple dialects spoken in U.S. Arab American communities. The first of three noteworthy waves of immigrants to the U.S. arrived in the 1880s, during the Ottoman Empire. Those immigrants were mostly Christians from Greater Syria who worked in farming and manual labor. Another key wave of immigrants came to the United States in the 1960s, and were mostly Muslims (Naber, 2000). After the 1967 war (between Egypt, Jordan, Syria, on the one hand, and Israel, on the other), immigration from Palestine and Jordan to the U.S. increased, lasting through the 1970s, in addition to immigration from the southern part of Lebanon due to the civil war that lasted between 1957-1977 (Abraham & Abraham, 1981). This second wave of immigration included many professional, educated immigrants, unlike the first wave, which included mostly pre-literate and under-skilled workers (Abraham & Abraham, 1981).
economy, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, was such that there were not enough jobs locally for the growing numbers of professionals (Abraham & Abraham, 1981). Most recently, in a third important wave in the 1990s, immigrants from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia—mostly educated male Muslims—arrived in the United States (S’hiri, 2010).

Many linguists and language instructors consider Arabic—in addition to Arabic’s multiple dialects—as a diglossic language, meaning there are at least two forms of Arabic: a high form and a low one. In the case of Arabic, the higher form is MSA and Classical Arabic. The low form in Arabic is composed of the Arabic colloquial dialects (Younes, 2015). Using the terms “high” and “low” forms, despite their wide use in linguistics, may carry an evaluative connotation that does not reflect the real value of both varieties. Native Arabic speakers use both forms—and other forms in addition to other languages—in their daily lives for different purposes. For example, Arabic speakers listen to the news in MSA and order groceries in colloquial Arabic. Bassiouney (2020) argued that diglossia as a term is too narrow to describe the use of Arabic language in Arabic countries like Tunisia, where many speakers are fluent in French, in addition to Arabic. I agree with Bassiouney that the term diglossia cannot fully capture the complexity of Arabic use, not only in Tunisia but in most of the Arab world.

The regional dialects of the Arab world are various and many; there are different opinions about how many main Arabic dialects are spoken in the Arab world. Some count the main dialects as four: Egyptian, Gulf, Moroccan/North African, and Levantine. However, Versteegh (as cited in Bassiouney, 2020) attempted to identify five main
regional dialects mostly depending on geography as well as other commonalities among these dialects that distinguish them from MSA. The five main Arabic dialects are: the Iraqi Mesopotamian dialects, the Arabian Peninsula dialects spoken in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia, Egyptian dialects, Syro-Lebanese [the Levant] in Syria and Lebanon, and finally the Maghreb dialects in North Africa (Versteegh, as cited in Bassiouny, 2020). For simplification, in this research I used the four dialects perspective, categorizing the Iraqi dialect as part of the Gulf dialect, while being aware of its unique features that are not shared with other Gulf dialects.

Again, although MSA is not viewed as a spoken language (R. Bassiouney, personal communication, August, 17, 2020) and various Arabic dialects are spoken in the Arab world and among Arab communities in the U.S., MSA currently is the only focus in the Arab world for “pedagogical practice” (Al-Batal, 2018b, p. ix), whereas colloquial Arabic, used in everyday communication, is not allowed in the curriculum (Al-Batal, 2018b). Neglecting the teaching of dialects in Arabic classes in higher education may marginalize AAHL students who come with valuable prior knowledge of Arabic and its culture. Schwartz (2001) explained that heritage students come to class with pronunciation and intonation that closely resemble native speakers with educated backgrounds. In addition, 80-90% of heritage students’ grammar use is undeviating from prestige dialect rules (Schwartz 2001). Thus, instructors do not typically view AAHL students’ extensive prior knowledge of Arabic language and culture as relevant to classroom Arabic language use.
As stated previously, despite the diversity of Arabic speaking immigrants and U.S.-born Arab Americans in terms of countries of origins, dialects, education level, professional skills, and faith, Arabic language instruction in the U.S. remains focused on MSA. This variety of Arabic can be seen as a “frozen” form of the language, meaning it does not evolve or grow at the same rate as dialects and has limited settings in which it is used (McGinnis, 2014, p. 146). For millennia, spoken Arabic has been dynamic, and has shifted and changed in terms of grammar, genre, and vocabulary, to meet the needs of everyday transactions, whereas written and formal Arabic adheres to grammatical rules developed centuries ago, resulting in an increasing chasm between written and spoken forms of Arabic (Ryding, 2018). In practice, for a variety of reasons, Arabic language teaching in higher education strongly emphasizes MSA which can be detrimental to learning Arabic dialects that AAHL students use in their communities.

Grammar instruction in MSA has historically been the core of Arabic instruction (Wahba, 2015), despite the existence of more modern and comprehensive methods of language teaching, to the point that integrating dialects in teaching Arabic is contested among Arabic instructors (Al-Mohsen, 2016; Trentman, 2017; Younes, 2018). The lack of agreement between leaders in the Arabic teaching community has resulted in limited resources for teaching dialects (Trentman, 2017), as well as pressure within much of Arabic teaching community to focus on MSA. Arabic instructors integrate almost no Arabic dialects in their teaching and if they do, dialects are included in a very limited way (Abdalla & Al-Batal, 2012); however, some instructors are gradually pushing for dialect integration. Consequently, a disconnection may occur between classroom use of
Arabic and AAHL students’ use in their lives, because they mostly use dialects in their home communities.

In addition to focusing only on formal Arabic and its grammar, Arabic language classrooms do not match the everyday reality of translanguaging, which is “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401). In other words, translanguaging focuses on speakers’ use of multiple language and semiotic systems, including shifts within registers of a language, to communicate an intended meaning. This natural use of language is typically not part of Arabic language instruction.

Although Arabic speakers use translanguaging practices (to be further discussed below) in their everyday lives, Bassiouney (2020) stressed the dire need for research on translanguaging in Arabic studies. Arabic language speakers commonly translanguage between Arabic and other languages like English, French, and Italian, as well as among dialects and registers of languages. Hillman (2019) explained that speakers of Arabic mix dialects and also integrate other languages like English, French, and Berber with Arabic where the “borders between these languages and varieties are more often than not fluid” (p. 299). The fluidity of Arabic language use extends to translanguaging within Arabic itself, for example between MSA and regional dialect, depending on the situation.

**Defining Heritage Language and AAHL Students**

In determining who qualifies as a heritage language student, consensus has been difficult to establish. There is “definitional fuzziness” (Duff, 2008, p. 108) around defining heritage language learners due to differing perspectives on heritage learners. Li
and Duff (2008) explained that there are two views in heritage language literature defining heritage language students. The first one is “a perspective reflecting an ethnic, historical, or sociopolitical investment in the language” (Li & Duff, 2008, p. 16), and the second one is “a perspective based on actual linguistic competence as well as familial affiliation” (Li & Duff, 2008, p. 16). These two views regarding heritage language learners represent the opinions of many in the field, which lead to a marked lack of clarity when describing these students and their experiences.

Toward a clearer definition, Valdes (2000) defined a heritage language speaker as someone “who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (p. 1). Wiley (2014) commented on that definition, stressing that it is the most useful one pedagogically. He critiqued pedagogical definitions of heritage language speakers because they focused on literacy; these definitions are not derived out of assessment needs in language programs, which do not match heritage language learners’ reality who are not usually taught in school settings (Wiley, 2014). Thus, Valdes’ definition represents some of the realities of heritage speakers when they enroll in university language programs.

In her research of AAHLs in Islamic schools, Labanieh (2019) used the following definition to refer to her participants, after adopting aspects of Valdes’ definition:

person who is raised in a home where Arabic in its mixed form of colloquial Arabic (CA) and modern standard Arabic (MSA) is present, who speaks CA and English, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and Arabic. (p. 15)
In Labanieh’s definition, prior use of Arabic and its different forms are factors in her research. Although I agree with Labanieh that some AAHL students translanguage between MSA and colloquial Arabic, I do not agree that using MSA at home or understanding it is a condition to be an AAHL student. However, because the setting of her research is Islamic schools, where Arabic is the focus of students’ studies (Labanieh, 2019), her definition perfectly matches her study, but cannot be generalized to AAHLs in other settings.

As mentioned earlier, for the purposes of my study, AAHL students refer to Arab American students who have some connection to the Arabic language, culture, and heritage, and Arabic is part of their lives in a direct or indirect way; they have experienced some interactions using Arabic outside of the Arabic classroom through relationships with family and friends inside and outside the U.S., or study abroad or travel. Proficiency in MSA or colloquial Arabic is not necessary for someone to be considered an AAHL student.

This definition suits the purpose of my study because it is inclusive of AAHL students who may not have had extensive exposure to Arabic; some of them might be second or third generation Arab American, and Arabic might only be used when visiting or interacting online with family members in the Arab world. Secondly, my definition includes cultural and heritage factors; some AAHL students, from my observations, can be active in celebrating Arab culture, without necessarily being proficient in Arabic. These students are also included in the definition which I am using for this study.
Problem Validation

A focus on MSA, particularly its grammar in instruction, has shaped Arabic language textbooks in higher education. In a study analyzing the three most commonly used Arabic language textbooks in the United States, Wahba (2015) found that all three books focused on explaining language components, rather than developing language skills. In other words, these textbooks were focused on describing Arabic grammar and structures, with limited opportunities to communicate in Arabic and use the language in context. Wahba’s study called for a pedagogical direction in Arabic language teaching materials that reflects what the native speakers do in real life with the language. In another study related to course materials, Badr (2019) surveyed Arabic language instructors. He found that for the most commonly used Arabic language textbook in colleges and universities in the U.S., *Al Kitaab* (Brustad et al., 2011), 70% of instructors expressed uncertainty as to whether *Al Kitaab* met their AAHL students’ needs, 65% were uncertain if the book fairly depicts the traditions of Arabic society, and 60% were unsure whether the book reflects Arabic values—which were not explicitly defined in the survey (Badr, 2019). Consequently, grammar, not culture nor dialects, is the main focus of dominant textbooks in Arabic teaching in the U.S., underscoring the disconnection between AAHL students’ colloquial Arabic used in their communities and the formal Arabic taught in Arabic language classes. This disconnection is exacerbated through textbooks and subsequent instruction that are not designed for fully fostering language communicative skills.
When instructors privilege MSA at the expense of colloquial dialects, most students including AAHL students are not learning how native speakers truly use the Arabic language. Al-Batal (2018a) explained that “to deprive students of the knowledge of Arabic dialect is to deprive them of the chance to learn how to communicate naturally with the majority of Arabic speakers who do not feel comfortable interacting in Al’fus‘ha” (p. 6). In the same way, to deprive AAHL students of developing and growing their use of their dialects, is to deprive them of communicating with their families and communities in the U.S. and abroad. Moreover, the harmful effect on AAHL students, who are students of color, may also cast AAHL students as invisible with their connection to their Arabic heritage; the Arabic culture and heritage are not explicitly taught in the curricula, and as such, students of color are often silenced or erased in the curricula of the mainstream (Museus et al., 2015). When students do not see themselves and their culture in the curriculum, they risk becoming invisible in the classroom.

AAHL students come from different regional, dialectical, and cultural backgrounds—as I explained in the historical context section—and bring varying levels of fluency in different dialects, which may be ignored or even dismissed in the Arabic language classrooms (S’hiri, 2010). Because, “MSA has always been the preferred variety to teach in the classroom and until more recently, little attention has been given to spoken varieties” (Hillman, 2019, p. 301). Many educators who teach Arabic are first generation immigrants, and they teach Arabic in the U.S. the way they learned the language in their original home countries, where Arabic is their first and national language (Labanieh, 2019). Consequently, instructors may disregard AAHL students’
proficiency in dialects, and may view students’ proficiency in dialects as an unacceptable and unwelcome influence on formal Arabic (Hillman, 2019). Failing to integrate dialects in teaching may be due to the strong beliefs the majority of educated Arabic speakers have about what “proper” Arabic, likely due to connecting Alˈfusˤha with Islam, which make this ideology unsuited to guide teaching principles in teaching Arabic as a foreign language (Al-Batal, 2018b, p. x). One might say that instructors may have internalized the idea that disregarding dialects and focusing on Alˈfusˤha and MSA is a way to “protect” the Arabic language, despite the reality of not using this form of Arabic in daily interactions. Consequently, exclusive focus on MSA, without including diverse colloquial Arabic dialects, may contribute to practices that do not promote or support the diversity of AAHL students and their experiences and needs.

The ways Arabic instructors dismiss or ignore AAHL students’ prior knowledge of Arabic in university classrooms is intensified with the lack of information about this student minority. On an institutional level, due to labeling conventions that count Arabs and North Africans as White, accurate tallies of enrollment, graduation, and retention of Arab American students in higher education in the U.S. do not exist (Shoman, 2016). At the language-program level, despite AAHL students being “an integral part” of many Arabic language programs in the U.S. (Albirini, 2018), not much is known about if and how colloquial Arabic helps AAHL students learn formal Arabic (Albirini, 2014) which connects to the earlier statement on AAHL students being one of the least examined groups in heritage language studies (Hillman, 2019).
Despite the lack of reliable and comprehensive data, S’hiri (2010) reported that AAHL students are estimated to make up 25% of students studying Arabic in college, but only a small portion of AAHL students reach advanced levels of Arabic language classes in higher education. Anecdotally, in my case study context, I can confirm from the university’s data that from 2016 to 2020, out of 38 Arabic Majors and minors, only 4 AAHL students graduated. However, there are yet to be more studies to confirm or negate S’hiri’s claim of 25% across U.S. universities. The lack of information about AAHL students can negatively impact helping them progress in their studies. Current teaching practices and curricula in higher education may be taking away an opportunity for the linguistic and cultural advancement of AAHL students who, despite their exposure to various forms of the Arabic language in their communities, may not continue studying Arabic at higher levels nor further develop their proficiency in their home dialects in university settings.

Statement of the Research Problem

AAHL students may experience Arabic instructors marginalizing and dismissing their prior knowledge of Arabic dialects used in their home communities due to instructors’ privileging of MSA, despite the complex nature of Arabic. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how AAHL students perceive their experience in Arabic classrooms in higher education as related to their actual use of Arabic in their local communities, in order to expand the body of knowledge on AAHL students and inform theory. Moreover, this study may better inform instructors and curriculum developers.
about inclusive learning experiences that affirm students’ identities, as well as draw upon their linguistic strengths and support linguistic needs of AAHL students.

Given the need to research translanguaging in Arabic studies (Bassiouny, 2020) together with the paucity of information about AAHL students (Hillman, 2019), my study aimed to share information about AAHL experiences with educators who work with them in U.S. universities. Additionally, AAHL students are under-researched in the field of heritage language education and teaching Arabic as a foreign language, and as a result, Arab heritage language learners’ perspectives on their learning experiences of Arabic is absent (Labanieh, 2019). These students’ stories and voices need to be visible to researchers, educators, and curriculum developers.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

Studying AAHL students’ experience in learning Arabic is important for three main reasons: the absence of information about AAHL students and its repercussions, the plethora of deficit-focused discourses among some Arabic language teachers and researchers toward AAHL students, and the high attrition rate of AAHL students. I explain each of these ideas in turn.

In this study, I aimed to add more information related to heritage language and higher education, to expand upon the dearth of studies about AAHL students. I sought to address the gap in the extant literature in relation to AAHLs learning expectations and identity development, as well as exploring ways to build on the prior knowledge they bring to Arabic language classrooms. Given this lack of information about their learning experiences, classroom practices that can harm AAHL’s learning and identity may easily
be perpetuated in higher education. Unsurprisingly, a lack of Arabic language teaching resources for AAHL students across the United States (Beale, 2010; S’hiri, 2004) could be the result of under-studying AAHL students’ linguistic and identity needs. Further, the gap of knowledge in understanding AAHL students’ unique educational needs has essentially resulted in providing AAHL instruction identical to the instruction intended for students learning the Arabic language and culture for the first time, which unfortunately is a common practice for many heritage language students in North American. Li and Duff (2008) explained that because of covering survival language skills and basic rules of grammar, foreign language textbooks are not well-suited for heritage language students in North America.

Additionally, researching AAHL students’ experience is vital because some instructors view AAHL students’ prior knowledge of the culture and language from a deficit perspective. Some instructors may believe colloquial Arabic influence on AAHL students’ use has a negative impact on language learning, and as such, requires correction. That is to say, some instructors believe that colloquial Arabic and dialects are “contaminating” AAHL students’ use of the Arabic language. Instructors may view AHHL proficiency in dialects as increasing the likelihood of “a negative transfer” (Hillman, 2019, p. 311) which is a deficit lens through which to view AAHL students’ prior knowledge. However, in reality “pure forms” of Al’fus’ha and colloquial Arabic “do not exist” (Hillman, 2019, p. 302). Although many Arabic instructors may require students to produce “pure” formal Arabic, speakers of Arabic mix the usage of Al’fus'ha, colloquial, and other languages in their daily lives. Consequently, there may be a
common practice among Arabic language instructors to view students’ prior knowledge not as an asset, but as a deficit in Arabic language classrooms. In response to this deficit-focused framing, in ways similar to Hillman (2019), Albirini (2014), in his study of AAHL students, urged Arabic instructors to view AAHL students’ grammatical errors in formal Arabic, not as proficiency problems, but rather, simply as a result of colloquial variety influence.

In a similar vein, Bale’s (2014, p. 152) study of Arabic in the U.S. mentioned that in his own experience as a researcher in Detroit schools with Arabic language teachers, he found that these teachers believe that colloquial Arabic is “broken” or “bad” and needs to be corrected through formal instruction. Viewing young people’s language use from a deficit lens is, unfortunately, common among some educators, family members, and adults in many heritage languages. Adults point fingers at youth, particularly young people of color for speaking in “broken” and “ungrammatical” ways (Bucholtz et al., 2017, p. 44). For example, in an ethnographic study investigating indigenous Hopi students in their school and their community relationships, they expressed a desire to learn the Hopi language but they sensed “fear of being ridiculed for linguistic errors” (McCarty et al., 2014, p. 83). A clear pattern emerges across the linguistic landscape: When young people use their heritage language in the classroom, they may be systemically devalued for this language use, when such use should instead be nourished.

In related ways, high attrition rates add to the importance of learning about AAHL students’ experiences. Few AAHL students advance to higher levels of Arabic (S’hiri, 2010). Just as is the case with their African American peers in advanced language
courses, the numbers of AAHL students significantly decrease in advanced courses, and many drop out completely (Watterson, 2011, as cited in Anya, 2020). This issue of attrition is as yet under-researched in the world language studies (Anya, 2020). The existing fields of second language acquisition and applied linguistics tend to focus on second language acquisition and mental mechanisms of acquiring languages, and not on learners and how they experience language in relation to their social identities (Anya, 2020). I partially agree with Anya (2020) that many traditions within existing fields, not all, include and embrace the social identities and races of the students. I use a similar argument used for African American students for AAHL students whose numbers decrease drastically in advanced Arabic classes, and study Arabic curricula that prioritizes grammar and Alˈfusˤha, that most native speakers only use when reading and writing, which minimizes AAHL students’ knowledge, identities, and experiences of the Arab culture in their home communities.

Learning more about AAHL students takes on greater significance when one examines the current research gaps in knowledge about this minority group. The gap in research may be due to the current and past research focus in the second language field and linguistics on AAHL students’ speaking and writing features—similar to the 1970s and 1980s dominant research topics in second language field learning English, focused on skills in isolation, artificially divorced from issues related to learners’ identities and cultures, motivation/investments, race, power-relations and others (Duff, 2008). On the other hand, research on identity and race topics related to Arab Americans addresses this population in general, without contextualizing these issues to university and college
students. While the second language field and linguistics of English and other languages like Spanish moved on to include learners’ identities, complexities, race, and motivation, Arabic studies and teaching Arabic as a foreign language field has yet to catch up. Thus, the gap exists where we have information about some of the struggles facing pronunciation and writing for AAHL students and some information about Arab Americans’ race and identity, but little is known about Arab American students in higher education (Shoman, 2016), including AAHL students in classrooms learning Arabic and how their identities and lives are (dis)connected with their learning in college.

Studying AAHL students’ experience in the classroom and their use of Arabic outside of the classroom is important to increase the body of knowledge about AAHL students and their experience in Arabic language classes in higher education. In addition, studying AAHL students highlights the current practices to learn how in the future we may create a more inclusive and affirming classroom experience for AAHL students.

**Research Questions and Methods**

In this study, I conducted a qualitative multiple-case study to explore the perceptions of AAHL students of their Arabic classroom experience in relation to their actual use of Arabic in their communities. I used two main frameworks, which I defined and explained in detail in Chapter 2. In short, these frameworks are Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which is a pedagogy that employs students’ multiple cultural experiences for effective teaching (Gay, 2002), and Funds of Identity (FOI), which is a framework that focuses on what the students perceive as meaningful for their learning on a personal level (Hogg & Volman, 2020).
After considering a range of methodological approaches, I decided to employ multiple case studies, because this approach was considered by many to be more convincing and rigorous than single-case studies, as well as fitting the goal of my research: attempting to learn more about the impact of classroom practices on AAHL students in relation to their use of Arabic in their local communities and their identities. In my study, I aimed to inform educators about AAHL students’ experiences as a means to affirm their identity, and foster supportive linguistic and cultural classroom environments that connect with AAHL students’ lives in their local communities.

My participants were AAHL students who were studying or have recently studied Arabic within the previous two to three years, to learn more about their experiences while their memories were still fresh. This multiple case study was set in one of the oldest Arabic undergraduate programs in the U.S., in an urban public North American university in the Department of Foreign Languages in which I taught for 8 years. Because of the diverse student population in this university, many of the AAHL students’ experiences provided a deep understanding of what this group, belonging to heritage students from different Arab backgrounds, experience within the Arabic classes at this university, which may resemble many other universities in the U.S. For further context, this program had very low AAHL student numbers with majors and minors in Arabic, despite their enrollment in visible numbers in first and second years of the program. Thus, multiple case studies in the context of this university can significantly help in comprehending the process, change (or lack of), experiences, and dynamics of studying Arabic and learning about their Arabic speaking communities in relation to their
classroom experience and (dis)continuing their Arabic studies at the university. As such, the following research questions emerge.

**Research Questions**

1. To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities?

2. How did AAHL students perceive the impact of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA or formal Arabic) on their development of linguistic skills?

3. How did AAHL students perceive the impact of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA or formal Arabic) on their identities as Arab American multilingual speakers?

The research questions directly related to the purpose and the problem of the study. First, the questions connected to the purpose because they seek to learn if and how classroom practices are meaningful to AAHL students’ lives. Additionally, the questions aimed at highlighting the impact of classroom experiences on these students’ perception of linguistic progress as well as identity development, so that educators and curriculum developers may learn about providing supportive and asset-based classroom learning to AAHL minority students, thereby encouraging them to continue their Arabic studies.

Second, the research questions reflected the problem of the study and its impact; namely, dismissing and marginalizing AAHL students’ prior knowledge of Arabic language and culture, within the teaching Arabic as a foreign language field that prioritizes MSA teaching. The questions helped in clarifying the troubling situations these students may be experiencing by asking to identify the connection, if it exists, between classroom practices and AAHL students’ use of Arabic language in their communities. Further, dismissing AAHL students’ prior knowledge most probably
impacted their perceptions of who they are and which language(s) they use in their daily lives. The last research question aimed at capturing the effect of privileging MSA on AAHL students’ identities.

**Conclusion**

In this study, my focus was on multiple-case studies of AAHL students who were studying Arabic at the time of the data collection, or who had studied Arabic within the last two to three years, where their participation in this qualitative research gave them the space and opportunity to voice their experiences in Arabic language classrooms, and how they perceived the impact of these experiences on their identities. I wanted to discover to what extent classroom practices may exclude, marginalize or belittle the wealth of knowledge that AAHL students bring to Arabic classrooms. Consequently, in the following chapter, I explain the theoretical frameworks for this study, reviewing research literature related to the problem of this study to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the problem among heritage language students and minority students in the U.S. context.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

“The future is a multilingual and multiethnic one, regardless of attempts to suppress that reality.” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 6)

In this chapter, I first share my positionality, and then provide a review of the conceptual frameworks that help in understanding the challenges facing AAHL students in Arabic classrooms in higher education. I summarize the state of Arabic language pedagogy in higher education and discuss the frameworks of CRT and funds of identity. Finally, I highlight empirical research regarding students of Arabic and other minoritized students in relation to these two frameworks.

Statement of Positionality

As a second-language learner of English, and an instructor of Arabic, I am aware that I can understand some of AAHL students’ struggles from the lens of my own positionality. Additionally, I am an immigrant to the U.S., living between multiple dichotomous worlds: West and East, Arabic and English, and instructor and student. I wonder to what extent AAHL students straddle their linguistic worlds and how Arabic, English and other languages affect how they navigate the world.

I have always been a student of languages, have learned English and Arabic in Egypt, and the UK, and English in the U.S., in addition to French and Italian. Further, I have taught in English in Egypt, and Arabic in the U.S., and my lens combines the different roles of being a student and an instructor. My educational experience and identity have been reshaped throughout my learning of Arabic and English, and my command of both languages has opened the world to me. However, seeing the struggle of
some AAHL students as they work to strengthen and deepen their Arabic saddens and frustrates me.

Although AAHL students are estimated to be 25% of students studying Arabic in college in the U.S., only a small portion of these students reach advanced Arabic language classes (S’hiri, 2010). As my own AAHL student Mahmoud said, “Seeing that I learned the alphabet much quicker than my classmates [in Arabic 101], I felt a void in learning for the remainder of the course.” This void can continue throughout the Arabic program when instructors do not build on these students’ prior knowledge, causing unfulfilling learning experiences and leading to attrition. My AAHL students’ stories that I witnessed during their Arabic learning motivated me to conduct this research and bring their voices into the light.

Finally, I am an insider in the setting of my multiple case studies in which I taught Arabic for 8 years, including first, second, and third year courses. However, I gained an outsider position by moving to another institution starting in fall term, 2020. This change allowed me to approach my previous AAHL students with a more equal power relation between us, in that the power of being an instructor in the same institution as the participants is not a factor anymore. Instead, my roles as an empathetic listener, a previous instructor, and an emerging ally are amplified.

An Overview of the Current Arabic Teaching Landscape

Many Arabic language classrooms in U.S. colleges and universities rarely reflect the real-world interplay of colloquial Arabic, MSA, and other world languages like
English, French, and Italian. This multidialectal context creates challenges for native and non-native speakers alike, considering that Arab mass media, politicians, religious leaders, and literature typically employ formal Arabic, while native speakers use colloquial Arabic, including regional dialects, in everyday transactions and conversations (Al Masaeed, 2020). Although for Arabs of older generations, such as Egyptians who came of age in the 1960s and 70s, often orient themselves towards an MSA idea, younger generations across the Arab world embrace translinguaging in English and other European languages as a lever for upward social mobility and ease of communication. In the classrooms, Arabic instructors generally emphasize formal Arabic in language classrooms (Davila, 2017), which can contribute to the stagnation of AAHL students’ uses of colloquial Arabic. As noted previously, Al-Mohsen (2016) found instructors disagree on whether dialect(s) of Arabic should be taught alongside MSA. Unfortunately, this disagreement complicates and limits AAHL students’ learning experiences. In his study of 29 Arab American heritage speakers, Albirini (2018) found that it is vital to teach AAHL students not as more typical second and third language learners; instead, language instructors should build on AAHL students’ prior knowledge of colloquial Arabic in the classroom. Thus, language instructors and curriculum designers must understand AAHL students’ linguistic skills and identities to better serve them in the classroom.
Review of Conceptual Frameworks

In this first subsection, I define CRT as the first conceptual framework, and summarize its relation to culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP). Then, I discuss prior learning as one of the most important pillars in CRT. Under prior learning, I define translanguaging, explaining its practice as a manifestation of prior learning for AAHL students, as well as its role as a lens to view AAHL students’ experiences. Additionally, I provide an overview of empirical research on translanguaging and Arabic; explain translanguaging’s role in language reclamation for minority students; highlight gaps in research on translanguaging and Arabic; and share research critical of translanguaging. Following this, I continue to focus on CRT, reviewing the empirical research on CRT and AAHL students, and the gap in current research in relation to these students. In the second subsection, I explain funds of identity in detail, as the second main conceptual framework in this research (see Figure 1).

CRT is a pedagogy that employs students’ multiple cultural experiences for effective teaching (Gay, 2002). Gloria Ladson-Billings first introduced the framework of “culturally relevant pedagogy” in 1995, although the concept had gained adherents in the 1970s and 1980s (Paris, 2012). Later, Gay (2002) developed the term CRT, defined above. Both frameworks advocate for “asset-based approaches” (Muñiz, 2019, Understanding Culturally Responsive Teaching section, para. 6) or “resource pedagogies” (Paris, 2012, p. 93) and research whose aims are distancing learning and teaching from deficit approaches to teaching.
Figure 1

Summary of the Asset-Based Frameworks Used in This Study
CRT

A more recent development pushed the CRT concept further. Paris (2012) coined the term CSP. Building upon the work established in CRT teaching, CSP’s goal is to “perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 93) which is direly needed to resist monolingual policies and classroom practices. The essence of Paris’ argument is the lack of assurance that CRT would preserve students’ heritage and sustain their multilingualism; CRT could be limited by transitioning students from their knowledge of their cultures to schools’ learning goals, which bears the risk of teaching students in monolingual and white-centered environments. Consequently, CSP moves beyond CRT’s limitations to focus on sustaining and growing students’ multiculturalism in multilingual and asset-based environments.

As mentioned above, CSP aims to foster and sustain students’ linguistic and cultural heritage in schooling (Paris & Alim, 2017). It is an asset-based pedagogy; it resists deficit-based pedagogies that consider “languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of color as deficiencies to be overcome in learning the demanded and legitimized dominant language, literacy, and cultural ways of schooling” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 4). Unlike deficit-based pedagogies, CSP respects, sustains, and develops students’ languages, cultures, and knowledge they bring to schools.

Educators use a deficit lens when they view their students—including young people of color—as lacking in culture, language, academic skills, and family support (Bucholtz et al., 2017). In contrast to this deficit viewpoint, language is seen as an asset...
in CSP because of its importance for all students, and especially for students of color (Bucholtz et al., 2017; Paris 2012). In fact, educators who apply CSP principles provide support to youth of color in terms of sustaining their identities and viewing students as linguistic and cultural experts (Bucholtz et al., 2017). Ultimately, what is at stake in education are the languages, cultures, and identities of students of color when learning in deficit-based pedagogies; however, CSP is an empowering pedagogy that could reverse and certainly avoid, in the first place, the deficit lens of viewing youth of color as lacking in culture, language and academic skills.

**The Importance of Prior Learning in CRT**

Building on prior learning (also referred to as prior knowledge) is one of the CRT principles that requires educators to focus on what students can do, and not on what they cannot yet do (Gay 2010). Prior knowledge resonates with the term “funds of knowledge” (p. 625) describing students’ first-hand experiences, which educators need to utilize to help students feel included and culturally represented in the classroom. (González & Moll, 2002). The shift endorsed in CRT from a deficit lens to resources pedagogy echoed what Paris (2012) called for when he explained the need to separate learning and teaching from deficit approaches. When teaching centers the cultures and ways of knowing of students of different backgrounds and cultures in the curriculum, students will be more academically successful (Gay, 2010).

The first step in such a pedagogy, according to Gay (2010), is viewing students’ cultural skills as an important resource for teaching, and utilizing these skills for scaffolding in order for students to succeed. This kind of teaching requires instructors to
teach with creativity and care, along with being culturally responsive to students’ cultures to help them succeed and experience equity during their education (Gay 2010). Another step toward building on prior knowledge, and a pillar in CRT, is to employ the pedagogy of listening. This pedagogy entails instructors’ attention to students when they speak to better understand their emotions, while withholding judgement when listening and respecting students’ diverse cultural expressions (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). To sum up, building on students’ prior learning and scaffolding lessons based on their ways of knowing and cultural skills—while listening carefully to their cultural expressions—will contribute to students’ success. One of the most essential manifestations of AAHL students’ prior learning is translanguaging, which refers to multilingual individuals who fluidly move between languages, (Canagarajah, 2011) dialects, and language registers. Neither CRT nor CSP present anything as concrete or useful in explaining the specific linguistic experiences and realities of AAHL students as translanguaging; thus, it is to translanguaging that I now turn.

Translanguaging

In this subsection, I dissect translanguaging in relation to AAHL students and prior learning. First, I define translanguaging, review its development from bilingualism, explain its relation to the prior learning pillar in CRT, and highlight its expansion as a practice in an interconnected world. Further, I discuss the following: translanguaging as a lens to describe AAHL students’ experience, empirical research on translanguaging and Arabic, and language reclamation in relation to translanguaging. Finally, I highlight a gap in research on translanguaging and Arabic, and critique translanguaging.
There are several definitions of translanguaging, but a common theme among definitions is the focus on fluidity between multiple languages and intended meaning. One way to define translanguaging is “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401). In other words, translanguaging focuses on the speaker’s movement from one language to another to communicate an intended meaning. In the same vein, Lin’s (2019) definition of translanguaging stresses:

> a fluid, dynamic view of language [which] differ[s] from code-switching/mixing theories by de-centering the analytic focus from the language(s) being used in the interaction to the speakers who are making meaning and constructing original and complex discursive practices. (p. 5)

Put differently, translanguaging emphasizes the speaker’s meaning, unlike other concepts like code-switching, which focuses on issues unrelated to meaning. I explore the significance of translanguaging to my study in more detail later in this chapter.

Another definition of translanguaging is a “trans-semiotic system with many meaning-making signs, primarily linguistic ones that combine to make up a person’s semiotic repertoire” (Garcia & Wei, 2014, p. 42). This definition similarly emphasizes the theme of prioritizing intended speakers’ meaning while expanding the repertoire to non-linguistic features. Similarly, Wei (2018) explained that translanguaging reframes languages as a resource that is “multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal” (p. 22) to create meaning. In other words, translanguaging has more dimensions and fluidity than other concepts such as code-switching. In sum, and in consideration of the various definitions of translanguaging, the theory primarily focuses
on the speakers’ intended meaning, the fluidity of language(s) use, and speakers’ use of repertoires that are beyond language, like semiotics.

**Translanguaging: The Development From Bilingualism.** The scholarly study of translanguaging grew from the scholarly literature on bilingualism, and is a lens used for understanding how polyglot speakers communicate. Bilingualism, multilingualism, and plurilingualism—as concepts—have in common “a plurality of autonomous languages” (Garcia & Wei, 2014, p. 11); in this way, named languages are the central focus and are conceived as separate systems. On the other hand, Garcia and Wei (2014) described translanguaging as dynamic bilingualism, which goes further beyond Cummins’ (1979) concept of bilingualism based on two languages that are linguistically interdependent. Cummins’ linguistic interdependence hypothesis explained that language skills are interdependent because speakers can use what they know in their first language to help them acquire their second language (Vrooman, 2000). Cummins’ view of bilingualism highlighted a connection between a bilingual individual’s first and second languages; this connection between first and second languages is absent in the traditional view of bilingualism as languages are considered separate and unrelated systems (Garcia & Wei, 2014), as shown in Figure 2. The traditional linguistic view considered first and second languages of speakers as two separate, unrelated language systems. Garcia and Wei (2014) illustrated how bilingualism is seen differently from diverse theoretical perspectives (see Figure 2). This figure also highlights the progression of scholarship on bilingualism, in that translanguaging is the latest in viewing speakers’ language systems as interconnected and fluid ones, preceded by Cummins’ linguistic interdependence
where the first and second language are connected, but still separate systems (Garcia & Wei, 2014), which was preceded by considering the two languages the speakers use to be two entirely separate systems.

Figure 2

Comparing Traditional Bilingualism, Cummin’s Linguistic Interdependence and Translanguaging

*Note: Fn stands for continuous blended characteristics appearing in interactions within one linguistic system (Garcia & Wei, 2014, p. 14) in translanguaging.

It is important to note that the concept of translanguaging does not replace the concept of bilingualism; rather, the construct of translanguaging transforms the construct of bilingualism (Garcia & Wei, 2014). This transformation is important because translanguaging casts individuals as “mobile resources that can adapt to global and local
sociolinguistic situations” (Garcia & Wei, 2014, p. 18), as their repertoire opens to include semiotic practices and more actual practices that match what happens in real interactions. Despite the progress Cummins’ hypothesis makes from the transitional view, which considers languages as separate and unrelated systems (Garcia & Wei, 2014), his view of bilingualism as a connection between a bilingual individual’s first and second languages (Garcia & Wei, 2014) does not reflect the current reality visible in everyday face-to-face and digital communication and speakers’ use of continuously changing language repertoires and semiotics.

**Seeking Clarity on Translanguaging as a Theory, Pedagogy, Practice and Concept.** Although I offer a critique of translanguaging, I restate here that the term translanguaging can refer to many constructs, including theory, pedagogy, practice, and a diversity of concepts associated with translanguaging itself. Thus, to provide greater clarity, I differentiate between “translanguaging theory,” “translanguaging pedagogy,” “translanguaging practice,” and “translanguaging concepts.” These uses are my own contributions, and are not used commonly in literature where “translanguaging” is used to refer to all the above concepts. What is most relevant to my research is translanguaging practice, because it refers to students' actual use and integration of different languages, registers, and dialects when they speak in their home communities and with their peers and instructors at the university.

**Translanguaging Manifests Students’ Linguistic Prior Knowledge**

Translanguaging practices manifest students’ linguistic prior knowledge. As stated in the prior learning section, instructors who apply CRT pedagogy incorporate
students’ cultural skills to help with students’ success (Gay, 2010). Language is among those cultural skills. Paris (2012) stated that languages which students know, particularly students of color, are an asset in CSP. Therefore, Paris and Alim (2017) emphasized CSP, supporting linguistic and cultural practices of students in schooling. Based on these ideas, I argue that students’ linguistic practices, including translanguaging between languages, dialects, and registers, are part of students’ prior knowledge which they bring to the classroom. Similar to the CRT approach in incorporating students’ cultural skills and CSP’s approach to foster linguistic practices, instructors need to understand translanguaging as a resource to bridge from what the students know to learning new concepts. In other words, translanguaging as a linguistic practice and a manifestation of multilingual students' linguistic repertoire is part of students’ prior knowledge, which instructors can utilize to teach students, help them, and sustain their linguistic wealth/capital.

**Translanguaging Practices are Expanding in a Globalized and Interconnected World**

The importance of translanguaging emerges as immigration and mobility are reshaping many university classrooms. There are many terms, concepts, and theories that have been used to study the dynamics of language use by speakers of different languages. Some of these concepts differ from translanguaging and do not fully explain the speaker’s pedagogical needs and language reality. In the following paragraphs, I briefly explain the language paradigm shift in viewing language use and language study, then differentiate between translanguaging and other common concepts, and highlight why
translanguaging is one of the most helpful theoretical frameworks for understanding AAHL students’ classroom experiences in diverse university classrooms.

Changes have occurred in viewing language and communication within a mobile and global world, which helps in understanding the value of translanguaging in the broader context. Drawing upon Blommaert and Rampton, Thorne and Ivković (2015) called for a paradigm shift when studying languages, which focuses on mobility, context, mixing, and activities in daily communication, rather than seeing languages from a bounded, stable, and homogeneous lens. Understanding language use as dynamic and changing reflects our world’s superdiversity—a term that refers to the interaction between three aspects: the traditional view of diversity, like ethnicity and state origin; variables like legal status and socioeconomic origins; and the degree of integration in society (Vertovec, as cited in Thorne & Ivković, 2015). The superdiversity of the globalized world impacts language use and communication. In fact, Thorne and Ivković (2015) explained that a used language reflects a changing system, which contrasts with the perspectives that consider languages in use as static, regular, and consistent. Building on such emerging and changing paradigms in viewing language and its use, I explain several concepts in relation to translanguaging, arguing for translanguaging as one of the most useful and practical theoretical frameworks for comprehending the fluidity and hybrid practices of AAHL students.

Code-switching is a term commonly conflated with translanguaging. Translanguaging concepts and practices differ from code-switching in that translanguaging focuses on the speaker’s meaning-making, not the language itself (Lin,
2019). Moreover, code-switching “considers language from an external perspective that looks at bilinguals’ language behavior as if there were two monolinguals in one” (Garcia et al., 2017, p. 20), while translanguaging focuses on the speaker’s internal use of their own linguistic repertoires.

Another concept that is closely related to translanguaging, while remaining distinct, is codemeshing. Canagarajah (2011) used the term codemeshing to refer to written forms of translanguaging practices. In contrast to Canagarajah’s idea, Wei (2018) stressed that translanguaging can also be viewed as multimodal practice—as it includes textual, spatial, linguistic, and visual aspects as well. Consequently, translanguaging concepts and practices allow for great fluidity between and among languages and semiotic systems, and I believe that translanguaging includes concepts like codemeshing under its umbrella. Translanguaging allows for greater fluidity than codemeshing, not to mention clarity and inclusivity of communication modes. As mentioned above, concepts like bilingualism, plurilingualism, and multilingualism frame languages as autonomous (Garcia & Wei, 2014). In fact, both plurilingualism and multilingualism are often critiqued for viewing language as static and stable, rather than reflecting the current communicative practices that show hybridity among language users (Thorne & Ivković, 2015). In sum, translanguaging reflects the dynamic nature of language use among speakers, and shows what speakers’ activities entail within a super-diverse world.

**Translanguaging: A Lens to View AAHL Students’ Experience.** There are multiple reasons to emphasize translanguaging as a means to understand the challenges facing AAHL students and alternatives for addressing their unique needs. First, the
construct of translanguaging speaks to polyglot students’ reality when they use multiple languages at the same time. Pedagogically, the application of translanguaging is characterized by its dynamic flow, meaning translanguaging pedagogical applications stress using diverse semiotic resources while emphasizing meaning making and maintaining communicative progressivity, rather than instructional approaches that constrain interaction to a single linguistic code or register. Garcia et al. (2017) used the term “translanguaging corriente” to describe the “flow of students’ dynamic bilingualism” (p. 21) as they construct meaning from their repertoire. In other words, students can, when uninterrupted, construct meaning and maintain engagement and momentum while they learn and make sense of their world (Lin, 2019). In the case of AAHL students, through the translanguaging practices, they can switch between and layer together their home dialects, MSA, and English to construct meaning and maintain communicative momentum while engaging with others.

Second, “translanguaging is a practical theory of language” (Wei, 2018, p. 27), meaning that translanguaging emphasizes practical human interactions. Translanguaging is linked with practical realities and practices about student’s engagement in communication in multiple languages and semiotic contexts (Wei, 2018). This focus on language in practice suits the nature of the Arabic language, because translanguaging is inherent to the everyday Arabic used by native speakers in their daily lives, where Arabic speakers generally translanguage across multiple levels of Arabic fluidly in their communication. In Egyptian Arabic, for example, there are at least five Arabic language levels, according to the classification of Badawi (1973, as cited in Younes, 2015): (a)
Classical Arabic, (b) contemporary Alˈfusˤha (MSA), (c) cultured vernacular, (d) the vernacular of the literate, and (e) the vernacular of the nonliterate. Even preliterate Arabs engage in different forms of translanguaging which can include listening to the news that is mostly broadcasted in MSA, and using the dominant dialect(s) when working or visiting capital cities. Therefore, translanguaging, as a lens for comprehending language practices, is useful for understanding the complexity of the Arabic language and the linguistic practices of Arabic speakers.

In related ways, translanguaging pedagogy—which supports students’ translanguaging practices—promotes fluidity between languages and language register levels, because it reflects language realities and how people use them in daily life. “The myth of a pure form of a language is so deep-rooted that there are many people who, while accepting the existence of different languages, cannot accept the ‘contamination’ of their language by others” (Wei, 2018, p. 14). That is to say, some resist the fact that languages can be mixed in communication, and see it as a harmful practice, despite its existence, and expansion with our digital reality.

Evidence suggests that instructors resist translanguaging in Arabic instruction, while emphasizing MSA (Davila, 2017). In contrast, colloquial Arabic is generally ignored when teaching AAHL students (S’hiri, 2010). Teaching colloquial Arabic in the Arabic curriculum is still “debatable” (Abdalla, 2006, p. 328) where some curriculum developers hold on to the idea of study abroad programs as the best or primary way to teach colloquial Arabic, rather than teaching colloquial Arabic in classrooms in the U.S. (Abdalla, 2006). Ignoring teaching colloquial Arabic in Arabic classes may dismiss
students’ prior knowledge or their funds of knowledge which they bring to class. The term “funds of knowledge” (González & Moll, 2002, p. 625) refers to the assumption that students have valuable knowledge because of their first-hand experiences, which educators need to use to powerfully represent students’ communities when teaching in the classroom. Consequently, ignoring colloquial Arabic, as AAHL students’ fund of knowledge, can unintentionally lead to marginalizing AAHL students and their prior knowledge in Arabic classrooms. Ultimately, adopting translanguaging pedagogy, with its acceptance and encouragement of multiple semiotic resources, may help in affirming AAHL students’ identities, their funds of knowledge, along with empowering them in classrooms to express themselves with confidence.

_Empirical Research Overview on Translanguaging and Arabic._ In this section, I briefly review scholarship related to translanguaging and the Arabic language, highlighting the gaps in the currently available research. As translanguaging research is an emerging field (Al Masaeed, 2020), the studies relating to Arabic are comparatively recent. One common theme in recent literature is that translanguaging is tremendously natural, normal, and common for traditional college students (18-22 years old) and those who speak both English and Arabic. In a case study involving interviews with six pairs of female college students at the same university in Dubai, the participants used translanguaging when speaking MSA, their colloquial Emirati dialect, and English as a functional occurrence in conversation as well as a natural one in their communication (Palfreyman & Al-Bataineh, 2018). In another study, S’hiri (2013) surveyed 371 Arabic language learners in the United States and found that learners completely rejected
learning only MSA, while they viewed learning dialects as vital and necessary for communication. In both studies, language learners preferred to use and have access to Arabic, including its different varieties, as well as English. Put differently, language learners expressed their need to study curricula that were centered in translanguaging between formal Arabic, Arabic varieties, and English to reflect the reality of Arabic language use of Arabic speakers. Although the learners and the researchers did not use the term translanguaging, the descriptions of the pedagogy of using multiple dialects and levels of Arabic and English fit the definitions of translanguaging.

Similarly, Al Masaeed (2020) conducted a study of ten students of Arabic and eight native Arabic speakers who were speaking partners in an American university in Morocco that employed a policy of speaking only formal Arabic. The researcher analyzed the translanguaging practices in conversation practice sessions between students of Arabic and native speakers. These interactions highlighted speakers’ prioritizing of “multidialectical and multilingual translanguaging over the program’s monodialectal and monolingual policy” (Al Masaeed, 2020, p. 262). In other words, both groups, students of Arabic and native Arabic speakers, connected and communicated using multiple dialects and languages, including both formal and Moroccan Arabic, as well as English and French. Additionally, students:

are humans who employ all of the various resources at their disposal to achieve communicative goals, as evidenced by the everyday translanguaging practices of native Arabic speakers; hence, attempts to limit these resources in L2 contexts may result in limitations on students’ agency and ability to contribute to richer interactions. (Al Masaeed, 2020, p. 263)
This means that restricting learners of Arabic to speaking only MSA may cause learners to miss opportunities to learn and interact with native speakers who employ translanguaging practices. Further, by limiting Arabic language learners to only MSA, the learners will be denied access to natural and commonly occurring forms of communication.

Translanguaging practices likewise extend beyond the classroom into social media. One study followed two native speakers of Arabic who reside and study in the United States (Alkhamees et al., 2019). Alkhamees et al. (2019) noted that many young Arabs find in social media a chance to write in different Arabic dialects, whereupon they can employ a wide range of “linguistic repertoire, regardless of what language varieties might be involved” (p. 130). In other words, young people have access to a rich linguistic repertoire through social media which they can translanguage across different Arabic dialects and languages.

**Translanguaging and Language Reclamation**

Language reclamation is closely tied to translanguaging. In order to understand the relationship between language reclamation and translanguaging, I explain the definition of language reclamation and the roles of: translanguaging in relation to language reclamation; translanguaging in relation to language reclamation among young people; and instructors and universities in supporting college-age students’ efforts in reclaiming their heritage languages.

**Defining Language Reclamation.** W. Y. Leonard (2011) defined language reclamation as a process that entails language acquisition, and “requires feeling and
asserting the prerogative to learn and transmit the language . . . in a way that reflects the community’s needs and values” (pp. 154-155). That is, language reclamation is not limited to learning languages, but extends to purposefully acquiring the language in order to serve the communities using these languages. Therefore, language reclamation expands beyond revitalizing minoritized communities’ languages, where communities’ needs and individuals’ learning are both intertwined during the learning process.

The Role of Translanguaging in Relation to Language Reclamation Among Young People. Young people employ translanguaging to linguistically survive, and at the same time they appreciate the value of using their heritage languages. To elaborate, Wyman (2012) explained that youth use “linguistic survivance” (pp. 2-3), which is practicing translanguaging in challenging situations in order to adapt and preserve their identities. Further, young people, through their use of translanguaging negotiate difficult situations, such as interacting with elders, through their use of heritage languages (Wyman, 2012).

Additionally, based on her decade-long ethnographic study on indigenous youth in Central Alaskan Yup’ik Eskimo, Wyman (2012) observed that despite some young people’s increase use of English, the youth see the value of maintaining their heritage languages in their youth community. As youth face limited resources (Wyman, 2012) in their language learning, translanguaging becomes a tool to both maintain their heritage language and reclaim it. Thus, translanguaging is a linguistic survival tool for young people to both reclaim their heritage languages and deal with uneasy linguistic situations that involve their heritage languages.
The Role of Instructors and Universities in Supporting Young People’s Efforts in Reclaiming Their Heritage Languages. Instructors play an important part in helping minoritized students in their efforts to reclaim their heritage languages spoken in their communities. Consequently, when a disconnect takes place between learning in the classroom and the communities of minoritized students, their learning experiences are negatively affected. For instance, in an autoethnographic study of indigenous graduate students (Chew et al., 2015), the authors stated that: “While our universities have imparted valuable skills that enable us as more effective language learners and teachers, they have done little to connect us to our communities in a way that is real or directly helpful to them” (p. 85). This quotation echoes the earlier point that language reclamation for young people is embedded in their communities’ values and needs. As a result, when one of the researchers in the autoethnographic study did not feel a connection between their graduate university program learning, they felt a void and helplessness with regard to assisting their communities. These unfulfilling emotions are what CRT is attempting to avoid by creating a connection between students’ learning and their lives in their communities.

In terms of practical steps toward supporting students in reclaiming their heritage languages, research points toward several actions language instructors and universities can take. First, instructors and program administrators should avoid over-emphasis on language acquisition alone when teaching indigenous students, and balance a focus on students’ engagement with the indigenous people’s ways of knowledge and use of their languages (Leonard & Mercier, 2014). Second, instructors and program administrators
should create safe spaces where indigenous (and otherwise minoritized) students can develop a strong sense of belonging, which can occur by doing the following: acknowledging indigenous students' histories, identities, and places; presenting indigenous’ ways of knowledge as well-founded and valid scientific systems while promoting them; and engaging in work with indigenous communities with reciprocity and respect (B. Leonard & Mercier, 2014). These strategies apply in similar ways to non-indigenous minoritized heritage language learners, as well.

Third, instructors and program administrators should respect minorities and indigenous’ voices especially in classroom settings and discussions. In fact, in the autoethnographic study of indigenous graduate students (Chew et al, 2015), which I referred to earlier, one of the indigenous students described her experience when her comments were missed in class, and conditional contribution to class discussion which her instructor allowed, when her opinions match those of the instructor. She explained, “the benefits of offering Indigenous language courses are severely impeded when classroom environments do not respect and value Indigenous voices and cultures” (Chew et al., 2015, p. 84). These words are in a similar vein to Leonard and Mercier’s (2014) recommendations about creating safe spaces for these students, and aligns with CRT’s principles of respecting and centering students’ cultures and voices.

Finally, regarding universities’ role in supporting young people’s efforts in reclaiming their heritage languages, it is vital to understand that universities can provide a wealth of resources these students direly need. As young people face two key challenges, escalating doubts about their ability of being bi/multilingual and limited resources to
improve their skills, universities can offer much needed resources for heritage students (Wyman, 2012).

For instance, Baldwin (2013) showcased a successful partnership—as part of language reclamation efforts—between the Miami indigenous community and Miami University, where the university supported the community in their efforts to build educational infrastructure and assist youth during their learning. In the Miami community’s case, the university provided education resources that otherwise would be hard for the community to find and sustain. What this case shows is that many minoritized students, especially those with limited resources, might not have access to linguistic training and resources except in university settings, emphasizing the transformative role which universities can play in language reclamation.

**Gap in Research on Translanguaging and Arabic**

As mentioned, translanguaging as a practical theory describes a natural practice for learners. One important constraint on many of the works discussed in translanguaging and Arabic is that, up to the writing of this study, rarely does the research directly focus on AAHL students’ translanguaging practices in the classroom in U.S. university settings, nor their translanguaging practices in their communities and social media, nor the impact of prioritizing MSA teaching on AAHL’s linguistic skills and their identity growth. To date, current research focuses on first-time language learners of Arabic in the U.S. and most recently, the importance of including dialects and translanguaging practices in the classroom for first-time language learners of Arabic. Up to now, current research highlights heritage speakers’ grammatical and linguistic errors, with a deficit approach to
what AAHL cannot do, rather than on what they can accomplish. Although current studies show some balance between qualitative, interview-and focus group-based studies and survey-driven quantitative studies, the voices and perspectives of AAHL students as they are learning Arabic and negotiating their identities have yet to be studied.

**Critique of Translanguaging**

Moving now to consider the limitations of translanguaging as a theoretical perspective on language use, I highlight some critiques. According to Canagarajah (2011), pedagogical strategies for applying translanguaging remain underdeveloped and are not yet ready for implementation in the classroom. In the same vein, Jaspers (2018) argued that the more translanguaging is defined as “natural instinct” (p. 3), the more it is undermined as a practice. In other words, some might think there is no need to develop a pedagogy for what is considered an innate capacity. While it is true that translanguaging as a practical theory encourages students’ linguistic natural instincts, that does not necessarily mean that a pedagogy for teaching is unnecessary for advancing students. In fact, Garcia et al. (2017) focused in *The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning* on lesson planning and concrete examples for teachers to implement translanguaging pedagogy in the classroom. It is a hands-on book for educators and schools that aims at eliminating difficulties and ambiguities in supporting students in successfully translanguaging in classrooms.

Another criticism facing the term translanguaging is that it has too many meanings. The term refers to fluidity in language use, to pedagogy, and to the innate capacity individuals have when speaking languages; this ambiguity causes scholars to use
the term inconsistently (Jaspers, 2018). I agree that using translanguaging to refer to several concepts is confusing; therefore, the field must create a differentiation mechanism by possibly adding descriptors for more clarity, as I have done earlier in this chapter. For example, the terms translanguaging pedagogy, translanguaging theory, and translanguaging speakers’ innate ability/capacity, would all be more descriptive.

One of the strongest criticisms of translanguaging pedagogy is its ambitious agenda to “give back voice, transform cognitive structures, raise well-being [and] transform an unequal society” (Jaspers, 2018, p. 3). Jaspers further explained that these seem like too many goals for a linguistic practice implemented in schools. Here, however, Jaspers overlooked an important point which is “the future is a multilingual and multiethnic one, regardless of attempts to suppress that reality” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 6). In other words, translanguaging pedagogy is focused on providing multilingual and multicultural learning experiences which entail giving voices to students and aim at creating an equal society. These goals are not too numerous and insurmountable, as Jaspers claimed, but they are intertwined in translanguaging pedagogy, as well as culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies, as I explain later in this work.

In view of all that has been discussed so far, one may suppose that translanguaging is growing as a pedagogy, a theory, and a lens through which to view and lessen disparity among multilingual speakers during their education. With growth, there is of course room for improvement. Like all pedagogical practices, translanguaging continues to develop and improve, with some experiments showing greater success than
others. In this global world, students need translanguageing and its fluidity, especially with its embracing of diversity.

**How are CRT and CSP Directly Related to AAHL Students’ Learning Experience in the Arabic Classroom?**

At root, educators who engage CRT and CSP resist, and can undo the deficit-based schooling that dismisses the culture and language of students, and particularly students of color. By focusing exclusively on formal Arabic (MSA) many Arabic language instructors may inadvertently (or perhaps unintentionally) negatively impact the dialect-specific communication which AAHL students use at home. CRT and CSP directly relate to AAHL students’ learning experience in the Arabic classroom. These ideas nest together in important ways, which I explain in detail below.

As noted, both CRT and CSP are asset-based pedagogies, where students’ culture, language and ways of knowing are valued, and seen as central to learning. Because CSP is an asset-based pedagogy, it “exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1). Thus, CSP focuses on sustaining and at times reviving ways of knowing and being for students of color to undo the damage done by deficit-based schooling.

Many university Arabic language instructors and curricula focus on what AAHL students cannot do, because of their exclusive focus on formal Arabic and simultaneous marginalization of AAHL students’ home dialects. As explained previously, Arabic instructors often emphasize formal Arabic in language classrooms (Davila, 2017). The situation of teaching Arabic is different than other less-commonly taught languages like
Mandarin Chinese or Hindi. Unlike Mandarin which is “a genuinely global Chinese language [and Hindi which is the official language in India, MSA is a] formal, frozen form that is less useful for the novice learners (the majority of current U.S learners of Arabic) for oral communication than it is for the relatively few advanced-level students” (McGinnis, 2014, p. 146). I would like to add that teaching solely MSA is equally less useful, and possibly more damaging to AAHL students, particularly for oral communication, because they do not use MSA at home with their families, nor within their social circles.

Additionally, Arabic instructors’ consistent corrections of AAHL students could result in undermining AAHL students’ confidence and assurance in using their own language. AAHL students are very similar to heritage speakers of Spanish, who experience “deficit-based approaches to language diversity [that] are stigmatizing, and contribute to the reproduction of educational inequality” (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 150). Moreover, the deficit-based approaches adopt discourses that linguistically devalue the Latinx students’ practices (Flores & Rosa, 2015). To sum up, AAHL students, like students who are heritage speakers of Spanish and other languages as well, may experience the devaluing of their dialects when instructors solely focusing on MSA in the classroom.

CRT focuses on students’ prior knowledge, and CSP considers culture and language as essential pillars, as previously mentioned. Arabic classrooms, pedagogies, and curricula may not build on prior linguistic and cultural knowledge which AAHL students bring. In fact, the exact opposite might be happening. Albirini (2014), in his
study of AAHL students, called for Arabic language instructors to view AAHL students’ grammatical errors in formal Arabic as natural because of informal Arabic transfer; and he warned against considering these errors as proficiency problems. Additionally, formal Arabic can be seen as a “frozen” form of Arabic (McGinnis, 2014, p. 146), whereas CSP focuses on the dynamic use of language. To assume that race, language, ethnicity, and culture are statically related can result in disregarding the changes in students’ practices and their communities (Paris & Alim, 2017). Languages change, and have always changed, and CSP sustains and embraces the changes that take place in students’ linguistic practices.

In sum, CRT and CSP are pedagogies focused on students’ assets. CSP takes CRT further with its aim to sustain the ways of being and knowing of students. In addition, CSP attempts to overcome CRT’s limitations by sustaining the languages and cultures of students of color. Building on prior knowledge is one of the most relevant strategies for heritage language students, including AAHL students, as this approach constructs new knowledge on old knowledge, which affirms students and contributes to their academic success. Culture sustenance, on the other hand, is one of the most relevant strategies for heritage language students, as it validates students’ identity and expertise (Bucholtz et al., 2017). The absence of CSP and CRT tenets in deficit approaches to viewing AAHL students’ home dialects can subvert their confidence in using Arabic.

**Empirical Research Overview on CRT, CSP, Arabic Teaching, and AAHL Students**

A number of studies have addressed the importance of CRT principles and similar pedagogical frameworks in relation to fostering language learning, including the Arabic
language. In a 2018 study, Albirini sought to learn from 29 AAHL students, enrolled in college-level elementary formal Arabic classes in two U.S. universities, as to whether or not they had a linguistic advantage over their peers who were learning Arabic as a second language. Based on his findings, Albirini (2018) concluded that with regard to theory and pedagogy, instructors need to think of how to build on AAHL students’ prior knowledge to develop their spoken Arabic fluency.

Following a similar path of inquiry, in a qualitative study of 60 Arab-Australian students, Mansouri and Kamp (2016) interviewed students, their parents, and their teachers to learn how the events of September 11, 2001, affected students’ identities. Students mentioned that the environment in the school was uninviting and unappealing; further, students felt the school faculty did not help them advance academically (Mansouri & Kamp, 2016). Mansouri and Kamp explained that after September 11, 2001, the social and political environment negatively affected young Arab-Australians’ identities and their experiences in education (Mansouri & Kamp, 2016). Mansouri and Kamp urged employing a “multidimensional approach” (p. 101), which includes connecting parents with school and teaching a curriculum focused on students' diversity as a resource among other principles (Mansouri & Kamp, 2016). The multidimensional approach recommended by Mansouri and Kamp is very similar to CRT in that it focuses on leveraging students’ multiple aspects of identity and ways of knowing in classes, and integrating them into the curriculum. Additionally, Mansouri and Kamp’s multidimensional approach, like CRT, seeks to connect the school with the students' community, and having parents engage with school activities is one way of creating the
continuity between school and students’ lives. Finally, Mansouri and Kamp concluded that using a multidimensional approach, which builds on students' ways of knowing and heritage, could help Arab-Australian youth in their education experience (Mansouri & Kamp, 2016, p. 101). In other words, the study urged using CRT-like approaches to improve Arab-Australian students’ academic performance and identity growth.

Similar to the ways AAHL students and Arab-Australian youth experience school, Native American students may have similar realities, in that their languages and cultures may not be fully represented in the curriculum. The parallels between AAHL students and Native American youth are striking. While researching Native American youth in New Mexico, Lee and Cerecer (2010) found that in 13 different schools, students described missing culturally responsive curriculum, courses, instructors, and schools. Native American students felt their teachers and administrators were intolerant of their heritage, because students experienced hostility, wherein school personnel did not appreciate their culture, language, and ways of knowing (Lee & Cerecer, 2010). Lee and Cerecer recommended integrating native cultures in the course content and curriculum, together with building partnerships with the tribal leaders and parents. These recommendations are the core of CRT: viewing students’ language, culture, and ways of knowing as part of the curriculum and connecting school with students’ lives outside of school.

Extending the ideas of Lee and Cerecer (2010), Naqvi et al. (2013) highlighted similar ideas in a Canadian context. In a study with Canadian multilingual children who read dual-language books in class, participants showed their awareness of the similarities
and differences in meanings, sounds, and written texts in English, French, Urdu, and Punjabi (Naqvi et al., 2013). In each class, only two languages were used: English and one of the above listed languages, read by volunteers from the community and students’ families (Naqvi et al., 2013). The researchers recorded 132 class sessions that were 20 minutes each (Naqvi et al., 2013). Naqvi et al. found clear evidence of CRT practices in 35% of these sessions, in that the young learners were supported to employ their linguistic and cultural repertoires (Naqvi et al., 2013). In reflecting upon the findings, the researchers recommended providing teachers with professional development opportunities to better employ CRT practices, and creating more opportunities for communities to participate in class teaching (Naqvi et al., 2013). What this study really conveyed is the potential of CRT classrooms, while emphasizing the need for professional preparation for teachers to implement CRT practices with the assistance of the students’ communities.

In related ways, this general lack of preparation and understanding of CRT practices may also exist in higher education. A 2018 Gallagher and Haan study of 197 faculty members defined “linguistically responsive instruction” as ways of knowing and skill sets that “connected with the nature of language, language use in society, and language learning and teaching” (p. 306), which is similar to CRT, and its focus on learners’ prior knowledge. In the study, faculty members reported consistently viewing their multilingual students as deficient (Gallagher & Haan, 2018). The study concluded with a call for faculty professional development, because their attitude toward languages is detrimental to their students, and clearly not in alignment with linguistically responsive
instruction (Gallagher & Haan, 2018). As previously mentioned, linguistically responsive instruction is very similar to CRT in that both are asset-based pedagogies; linguistically responsive instruction is a variation of CRT with a focus on students’ linguistic repertoires and strengths, and situates students as experts with prior knowledge to build upon.

**Gap in Current Research on CRT, Arabic Teaching, and AAHL Students**

When considering the overview on CRT studies in relation to AAHL students, Arabic and other heritage speakers, it is clear that studies are lacking on CRT practices and their impact on AAHL students in terms of linguistic and identity development. But this gap is not only related to AAHL students; generally, there are axiological challenges around researching CRT practices. As an illustrative example, Klump and McNeir (2005) challenged the validity of the majority of research on CRT, because few studies employ quantitative methods to measure the practice with the result, even though case studies and correlational research show that CRT helps contribute to the success of students from diverse backgrounds. In truth, at the time Klump and McNeir completed their study (2005), conducting robust CRT-focused research in public schools was more novel, and the limited number of studies at the time was not necessarily reflective of the ineffectiveness of CRT practices (Klump & McNeir, 2005). I disagree with the authors’ claim from an axiological perspective, because qualitative research is valid and valuable to practitioners and the learning community. However, I endorse the authors’ final conclusion about the existence of difficulties in undertaking research on CRT practices, particularly in relation to language teaching and learning within CRT practices.
Despite the limited information available on the specific intersection of AAHLs and CRT, there are three important pieces of information known. First, there is a need for future studies to learn more about AAHL students’ spoken Arabic skills to learn more about their knowledge gaps and opportunities (Albirini, 2018). Second, the above-mentioned studies suggested that heritage language learners strongly benefit from CRT practices implemented in their schools to improve their learning experiences and affirm their identities. Third and finally, faculty and instructors would benefit their students by developing awareness of CRT practices, learning to implement CRT practices, and engaging in and researching the most effective CRT practices. As illustrated in Naqvi et al.’s (2013) study in Canada, educators could better serve their students through more preparation in CRT practices (Naqvi et al., 2013). Similarly, Gallagher and Haan (2018), in their study of faculty members, highlighted that “relatively little focus on the knowledge base for or implementation of LRI (linguistically responsive instruction) in the societally dominant language at the university level has occurred” (p. 305). In other words, there is a clear call for researchers and educators to study the application of linguistically responsive instruction, which is another variation of CRT with its focus on students’ linguistic repertoires and students as resources. Hence, both the studies of Naqvi et al. (2013) and Gallagher and Haan (2018) shared an urgency about preparation for CRT practices and research.
**Funds of Identity**

“Any study of language needs to take consideration of identity if it is to be full and rich and meaningful, because identity is itself at the very heart of what language is about” (Joseph, 2004, p. 224).

In the previous section, I discussed CRT as the first conceptual framework in this research. CRT and funds of identity are interrelated and complementary, as I explain in detail below. I open this by explaining funds of knowledge (FOK) and its development into funds of identity (FOI). Then, I include three steps to FOI to achieve FOI’s purpose of affirming students’ identities (Poole, 2017), and their types. Furthermore, I highlight the role of artifacts in FOI and their importance. Following this, I highlight the relationship between FOI and CRT, discussing the commonalities between these asset-based frameworks including building on students’ prior knowledge. Finally, I provide an overview of how translanguaging can be a useful pedagogical tool for successful learning in the FOI approach.

**FOK Definition**

The concept of FOK refers to the experiences students bring to the classroom, on which educators need to build in the curriculum in order to represent these students and their communities (González & Moll, 2002). Additionally, the FOK approach is pivotal in CRT (Banks et al., 2001). Thus, FOK term is analogous with prior knowledge in CRT as both build on students’ experiences and knowledge integration in the curriculum within student-asset-based approaches. FOK-focused educators believe that students have invaluable knowledge learned in their home communities. Additionally, educators engaging the FOK approach validates students’ prior knowledge in class aiming at
empowering them to be active citizens, and developing affirmed identities (González & Moll, 2002).

**FOI Definition**

FOI builds on FOK, expanding it to include both meaningful learning for students, as well as learning that develops their identities. Hogg and Volman (2020) argued that “funds of identity theory aims to complement the funds of knowledge conceptual framework that draws attention to knowledge and competences of minoritized students. FOI theory is distinctive because of its focus on funds that are personally meaningful for students” (p. 862). Here, Hogg and Volman focused in their definition on students’ viewing their learning as meaningful to be the necessity for FOK to be FOI. In addition to this definition, Esteban-Guitart (2016) added that FOK became FOI when students’ learning shaped their identities, explaining, “the term funds of identity is based on the simple premise that people have and accumulate not only their house-hold funds of knowledge, but also life experiences that provide resources that help define themselves” (p. 48). To put it in another way, when students are exposed to a personally meaningful educational experience that helps them define their identities, FOK becomes FOI.

**Relationship Between FOK and FOI: Criticism and Collaboration**

Some critics have observed that FOK suffers from shortcomings which FOI attempts to avoid. One of the objections against the FOK approach is that it often does not pay attention to students’ identities and ways to incorporate them into learning (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Another criticism against FOK scholarship was that it focuses solely on students’ families (Moll, 2005), rather than the students themselves, when
gathering information to shape the curriculum, despite students creating their own knowledge that could be separate from their parents’ lives (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). To avoid all these shortcomings in the FOK, the FOI approach attempts to refine FOK through emphasizing learners’ funds which they count as important for their own understanding of themselves (Saubich & Esteban-Guitart, 2011).

Moving forward, FOK, despite its shortcomings, is still valuable. Consequently, FOI can go hand in hand with FOK to help educators guide their activities and curriculum for an inclusive education that builds on students’ prior knowledge and connects learning to their experiences (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). That is using the scholarship and practices, which FOK have contributed, while expanding them by including the focus on identity and meaningful learning which FOI emphasizes to move forward in acting like a compass for educators.

**Three Steps to Fulfill FOI’s Purpose**

Three steps are crucial for successfully engaging with students’ FOK: legitimating students’ knowledge, building on students’ prior learning, and helping students succeed through motivation and identity support. The first step in fulfilling FOI’s purpose of confirming students’ identities (Poole, 2017) is recognizing the knowledge, language, and skills students already have (Hogg & Volman, 2020). Together with this acknowledgement, educators legitimate students’ voices, including their expertise about their cultures (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2017).

Educators can legitimize and delegitimize students in different ways. To capture these subtleties, I point briefly to authorization and illegitimation tactics. The tactics
generally aim at addressing culture, agency, and power via language and semiotics in social interactions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Authorization and illegitimation tactics are antithetical to one another. Authorization tactics specifically aim at legitimating identities via authority (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). For example, Joseph (2004) highlighted that standard languages veil variations among dialects when standard languages are constructed and related to national identity. On the other hand, illegitimation is the antithesis of authorization; it is the “process of removing or denying power” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 387) to either support or deny authority. In fact, standard and official languages take authority away from language varieties that do not have the same classifications (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). I argue that authentication and illegitimation take place in learning settings, particularly language classrooms, and can impact the identity of students. Thus, as FOI points to the importance of legitimating students’ identities, illegitimation and authentication tactics can be of use to subtly capture these dynamics in language classrooms.

The second and third steps to fulfill FOI’s purpose are related to teaching practices. The second step is building on students’ prior knowledge in the curriculum in order to have a continuity between students’ lives and their learning (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Llopard & Esteban-Guitart, 2017). Ultimately, FOI focuses on connections between what the students learn and their life experiences outside the classroom. The third step is to help students be motivated in their learning (Llopard & Esteban-Guitart, 2017) and develop new identities (Poole, 2017). In short, one of the goals for FOK is to
engage and encourage students along with helping them continue to develop their identities.

Expanding on motivating students in language classrooms, I briefly explain reasons for prioritizing students’ motivation when teaching in relation to FOI. First, learners can be very motivated in learning a language, but certain classroom environments can interfere with their investment in learning the language (Norton, 2013). Second, when language learners’ progress slows or is halted, educators should not jump to the conclusion that these learners are not motivated to learn; instead, educators can consider the possibility that learners could be facing challenges as a result of marginalizing circumstances interfering with their learning (Norton, 2013). In fact, Norton’s (2013) research—following four case studies on immigrant women learning English in Canada—discovered that the correlation between highly motivated language learners and their language learning progress is consistent. Consequently, FOI emphasizes motivating students as one of its three steps to ensure students’ success.

Third, power relations can either empower or disempower language learners’ negotiation of identities in their language classrooms and in their communities (Norton, 2013). Some practices—including denying meaning-making for students—in the classroom can subordinate students’ identities, which restrict both their learning and their construction of strong identities for themselves (Norton, 2013). As a result, FOI centers meaning making in learning and connecting learning to students’ lives as the second step among three to empower students.
Types of FOIs

The extant literature has addressed and described several different types of FOI. Although new types are emerging (Hogg & Volman, 2020), in what follows, I explain the FOI types that relate to my research participants in order to better understand their experiences. The importance of these types for this research is clarifying the complexities of individuals’ identities in a concrete manner. They include—but are not limited to—the following: geographical, cultural, practical, existential, and digital. The geographical FOI focuses on lands, regions like countries, landscapes and rivers to which the students affiliate themselves (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). The cultural FOI are concerned with artifacts which shape students’ experiences, including tools and symbols such as smartphones and religious symbols (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). The practical FOI point toward important activities or hobbies for students like music, work, sports (Esteban-Guitart, 2016) and cooking. As for the existential FOI, they are the ones that deal with students’ negative experiences and feelings which are not recognized in the classroom, like school-related issues such as experiencing stress from exams, as well as personal challenges, such as school suspension or the inability to grow from such experiences and their effects on students’ identities (Poole & Huang, 2018). Existential FOI addressed various negative experiences and feelings, but FOI as an emerging theory does not yet account for positive emotions, such as friendship, love, attraction. Finally, the digital FOI demonstrate young people's use of technology where they share and create their identities through their digital devices, which happens mostly out of school (Poole, 2017).
Artifacts and Their Importance

Artifacts, including language, are important in the FOI approach because of the ways they connect the classroom with the students’ lives. Esteban-Guitart (2016) explained that FOI for each one of us has a toolbox that assists us in defining who we are, including meaningful things, actions, and individuals. These artifacts can be used in pedagogy connecting the learners' contexts and experiences to their classroom learning (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). In fact, FOI can refer to written, spoken, visual, multimodal artifacts students create from their own experiences and their families’ FOK (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Language is one of the cultural artifacts in FOI, whether written or spoken, as it forms and develops people’s identities; through language and discourse individuals interconnect and express their worlds (Esteban-Guitart, 2016).

In this research, I’m using artifacts from both the classroom and students' home communities in order to understand the present connections and disconnections between classroom learning and students’ lives. Consequently, the choice to include artifacts in addition to the interviews places the methodology of this study in harmony with FOI approaches which stress connecting and empowering students’ learning in the classroom with their personal experiences.

FOI and CRT: Common Goals Toward Building on Students’ Assets

FOI and CRT are both asset-based frameworks that value students’ prior knowledge and aim at empowering them. There are at least five main commonalities between these two frameworks: rejecting deficit-based views of students’ knowledge, building on students’ prior knowledge and incorporating that into the curriculum, creating
connections between students’ lives and their learning in the classroom, building trusting and respectful relations between educators and students, and establishing a pedagogy of listening by educators to their students.

Since both frameworks value knowledge students acquired in their communities, educators who embrace these frameworks reject seeing students’ cultures, languages, and identities from a deficit viewpoint. In both of these frameworks, educators incorporate students’ prior knowledge and FOK into the curriculum. Esteban-Guitart (2016) explained that in FOK “we can connect prior knowledge and form learning experiences and connect educational contexts and agents in and out of school” (p. 52). In other words, prior knowledge is used as a catalyst by which teachers can build academic knowledge and create connections between home and class learning. Similarly, as one of its key principles, CRT seeks to build on students' knowledge learned from their home communities (Gay, 2002). Consequently, learning that happens in school becomes meaningful for the learners. Esteban-Guitart (2016) defined meaningful learning experiences as the ones which the:

learner selects and chooses from his or her prior learning experiences for the positive or negative impact. These experiences are the most relevant from the learners’ point of view, for whatever reason, and are connected to their needs or interests. (p. 52)

That is, meaningful experiences for learners are the ones which they choose from their prior learning and determine to be important.

Another commonality between CRT and FOI is creating continuity between classroom learning and students’ lives and communities. For FOK and FOI, this continuity is an important pedagogical goal for the curriculum as the instructors work on
creating connections between the curriculum and students’ lives (Esteban-Guitart, 2016).

In addition, in this framework, instructors attempt to increase students' FOI in order to create a continuity between activities in formal and informal educational settings and to create meaningful learning experiences for students. Consequently, FOI centers continuity between learning that happens in students’ classroom and home communities. Similarly, CRT aims at creating continuity between students’ learning in the classroom and students’ lives. The goal in CRT is to validate students from all backgrounds through building “bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). This means that connecting students’ skills, which they learned in their home communities in schools and universities, is at the heart of CRT as a pedagogy that seeks to affirm students.

Building trusting and respectful relationships is pivotal to both FOI and CRT. In FOK on which FOI is built, strong trust between educators and parents exists (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). In fact, in order to have continuity between students’ lives in their communities and classroom learning, instructors, students, and families need to trust each other (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Similarly in CRT, trusting relationships between students and instructors are crucial for the learning process. The first step in creating these trusting relationships in CRT is building rapport between the instructor and the student in order to establish a partnership between both (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). The rapport paves the way for the instructor to meaningfully challenge students and push them toward learning, which could only happen when trust between them takes place (Hammond & Jackson,
Therefore, both CRT and FOI stress the importance of trust between students and their instructors.

As trust building is central to FOI and CRT, listening to students becomes a requirement to reach that goal for both approaches. For CRT, through listening and caring about students, trust-building occurs (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Moreover, listening to students emphasizes that instructors respect them and have an interest in their knowledge and what they have to say (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). How to listen in CRT—or in other words, the pedagogy of listening in CRT—includes the following steps for instructors: giving students complete attention when they speak, working to comprehend the emotions behind students’ words, holding judgment when listening, and respecting the diversity of students’ cultures and their cultural expressions (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Along the same lines, FOI assert the importance of instructors’ listening to students and their families. FOI allows instructors to employ the research tools of ethnography. To reach the goal of bettering students’ learning and understanding students’ lives, instructors use ethnographic tools like listening to what students and families say, asking them questions, observing them, and creating activities for students such as self-portraits and diaries, among others (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Here, FOI and CRT have the same goal of listening to the students, despite some slight differences in approach: CRT focuses on compassionate listening to students, while FOI centers on ethnographic strategies.
FOI and Translanguaging

FOI adopts Vygotsky’s emphasis on the role of the environment in helping students learn, and the role of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in learning. ZPD refers to a concept Vygotsky created: The space between the tasks which students can do without any help and the ones that are the most challenging for them (Mooney, 2013). In other words, ZPD as Esteban-Guitart (2016) explained, is the “process that transforms us from being helped to helping ourselves” (p. 28). As a result, reaching ZPD can assist students in becoming independent learners and develop awareness of their abilities. This kind of learning, as Esteban-Guitart (2016) emphasized, cannot happen without participating with others in the environment in which we live.

Translanguaging pedagogy can concretely build on students’ ZPD to express what they can in the language (S. Thorne, personal communication, June 14, 2021), where instructors can give the necessary support for students to transition from what they know to what they do not know. For example, students can use a word in English when speaking in Arabic, and the instructor can say the word or expression in Arabic, to fill in the gap and help students reach a higher level of competency without disrupting the communicative flow or the student’s attempt to build confidence in speaking and expressing themselves. Therefore, translanguaging can be used as a pedagogical tool to reach ZPD, which is pivotal for the FOI approach.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed CRT and FOI as the two main frameworks used for this research. The two frameworks provide a lens through which I can analyze AAHL
student’s experiences and the challenges they faced when taking Arabic language classes in higher education. Prior learning/knowledge and the pedagogy of listening are at the heart of CRT; instructors help students utilize what they learned in their home communities to learn new concepts and listen carefully to identify students’ needs and skills. Under prior learning, translanguaging practices are vital aspects for minoritized students. Due to many factors including limited resources which minoritized and heritage students encounter, translanguaging becomes an important tool for the following: communication, language reclamation, as well as a linguistic demonstration of their repertoire which instructors can use to concretely reach ZPD for successful learning.

I also detailed the FOI framework in this chapter stating that FOI is built on FOK with a focus on students’ identities and experiences they chose to be meaningful in their learning. FOI seeks to complement and add to FOK, not to negate it. In order to achieve FOI, instructors need to take three main steps: legitimating students’ knowledge, connecting their prior learning to the curriculum, and using their FOI to help motivate them and be successful in their learning. In addition to these three steps, FOI includes several facets that help in understanding students’ multiple layers of identities, including geographical, cultural, practical, existential, and digital. Finally, with their parallel goals and asset-based focus, FOI and CRT are closely connected.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Generally, little research has been conducted on Arab American students at universities (Shoman, 2016) and specifically, in the heritage language studies field, AAHL students are significantly less examined than other heritage language students (Hillman, 2019). As stated in Chapter 1, the challenge some AAHL students face is that Arabic language instructors in higher education are often dismissive of these students’ prior knowledge of the Arabic culture and its language, specifically the Arabic dialects used in their home communities. Privileging teaching of MSA over dialects in universities (Al-Batal, 2018a; Younes, 2018) can contribute to Arabic instructors’ dismissal of AAHL students’ prior knowledge, resulting in non-affirming learning experience for these students.

The purpose of this study is to explore AAHL students’ perception of their experience in university level Arabic classrooms in relation to how they use Arabic in their local communities. This study—and similar future studies—is needed to help inform theories on heritage students and increase the current limited body of knowledge about AAHL students so that instructors of Arabic and developers of Arabic curricula are better equipped to create inclusive classroom environments that draw upon AAHL students’ prior knowledge and affirm their identities.

Further, learning about AAHL students’ experiences can serve in increasing awareness of classroom inclusive practices among instructors and in designing supportive curricula that builds on their previous cultural knowledge and dialects as well as confirming their identities as multilingual Arab Americans. The study can also help in
understanding some of the high attrition rates among AAHL students and model future studies that center AAHL students’ identities and actual use of the language.

**Research Methods**

In the coming sections, I explain the research design rationale, highlight the strengths of qualitative research, and explain my choice of a qualitative multiple case study to both explore and understand AAHL students’ experiences. After that, I discuss the research questions, settings and participants, and different phases of the proposed research. Finally, I explain the role of the researcher, data collection and analysis, and validity procedures.

**Research Design and Rationale**

In the coming sections, I explain the rationale for choosing qualitative research, multiple-case studies approach, and its advantages and limitations. Moreover, I discuss the exploratory nature of my multiple case studies of AAHL students and the role of artifacts in this research.

**Why Qualitative Research Suits My Inquiry?**

Because I seek to understand AAHL students’ perception of their experiences in the Arabic classroom, qualitative research is best suited for my research; qualitative inquiry is “interested in how people interpret their experience, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). In other words, qualitative inquiry focuses on accessing how people understand their experience. Thus, qualitative research is more suited to comprehend AAHL students’ meaning making of their learning in Arabic classrooms than quantitative research as the latter does not give as much space, time, and tools to voice the participants’ perceptions.
What is a Case Study(ies) Approach?

A case study, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined it, is “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37). The definition underscored thick descriptions and deep examinations of a chosen and enclosed case(s). Yin (2018) defined case study as a method that examines a “contemporary phenomenon” (p. 15) in detail and in its context, particularly when boundaries between the phenomena and its context may not be clear. Generally, case study definitions stress the importance of deep analysis, as well as, bounding the case, explaining the context, and drawing from several information sources (Duff, 2008).

Advantages of Case Study

Conducting case studies has several advantages. Case studies, as mentioned previously, focus on understanding “a complex social phenomena” (Yin, 2018, p. 5), creating the space of a deep and holistic focus when studying this phenomenon. By extension, Duff (2008) cited various authors—including Larsen Freeman (1997), and Van Lier (2004)—who explained that case studies highlight complex and comprehensive understanding of a specific entity, connecting the parts to the whole. This holistic and in-depth view, when researching the phenomena, is one of the strengths of case studies because it connects relationships among parts of the phenomenon, and gives the whole picture.

Another advantage of the case study method is the flexibility to include a variety of sources including interviews, artifacts, observations, and documents (Yin, 2018). These varied sources provide opportunities for triangulation (Yin, 2018), meaning
employing various data sources to check the collected data and its findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation is a strong validity measure (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) which adds another strength to conducting a case study approach that has multiple data sources in its methods structure.

Consequently, the multiple case studies approach enabled me to deeply focus on AAHL student's thoughts about what happens in classrooms when learning Arabic, while connecting different aspects of their experiences inside and outside the classroom and their Arabic language use in their home communities. Simply, the case study method allowed me to connect the puzzles of AAHL students’ translanguaging reality between the classroom and home.

**Why I Chose the Case Studies Approach**

When researchers choose a case study approach, they are not interested in a wide sampling of the phenomena, rather they want to create thorough and deep portrayals of certain individuals or sites experiencing certain phenomena (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015). Due to case studies’ focus on deeply comprehending a phenomenon in relation to contemporary specific individuals and locations, I chose case studies as an approach to understand current AAHL students’ experience in Arabic language classroom practices and their effect on their identity from their own perspectives. In fact, the case studies approach highlighted the struggles and victories my participants experienced in their learning and using Arabic in their home communities that would have been much harder to identify if I only conducted surveys. Another reason for choosing case studies is that this method is best aligned with my research questions; questions that focus on how or
why a phenomenon is taking place (Yin, 2018). In the research questions section below, one of my questions literally starts with “how” in an attempt to understand AAHL students’ struggles and victories in Arabic language classrooms.

**Exploratory Multiple Case Studies to Study AAHL Students**

Case studies can take a variety of forms. They may be exploratory when crafting new questions for research, or descriptive when providing answers for research questions using “what.” They are said to be relational when investigating the relationships between variables, or, as stated above, explanatory when asking research questions with “how and why” (Yin, 2018). Case studies are characterized as evaluative when answering questions about the effectiveness of practices or programs or learners, whereas they are confirmatory when asking if the research study substantiates current understandings (Duff, 2008). This variety offers researchers a range of approaches.

Often, case studies are exploratory in nature, which means they can help in future discoveries by uncovering ways of seeing processes or voicing various participants’ experiences (Duff, 2018). As a result, case studies assist in creating models or hypotheses for testing in future research (Duff, 2018). My multiple case studies approach is exploratory in nature, because using this model, I posed questions that are rarely asked in teaching Arabic as a foreign language, and heritage studies fields, and the learning community is yet to learn about their answers. If I follow my study with another one based on the findings of the exploratory study, the second study will be an explanatory one. As I seek to amplify AAHL students’ experiences, the findings can contribute to the body of knowledge for heritage students and possibly enrich the current models of
teaching. Thus, the exploratory nature of a multiple case studies approach like mine allows for such contributions.

**Rationale for Multiple Case Studies**

I conducted multiple case studies of AAHL students, instead of one, because multiple case studies are probably more powerful than one single case study and have more effect (Yin, 2018), where two or more cases can give more assurance that these cases are not exceptionally unique (Duff, 2018). In other words, multiple case studies can highlight the uniqueness of each individuals’ experience, but still affirm that the cases are not an anomaly of the phenomenon.

My research purpose is better aligned with multiple case studies rather than a single case study. A single case study is justified when studying or testing a current theory, or examining an extraordinary case, or longitudinally following a case (Yin, 2018). In contrast, the justification for multiple case studies can vary. According to Yin (2018), the approach can be replication whether in theory or having similar outcomes; according to Duff (2008), the justification for choosing multiple case studies is reflected in the rationale for sampling, which can be sampling cases that are similar or diversifying the choice of cases to reveal multiple attributes related to a phenomenon or a group.

A single case study does not suit my purposes, as I am not studying an extraordinary case, nor am I following a case for a period of time, nor testing a theory. My goal, as mentioned, is to comprehend AAHL students’ views of their experience learning Arabic in university in relation to lives and use of Arabic in their home communities.
Choosing multiple cases bounded by one setting, and diversifying my choice of AAHL students, helped in uncovering their experiences, and learning to what extent they are similar or different in experiencing similar classrooms in the chosen context. Below, I explain more about the context and participant selection of the multiple case studies. In sum, the single case study approach does not fit the purpose of this study because it does not allow for a deeper understanding of AAHL students’ common or different experiences in Arabic classrooms and learning.

**Case Studies: “Limitations” or Opportunities?**

Yin (2018) explained that case studies’ results are not generalizable for individuals or groups of people, but they are generalizable to theoretical propositions. The aim of case studies, thus, is to add to the “analytic generalizations” (p. 21), meaning the body of knowledge resulting from case studies will help in generalizing theories. Similar to analytic generalization, Paltridge and Phakiti (2015) referred to “universal understanding,” when the case study approach contributes to theory. However, unlike Yin, Paltridge and Phakiti (2015) stated that case studies allow for generalizations that are situated in similar contexts. The findings from case studies cannot be generalized results for individuals or populations as Yin explained, which seems to be a “limitation” for this approach. However, this method provides the opportunity for a deeper understanding of a phenomenon, as well as a situated form of generalizations and theory generation, as explained above. These contributions of case studies to theory and context-related generalizations are harmonious with my study purposes where instructors are more informed when teaching AAHL students of classroom practices.
Research Questions

Based on my review of the extant literature, described in the preceding chapters and sections, I have identified the following research questions that guided my study:

1. To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities?

2. How did AAHL students perceive the impact of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA or formal Arabic) in classroom instruction on their development of linguistic skills?

3. How did AAHL students perceive the impact of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA or formal Arabic) in classroom instruction on their identities as Arab American multilingual speakers?

Setting

The case study approach requires the researcher to clarify and establish the case boundaries (Yin, 2018). Each student in this multiple-case study was a single case, meaning that the boundaries are the individual students. Additionally, all the students studied in the same setting. In this multiple case studies research, the setting was an urban public North American university in the Department of Foreign Languages. One of the criteria, as I explain later, chose participants who studied in the same department at the same university. The university followed a quarter system, where each term is 11 weeks and the academic year was composed of four quarters: fall, winter, spring and summer.

The Department of Foreign Languages had a medium-sized Arabic section, compared with other Arabic programs in North America, as it included three faculty members and one adjunct. Smaller-sized Arabic programs in other universities included one instructor. The class sizes in the first-year range between 15-20 students, and the second year between 10-15 students, although numbers had been decreasing in recent
years. Traditionally, the program focused on teaching MSA, grammar, writing, and reading, while adding speaking-focused classes, which can be very different than traditions in other universities in North America, including the ways in which they are taught. To be specific some programs teach MSA and colloquial Arabic together and/or teach Arabic grammar in Arabic.

The first-and second-year Arabic classes did not allow native speakers of Arabic to join. Starting the third year, native speakers could join, including freshman students. There was one standard placement test instructors give to students who would like to join Arabic beyond Ar 101; the test had written and spoken components that determine the placement of students. However, the process of identifying native speakers was usually not conducted through taking placement tests in Arabic first and second year. Instructors identify native speakers on the first day of class by explaining that if there were native Arabic speakers enrolled, they need to speak to the instructor. Next, the instructor detailed the policy to self-identified native speakers. The rationale for not allowing native Arabic speakers to enroll in the first and second Arabic classes was that the section members and section policy assume that native speakers have already acquired the first 2 years of Arabic when they were children through schooling, and it would cause an unequal advantage for them over non-native speakers who are learning for the first time. In other words, instructors in the section assume that non-native speakers would likely earn higher grades than non-native speakers without learning much. In addition, the Arabic program did not include specific proficiency targets set for the highest level of classes that are clearly communicated for students graduating with Arabic majors and
minors, which might be a unique case for the Arabic section compared with other programs like Russian and Japanese in the same department, at the same university.

The program offered a major and a minor in Arabic, with 3-5 majors graduating per year. The university’s data showed that from 2016 to 2020, out of 38 Arabic Majors and minors, only 4 AAHL students graduated. To be specific, one AAHL student out of the 17 Arabic major students and 3 students out of 21 minors of Arabic. I identified these four students from the Arabic-graduate section list.

I chose this setting because the program is one of the oldest Arabic undergraduate programs in North America. The Arabic undergraduate program offered a variety of Arabic courses beyond second year Arabic, including Arabic media and advanced writing. Additionally, some Arab American families have established multiple scholarships for the Arabic programs to support teaching Arabic. Further, I taught in this program for more than eight years, from fall 2012 to spring 2020, witnessing changes in leadership, curriculum, books, and modalities, including both face to face and online. Thus, I was deeply embedded in the setting of this multiple case study.

**Participants**

With the goal of learning from students with a range of perspectives, I recruited AAHL students from the Arab world, who spoke a dialect of Arabic. I did not require any specific proficiency level, but sought participants who were taking or had recently taken Arabic classes within the previous two to three years at the same university in the same department. The four main dialects of Arabic spoken in the Arab world and the U.S. are: Egyptian, Gulf, Moroccan/North African, and Levantine. For a multiple case studies
approach, sampling cases can take place by choosing cases that are similar or diversifying the choice of cases to reveal multiple attributes related to a phenomenon or a group (Duff, 2008). In my study, I planned to diversify the group of students I interviewed as Yin (2018) explained, to learn about the similarities and differences between students sharing similar experiences in the same program, while following Duff’s (2008) rationale that the sampling can be diverse, to uncover patterns and attributes contributing to the phenomenon. Although I attempted to diversify the group of participants, I created criteria, listed below, for choosing participants, in order to answer my research questions on students’ Arabic reality in the classroom and their lives as well as their sense of identity.

**Participant Selection Criteria**

Several sampling strategies can be employed depending on the goals and context of the case study/studies. In my study, I employed criterion sampling: choosing participants who meet criteria that are previously determined (Duff, 2008). Criterion sampling is an approach that is commonly employed in research, especially as a quality assurance measure (Patton, 1990). Criterion sampling allows for choosing cases that are more likely to provide rich information, uncovering shortcomings in the context or system studied, and providing a chance to improve the shortcomings in these contexts or systems (Patton, 1990).

The criteria for choosing AAHL students, explained in Table 1, helped with selecting participants who were most likely to best contribute to answering my research
questions. Recent immigrants were not part of the context, as researching them would not help me answer my research questions.

Table 1

Criteria for Choosing AAHL Student Participants in the Multiple Case Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for Choosing AAHL Students</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The participant studied Arabic for more than one quarter (11 weeks) at the chosen setting</td>
<td>Students have spent more time in the classroom and have experience to share about their learning inside the classroom and their language practice in their home community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants have studied Arabic with more than one instructor at the same university in the same department</td>
<td>Students will be able to compare and contrast learning experiences in different classrooms, allowing the researcher to find patterns in their learning and language practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ proficiency in Arabic is not a factor in choosing them for interviews</td>
<td>To avoid eliminating possible factors that can contribute to deeper understanding of AAHL students’ experience and maintaining the exploratory nature of the case studies approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ generation status, meaning their geo-cultural origins, is not a factor in choosing them for interviews</td>
<td>To avoid eliminating possible factors that can contribute to deeper understanding of AAHL students’ experience and maintain the exploratory nature of the case studies approach. Participants can be born in the Arab world or the U.S.; recent immigrants are beyond the scope of this research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic is part of the participants’ lives, which can include any of the following:</td>
<td>This criterion helps in answering the research question: To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ Participants have experienced interactions using Arabic outside of the classroom, either through travel, study abroad, or relationships with family and friends inside and outside the U.S.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ Participants are embedded in situations where Arabic is used (e.g., with family members in the same household or when traveling abroad to meet extended family)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ Participants actively seek opportunities to use Arabic and culturally participate in the Arabic community in the U.S. or abroad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Numbers of Participants and Rationale**

In case studies, the data collection is an in-depth process from a limited number of people and settings (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015). Yin (2018) explained that choosing 6-10 cases gives strong support for the preliminary propositions of the multiple case study as a whole. Most multiple case studies’ participants range between two and six cases in thesis and dissertations in applied linguistics (Duff, 2008). Because my research has a linguistic aspect which discusses the language development of AAHL students, I interviewed four participants to better comprehend their linguistic practices.

**Participants’ Recruitment**

Recruiting AAHL student participants took place by connecting with AAHL students who I taught previously. To be clear, as I no longer work at this institution, I had no power or influence in the grades or academic standing of any potential participant in this work. Because I planned to pose questions about AAHL students’ learning and identity, previous connections with the students helped in establishing trust and rapport about such sensitive issues. Therefore, the priority for recruitment was for students who I taught within the previous two to three years and who have taken classes with other instructors of Arabic in the same department at the same university. In this way, students could compare across instructors, which added greater validity to the data collection and analysis.

As stated, it is important to reiterate that I did not interview any student who I was teaching during the interviews to avoid power dynamics affecting the results of study. By the start of fall 2020 term, I had stopped teaching in the chosen context by choice, but
continued teaching Arabic at another institution. Leaving my teaching role in the chosen setting helped me position myself as an ally, interviewing and voicing AAHL students’ thoughts, feelings and stories about their learning of Arabic and their lives.

**Procedures**

To begin, I acquired Institutional Review Board approval at Portland State University. After receiving institutional approval, I emailed those AAHL students who I previously taught. The email contained information about how the interview process would be conducted, consent forms, confidentiality practice disclaimers, as well as open the floor for any questions they would have.

**Interviews**

I conducted two in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 4 AAHL student participants. Although Seidman (2019) recommended that each interview last approximately 90 minutes, I found that this suggestion was too long and tiring for both me and my participants so I decided that the interviews were one hour each. In my pilot interview with Fatima,\(^1\) I learned that one hour was the maximum and most efficient length. Then I adjusted the time from 90 to 60 minutes for all the following interviews with the participants.

The interviews followed the structure designed by Seidman (2019), starting with learning about the participants' life history, then the details of their lived experience, and finally, reflecting on the meaning of their experience. Additionally, in my second

\(^1\) Although my interview with Fatima was initially designed as a pilot, because her responses yielded valuable information, I invited her to participate in my main study.
interviews I included follow-up questions, asking for clarifications and examples. Although Seidman suggests three interviews for the three stages, I limited the interviews to just two, because meeting three times for many of the students was a time-commitment they could not afford with their academic workload. I gave a $25 gift card to the participants after each interview to express my appreciation for their time. Weiss (1994) explained that participants would appreciate acknowledging how they are contributing to the research with a gift. In this research, the students appreciated the gesture.

Two sequential interviews provided opportunities for participants’ reflections to emerge. During the first interview, I asked students to share two or more artifacts from the classroom, and during the second interview, I asked students to share home/community written artifacts which can be social media or texting artifacts, or other written texts they do at home that are important to them. After I conducted the interviews, I followed up with most of the participants in different ways, depending on their availability, to ask for clarifications on what they shared with me in their interviews. For Sarah, I emailed her questions and she typed back the answers in a Google document. For Khloud, she sent voice messages, and for Fatima, I met with her for around 30 minutes on Zoom.

In addition to these follow-ups, the artifacts and the home/community written texts provided more data to triangulate the findings of the study. I explain shortly—in the section on data collection steps and multiplicity of resources for triangulation—the research purpose of both the classroom artifacts and community writing samples and I explicated the choice presenting them in this particular order.
I conducted and recorded the interviews through Zoom—because of social-distancing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic—and then transcribed them. I recorded the interviews through the Zoom recording feature and also used an audio recording application as a back-up recording tool.

**Data Collection Steps and Multiplicity of Resources for Triangulation**

As mentioned above, one of the strengths of the case studies method is triangulation through the use of multiple resources of data. In this multiple case studies research, I used interviews, classroom artifacts, community written artifacts, and research journals.

**Classroom Artifacts**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined artifacts as three-dimensional objects that the participants consider meaningful. Before the first interview, I asked AAHL students to identify and bring at least two classroom artifacts from the Arabic language classes they attended. The artifacts can be a textbook, an assignment, a quiz, a video they saw or created, a doodle they drew when they were in the classroom, and the like. The general purpose of bringing an artifact from the Arabic classroom to the first interview was to provide the opportunity to talk in depth about their classroom experience, which fits the goal for Seidman’s (2019) interview purpose of exploring the participants' lived experience. Additionally, the artifacts represented tangible examples that facilitate the discussion.

As noted in Chapter 2, artifacts are vital in the FOI approach as they connect students’ lives with classroom learning, which makes using them in my research more
important. Both classroom and students’ home artifacts helped in understanding the connections and disconnections between classroom learning and students’ lives.

Summarizing what I mentioned on artifacts in the previous chapter, in FOI, individuals have personal toolbox that define our identities, actions and meaning (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). To elaborate, FOI artifacts have many formats that can be written, spoken, visual, multimodal which students create as a result from their experiences’ and their families' FOK (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Consequently, these artifacts can be utilized in bridging students’ experiences outside of classrooms and the learning that happens inside them (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). One of the cultural artifacts in FOI is spoken and written language because it develops individuals' identities, helping them interconnect and express themselves and their worlds (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). As a result, the choice of asking the participants to share their artifacts aligned this research’s methodology with the FOI approach, in an attempt to connect students’ personal experiences with classroom learning.

The specific purposes of the two artifacts, and the prompts that I gave to the research participants, are listed in Table 2. Further, I added the rationale for choosing the artifacts for the first interview.

Classroom artifacts provided a deeper understanding of the classroom dynamics. Although I hoped to observe students in other Arabic classes in the program, access might be challenging because some colleagues might not feel comfortable with me in their classrooms. I prioritized the best experiences for students, and harmony and professional relationships with colleagues. The dynamics in the Arabic section have been
top-down and my observations might be mistaken for criticism. Thus, I did not conduct Arabic classroom observations, but had access to the classroom dynamics as described by AAHL students and the classroom artifacts they bring.

Table 2

Artifacts Choice and Rationale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artifact 1</th>
<th>Prompt Given to the Participants</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| An artifact significant to the participants | Show me something from the Arabic class that is significant to you. The object can be a passage from a textbook or something you wrote, or a video you saw in class or created for class, or audio you heard or created for class or a game you played in class or any other object(s) that is meaningful to you. | ● The artifact opens the possibility of sharing moments of victory, loss, possibility, and self-discovery that AAHL students experienced in the Arabic classroom.  
● This artifact together with the interview questions can help in answering research question 2 and 3: How did AAHL students perceive the impact of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA or formal Arabic) in classroom instruction on: their development of linguistic skills? Their identities as Arab American multilingual speakers? |
| A written artifact | Show me how your instructor responds to your writing | ● This artifact can show translanguaging moments of using dialects in writing, and the instructors’ reactions to them.  
● This artifact can help in answering research question number 1: To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities? |

Home/Community Written Artifacts

Another source of data that I employed in this study is home or community written artifacts. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that documents refer to materials that are visual, written, digital and physical with relevance to the study. For their second interview, I asked AAHL students to bring 3-6 samples of their writing with friends and
family posted on their social media or texts with family members on their cellphones, or letters to family members or other written artifacts that are important to them. If the participant chose to share written samples from social media posts. I asked that they share 3-6 samples of single posts on Facebook or Tweets or Instagram posts or others. I further explained that these samples could be in any language. The goal was to see how translanguaging practices took place in students’ lives to understand the relation between classroom practices and AAHL students’ lives. Choosing 3-6 samples was a purposeful decision, in order to identify the communication patterns of each participant and lessen the likelihood of observing an exceptional or unusual interaction. I wanted to capture the common features of communication AAHL students use in their daily lives, and the artifacts successfully fulfilled that purpose. To elaborate, the importance of accessing the home/community artifacts was capturing some of the translanguaging practices of the participants.

**Research Memos**

The third source of data in this study is research memos. I created handwritten and digital memos at regular points during my research to record my thoughts and processes. Then, I immediately and concurrently with interviews transformed them into profile drafts which turned into the participants’ profiles shared in Chapter 4. In practice, the researcher’s reflections are documented in memos, which represent data (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015). Because qualitative research design is an ongoing process during the study, memos are like a “decentralized field journal” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 20) where one can reflect and analyze. Building on the notes to draft the profiles supported their accuracy and freshness in my mind as a researcher.
Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research allows for researchers to examine their biases, highlight them, but not necessarily eliminate them. Researchers carry their assumptions and understandings of theories to the research, even if they are not fully aware of them (Glesne, 2016). Qualitative research allows for an implicit contract between the readers and the researcher; the researcher adheres to full honesty, transparency, and disclosure, while the reader is left to decide how the background of the research has influenced the research and its findings.

My role as a researcher in the multiple case studies that I conducted, as Glesne (2016) stated, was influenced by my experience and assumptions. I am aware that my educational experience and identity has transformed me throughout my language studies in the U.S., the United Kingdom, and Egypt. Further, this experience has made me curious to understand what Arab American students in Arabic classes at the university level experience in their acquisition of language skills as well as in their self-perception of identity. I believe that my experience as a student as well as an instructor of languages (Arabic in the U.S. and English in Egypt) has colored my lens in approaching AAHL students’ experience. I believe that my access to both English and Arabic has shaped how I view the world and how I view myself. My language professors’ practices in the classroom contributed to the reshaping of my world. As a researcher, I am aware that my experience should not be imposed on others; instead, I should be open and listen to what others say without projecting my experience onto theirs. However, I also acknowledge I
am more likely to be empathetic with my participants’ experiences because of my experiences in language classrooms as a student for many years of my life.

I have taught Arabic for at least 11 years, and many of my students, both second language learners of Arabic and AAHL students, have shared with me their frustrations and disappointments, particularly after traveling to Arab countries, with what they had learned in the Arabic classroom. Many of them felt that their experiences, and the ways Arabic was used in those places, did not match their classroom learning. I come to this research with my prior knowledge, along with awareness of and sympathy for many students’ frustrations about connecting Arabic learned in the classroom with Arabic spoken by native users. I am gaining more awareness with journaling, conversations with EdD peers and scholars, and readings about the need to highlight both the frustrations as well as the victories in Arabic classroom practices.

Addressing the influence of my background and prior knowledge, I triangulated the information I learned from the participants through research-memo writing to regularly reflect and capture my ideas, as well as document my influences and positionality development. Glesne (2016) recommended having a field journal to save reflections, ideas, patterns, and reactions including those of the researcher.

In addition to keeping research memos, I triangulated these memos with students’ classroom artifacts, students’ home/community written samples, interview transcripts, and member checks—asking participants who contributed the data and checking if the interpretations are accurate (Merriam, 1998). I asked all my participants to read the profiles I created for them based on my notes during and after their interviews, as well as
their interview transcripts. Additionally, I had been meeting with my writing tutor, who was also a doctoral student, to receive feedback on my research writing. These meetings took place before, throughout, and after the research ended. We regularly engaged with each other’s thoughts, writing, and my research rationale. Moreover, I regularly sought the advice of my advisor, and committee members, who provided guidance in research design, writing, thinking, and I continued to do so during the data collection and analysis. Thus, by triangulation and including multiple scholars—experts and emerging—in my research processes, I not only checked my interpretation of findings, but also highlighted, with transparency, my role in the research for my readers.

Data Collection Analysis

As I explained earlier, I collected the data for the multiple case studies approach through conducting two interviews, classroom artifacts, community written samples, and research memos. Multiple data sources allowed for triangulation and cross-examining the information from various sources. My research questions guided my research design and data collection, through an inquiry that attempted to stay true to the exploratory nature of a multiple case studies approach. When analyzing my data, I first examined the individual cases through writing detailed and contemporaneous profiles, and then I conducted a cross-case analysis through creating many handwritten and digital tables. Some of them are included in Chapter 4.

Table 3 highlights the connection between my research questions, data sources, and my rationale for the connection between them. To remind the readers and for easier reference, I share the research questions again here.
1. To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities?

2. How did AAHL students perceive the impact of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA or formal Arabic) in classroom instruction on their development of linguistic skills?

3. How did AAHL students perceive the impact of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA or formal Arabic) in classroom instruction on their identities as Arab American multilingual speakers?

Table 3

Connecting Data Collection With Research Questions and Rationale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Questions 1, 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Exploring students’ perceptions of their classroom Arabic use inside and outside of class, their perceptions of their linguistic skills, and how they view their identity in their own words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom artifacts</td>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>Exploring, while comparing with other data sources, how AAHL students perceive the classroom experience—in a tangible manner—and their relationship with the Arabic language as a language and a vessel for Arab American identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home/Community written artifacts (including digital)</td>
<td>Question 1</td>
<td>Exploring AAHL students use Arabic (MSA and colloquial), English and other languages out of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research memos</td>
<td>Questions 1, 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Comparing, contrasting, and triangulating with my prior knowledge, my reflections, observations and students’ perspectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 3, I presented the relationship between the data sources, research questions and the rationale between them. There is intentional overlap between the sources, which allows for triangulation and visiting the data from different angles. I have included a list of the interview questions in Appendix A.
**Interviews Analysis**

Interviewing, coding, and additional analysis was a simultaneous and recursive process. To analyze the semi-structured interviews and students’ perception of the classroom artifacts, I used ATLAS.ti software to organize and help code the corpus of case studies data I collected. At the beginning, after transcribing the interviews, I employed In Vivo codes, which entailed using the same words and phrases participants used (Saldana, 2016) while reading the interview transcripts. This coding suits beginner researchers in the qualitative field, like myself, and captures my participants’ views (Saldana, 2016). I also used emotion and value coding. Saldana (2016) explained that values codes suit studies exploring identity and attitudes, actions and experiences in case studies, and cultural values. Thus, values coding aligns with my exploration of AAHL case studies of identities and attitudes toward their Arabic language use.

For the second cycle of coding, I continued to use concept codes. Additionally, I used pattern codes, which organize the data into themes, assign meaning, find explanations, and determine patterns to the data organization (Saldana, 2016). I wanted to avoid depending solely on In Vivo codes because Saldana (2016) warned against this practice as it restricts the researcher’s view of the data. Employing In Vivo coding, values coding in the first cycle, and pattern coding in the second helped in refining my categories, themes, and patterns in the interview data.

During the process of coding, I kept both digital and handwritten notebook organizing and reorganizing the patterns I saw emerging in the codes. I shared these patterns with various colleagues and committee members for feedback. One of the strategies to establish validity is explicitly stating the researcher’s role and clearly discussing how the study was conducted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I continuously
attempted to be transparent about how I was conducting my study through member checks and having an audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) by using ATLAS.ti software, which was recommended to me by previous successful EdD students who used it in their case studies.

Classroom and Home/Community Written Artifacts Analysis

As previously explained, I asked students to bring 3-6 samples of home/community written artifacts in their second interview in order to explore their language use in their lives and their translanguaging practices, in addition to having classroom artifacts in the first interview. The language samples and the artifacts helped in triangulating with interview data about students’ perceptions of their classroom language use versus real life language use. I triangulated these samples, as a tangible source of data, with my research notes and interview transcripts. They revealed the juxtaposition between classroom practices and the participants’ linguistic practices, as well as highlighted classroom practices that mostly focused on MSA, which aligned with what the participants reported in their interviews. In Chapter 4, I fully detail the content of the interviews and intricately describe the artifacts.

Concerning classroom artifacts and home/community written artifacts analysis, I analyzed them by describing them in detail using start codes (which are also known as initial codes). The list of codes is included in Table 4. These codes are based on my observations of linguistic occurrences in the article (Alkhamees et al., 2019) on translanguaging practices among young Arab students studying in U.S. colleges, and my knowledge of Arab American populations’ interaction on social media. Over the course of coding, I consolidated the start codes into one which was translanguaging code when the participants switched from one level of a language to another. This switch was
consistently repeated which led to the emerging theme on the (dis)connection between AAHL students’ lives and class. Contemporaneously, I used translanguaging code to code the interview transcripts when AAHL students discussed their uses of Arabic, English and other languages and when they actually translanguaged during the interview.

**Table 4**

*Start Codes for Interview Transcripts, Classroom Artifacts and Home/Community Written Artifacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Research Question it Addresses</th>
<th>Approach to Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview transcripts</td>
<td>RQ1</td>
<td>Start-codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· uses of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· uses of students’ home Arabic dialect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· uses of students’ non-home dialect of Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· uses of MSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· uses of Arabic words but written in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· uses of English but written in Arabic letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>These start codes evolved into the code translanguaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td>In Vivo, emotions-focused coding (first round); pattern-coding (second round)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom artifacts</td>
<td>RQ1</td>
<td>Start-codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· uses of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· uses of students’ home Arabic dialect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>These start codes evolved into the code translanguaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home/Community written artifacts</td>
<td>RQ1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>These start codes evolved into the code translanguaging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Confidentiality and Maintaining Data

I took several measures to protect the confidentiality and privacy of my participants, that were communicated with them in the consent forms and when I met them in the interviews. I assigned pseudonyms and anonymized any information shared that could make the participants identifiable. I described their artifacts, including those from social media languages samples, without any identifiers. All the data gathered were saved in a double-password protected university data cloud and computer.

Validity and Reliability in a Qualitative Context

In order to ensure high validity and reliability for my study, I took several measures; some of these measures are mentioned before. To summarize them, I employed thick descriptions, triangulation, member checking with participants, peer examination, research notes for reflection and coding, and an audit trail. Merriam (1998) stressed that triangulation, member checks, peer examination, and explaining researcher’s views of the world and theories are strategies for ensuring studies’ internal validity.

First, thick descriptions refer to “the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 30)—in other words, describing for the readers the cases, context, and incidents. Thus, I included in the participants’ profiles in Chapter 4 thick descriptions of the settings, participants, classroom artifacts, home/community written artifacts and my reflections. These descriptions attempted to give the readers more information to follow and evaluate the study. In other words, both thick descriptions and triangulation help the readers to be informed in order to support the cases or find opposite examples (Duff, 2008).
Second, triangulation is a validity measure because it compares and contrasts different data points, highlighting the commonalities and discrepancies in the case and in-between cases (Maxwell, 2013). As explained previously, the data gathered from multiple sources—classroom artifacts, home/community written artifacts, interviews, and research notes and journaling—created a strong triangulation process to corroborate information. Additionally, the type of data which artifacts and documents show the results of real behaviors without modification (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) strengthens the validity of the information acquired through these documents—classroom artifacts and home/community written artifacts.

Third, I followed Maxwell’s (2013) and Paltridge and Phakiti’s (2015) recommendations by including member checks with the participants to check if my transcriptions of their interviews are accurate. Member checks took place when I asked the participants to read the latest drafts of their profiles which included both analysis and transcripts of their interviews to make sure that I had transcribed and interpreted their words correctly. Moreover, I engaged in peer examination, which Merriam (1998) defined as seeking colleagues to share their commentary on the process and findings. As noted, I met weekly with a PhD student writing faculty and tutor, where we discussed my findings as well as worked on thinking and writing about this research in a very detailed manner. Additionally, my advisor and committee members guided me through the different phases of my analysis, coding, and interpretations to re-examine my research process with fresh and more objective eyes.
Fourth, throughout the research, I kept—as mentioned above—a series of research notes and memos to continuously self-reflect and clarify my positionality while conducting the study. Clearly describing the researcher’s presuppositions and theoretical positioning is an internal validity strategy (Merriam, 1998). Finally, keeping an audit trail strengthens research validity through saving documents, documenting analysis steps (Duff, 2008), and providing a thorough description of the following: data collection, categories rationale, and decision-making processes during the research (Merriam, 1998). Using ATLAS. ti software as well as handwritten and digital notes allowed for saving documents, codes, and transcripts, along with research memos, my research was thoroughly documented during its different stages.

**Conclusion**

Research questions closely guided my study design. The case studies approach, with its in-depth and granular focus, equipped me to have a close look at AAHL students’ classroom experiences and home communities’ linguistic practices. With multiple case studies’ employment of various resources, I cross-checked information and compared cases. In this chapter, I explained in detail my role as a researcher, analysis steps, and different validity procedures I used in this research to continuously reflect, re-visit, and examine my findings for high validity and a close authentic representation of AAHL students’ experiences.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, I summarize the problem of practice, the purpose of this study, and the description of my data analysis. Then, I present a profile of each participant, wherein they discuss their journey to learn Arabic. Following this, I compare and contrast the cases for each participant, using their prior knowledge of Arabic when taking Arabic university classes as the main comparative factor. Then, I explore four recurring themes, while weaving in the answers to the three main research questions. Finally, I explain the limitations and the delimitations of this study.

At the university level, those in the field of AAHL teaching and learning have much to learn about AAHL students’ Arabic learning. Most university Arabic instruction privileges MSA over dialects (Al-Batal, 2018a; Younes, 2018). In this study, I explore AAHL students’ experiences in terms of their Arabic learning, their identities’ development, and their linguistic practices outside and inside Arabic classrooms to address the following questions:

1. To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities?

2. How did AAHL students perceive the impact of teaching MSA on their development of linguistic skills?

3. How did AAHL students perceive the impact of teaching MSA on their identities as Arab American multilingual speakers?

In this study, I attempt to achieve three main objectives: expand the body of knowledge on AAHL students in the field of heritage language teaching; inform theory; and inform instructors and curriculum developers about linguistic support and inclusive practices which AAHL students may need when learning Arabic at the university. Thus, this
research focuses on exploring AAHL students’ perspectives on their Arabic language learning at the university in (dis)connection to their Arabic use in their communities.

**Data Analysis Description**

Here, I briefly describe the analysis of the semi-structured interviews and artifacts which the participants shared. As described in Chapter 3, I interviewed each of the participants twice, followed up with them after the interviews, and asked them to share some of their classroom and home artifacts. During and after the interviews, I took notes and started writing detailed profiles for each participant. Then, I edited and updated the profiles several times, and shared the latest drafts of the profiles with the participants for verification.

After collecting the data and participants’ verification, I analyzed the transcripts of the interviews and wrote detailed descriptions of the artifacts. The first interviews focused on the students' backgrounds, languages, and classroom learning experiences, as well as classroom artifacts. The second interviews focused on their perceptions of their identity(ies) and multilingualism, along with clarifications about some points they mentioned in the first interviews. Additionally, students shared their home artifacts in the second interview and discussed the context of these artifacts.

During the coding process, I started with invivo, concept, value, and emotion coding in the first cycle of coding. Following this, I used concept and pattern coding, which helped me in reorganizing the codes, identifying themes and subthemes, and making categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Throughout the process, I constantly
triangulated what the participants said with their artifacts to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in the data (see Table 5).

Table 5

Summary of Participants’ Classroom and Home Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Class artifacts</th>
<th>Home artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Fatima      | For second year MSA course:  
- 1 composition in MSA  
For third year colloquial Arabic courses:  
- A typed report in Egyptian colloquial Arabic about an Egyptian movie  
- Presentation slides in colloquial Arabic  |  
- Group text messages inviting a friend to watch a movie; interactions are in English, Somali/Arabic words written in English letters  
- Group text messages celebrating a birthday using English and Somali/Arabic words written in English letters  
- Twitter posts in English only  |
| Sarah       |  
- A hand-written composition in MSA about daily routines in a college student’s life  
- Two hand-written exercises from the textbook, Al-Kitab, with corrections written in red  |  
- Group text messages celebrating Eid (Muslim holiday) with friends in the U.S. using English and Arabic words in Arabic letters  
- Group text messages with family in Syria titled “عَلَّمْنَا” meaning “our family” where all the messages were in Arabic written in Arabic letters.  
- Group text messages with friends in the U.S. showing only English texts  |
| Khloud      |  
- Two academic typed essays written in MSA. One was still in progress which she chose to write to improve her Arabic and the second was an assignment about immigrants in one of the cities in the west coast.  |  
- Group text messages with friends in Egypt; Egyptian Arabic is written in English letters  
- Text messages with her cousin written fully in English  
- A request to one of the Arabic instructors in MSA  
- A message in English written in Arabic letters  |
| M.J.        |  
- A hand-written essay in MSA about her life  
- A typed assignment in MSA about what she learned from different units in the textbook  |  
- A screenshot of her naming her computer files in Arabic  
- List of Arabic movies in English that she wanted to watch  
- A group chat on a Snapchat room called “بالصدح” meaning In MSA with her peers. |
The artifacts, revealing home versus classroom language use, provided valuable insights that helped in engaging the research questions. In addition, seeking the participants’ validation of the latest drafts of their profiles strengthened my analysis of the data because the participants not only verified their quotes, but they affirmed how I analyzed the information they gave about their experience.

**Participants’ Profiles**

Below, I include a profile of each participant, based on the order of our interviews: Fatima, Sarah, Khloud, and M.J. In each profile, I explain the participant’s backgrounds, learning goals, and classroom experiences, as well as their challenges and victories in their Arabic learning. Moreover, in the profiles, I describe the participants’ dialect(s), translanguaging practices, and their view of their identities in relation to being Arab American and multilingual. Thus, the profiles are a close representation of these students, their experiences, their emotions, and their learning journey.

**Fatima’s Profile**

To be “exploring” and not “judged”
This is how classrooms should be,
As “we are all struggling to learn,
but we will get there.”

**Background**

Fatima was 3 years old when her parents moved from Somalia to the U.S. At the time of our conversations, she had just graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Public Health. She wanted to minor in Arabic, but two challenges stopped her from achieving this goal. The first challenge was that her major course work gradually became more intense, requiring more rigorous work toward the end. Second, the Arabic instructor who
taught third year MSA, required for the major, was not giving the right “vibe,” and so she dropped the class. She was remarkably close to earning a minor in Arabic after 3 years of taking Arabic classes at the university, preceded by 6 years in Islamic school, and weekly home Arabic lessons. However, she sensed that her third year MSA instructor’s teaching would not help her learning, and she thought, “No, thank you.” Through our conversations, I explored this decision with Fatima: dropping Arabic, despite many years of investment. I explore her decision in greater detail later, in the classroom experience section.

Fatima’s family, particularly her mother, had encouraged her to learn Arabic since she was young in order to read the Quran. In fact, every weekend, Fatima would take Quranic lessons, in addition to going to the Islamic school, meaning she studied Arabic for at least six years before joining the university and enrolling in Arabic classes. As a child, she did not have much choice about learning the language. However, studying at the university was different for her because she chose to study Arabic as she sensed that this language made the most sense to her since, unlike Chinese or Japanese, she could actually use Arabic in her life.

At home, Fatima used several languages to communicate with her family and friends. She used Somali with some English words with her parents, while she communicated in English with her siblings. She had friends from Syrian and Egyptian backgrounds, who, like her, moved to the U.S. or were born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. Her family members lived all over the world, making homes in different countries in Europe, as well as in the UAE, and speaking languages including English,
German, and Somali. The elders in Fatima’s family spoke some Arabic, too, or at least peppered their conversations with Arabic words and phrases. Fatima was exposed to multiple dialects of Arabic long before joining the university, because most of her Arabic teachers at the Islamic school were from the Levant area. Finally, when she felt “disconnected” from the Somali and Arabic cultures, she made sure to listen to Somali and Arabic pop music, such as Nancy Ajram and Tamer Hosny. Music helped her feel connected and “encultured” to her Somali identity.

**Goals for Learning Arabic**

When she began taking university Arabic classes, Fatima’s goals were to speak and “reply back” in Arabic when people from the community spoke Arabic to her. From Fatima’s perspective, her understanding was stronger than her ability to speak Arabic, due to her 6 years of schooling in Islamic school. She described her journey with Arabic as “rough at the beginning and then better at the end,” because when she was learning Arabic as a child, she did not like it; it was “just a requirement and it wasn't something I definitely wanted but at the end, it was like, huh, it was not even that bad!” But when she joined the university Arabic classes, her journey took a positive turn during the three consecutive turns in which she took the spoken colloquial Arabic classes, wherein I was her instructor. Fatima explained:

> It's just a way that you taught it, like you weren't strict with it. It was just like, this is flowing, you know, and that was just very natural and you know, I just didn't feel like I was judged. You know, because, like, when you're younger, you have to like . . . I have to get this correct. I have to do this. I have to get this right. Like, I can't mess up because I'm being judged by their peers, I'm being challenged by others . . . but with this class [spoken colloquial Arabic class], it was more like you come in, you speak as much as you can. If you don't know, you're there to always like: Oh hey you, it's this way, it's not that way, but you're doing well,
good job, keep going, you know, and it's just very motivational, you know, and I like that.

In sum, she contrasted the strictness of her previous schooling and lack of choice in studying Arabic as a child with her choice to study Arabic at the university, wherein she experienced classroom instruction and involvement that was free of judgment.

**Classroom Experience**

Because I taught Fatima for six courses (second year series of MSA, and third year spoken colloquial Arabic), most of her experiences learning Arabic at the case study location were based on her experience in my classes. She took two Arabic classes with two other instructors; one adjunct and another full-time faculty. She finished the class with the adjunct successfully, but dropped the other Arabic class, required for the Arabic minor, because she did not feel that the class was the right one for her, as briefly mentioned above and fully explored below.

**Victories.** Fatima’s Arabic learning journey took a positive turn when she joined the colloquial Arabic university classes when they were offered. The reasons for this positive turn are many, including: learning in a non-judgment environment, feeling her learning journey and struggles respected by some instructors, receiving purposeful feedback, and enjoying an intimate class setting. First, Fatima kept referring to the importance of not being judged during her studying Arabic in my classes, and made mention of a particular classroom activity where the students and I stand in a circle, and we pass a ball. The person who has the ball would say something in Arabic related to the assigned lesson. Fatima described her experience:
No one is perfect. Then you can tell when we were in a circle, like everybody, was making mistakes, and it just, it was like okay. Well, I don't have to be too stressed out, either because it's not like they speak Arabic either, you know, and it's like we're all learning here together. But, like as far as like, for example, I'll just compare to Islamic school. Most of these kids that I was in class with, they were already Arabic speakers, you know, most of these kids because their parents like some of the teachers were their parents. And so, they already had the foundation, as I who barely even, you know, spoke it [Arabic] and so then, there was always that kind of like imbalance, there wasn't really that balance in the classrooms and it was just kind of like a little awkward because it was students who are already perfectly fluent in Arabic and can speak it because it's their first language compared to me [who] was trying to like learn ٍب ٍأ | basic Arabic alphabet]. At this point, you know, and trying to pick that up because I don't even speak the language, but at [the university] it is more like okay, we're all in this together. We're all struggling, and we'll get there.

Fatima compared her experience learning Arabic in the Islamic school with her university classes, where students’ different levels of Arabic caused an “imbalance” in the classroom learning environment, because students whose parents are Arab immigrants spoke Arabic, while Fatima did not. By contrast, her Arabic classroom experience at the university equalized the platform for heritage and non-heritage students, as exemplified in the circle activity where everyone is “struggling” and the confidence in her learning because she knew that she and her classmates “will get there,” collectively.

In addition to providing an equal ground for students to learn, the circle activity provided the opportunity for receiving purposeful feedback in a judgment-free learning environment. Fatima said the following about her experience getting feedback during the circle activity:

Like when we were doing like those little circles, where we talk around, you'd be like: “Okay, just talk,” you know. And then, like you’d come in and be like, “it's this way; it is not that way, but you have it, you're good, you're great, keep going,” you know. And I like that because it gives you... the chance to improve yourself, you know... Rather than just letting me go off without even knowing you know what I'm saying, what I'm doing is incorrect.
Fatima highlighted here that feedback during the circle activity was helpful for her because of its ability to guide her learn toward improvement based on her individual needs, encouraging her to continue learning, while helping her understand where the mistakes were, without interrupting the learning process. She explained further that “I was implementing your feedback and I like that a lot. Oh, I find myself improving.” The result of successful feedback is progressing in the learning process, and both the instructor and the students sense this improvement.

Fatima attributed her victories in the Arabic university classes to small class sizes and a learning environment that created an “intimate” setting for “one on one” student-instructor interactions, as she described it. She further explained, saying:

You know, when it's like a smaller classroom, I feel like it's more intimate and it's not too stressful . . . I feel like we were able to have one on one in this class, rather than you know some of the bigger classes, where it's like, okay, well, I don't understand I just, I guess. I have to go home and try to figure that out, on my own, you know.

Here, Fatima shared how she felt the classroom size contributed to a sense of belonging, not isolation, where she could interact with the instructor and was not on her own in her learning journey. Even though she did not like presentations, she thought that a small classroom helped her presentation skills because the audience was small, which encouraged her to confidently present in Arabic. In sum, Fatima’s victories and sense of achievement were a result of learning in a classroom that made her feel she was free from judgment, respected for where she was in her learning process, while getting feedback that directed her education in a small intimate class.
Challenges. Despite all the victories in Fatima’s Arabic learning journey, challenges existed while learning Arabic, which included study of MSA grammar, judgment about her Arabic language use, and too much focus on grammatical accuracy, among others. The first challenge was how learning MSA felt “more like a chore” because Fatima “never really liked grammar.” She enjoyed most learning spoken colloquial Arabic classes because there was no judgment, unlike MSA in some of the university and Islamic school classes, where accuracy was emphasized, and there was less tolerance for mistakes. Additionally, she realized that speaking was the skill that she needed most to converse with people from her community. In short, Fatima found a refuge in learning colloquial Arabic because of her struggles with learning MSA.

A second challenge Fatima faced was speaking. She always struggled, until the time of the interviews, with spoken language production in Arabic when people spoke to her. She described her challenges by saying:

I understand what people are saying in Arabic, like I understand it. But, it’s always been like replying back in Arabic, that was the most challenging part and I've always struggled with that… so I did want to fix that, especially when it comes to Arabic. That was one of the main reasons why I actually took that course [spoken colloquial Arabic].

Fatima clarified that her listening was stronger than her speaking, but she never had the chance to work on her speaking. Thus, joining spoken colloquial Arabic classes was an opportunity to support her need to reply back when people in her community asked her questions in Arabic and wanted to converse. She had struggled with speaking for many years, long before she joined the university.

So in the Islamic school, um, honestly, I don't even know if they really cared if I understood or not. It was just more forced, like I said, like we didn't even have an
option. And I found myself a lot of the time speaking back in English. And like I understood what they were saying. But it's kind of like, it's kind of like how sometimes with my parents like if they ask me something in Somali, I would naturally just, you know, respond back in English. And it was kind of like that in that sense. Like, I was just responding to them in English, while I understood what they were saying.

Fatima, after 6 years of schooling in Arabic at the Islamic school, did not have the chance to learn how to speak, and was not supported in her pre-university schooling to be able to produce Arabic in response to her teachers. She drew a parallel between the speaking situation at school with her speaking situation with her parents, where the authority figures—whether teachers or parents—speaking Arabic or Somali, but she could only respond to the language she was comfortable or capable of using to successfully communicate. As a result, she felt she was put in stressful situations as she further explained:

I feel like I was thrown a lot into situations where I didn't even know what I was doing, like, Oh, you have a presentation and it needs to be you need to speak in Arabic fluently, no English words and it was just like so bad because I wasn't even taught, but okay, I just went up to them like قال [heee saaaid]. Like I would just drag every single word just as long as I can, and I just kind of find myself in that situation a lot but, as far as [university Arabic classes/name of the case study location], it was more, like I said, you [in the researcher's Arabic classes] would definitely be like, ‘Oh I don't think that's the right word’, but I understand what you're trying to say is, is, done this way, you know, like I was …implementing, getting your feedback, and I like that a lot. Oh, I find myself improving.

Fatima pointed out the contrast between Islamic school Arabic classes and my spoken colloquial Arabic classes in particular, where feedback was specific and purposeful, as mentioned above. The result was she felt improvement in her speaking skills, where in her pre-university Arabic classes, she was “thrown” into difficult learning situations, being asked to produce the language, without a clarity on expectations, feedback, or even teaching her how she would speak in the first place.
Not all university Arabic classes were the same as spoken colloquial Arabic classes for Fatima. One of the challenges she faced was with some Arabic instructors, who she perceived to be discouraging. In fact, as I mentioned in the introduction, Fatima did not finish her minor in Arabic because she did not want to take third-year courses in MSA, which were only offered by a specific instructor. She did not get the right vibe from this instructor, dropped the class, and dropped the Arabic minor, despite being very close to finishing it. It was an uncomfortable topic to talk about, but we both gradually tried to understand her decision, as she walked me through her thoughts of how she made the realization to let go of her Arabic studies, and being “not worth it” to take third year MSA, after 6 years of pre-university Arabic and finishing a third year of spoken colloquial Arabic at the university. She explained:

It's like I feel like [the instructor] put us on a higher pedestal, like higher expectations . . . like I felt like that's kind of what it was like higher expectations, but I'm like, but I'm not any better.

While taking one of the classes with this Arabic instructor, which she dropped after about a week, she faced three main difficulties. The first was that she sensed that the instructor treated her as if she knew more information than others, but she did not feel that she was more accomplished or knew more to deserve this treatment. Consequently, she sensed that the instructor was giving their attention to other students, who the instructor perceived to have more need.

She shared that if she was not wearing a headscarf nor looking Somali, the instructor might have expected less from her in terms of her Arabic studies. All of these classroom dynamics were “subtle” as she described it:
I feel like there's that imbalance there, for sure . . . because they [her peers] definitely need more help, and they appear to not know it [Arabic], like it wasn't like that. But it was just like subtle, like I said, it's very subtle.

The imbalance Fatima referred to was not treating all students equally. This treatment resulted in her feelings that she was put on a “higher pedestal” than others, and not equally being treated as deserving to learn like other non-heritage peers.

I followed up by asking if she thought that these subtle differences in treatment between students who come with Arabic knowledge and others who do not, could lead to students discontinuing their Arabic studies; she responded by saying “for sure,” but added that one of her peers “has to” to take the class to fulfill the language requirement, implying that her peer would have dropped the class if it were not required. I interviewed her peer, Sarah, for this research, and she confirmed that perception.

Another difficulty Fatima faced with this instructor was she hesitantly thought that they could have been “intimidated” by her native-like pronunciation of Arabic, while the instructor’s accent was clearly—to Fatima—a non-native one. It is important to note that at this point in the interview, Fatima was clearly forming her thoughts about this matter, speculating, and shaping her ideas, articulating these matters to herself for the first time. Fatima explained this intricate and complicated situation she experienced:

Just felt like it was just [the instructor] was intimidated, that's kind of like the vibe that I got, but . . . I don't know if it's like intimidation, maybe, I don't, maybe, it may be, may not, but it could be that. He thought we knew it; I don't know what the issue was to be honest, I don't know. And the reason was because I did come in with some knowledge, like I feel like if I didn't know at all, like if it's a new subject for me, definitely, I would have been intimidated. I would have been, like okay, well, maybe I don't know what I'm doing, you know, maybe, I'm not good enough, maybe I won't learn it, you know.
Fatima’s words were shedding light on two important points. First, although she was not sure of the possibility that instructor was intimidated by her native-like Arabic pronunciation, it was worth mentioning that her perception of the possibility: some non-native speaker instructors might give the impression to their heritage students that they are intimidated because some of these students had native-like pronunciation of Arabic, while the instructors do not. Second, Fatima’s prior knowledge of Arabic protected her from feeling that she could not learn Arabic, despite the vibe which the instructor was giving in the classroom. In other words, because she learned Arabic for many years before, one uncomfortable experience with an Arabic instructor did not shake her confidence in her ability to learn Arabic.

Indeed, Fatima’s classroom artifacts demonstrated three main points: a strong command of colloquial Arabic, a significant potential for reaching a high level of fluency in Arabic, and an investment in her learning of Arabic. Fatima shared three assignments she completed for three different Arabic classes. The first one was a composition written in MSA for Arabic 203, which was a second-year Arabic class offered in the third quarter in the academic year and built on Arabic 201 and 202. The second sample was a report reviewing an Egyptian movie for Arabic 305, which was a third-year Arabic class offered in the second quarter in the academic year, and built on information offered in Arabic 304. This sample showcased her strong command of colloquial Arabic because of the high level of detail in reporting the movie. The third sample was the slides for the presentation she gave in Arabic 306, which was a third-year Arabic class offered during the last quarter of the academic year.
A brief explanation of the program structures would help in understanding and situating these samples. First, I taught her in all three classes from which she chose the samples, and each course was unique. To elaborate, Arabic 203 was taught in MSA, as a requirement—according to the Arabic section plan then—for taking Arabic 304. The spoken colloquial Arabic series included Arabic 304, 305 and 306. Second, Arabic 306 was the last course in the spoken colloquial Arabic sequence, and was the last Arabic course Fatima took at the case study location, and it was with me as the instructor.

Fatima explained to me that she chose the three samples from my classes for several reasons. First, she did not save the work she did with other Arabic instructors. Second, she invested more time in these assignments she shared with me, and therefore they were more meaningful to her. She said “after you invest time on something. They just, they just have more value.” The last sample, her presentation on traveling and seeing her family all over the world, was the last assignment she did for Arabic 306, the final class she took, as mentioned above. I remember that she spoke with confidence, fluency, and clarity unparalleled by many of her peers. Her presentation shed light on her significant potential for reaching a high level of fluency in Arabic because of her clear pronunciation, sophisticated use of vocabulary, and length of her presentation. After her presentation, I expected that Fatima’s journey would continue after her strong finale in this course.

**Dialects and Translanguaging**

Translanguaging practices clearly existed during my interviews with Fatima. When we were conversing, she used many words several times like *inshalla,*
AstaghfirUllah (meaning I seek forgiveness in God), and wallahe (by God, used for emphasis), along with referring to the Arabic alphabet and words like قال (he said). She used them effortlessly when conversing with me. As previously mentioned, translanguaging practices existed in the text messages she shared in her samples between her and her friends. Undoubtedly, Fatima existed and continued to communicate with English, Somali, and Arabic, before, during and after her studies at the university.

**Dialects in Arabic**

Fatima compared learning MSA with spoken colloquial Arabic. Throughout the interview, Fatima referred to her learning of the MSA language and grammar as rigid, “torture” when learning it at the Islamic school—which I can personally connect with, as it can be a mentally exhausting and unexciting part of learning Arabic, regardless of where you study it. She constantly compared MSA with colloquial Arabic, the “strictness” of MSA juxtapositioned with how colloquial Arabic was “natural” and “fluid.” Moreover, she felt that while she was learning colloquial Arabic, she was not judged. In contrast, accuracy was of highest importance when learning MSA where she said, “I have to get this correct” and “I have to get this right because I'm being judged by their peers” and “challenged” by teachers. My impression was that learning MSA and its grammar was exhausting and took enjoyment from Fatima’s experience.

Despite speaking and understanding English, Arabic and Somali, Fatima did not see herself as multilingual, because she mixed Somali and Arabic with English. However, she said she would consider herself multilingual if she spoke colloquial Arabic fluently because she would “be able to communicate with more people and relate to more
people.” In contrast, she was not sure if she would be considered multilingual if she were fluent in MSA. In other words, her answer about viewing herself as multilingual in the case of mastering colloquial Arabic was clearer and more confident than her ideas about fluency and MSA. Finally, although she learned the Quran when she was young, she considered herself still bi-lingual (English/Somalı), excluding Arabic from her repertoire, because she cannot speak it fluently.

**Identity: How Do the Participants Define Themselves and Why?**

Fatima thoughtfully described her identity. She felt Somali when she was at home when cooking, and speaking with her parents, while she felt American when she was outside of home. With her friends, she spoke English mostly, although when she used to study Arabic, she made the effort to use some Arabic here and there with her Arab American friends, who are mostly from Syria, and her Somali American friends, who grew up in Egypt. The Somali language has many Arabic words like *inshallah* (God willing), and *wallahe* (by God, used for emphasis). During our interviews, Fatima used them frequently with spontaneity and ease, as mentioned above.

Fatima did not identify herself as Arab, even though Somalia is one of the 22 Arab countries in the Arab League. She explained that the Somali and Arabic cultures—like food, clothes, and languages—are too very different from one another. At the same time in the following interview, she expressed her feelings that Arab American youth, like Somali American youth, faced similar problems like cross-generation tensions between them and their parents, who generally reject their “American” way of thinking.
Overall, Fatima defined herself as Black Somali American Muslim woman. She wore a headscarf during our three interviews and when I taught her a couple years ago. “Fluid” was how she described her identity while using several languages with different people in her life. As mentioned before, with her parents, she used Somali with some English words. With her siblings, she used English. With her friends, although she mostly used English, she sometimes used Somali with her Somali/American friends, Arabic with her Levant friends and Somali/American friends who grew up in Egypt. In sum, she considered her identity to be as fluid as her language use.

**Foreigner Everywhere.** Fatima shed light on positive aspects of her identity including the fluidity and flexibility she had in interacting with different people from various parts of the world. However, she struggled, as well, with feelings of “confusion” about her identity. When I asked her about how she navigated this confusion, she explained that:

> With my identity wise, I feel like I was, like, always constantly reminded like, okay well you're Somali first, you are Somali first, you are Somali first. But, overall before that, obviously, comes religion and I feel I did take classes for that. Like …I was in Islamic school and then I was doing Quran on the side every weekend. And then like, obviously, I had the opportunity to go back to Somalia, like, visit and stuff. And, I was able to like re-identify myself in a sense, even though, even when I went there. I just felt like a foreigner, as well, as I am here, just because you know this is it's completely different. And so, I do feel like there was, like confusion. Like sometimes I do feel like, okay, well, I don't belong there, but I don't I don't feel like I belong here either. So I feel like there's always been that sense of loss, I guess. In terms of language, I'm trying my best to retain it, to be honest. Like it's hard, it's definitely hard, but I'm trying my best to like every single day, trying to use or speak to my cousins, even in Somali just maintain it.

Here, Fatima clarified her complex identity and language situation that she experienced and navigated. These words showed how thoughtful and aware she was in her
understanding of herself. It seemed that her upbringing emphasized being Somali and Muslim as the two main identifiers of her identity, but going to Somalia reminded her that she was a “foreigner” there and in the U.S., causing this sense of confusion and “loss,” as she described it. All of these emotions were directly related to language maintenance, where she was actively and purposefully trying to use Somali with her relatives.

Fatima highlighted that losing one’s heritage language and being confused about ones’ identity were part of the Somali Americans’ and Arab Americans’ experiences in her generation:

Yeah, it's definitely similar because as generations go by, we are definitely losing our languages. In terms of identity, I feel like there's also that confusion, sometimes like being an Arab, being an American, but also being, like, keeping your religion background as well. I feel like that's all very confusing, in a sense.

She noticed that her generation, whether Arab Americans or Somali Americans, went through the same challenges and emotions regarding their identity, while balancing the need to preserve their religion. Clearly, she was juggling many aspects of her identity: preserving her Somali language, and her faith, along with realizing that she did not belong to both the U.S. and Somalia. In fact, these emotions could be a heavy burden for some young people, and gradually cause a sense of loss.

**Conclusion**

Fatima’s interviews were rich with insights about the world of a multilingual learner. In this profile, one learned about her international background, her classroom experiences learning Arabic, and translanguaging practices in her daily life. As explained above, Fatima’s everyday communication practice involved translanguaging between
English, Arabic, and Somali. She viewed it as an integral part of her daily life. Some of these words reflected her faith and some reflected her connection with multiple cultures. Her journey with Arabic was positive when she joined the university, but was not rewarded with finishing a minor. Still, Arabic would continue to be part of her life even after graduation.

**Sarah’s Profile**

The instructor’s “vibe,” and “shame”
“makes me feel I will never will learn Arabic”
Sometimes, getting an A is a game
Stuck; wanting to learn “true Arabic”

**Background**

When I interviewed her, Sarah was enrolled in second year Arabic classes. She majored in International Studies. Just like Fatima, she decided against minoring in Arabic, despite considering it last year. Below, I share the complex classroom related reasons for her decision to stop her Arabic studies after finishing the two-year language requirements, despite her true desire to learn Arabic, her father’s first language.

Sarah was part of three cultures: Arab, Latin American, and the U.S. Her father was from Syria and her mother was from Latin America. She grew up in the U.S., speaking mainly English at home, occasionally using a few words of Arabic and Spanish with her parents. Sarah spoke fluent Syrian Arabic when she was younger, during her summer visits to Syria. She perceived herself to have lost her Arabic speaking abilities when she stopped visiting Syria, while continuing to receive education in the U.S.

**Unique Linguistic Situation at Home.** Sarah lived in a unique linguistic situation at home, where her mother’s native language was Spanish, but Sarah spoke English to her
father because he did not speak Spanish. She grew up using English as the main language in the household. She would correct her mother’s English, which had been improving. She explained that she did not really learn English grammar growing up. As explained below, Sarah’s lack of meta-cognitive awareness about English grammar and its labels would prove to be a colossal challenge when learning Arabic.

Sarah experienced an ebb and flow in relation to learning and practicing Arabic throughout the years. From ages 5 to 10, she went to Syria each summer to visit her family, where she would speak Syrian Arabic with ease. When she stopped going to Syria, she felt that she lost her Arabic from lack of use. Consequently, her parents sent her to Islamic school for elementary and middle school, where she remembered Arabic with a Syrian teacher. Following this, she went to high school, where no Arabic was taught, and she forgot her Arabic speaking skills again, but maintained some of her reading skills until the time she entered college.

In college, she had a diverse group of friends, including Somali Americans and Arab Americans. She enjoyed having a diverse group of friends “because I get to learn more about their side and like to connect with them through a different way, you know.” Sarah was truly a global citizen, whose parents belong to two different countries, living in a third one neither of them grew up in, and immersed herself in diverse cultures and friendships.

Interviewing Sarah evoked a lot of emotions for her and for me, as well. I had taught Sarah in all of her first-year Arabic classes before I left teaching in the case study setting. She consistently received A grades in my classes, while showing growth,
confidence, and great potential to reach higher levels of communication in Arabic. I did not detect any stress or anxiety when teaching her during her first year Arabic. During the interview, I was surprised to see the changes that happened in her learning journey. We were both stressed to see her stuck in her Arabic learning, and playing the survival game of grades, while losing hope that she could actually learn Arabic the language. Toward the end of the first interview, I witnessed how one of my most promising students lost her self-confidence to learn Arabic.

**Goals for Learning Arabic**

Sarah’s goal for learning Arabic was simply to speak the language to connect with her grandmother and her extended family in Syria. To be specific, she wanted to speak colloquial Arabic, specifically the Levant dialect (which she referred to as *Shami*, the Arabic word for the Levant) to communicate in the same dialect as her family who were not living in the U.S.

I just want, when I go to Syria, I want to feel like I'm talking to my family correctly. I want to not show them that I'm learning very modern Arabic that we don't use in Syria. I want to use the Arabic that I know my family speaks, and I want to talk to my grandma in the way that she talks to my dad, you know. That part of my culture with my family, that's my main focus, like I really want to speak to my family the way I spoke to them as a child.

In other words, Sarah wanted to speak Shami (Levant) dialect to her family and gain a level of fluency closer to what she had when speaking Arabic as a child. Although this learning goal was possible to reach, Sarah’s interviews showed that she thought it unachievable as a result of the current education environment she was in, after 2 years of learning Arabic at the university level. In the sections below, I explain why she perceived her goal to be impossible as a result of classroom practices.
**Classroom Experience**

**Victories.** When Sarah started university, she was excited to see the diversity of students, including Muslim and Arab students, which was in contrast to her experience in high school, which was the exact opposite. She was one of only three Arab Muslim students in her high school, and did not get the chance to speak Arabic. She explained:

It is really difficult when you go to school… In my high school, there wasn't really any Arab students. I was the only Hijab-wearing girl in my class. No other (Arabs) or people that spoke Arabic in my grade that I would speak to because we're three of us, and we were like completely different group friend groups and everything like that. So I didn't really get the chance.

The difficulty of missing representation in high school was contrasted with the representation Sarah experienced at the diverse urban university campus. She said:

I never really had that [having friends from different cultures] in high school, although as much as I like made friends, I never really had that connection [she said with emphasis] of like, they would still be like, Oh, why do you do that again? Why do you do that? . . . I felt like it was judging. But I knew it wasn't like, that wasn't their intention, but I felt like I couldn't fully share everything with them, you know, like during Ramadan and all that stuff, I wouldn't really like, explain what I was doing. I just like, Oh, no, you know: Not really wanting to go full in depth with it. But in college, obviously, it's like way different, because everybody's like, oh, I want to know more, like, oh my, I know somebody who does that or something like that, you know, and a lot of my friends are Muslim so they understand.

Simply, at the university, she saw more students like herself, and she interacted with others who had a positive curiosity about her identity, which she welcomed. Additionally, she explained that she felt represented at the university in different ways, for example, events like “Arab nights” run by different Arabic student clubs made her feel represented and seen. When I, as her previous instructor, used Arabic words (Al hamdoulellah, Thank God) and inshallah (God willing), among others, in my emails to students, she reported that she felt represented.
Sarah had experienced a cycle of gain and loss of Arabic throughout her pursuit of learning the language long before taking Arabic university courses. As mentioned above, she used to speak Arabic during her visits to Syria as a child. Also, her parents had sent her to an Islamic school to continue her Arabic journey when she was in fifth grade, but she did not retain all of what she learned after she started high school, where her education was in English. Thus, her journey was marked by continuous gain and loss of Arabic over many years. She explained:

When I was younger, I would tell him [father] like it's too difficult, but when I would go to Syria because my dad and my mom used to send me to Syria for 3 months, every year, and I would just stay with my family. So I would come back and not knowing English anymore because I will just speak Arabic. But as soon as I got back, I would go right back to school, and I would forget everything. And I went to a public school, so then when I was in fifth grade, my parents decided to put me in Islamic school so I could really learn Arabic and read the Quran well, and all that stuff. And I had a Syrian teacher in Islamic school. So at that time, I wasn't going to Syria because my dad, he felt bad because, like, I couldn't communicate with my family, so he put me in that school to learn Arabic and actually helped me a lot. But once I got to high school, the same thing happened [forgetting the Arabic language]. But still I knew how to read and write, but like communication like talking and understanding, it was really hard for me because I wasn't doing it as much.

It is clear from Sarah’s words that she and her parents invested a lot of time, resources, and emotions to learn Arabic over the years long before her taking Arabic classes at the university. The emotional aspect of learning Arabic stemmed from the inability to connect with family back in Syria, and Sarah’s feelings that she was possibly disappointing her father, despite how much effort she had put into learning Arabic. Consequently, when taking Arabic classes at the university, it was an emotionally charged journey for her to try one more time to regain her Arabic skills.
**Challenges.** Despite the diversity of the big urban university, as well as the significant representation of Muslims and Arab students on campus, her current Arabic classes, at the time of the interview, negated the value of this diversity in a series of incidents which Sarah described below. Some of them include her instructors showing disrespect to Arabic culture and confusing messages on using dialects versus MSA, together with her experiencing an uneasy learning environment, where she frequently felt shame, confusion, distrust, and entrapment. Consequently, Sarah lost her motivation to learn Arabic and changed her decision to minor in Arabic. In the section that follows, I explain the above-mentioned challenges, the feelings Sarah experienced, and the reasons why she felt them in relation to her classroom experience. Most importantly, I described how she reached her decision to discontinue Arabic at the university beyond the two-year language requirements.

**Disrespect Toward Arabic Culture in Class.** During the earlier parts of Sarah’s interview, it was obvious that she was hurt by her perceptions of one of her Arabic instructor’s attitude toward Arabic cultures, despite teaching the language. The instructor was not an Arab nor a native Arabic speaker. Sarah shared the following specific incident which disturbed her.

I don't want to be rude to the instructor, but I feel like he's not very respectful towards Arabic culture for some reason. Like the other day, like literally this happened a couple days ago in class. One girl, she's not Arab, but she's in this class. And she was talking about how she tried to make Middle Eastern food for the first time. And I was like, she seemed so excited for it, and I felt, like, really happy for her because she was explaining to us how she made and he, kind of like, made a face like I don't think I would try that. And I was just like, you're an Arabic teacher: How are you not going to try Arabic food and be disrespectful towards it?! And it just really threw me off. I was just like, that's extremely disrespectful. If you're going to be an Arabic teacher, you wouldn't, and especially
if you're not Arab, you cannot disrespect the whole culture and the language and everything like that, you know.

Sarah’s perception of the Arabic instructors’ body language, reacting to the student’s attempt to cook Middle Eastern food, sent a message to her that he was not showing appreciation of the Arabic culture. Her emotions were clear by her repetition of “it just really threw me off” several times, describing this incident. Her anger stemmed from the instructor’s discouraging attitude toward her classmate’s attempt to understand Arabic culture. This incident along with other classroom practices gradually led Sarah’s investment in learning Arabic to significantly diminish, and undermine her desire to learn it.

**Shame and Embarrassment.** Sarah experienced feeling shame when studying Arabic during her second year at the university. She described her sense of shame due to many reasons. One reason was her sense of not really knowing English grammar due to having parents whose first language was not English.

So English grammar has always been really difficult for me. And, obviously the kids who are do not have like a secondary, a third language within their household and they only speak English, they’re really succeeding, probably because they understand fully the English grammar, which will help them within the Arabic [learning], And me and [her friend’s name who is also an Arab American], I literally reached out, [and said] girl, I just really don't understand English grammar. I feel like that's what's my problem. That's not why I'm learning well. She said, I feel the same exact way.

Sarah made comparison between herself, growing up between different languages, and her mono-lingual peers, whom she perceived as more successful than her in Arabic classes. In her opinion, their success was because they knew English grammar more deeply than her. Because of having parents whose English was “broken,” Sarah believed
that her English grammar was poor which was affecting her understanding of Arabic
grammar and her success in the Arabic class.

I don't think it's bad for everybody. No, because like I said, I am really struggling
with grammar, because he's really teaching that I feel like I'm getting an English
grammar lesson, when he's teaching Arabic grammar and I come from a
background, my parents, they don't really speak, that, they speak English well, but
nothing within like they can teach grammar and within school. I always found that
difficult because I grew up with my parents speaking broken English.

As mentioned, she believed that her monolingual peers had an advantage with their
understanding of grammar to advance in the Arabic classroom, where she was not
successful in the Arabic class because she could not follow the instructor’s explanation of
grammar that was based on English grammar rules and terminology. Her lack of success
to follow the instructor’s explanation of grammar caused her to feel ashamed and
embarrassed because she believed that she should know more Arabic because of her
background, as she explained:

The English grammar part is really like, he [the instructor] will be using all these
words and I honestly don't know what that means at all, like in class . . . And I'm
like really confused. But obviously, some kids, they know that grammar really
well, they can apply Arabic grammar. So they're probably doing better than I am,
which makes me really like embarrassed because I should be learning Arabic
well, because I have a background in Arabic, like I'm Arab عرب so I feel almost
ashamed, you know.

In Sarah’s case, her linguistic heritage worked against her in this particular Arabic
classroom in two specific negative ways. The first one was that Sarah viewed her peers' monolingualism as a strength, and her multilingual background as a weakness or deficit.
Simply, she saw her linguistic upbringing as a hurdle to her education because of her
peers’ development in response to the instructor's grammatical approach to teaching
Arabic. The second way Sarah’s linguistic heritage worked against her was her sense of
identity as a learner of Arabic, who lived in Syria and had a Syrian father, and “should’’ be successful in the Arabic class. In fact, from her words, it was clear that as a heritage language speaker in these learning environments, she was penalized—unintentionally—for coming to classes with prior knowledge, as her instructor routinely dismissed colloquial Arabic and focused mostly on grammar.

As a result, Sarah realized that she was not learning the same way as her peers, and concluded that she was not even learning at all. As she explained:

I'm not learning. Like, I feel like I don't learn it [Arabic] the same way. Like some people will know the answers. And I'm just, I'm so lost. And I'm just like, this is so embarrassing. Like, I should know this, you know.

The sense of loss, embarrassment, and shame were recurrent when Sarah shared her Arabic classroom experience with this particular instructor. Monolingual students were succeeding in these classes, where Sarah’s years of Arabic studying and living in Syria, speaking Syrian dialect, were not. Again, Sarah’s words showed that being a heritage student with a wealth of prior knowledge could be punished in Arabic language classrooms, where CRT pedagogies were entirely absent.

**Entrapment.** Sarah felt trapped while learning Arabic in this classroom environment, waiting for an escape. Throughout the interview, Sarah mentioned that she experienced a lot of difficulty and repeated the word “difficult” around 35 times in the two interviews, which may be tightly connected to her feeling of entrapment. She explained that working with her instructor was challenging: “He's just been difficult for no reason.” She observed that she could not succeed within a learning environment that
was confusing, and she could not get help even from her father who spoke Arabic. She
described as follows:

    Every time I was like okay, I just I can't make any more mistakes like, he gave me
four F’s in a row; after that, and a D in my first quiz. After that, I was like, No,
I'm not going to do this anymore. I have to just like, every time I would make a
mistake, I'd be like email him please like let me fix this, like my grades are on the
line. And I really thought I would have to, like change my grades to pass no pass
because he would fail me, like, that's what he made me feel like I was going to do.
He's [said]: you need to work on this. And I was like, I am working on this, and I
would even tell my dad. My dad's, like I don't understand what he wants you to do
anymore, you know.

Sarah’s words revealed the sources of difficulty she experienced: continuously failing
assignments, along with being consistently confused about why she was making
mistakes, and not being able to get help, not even from her father.

    While facing all these difficulties, the obligatory requirement to fulfill taking the
second-year Arabic classes language requirement in the university, led to Sarah’s feeling
of entrapment. Additionally, no other instructor offered these classes except the two
instructors who co-taught second year. She described her feelings:

    I just plan on getting my next two A's hopefully in the class, doing what he asked,
and then after that, unless a new Arabic teacher comes to [name of the university]
. . . I just won't put myself through that again.

Sarah vowed not to put herself through the experience of learning Arabic in such a
classroom setting, which demonstrated the emotional turmoil and entrapment she
experienced while learning Arabic. The only thing that held Sarah back from dropping
the class was the university language requirement.

    Confusing Messages on Using a Dialect and MSA in Class. Conflicting
messages from instructors of Arabic on whether students should use MSA or CA created
confusion for Sarah on multiple levels; one happened with one Arabic instructor and the
other happened among instructors of Arabic as detailed in this section. Sarah spoke Shami (Levant) dialect as her father was from Syria, and her summer trips to Syria had helped her acquire that dialect. In her Arabic classes, the textbook used was *Al-Kitaab*, which explained three Arabic levels/dialects next to each other—MSA, Shami/Levant, and Egyptian—in tables throughout the book in terms of vocabulary and conversations. Sarah mentioned that at the beginning of the term, the instructor said they could choose any of the three they wished to speak, but when she spoke Shami, the instructor objected to her use. She recalled:

> So obviously, I speak Shami. I am from Syria. And I feel most comfortable with speaking Shami. In the vocab lists, and I see Shami [in the Arabic textbook], and we're learning about something else. And he even asked us at the beginning of school: Do you guys prefer Shami, or this? and whatever you prefer, speak it. But then literally, the week after, I will be speaking Shami or I will be saying a Shami word, he is like that is not correct. You are supposed to be speaking Modern Standard Arabic. Then yeah, and I'm just like: Why would you try and give us the option?!!

The instructor showed contradictions in pedagogy when he gave the option for students to use dialects, but illegitimated them as “not correct” when students used them. Consequently, Sarah experienced confusion and her wealth of knowledge about this dialect was negated and dismissed in the classroom. As stated, one level of confusion was from the instructor’s giving students the choice of dialects and MSA, while penalizing them when they chose anything that was not MSA. The second level of confusion Sarah experienced was related to Arabic instructors’ disagreement.

**Conflicting Messages on Students’ Dialects Speaking Among Instructors in the Same Classes.** Sarah’s Arabic classes had two instructors of Arabic, dividing teaching tasks between them. Both had been sending conflicting messages about MSA and dialect
use, which caused more confusion for Sarah. Instructor 1 was a non-native speaker of Arabic, while instructor 2 was a native speaker. Sarah described the confusing learning environment as follows:

He [instructor 1] will say something with grammar, and then he'll change it, and then dialect too like he's like, you can't say that word. Nobody uses that word...and a lot of kids in our class are like he [instructor 2] taught us this. [Instructor 1 would say] oh yeah, that's partially right, that's sometimes you can use that or something like that. And, like even with, I don't know, like so many instances happened, and [Instructor 1] he will tell us is not supposed to be teaching you vocab; don't, like, don't let [instructor 2] teach you that he's only supposed to be teaching you this one. He [instructor 2]'s like, incorporating the vocab in order for us to understand it more, and I really appreciate when he does that, but he's [instructor 1] like no, he's [instructor 2] not supposed to be doing.

The disagreements about using MSA versus dialects use between the two Arabic instructors in the case study was not a surprise; Al-Mohsen (2016) interviewed Arabic teachers across the U.S. and found that “no agreement emerged among participants on whether spoken Arabic must be simultaneously taught with MSA [formal Arabic]” (p. 137). However, Al-Mohsen’s research scope did not expand to include the impact of such disagreement on students’ learning including heritage students of Arabic. From Sarah’s words, the impact was confusion, and gradually her diminishing interest in learning Arabic. When I asked her what she felt about these contradictory messages from her Arabic instructors, she explained:

I feel like very confused, and I feel like in class. I'm not learning anything like I feel like, okay, I have to do this. I have to get an A, it's only for the grade for me. At this point, like I need to get an A. That's all I'm worried about. I don't care what he says, I just need to follow his instructions perfectly. If I make one tiny mistake. I'm not going to get the grade I want. Obviously, I want to succeed. And I want to learn Arabic, but at this point, he's making it more of a grade, and not me learning.
Her confusion led to her feeling that she was not learning and eventually, her investment in learning Arabic significantly decreased. In fact, her interest in learning changed to be transactional—to get a good grade—while she felt negatively about her Arabic learning. Her voice throughout the first interview and portions of the second showed distress about her education, and her learning was stymied in such a learning environment.

The consequences of conflicting messages, consistent low grades, illegitimizing dialects in class, and other similar experiences had affected Sarah’s emotions. She directly said that she felt shame and confusion, as explained above. These feelings exacerbated Sarah’s belief that she could not build a trusting relationship with her Arabic instructor where she could seek help when she needed.

**Distrust.** Sarah felt she could not trust her instructor to ask for help when she needed it while working on assignments. One of the reasons for this broken relationship with her instructor was that his explanations were inconsistent with her experience speaking Arabic with her Syrian family. She described the situation by saying:

He'll be explaining a word, and he's like, don't use this in regular Arabic because nobody uses this word anymore. And I'm like, when I go to Syria, my family and I use this word all the time. What are you [addressing the instructor] talking about?! And I'm just like, no, like, sometimes, I don't really trust that he's teaching the correct stuff, you know.

Excluding colloquial Arabic in Sarah’s classroom made her experience distrust with her instructor. The classroom experience was not connecting with what she experienced with her family. Another reason for the lack of trust was the instructor not building on what she knew nor knowing where her Arabic level was at in order to simplify the Arabic content to help her better understand. She explained her experience in detail:
I feel like I can't go to him for anything. Like, um, we have to do every, like two or three weeks, we have to do a page of Arabic writing, and it's about the same topic. We use different vocab words. It's called Composition Writing, and we go to him or his TA, and I 100% rather go to his TA for help; I would rather go to anybody else than him because I know he's going to like make it difficult on me, like, no. And I'm not going to understand who's going to be trying to say because he, I don't know, like, I just don't like the way he teaches it and it's just like, not the way I would want to learn it. Well, he's teaching me, like I don't know how to explain it, like, just like this modern Arabic that like has no, it's like, if I could get it from Google Translate, you know, like, it's not that teaching me true Arabic like native Arabic speaking.

Sarah explained that she refrained from asking for help from the Arabic instructor because he would make things “difficult” as his explanation of the lesson would resemble Google translate, as she perceived it. Sarah came to the Arabic class with years of Arabic knowledge and practice. Consequently, Sarah’s perceived “difficulty” of learning Arabic was just the tip of the iceberg for the absence of pedagogies of CRT and building on prior knowledge were absent in her Arabic classes.

By extension, some of Sarah’s classroom artifacts further demonstrated diminished pedagogies of CRT, specifically not recognizing her prior knowledge by her second-year instructor. This resulted in distrust between Sarah and the instructor as I explain below. First, I detail the artifacts, then I discuss what they manifest in regards to CRT and prior learning. Sarah shared three writing samples with me from her second year Arabic class. The first writing sample was a written composition about daily routines in a college student’s life, where she described what she did in her everyday life using the new vocabulary she and her peers learned during the term. There were two additions and two corrections in red. The second two samples were from the textbook Al-Kitab where
she completed two vocabulary exercises from two different lessons. Similarly, there were some corrections in red fixing some letters and one word.

I asked Sarah about the corrections in the written classroom artifacts. She shared with me that in her written composition, the instructors asked them to go to the Arabic tutors assigned to the class, who were non-native speakers, to help them with the composition. Sarah’s tutor, who was an advanced learner of Arabic, made the corrections in red. This makes sense as the handwriting showed a learner’s handwriting. On the other hand, the corrections in the textbook were written by Sarah herself as part of the homework, as the instructors asked the students throughout the term to consult with the answer key, correct their answers, and then show him so he could give them the grades.

It was disheartening to learn from Sarah that when she did her homework right, entirely without mistakes, the instructor marked her down because he thought that she might have not done the work herself/independently. She explained:

We have the answer key, right. I'll check it [her answers] with the key and I got, let's say I got hundred percent, like I did everything perfectly. I turned that in, and he will mark me down because I have no corrections. He's like you didn't make any corrections. I said, I don't have any corrections. I actually got it all right this time. He [said] I cannot give you full credit because you didn't make any corrections. So I don't; I will if one day, I don't have time to do my homework and I copy from the key. Let's say you know I just copy down whatever I see on the key. I will go over [with] red marker, just with just over my lettering, just to show that I did something.

Consequently, she started making up mistakes in order to earn points. She would intentionally write some wrong answers, and then correct them in red.

Marking Sarah down for not making mistakes in the homework, and pushing her to such an unnecessary trick show a lack of knowledge on the instructor’s part of Sarah’s
linguistic abilities. Because the instructor did not know or recognize how much Arabic prior knowledge Sarah had, he penalized her for correctly solving the exercise. Furthermore, these grade penalties significantly contributed to the mistrust Sarah had in her instructor, demonstrating the repercussions of not following CRT pillars of recognizing and building on students’ prior knowledge. This learning environment punished Sarah for her prior knowledge of Arabic, causing her to make fake mistakes to save her grade and adapting to such an unsupportive and distrusting classroom environment.

**Dialects and Translanguaging**

Translanguaging practices were part of Sarah’s life as both her parents’ first languages are not English. Her mother’s English was a work in progress, getting better, and Sarah gave her feedback and corrections at home when they communicated. As noted earlier, her mother’s native language was Spanish, and her dad’s first language was Arabic. Despite using English as the main language, Sarah’s household adopted translanguaging as a way to communicate as a global household belonging to three different nations, languages and cultures within the U.S., as described below. Please note that I added words in brackets in the following quote replacing the specific Latinx country to protect the identity of the participant:

We always speak English. Like, that's the main language, people sometimes we will throw in like Arabic words or Spanish words, you know, even my dad was throwing some Spanish words sometimes, and like it's good because we mix all the cultures together like my mom always cook Arabic food or [Central American] food or if we go out to eat will want you to like [Central American] food if my mom doesn't cook it that much because my mom loves cooking Arabic food for my dad because obviously he loves it. So we're always used to that. My mom's really absorbed the [Arabic] culture really well. Like, she's tried to learn
Arabic. She always talks to my family in Syria and that she's so happy to go to Syria every year.

Sarah’s international household embraced translanguaging when communicating in an easy and fluid manner in her family’s daily lives. When we were conversing during the interviews, she used many words several times like عرب (Arab), حجاب (Hijab/headscarf). As a listener, I observed that when she uttered these words, moving between Arabic and English languages, that she translanguaged with ease and comfort, revealing it was second-nature to her.

**Translanguaging, Representation, and Motivation.** Sarah shared that when I used للحمد الله (Thank God) in my emails to students and in class when I taught her, together with other Arabic words, she felt represented. In this way, translanguaging can help with representation. As Sarah explained:

> It feels nice to hear those words [Arabic words and expressions like inshalla, and Al hamdoulellah] that you use every day within your like [teaching] materials because you know . . . when I went to public school for so many years, and when I got to college, the same thing. And, then it's nice to see something that you hold so dearly to you be within your material, you feel more attached to it. That's why I love learning Arabic because I feel attached to it.

Her words showed that the instructor’s simple act of translanguaging using Arabic words made Sarah feel represented and connected with her home. Consequently, translanguaging practices which she experienced in my classes strengthened her attachment to Arabic as she clearly explained, “that's why I love learning Arabic because I feel attached to it.” In other words, her motivation to continue learning Arabic increased when I, as her instructor, engaged in translanguaging practices.

**Her Father’s Role in Shaping Her Translanguaging Beliefs.** Sarah mentioned frequently how her father helped her with her Arabic homework and questions she had
during her Arabic studies. His role not only progressed through her learning, but also shaped her translanguaging beliefs and how she viewed MSA and CA. First, I explain his role progression, and following this, I explain his influence on her language perspectives.

Sarah’s father’s role changed throughout the course of her studying Arabic. When she was young, she resisted learning Arabic as she said: “When I was younger, I would tell him like it's [Arabic] too difficult.” She saw Arabic as a challenging language to learn so she had no motivation to learn it. However, her father noticed that she could not converse with his family so he decided she needed to receive education in Arabic in the U.S. His decision was emotionally driven, as she explained:

My dad, he felt bad because, like, I couldn't communicate with my family, so he put me in that [Arabic] school to learn Arabic and actually taught me a lot. But once I got to high school, the same thing happened [backsliding her Arabic].

Learning Arabic was an emotional investment which both heritage language learners and their families experienced. Sarah’s words exhibited how her father felt responsible for her not being able to communicate in Arabic with her Syrian relatives. He may have believed that he was failing in his role as a father because Sarah could not speak Arabic. In other words, learning heritage languages could intertwine with deeply embedded emotions in the families and learners of these languages.

Consequently, her father played the role of a witness to her success in learning Arabic, as well as her challenges. She experienced success during her learning in my classes and she felt proud that she shared what she learned with her father. Sarah compared what she and her father felt about her learning journey while she was taking
classes last year with her feelings and her father's emotions during the time of the interviews (a year later). About her experience in my classes, she said:

I would tell him all the time. I love my teacher, like, I'm really enjoying how I'm learning. And I feel like I actually am learning stuff. So, he would be like, yeah, just keep up like, you know, you're doing good. Like he would look at my assignments and stuff. Okay, yeah, you're doing good! Good job. And, I would like to teach him like, oh, tell him what I would learn and all that stuff.

Later in our interviews, Sarah described the juxtaposition between her previous experience and her current experience:

But this year, it's, like, completely different, and he [her father] even sees it: That I'm like struggling and I tell him like my teacher wants it this specific way, and I have to follow his instructions and my teachers. My dad is, like, that's just what I don't understand he's trying to tell you to do, like, he'll read the instructions in Arabic. You feel like, I have no clue what you have to do. So, he knows, like he's not like telling me, oh, it's like you know you're doing bad because you're not learning Arabic, you know, like he knows I'm trying, but he knows I'm struggling really hard, like, badly.

Sarah experienced proud moments of her progress during studying Arabic in the first year where she enjoyed Arabic as well as proudly showing her father her advancement. He encouraged her by saying “good job,” and a sense of hope emerged that she could make significant progress in her Arabic. On the contrary, during the time of the interview, her father witnessed her facing difficulties learning Arabic and seemed without much to offer to assuage Sarah’s pain and frustration. Although he might not have been communicating about how he felt to Sarah, she knew that he was aware of her challenges and struggles, as detailed below. Undoubtedly, these experiences must have been emotionally exhausting and painful for both of them.

Clearly, Sarah’s journey to learn Arabic was filled with gain and loss, moving along a continuum in both directions. At the time of the interview, she repeatedly
mentioned that her father knew about her challenges in her Arabic class: “He knows that I'm struggling [in the Arabic class]. He knows that every week. I go to him for help because I'm not learning anything.” She stated many times that her learning paused and her father was the first person she went to for assistance. Like her, her father adapted to her new instructors’ class rules when trying to help Sarah learn. She explained: “So at this point, he's even learned the rules too. He's like, okay, this is what you have to do. Just follow the instructions.” The classroom practices pushed Sarah and her father to solely focus on how she could pass the class, and push aside learning Arabic to communicate with her family, which was her reason for joining the Arabic class in the first place. She explained:

He’ll [her father] try and like, teach me what he would like if you were to teach me Arabic, how he would teach it. So that's how he would incorporate it but . . . he knows that I'm not learning anything . . . he knows that after I finish these last two terms, that I'll like, rather learn from his friends or him if he has the time because he works a lot. So if I can learn from anybody else he would definitely lead me in that direction to learn from his friends or something like that.

Sarah described that she and her father knew that the class was not teaching her what she needed to know and that she would seek the knowledge somewhere else, with him or his friends. There were obstacles to this informal learning plan, including her father’s busy schedule. This specific Arabic class sequence proved a waste of time for Sarah and a lost opportunity for learning—one for which her busy father would not be able to compensate.

Further, Sarah’s father’s reactions helped form her views about the value of MSA and CA to herself and her communication needs. Sarah expressed that her definition of fluency in Arabic entailed speakers communicating fluently with colloquial Arabic, not
MSA. Her learning goal and motivation to learn Arabic, as mentioned earlier, was to reach the fluency level in speaking the Levant/Shami dialect, to the level she experienced when she was a child during her summer visits with family in Syria. During the interviews, it was hard to ignore how her father’s reactions to what Sarah was studying were subtly shaping how she viewed the teaching material and the value of what she was learning in the Arabic classroom. In the following quote, Sarah showed her father’s role in her learning, her view of the Levant Arabic, and her ongoing struggle with the disconnect between classroom practices, and her home use of Arabic.

With my dad, like how he teaches me... he's like, okay, if you need it [Arabic assignment], like let's say I need to write a page of Arabic about my life or something. And I'll go to my dad and I say: Let's start because I always go to him because I want to make sure it's correct. And I say, okay, this is what we learn from my teacher. And he's like, why you are not writing it in Shami? And I'm like, I'm not supposed to; I have to write it in modern standard. And he was like, like you, you know, like that's not how you're going to speak to people in real life... I can't imagine talking to my family like that, you know,

Sarah’s statement highlighted multiple important points. The first point was that Sarah’s father was her language mentor, supporter, and Arabic expert as she “always” went to him to assure that her assignment was done accurately. The second point was he, indeed, questioned the Arabic instructor’s pedagogy when he did not allow students to write in dialects, and he shared his rationale with Sarah: that in “real life” Arab speakers do not communicate in MSA among themselves. The third point was a result of Sarah’s interactions with her father and connecting with her Syrian family, and she agreed with him; she confirmed that she “can't imagine” herself communicating to her family the way she wrote the essays in the Arabic classroom, which confirmed the disconnect between
the Arabic classroom and her life. In fact, the home artifacts, as previously described, confirmed her translanguaging practices and the use of the Levant with family members.

In sum, the translanguaging practices Sarah grew up employing were in clear juxtaposition with the classroom practices of her second-year Arabic classes. The instructor constantly saw her performance from a deficit lens when she exhibited her prior knowledge of Arabic as explained above, whether in her homework when she got her answers correct but he marked her down or in her use of the Levant dialect, where he insisted she use MSA. Clearly, the class environment denied Sarah of daily practices of translanguaging, and even punished her for it.

Identity

Sarah shared fascinating facts about how she viewed her identity and how others perceived it. In this section, I describe how she identified herself, how other Arabs and Arab Americans labeled her identity, and how she reacted to their labeling. Regarding her identity and textbook use in class, she said:

So obviously, I speak Shami. I am from Syria. And I feel most comfortable with speaking Shami. In the vocab lists [in the textbook] I see Shami, and we're learning about something else [in class].

Here, it is clear that she saw herself belonging to Syria and when she found in the textbook the option to learn the Syrian dialect in the vocabulary list, it did not seem logical for her to learn MSA as the only option to communicate. Consequently, her quote demonstrated the disconnection between the Arabic classroom practices and Sarah’s life, identity, and choice of Arabic learning.
Sarah considered herself to be Arab American, Syrian, and Latinx. Despite this complexity and diversity in identity, her Arab and Arab American friends refused to see her as Arab. When I asked her about the Arab American identity and how she defined it, she explained:

Personally, I would define an Arab American for somebody who knows about their culture . . . Even though I'm an Arab American, I feel like I need to learn how to speak Arabic because a lot of my friends, my Arab friends, will be like you're not really Arab because you don't speak Arabic. I'll be like, no, I am. I've been to Syria. I talked to my family, all the time. I'm very proud of my heritage and all that stuff. So, I feel like Arab American, they should know some of their language. Like, I feel like a person who just like oh, yeah, I'm half Arab, but they don't really know anything about their culture or they don't try to learn or they'll like talk badly about it, they're not really an Arab American, you know.

Sarah identified Arab Americans to be people who were culturally aware of their Arabic heritage and actively seeking to be part of the Arabic culture and learn the language. She highlighted that her friends doubt her Arabic identity because she did not speak Arabic. She resisted their labeling and defended her Arabic identity by sharing her trips and her constant contact with her Syrian family made her Arab.

Her friends’ labeling of her as a non-Arab took place during conversations among Sarah and her friends. For example, when she asked her Arab and Arab American friends about the meaning of words when they speak, they told her that she was not Arab. She described:

Sometimes they [her Arab American friends] say something in Arabic, to me, like, oh [in] conversation . . . [she asked] can you just repeat that? Or I don't understand what you said. [They said] you're not really Arab, like you don't speak Arabic, you don't really know. I'm like, I don't think that's what defines me being Arab and it's just and some of them like have never even been to their country like their parents’ countries. And they're like, oh, all this. I'm like, I know what it is to be an Arab because I, I used to go to Syria for 3 months out of the year and like live with my only my family and speak only Arabic, just because I may struggle
with it now, doesn't mean I'm not Arab or I don't identify as an adult, because I am proud and I want to do that for my family and my dad, you know, to make them proud to like still have a little piece of Syria in America with them. I know that's . . . if I told that to my grandma should be very disappointed if I didn't say I was Arab or Syrian.

Speaking colloquial Arabic, according to Sarah’s friends who were Arab and Arab Americans, was the condition to be an Arab person. In fact, when I asked her if they write Arabic, she said some of them do not, and did not even visit Arab countries, including the ones which their parents were from. According to her friends, Sarah was not an Arab. However, she defended herself saying that her challenges learning and speaking Arabic should not define her identity as a proud Arab American.

Additionally, she highlighted that her struggles with Arabic learning should not undermine her Arab identity. Here, we clearly see the effects that marginalizing colloquial Arabic in class had impacted Sarah’s identity; the classroom environment created an obstacle in Sarah's connection to her Arabic identity. The classroom environment, where students’ language should flourish, was disconnected from her goals and her life, and was not sustaining her language development or nurturing her Arab identity.

Finally, Sarah took pride in her Arabic culture, her Syrian family, and her role in sustaining the Arabic culture outside of Syria. When she stated that “I know . . . if I told that to my grandma should be very disappointed if I didn't say I was Arab or Syrian,” it was clear that her connection with her Syrian family was strong, and she wanted to make her family proud. Consequently, her studies of Arabic were important to make them proud and to assure them that living in the U.S. did not erase their Arabic language and
culture. As a result, the Arabic classroom environment was a big factor in Sarah’s identity growth, sense of pride (or shame), and belonging to the Arabic world. After all, through her Arabic learning, she could make her family proud by keeping the Arabic language and culture alive, despite being far from Syria.

**Arab & عرب (ʕArab).** It is worth noting that throughout the two interviews, Sarah used the word عرب (ʕArab) to refer to Arab and Arabic almost every time the word appeared in the conversation. She said the word in Arabic, pronouncing the letter ع (the International Phonetic Alphabet refers to it as ʕ), which is a unique pharyngeal fricative sound to the Arabic language and a few others like Somali and Hebrew, and does not exist in the English language. In interpretation, Sarah’s consistent translanguaging to the Arabic word when referring to Arabs and Arabic reflected a sense of authentic pride and belonging to the Arabic language and culture. Overall, Sarah felt she was part of Arab culture and defined herself as Arab American. Her translanguaging to Arabic in these instances during the interviews confirmed her connection to her Arab roots.

**Conclusion**

In sum, Sarah’s experience in the classroom demotivated her from minoring in Arabic, although she cared a great deal about learning this language. Her unique linguistic situation at home, where she translanguaged between Arabic, English, and Spanish with her friends and family, was juxtaposed with a monolingual pedagogical approach, privileging MSA in the classroom and punishing her for speaking her dialect and getting the right answers in her homework. These incidents created feelings of mistrust toward the instructor together with shame about her perception that she could
learn Arabic. She consistently experienced confusion in the classroom with mixed messages from different Arabic instructors about dialects and MSA, causing her to feel trapped for not being able to switch classes due to the language requirements and limited Arabic class offerings. Her sense of pain learning Arabic was consistent throughout the interviews.

**Khloud’s Profile**

> Sometimes when I speak Arabic,  
> “Everything I know about it leaves my head!”  
> “Awkward ” to speak Arabic with family  
> But, “I love it!”

**Background**

Khloud was in third year Arabic when I interviewed her. Khloud learned some Quranic Arabic before enrolling in university Arabic in Sunday Islamic school, where she learned reading and writing Arabic. However, she could not speak nor could she understand what she read. In other words, she could pronounce the words as written, but did not understand what they meant.

Her father grew up in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where he spoke Egyptian Arabic and studied in international schools in these two countries. He did not speak to her in Arabic when she was growing up. However, he would drive her and her siblings long distances to Islamic school on Sundays so his children could learn Arabic. English was the language everyone spoke at home, including her American mother who communicated with her in English. As she explained, her family did not push her to learn Arabic. However, when her father knew that she chose to study it at the university, he
was “excited” for her choice. Thus, the overall role of her family in encouraging her to learn Arabic was positive.

Because of her struggles with speaking, her goals when she decided to study Arabic at the university were to learn to speak the language, travel to the Middle East, and communicate with her family in Arabic. She wanted to be able to travel independently in Egypt, as she explained:

I really [with emphasis] wanted to speak. So, I came here [university] to learn how to speak it, and I really love it . . . I wanted to be able to travel on my own to Egypt, to the Middle East, without being worried about communication . . . So, most of my family also speaks English, too, and when they talk to me. They're like, I want to speak in English, though. And I'm like, well, I want to speak in Arabic . . . it was a lot to communicate with my family because I really want to, but I would have been fine without learning it but it really was just because I love the Middle East. I want to go to the Middle East; I want to be in Egypt. I want to be everywhere! But I don't want to have to rely on my dad or my family to, like, get me everywhere and take care of me.

Here, Khloud’s words highlighted her independence on several levels. First, she wanted to travel with the ability to communicate with people without depending on her family. Second, although her extended family, who were living in Egypt, spoke both in Arabic and English, she insisted on learning Arabic at the university to have a deeper communication level. In fact, she was the only person among her siblings learning Arabic at the university.

Regarding her family’s communication in English and Arabic, she practiced translanguaging based on who she talked to. As noted, the dominant language spoken in her immediate family in the U.S.—mother, father, and siblings—was English, and so she spoke to them in it. However, when she started learning Arabic at the university, she started communicating with her dad in MSA (Al’fus'hā), which proved to be partially
unsuccessful. In the challenges section below, I explained in detail the struggles of her communication situation with her father after learning Arabic in college. On the other hand, she had greater success in speaking MSA to both her extended family who lived in Egypt, and Maghreb countries, where Arabic and French are often mixed when people converse. With her grandfather, who was a retired Arabic professor, she spoke MSA, and he would answer her with MSA. However, he did not sustain the conversation in MSA, switching to Egyptian dialect. As a result, the inconsistent communication in MSA affected the flow of their communication because Khloud did not fully understand Egyptian dialect—except for a few common words she heard from conversations when she was young.

**Engaging With Arabic Beyond the Classroom.** Khloud was a top student in the Arabic program and sought to advance her knowledge of Arabic beyond the classroom. She engaged in extracurricular activities related to Arabic, Arab communities, and students of Arab countries on campus. Her passion for Arabic showed in my interactions with her during the interview, as well as when I taught her in Arabic 102, a year before the interview took place. She successfully participated in a community of practice for Arabic to learn as much of the language as possible, in addition to her university Arabic classes. Khloud specialized in the Arabic language. I made an intentional choice to protect the students' identities by using the word “specialized” to refer to both majoring and minoring in Arabic.
**Classroom Experience**

**Victories.** Khloud’s Arabic learning journey was filled with many successes such as: developing strong writing skills, feeling proud of her learning progress, having strong motivation to continue learning Arabic, contributing to a strong learning community, and an active member in Arabic communities on campus.

Below, I explore each aspect of her victories while learning the Arabic language.

**Strong Motivation and Learning Community.** Khloud’s passion and motivation were clear when I conducted the interviews, as well as when I taught her in the previous year where she regularly showed up in my office hours and submitted her assiduous work consistently on time. It was clear that she was attached to the Arabic language, as she used the word “love” 10 times in the interviews, referring to her passion toward Arabic and said “I really love it [Arabic].” Her positive and strong emotions toward this language continued during the interview and continued to fuel her efforts to learn.

In addition to her love for Arabic, her Arabic classmates made a difference in her learning. She described the class learning environment with her peers:

I honestly have loved my experience with Arabic at [university name]. Um, I've really loved the classes I've been in, people in it too. I think they made it super engaging. I think that a lot of what made it so amazing is the people who were there learning with me . . . So, I think that's been really nice because we're all learning Arabic together, we've all become super close. So that was really engaging was just the people.

She enjoyed her peers in Arabic classes and she made good friends with five of them who she regularly contacted, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. These positive relationships with her peers in Khloud’s Arabic classes helped her enjoy her learning and continue it.
Feeling Proud Because of Developing Strong Arabic Writing Skills. Khloud developed strong Arabic skills in less than three years of taking university Arabic classes. She was proud of her progress, as she explained, referring to the classroom essays she shared with me:

I'm kind of proud, especially the first one [essay] I sent you. I was shocked by my ability to write so much in Arabic. And just being able to have something to say. Even if it's not perfect, or I don't know the words. So, I'm trying to do work around to get my point across, but, um, I was really, really proud of, especially, the first writing that I had. I was like, wow, I can't believe that I wrote this myself well.

Khloud referred to a two-page essay written in a sophisticated MSA that certainly demonstrated a higher level of writing beyond third year. Additionally, she shared another scholarly essay that showed the same level of sophistication in MSA. She received a lot of encouragement from one of her professors who said that her first essay was among “the best” of those instructors saw in second year. She was very proud of the hard work she put into composing these essays. For the first essay, she spent many hours looking up and reviewing older vocabulary and structures to write it. Undoubtedly, Khloud was an excellent student of Arabic whose progress was impressive and steady, and she was proud of her success.

It is important to point out that when Khloud shared her two academic Arabic scholarly writings, she wanted to represent her Arabic learning growth and share the feelings of pride. She was still working on one of the two during the time of the interview, which was a manifestation of her latest writing progress. She even explained that “I just sent you both of them . . . because I think that they kind of reflect my learning growth,” which made them a reliable and current representation of her Arabic learning
journey. In the victories section, I mentioned that Khloud felt proud that she was able to
write a lot in Arabic and she received encouraging words from her instructor on her work
as one of the best they saw for second year students. The instructor was referring to one
of the essays Khloud shared with me. She explained that they were not “perfect,” saying:

Some of them [written essays] and I'm still I'm were previous compositions that
I've written. Yet, but I'm still trying to go back and like, edit them. So it's not,
like definitely, a perfect draft. I still have edits and highlights in here trying to
figure out certain things I want to include and take away . . . Um, so I just sent
you both of them. I just sent you the other one I think is ones because I think
that they kind of reflect my learning growth, the most definitely I, I'm kind of
proud of, especially the first one I sent you.

Here, I can point out two contradictory feelings Khloud had. One was her feeling of pride
in her writing progress, and second was her belief that the essay was not perfect.

Repeating the word perfect demonstrated a focus on grammar and vocabulary accuracy.
The goals of reaching perfection and full accuracy are unrealistic. Despite getting
compliments from her instructor that her essay was one of the best, still she thought that
it was not perfect.

Beyond the classroom learning, her dedication to her Arabic learning was very
impressive as I asked her about her writing. She explained her process:

Specifically, it [the essay] took me a lot of time; I went back and tried to really
think about it. You know, that term was the first time we were in COVID. So, it
was spring term . . . I had nothing to do. I was taking 16 credits, but I was like, I
don't work right now, I don't have any activities going on. I don't have anything
else happening. So, I was like, well, I really want to focus on my Arabic, seeing
what I can practice . . . I went through basically my entire, like, my books and
tried to incorporate structures and words that maybe I had forgotten about or
hadn't used as much to try to incorporate them, and really think intentionally
about how I was writing my Arabic.

Khloud was passionate about Arabic. Her love for the language motivated her to create
her own project during the pandemic to practice, expand, and challenge her Arabic skills.
The result was her writing a complex essay in MSA that her instructor praised her for. All in all, Khloud loved the Arabic language and saw herself progressing especially in writing. However, she also faced challenges while learning Arabic that she touched upon in the previous quote and I expanded on in the following section on challenges.

**Challenges.** As mentioned previously, Khloud’s learning primary goal when she took the Arabic university classes was to learn how to speak. At the time of interview, she was in her third year Arabic and shared that she was still struggling with speaking. She described her challenges:

I think one thing I would like to be doing more is focusing on speaking, because I think that's the hardest thing for me still is just like, which is the thing I want to be able to do most is speak . . . you know, I feel like I know a lot of grammar. Now, I can write it . . . I can write a composition pretty well, but then when it comes to speaking. Everything I know about Arabic sometimes, like, leaves my head! Wowowow!

She was taking two third year Arabic classes; one taught Arabic four skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—continuing building on first- and second-year Arabic. The second class focused on teaching and developing Arabic speaking skills. The instructor taught MSA for students to speak. Khloud continued to struggle with speaking Arabic, although she took three years of Arabic classes, the above-mentioned course focusing on speaking, along with her engagement in extracurricular activities with the Arab community on campus.

Two challenges presented themselves with Khloud’s speaking struggles. One was the ability to speak Arabic. Second, and most importantly, was her communication in MSA which limited her interaction in Arabic within her community. For example, her father only spoke Egyptian colloquial Arabic. In fact, because she only learned MSA, she
Khloud attempted to apply what she was learning in class with her father and family. Thus, she tried to communicate with her father using what she learned in MSA. However, the communication between them did not happen because her father was not able to comprehend what she was saying in MSA. Consequently, despite her attempts to connect what she was learning in the Arabic class with her life, successful communication did not fully take place, shrinking her opportunities in practicing speaking Arabic.

This disconnect between Arabic classroom learning and her life continued to appear when she communicated with her grandfather, who was an Arabic professor and knew MSA very well. She shared that he read the Quran many times as he was an Imam in a mosque as well. Nevertheless, he could not maintain speaking it and switched to Egyptian dialect, reflecting what many educated Arabs do. She described the situation well when she said:

Oh, my geddo (grandfather) جدو too [spoke in Egyptian dialect]. He was an Arabic instructor, so he knows fus؟ha [MSA] . . . He knows everything about it. He knows Arabic like the back of his hand. But, even when he speaks with me, sometimes he switches to the Masri [Egyptian] dialect.
Then she explained that the communication between them was affected when he switched to Egyptian dialect, as she tried to remind him to switch to Fus-ha to continue the conversation with her.

Her communication situation with her grandfather revealed that despite how well educated in MSA and Classical Arabic he was, he could not speak for a long time without switching to his dialect. Consequently, focusing on teaching only MSA in the Arabic classroom was not reflecting the reality of speakers in the Arab world, and was causing a disservice to students such as Khloud. However, the disservice and harm were more impactful on heritage students because they cannot communicate efficiently and naturally with their families and friends. Accordingly, focusing only on MSA for heritage students could deny creating stronger and deeper bonds with their family. In other words, Khloud’s communication situation with her grandfather is a showcase against the Arabic classroom’s sole focus on teaching MSA only because it created a disconnect between heritage language students’ classroom learning and their communicative needs in their lives with their families.

Observing Khloud’s learning situations, I noticed two things that were almost contradictory. First, Khloud expressed her happiness and satisfaction with her learning in her third-year class focused on speaking because of practicing speaking and getting feedback. Nevertheless, her reply to my question on re-imagining the Arabic programs and curriculum design showed her awareness of what was missing in her education.

Yeah, I mean, if we had all the resources in the world and the professors to do it, I would, I think I would have a lot. I would include some electives for just colloquial speaking so people who are curious about traveling abroad just taking classes, and just learning how to speak now really certain dialects.
Here, Khloud demonstrated her understanding of the limitations language programs had on their offerings, but explained the need for classes focused on colloquial Arabic to fulfill students’ learning needs who want to travel to the Arab world. Then, Khloud elaborated on what she thought would help most in her learning if she were to design Arabic curriculums in the U.S. and her university:

I think it would be so helpful and I think, like, thinking more about the question you asked earlier, if I were designing the curriculum. I think it would be really cool to have like, it’d be designed from the beginning, like you're taking fus'hah [MSA] classes. And, then, you also get classes in a specific dialect, like, that you're really wanting to learn and maybe . . . you know Arabic 101, you're learning how to read and write, and then Ammeya [colloquial] Arabic 101. You're just learning about the different dialects so if you're unsure about which one [dialect] you want to learn or whatever you can learn more about each of them, and then just choose a path you want to go down . . . Masri [Egyptian], Iraqi, Shami [Levant], whatever you want to do. So, um, I don't know. I think that would be, you know, something that kind of goes along with the fus'hah. I can understand how that also might be harder, but I also think it would be better for me as a student. I would have loved that . . . Because I get to learn how to speak, speak the language of the people I guess, the language, how the people who I want to be around and associate with are speaking.

In other words, she suggested having a dual track of presenting both MSA and colloquial Arabic classes that offer different dialects. The offerings, in her view, should be at the same time to help students be exposed to the complexity of Arabic and be empowered to choose what to do next with their Arabic learning. Yet, she explained her awareness of the challenges facing such suggestions while valuing the learning benefits of such a dual-track design of the curriculum. From her perspective, this design would help her speak and communicate successfully with the people she wanted to connect with.

In a similar vein, I asked Khloud to define fluency in Arabic from her perspective. After some reflection and acknowledging how this issue was hard, she said:
I don't know. I would say fluency is just the ability . . . to have conversations with people that go beyond the basics like: Hi, Hello, How are you? You can talk about politics. You can talk about your feelings and you can talk about in depth why you're feeling the way you are, you know, like, conversations that kind of go beyond the surface level . . . in colloquial [Arabic].

Khloud’s answer demonstrated a strong sense of what it took to communicate on a deeper level in a language and based on this, she defined fluency from her own view.

Furthermore, she clarified that in Arabic, fluency could not happen without speaking in colloquial Arabic. She explained her reasoning:

Because I feel like that's how people speak, right? So, that's when you're fluent in a language is when you're able to speak how the people speak, rather than how the news speaks or how scholarly readings speak or how just writing in general reads.

Khloud developed deep language awareness, despite the limitation she faced in expanding her colloquial Arabic speaking skills; consequently, she came on her own to the conclusion that fluency in Arabic cannot happen without learning colloquial Arabic. She told me that she thought a lot about the issue of fluency in Arabic, and how it was complicated by the existence of many dialects. Hence, her words were thoughtfully expressing an issue she contemplated long before the interviews, making them a valid testimony to what she considered important to learn. In this respect, she based her view on the reality she observed of Arabic speakers’ use of the language.

**Non-Native or Native Arabic Instructor?** Khloud compared her learning experience with her two instructors; one was a non-native speaker of Arabic and the other was a native speaker. In Khloud’s quotes below, I referred to the non-native speaker instructor as “instructor 1” and the native speaker as “instructor 2.” She explained her experience with instructor 1 saying:
I think I've had really positive experiences because with [instructor 1]. [instructor 1]'s super, I think because he went through the process of learning the language as a nonnative speaker, he's super understanding and knows how difficult it is to learn the language. So, I really appreciate that about him; how understanding he is, how willing he is to answer questions and how he doesn't expect you to be perfect the first time he introduces a concept, especially if it's really confusing so I've really appreciated that: his willingness to just kind of . . . be not like he's easy on us. I think that he's understanding of like what it is to go through learning a new language.

Here, instructor's 1 background in learning Arabic was encouraging to Khloud who saw in him a success story in being able to master Arabic. In addition, she appreciated the instructor’s understanding of where she was as a learner and willingness to clarify different concepts with patience. She contributed the instructor’s style of teaching to being a learner of the language himself.

On the other hand, Khloud had a different, yet equally rewarding experience with instructor 2 whose first language is Arabic. Comparing instructor’s 1 with instructor 2 style of teaching, Khloud explained:

With [instructor 2], it's super different; she's um she is super, I mean, she's a fluent speaker, and she's definitely a lot more old school in her teaching. But, I found it really beneficial too in the ways that she does it. Because, um, I think a big thing for me that I struggled with and that I haven't been doing much of was memorizing the vocabulary, and so she's super big on memorizing the vocabulary. So, that I guess, especially in this class, it was super, super useful to just be able to start focusing on vocabulary and putting a lot of time in it. She has this exercise we do weekly… with our new vocabulary, we look at our words and just on the spot, you have to come up with a sentence including the new word. And so, I thought that was really useful and just helping me being able to remember the vocabulary. So, but it is very stressful, that class. I'm so nervous to go, oh like oh my God, she's gonna . . . Oh my gosh, I'm gonna be yelled at that today or not yelled at. Yeah, that but, um, she's definitely gonna she does, she doesn't hold back, which is a good thing because you definitely learn a lot more, but you're like, wow; [my Arabic] not as good as an Arabic as I thought I was my gosh!

Again, I observed a juxtaposition with Khloud’s experience when learning Arabic and her perceptions. Because of her deep awareness of the language and her needs, she could
capture complex angles of her learning. Here, she stated that the more “old school”
teaching approach of instructor 2 was helpful for Khloud’s vocabulary acquisition, yet
she experienced a lot of stress in this class because of the demand to produce on the spot.
Moreover, she seemed nervous of instructor 2’s reaction if Khloud did not get the answer
correctly. Thus, both instructor 2’s requirement for students to produce Arabic on the
spot and the reaction toward students’ mistakes created a stressful learning environment.
However, Khloud adapted to this learning environment to work for her advancement and
vocabulary development.

Overall, Khloud successfully learned from both instructors, the native and non-
native Arabic ones. However, she seemed to appreciate the understanding aspect of the
non-native instructor to her linguistic situation. Khloud came to class with a modest prior
knowledge of Arabic—knowing only how to read—and thus, she appreciated the
instructor's successful learning journey with Arabic whose steps she could follow. Her
experience was the opposite of Sarah’s, the second participant in this case study, who had
extensive prior knowledge of Arabic, and strongly preferred native speaker instructors.

**Dialects and Translanguaging**

Khloud showed many instances of translanguaging during the interviews. She
used the words geddo (grandfather) جدو, Masri (Egyptian) مصري, Ammeya (colloquial)
عامية in the interview with flow and ease that did not require her to think. Additionally, as
mentioned above, she translanguage regularly between MSA, some colloquial words in
Egyptian, and English based on her conversational partner, if it was her father, siblings,
extended family in Egypt and the U.S, grandfather, significant other, peers studying
Arabic and her community at the university. She adjusted her speaking based on what her recipient knew. For example, she spoke English to her cousins in the U.S. who did not know Arabic, while she spoke MSA to her cousins in Egypt, who learned it in public Egyptian schools, and would reply back to her in English and MSA.

Khloud’s rich repertoire and active translanguaging practice among her community was juxtaposed with her learning in the Arabic classroom that mostly focused on MSA. Although the class mono-linguistic situation did not seem to her as a big hurdle in her learning, she explained that when her heritage speaker peers in third year spoken Arabic class spoke their dialects, their instructor insisted on them repeating what they said in MSA; she said:

[The instructor] said: Hey, now, can you say that again in fusʿha [MSA]? [The instructor] does that a lot with the girls who already speak [colloquial Arabic], like one is Iraqi and the other who is from Yemen; When they say something in colloquial [Arabic], [The instructor]'s like, okay, please repeat that in fusʿha so everyone else can understand you. So they have to just figure out how to say . . . It's really difficult [for them], and it's kind of stressful, I think. And it's also pretty difficult for them because I mean they are mostly focused, they know their dialect and not really the fusʿha.

Khloud’s prior knowledge of Arabic did not reach the level of speaking colloquial Arabic when she enrolled in the university, but some of her peers, to whom she referred, have some fluency in Arabic dialects when they took Arabic classes. When heritage students speak their dialects in class, these can be teachable moments where other students can learn about the diversity of the Arab world, particularly in classes focused on speaking. The above quote showed the exact opposite, where heritage speakers—who had prior knowledge of their dialects—were asked to switch to MSA, which they had no previous training or practice to produce. Thus, the classroom learning environment and
requirements punished them for their prior knowledge. On the other hand, Khloud, who did not have Arabic speaking prior knowledge, and solely focused on learning MSA, her classroom learning experience was much more positive, despite her struggles to speak with family members.

Comparing Khloud's learning experiences in the Arabic classes and instructors' views on dialects versus MSA, different instructors revealed their beliefs of teaching MSA vs CA. For example, the spoken Arabic class's instructor insisted on using MSA as the only acceptable option for speaking; on the other hand, Khloud explained that in her other third year class, the instructor believed colloquial Arabic was for communicating, and MSA was for grammar teaching. In writing, however, the instructor made sure that students used MSA. When a new instructor co-taught the third year, he demanded that the students speak MSA in its highest forms, using case endings; the main instructor of the course talked to him to be "more open to colloquial" Arabic, as Khloud explained, allowing students to speak colloquial Arabic. Following this conversation, the new instructor permitted students to choose MSA or colloquial when speaking in class. These instructors' disagreements on teaching MSA and colloquial Arabic were discussed in Al Mohsen's (2016) research, where she found instructors lacked agreement on how to teach MSA and colloquial forms. Overall, the Arabic classes—across most instructors, were training students to speak in imaginary mono-linguistic situations of Modern Standard use, which native speakers do not speak in their daily lives. Contrarily, Khloud’s communication circles were multi-dialectical and dynamic, similar to the other three participants in this study and Khloud’s peers she talked about. To sum up, the classroom
environment obligated students to switch to mono-linguistic mono-dialectical situations that did not match the students’ linguistic and cultural realities.

Another aspect of Khloud’s translanguaging was the type of music she listened to in her daily life. On a regular basis, she listened to songs from all over the world, in many languages, including Arabic, English, Italian and German. She explained:

Seriously, I listened to so many different kinds of music, so I listened to American music, just pop and stuff. If I listen to American music, it's like show tunes and musicals. I love those. But, I listen to a lot of Arabic music, a lot of older stuff though like Amr Diab and Nancy Ajram and stuff like that. Um, but I'm also listening to Algerian singers, French singers. Um, I listened to Italian singers. I listened to Spanish singers as I just listened to music and all sorts of languages. I have some German songs in my music list. So, I love listening to music and other languages.

When Khloud listened to Arabic songs, she sought out different singers using different dialects from the Arab world. She mentioned Amr Diab, who is an Egyptian singer, along with Nancy Ajram, who is a Lebanese singer. Moreover, she included Algerian singers in her music lists. Thus, her music choices reflected a rich repertoire of openness to different dialects in Arabic and different languages. Again, this openness was contradicted in the Arabic classroom that mostly focused on MSA. Her words revealed the disconnect between the Arabic classroom mono-linguistic situation and her diverse linguistic inventory of music—and her community.

Khloud’s language choices were similarly diverse, when she communicated with her family and friends. Khloud shared four home artifacts that further show her translanguaging practices in her life. Two of them were group text messages; one with friends in Egypt and one with her cousin in Egypt. The third artifact was a message to her friend while they were giving a virtual presentation; and finally, a request to one of her
Arabic instructors via email asking for a recommendation letter. Translanguaging in Khloud’s communication was very prominent in her home artifacts as she used MSA, English, Arabic letters for English words, along with receiving text messages in Egyptian dialect written in English. Each social situation required different communication needs. Therefore, when communicating with her instructors for professional purposes, she used MSA; while texting her cousin in Egypt, she used English. Her friends in Egypt used Arabic written in English letters, which she did not understand. Moreover, Khloud used Arabic letters to write English sentences, when she was communicating with a friend in the U.S., which she described as a “secret message” to prevent others from understanding what she wanted to communicate. Consequently, translanguaging in Khloud’s life was a way to live and communicate.

**Identity**

Khloud identified herself as mostly “White,” “Egyptian,” “Middle Eastern.” Because her mother is white and her father was born in Egypt, she chose these identity markers. But these labels were not easy or straightforward for her to use. In fact, when I asked her how she described her identities, it took her a while to give me an answer. Although she was laughing about how complex it is to identify herself, I sensed some agony or uneasiness of trying to identify herself. The first time she answered my question, she said “all over the place,” then we started to discuss her identity further, and she said:

It's so difficult [to define her identity], it's always different. It's also like a weird game when people ask you, like, especially because the labels people put on you. You like should I go by that one, or should I go by how I feel, or what? Like I know right I'm like, I don't know. I don't know! It’s so hard. But, I mean, I
definitely identify as Egyptian. Sometimes I'll say, like, African American, in some way, because I have my citizenship in Egypt and the U.S. and it's like I'm in this African and it's American and I don't know, but that also has some connotation of me being black and being not North African, and where below that. So I'm also like, why can say, Middle Eastern, for sure. But some people don't include Egyptian so it's really weird. Um, sometimes I just say Middle Easterner; Egyptian if someone asked, I am like, oh, I'm Egyptian or I’m Middle Eastern . . . the easiest.

Here, Khloud demonstrated a high level of self-awareness as well as confusion about which category her identity can go under. In fact, since no official categorization still exists in the U.S. (Shoman, 2016)—except as White—for Arabs, it makes sense that she was not sure how best to describe her identity. The simplest solution for her was to define her identity with location, and so Egyptian and Middle Eastern offered a way to identify herself but still they did not fully capture her complex sense of who she was.

Additionally, she identified as White, as her mother is White American, as mentioned previously, and with this label, she discovered more about herself. To elaborate, Khloud explained that she was surprised that she did not appear to others as White, as she thought she was. This discovery took place in a class activity in her politics class, where the instructor asked students to guess the race of each other and also how they identify themselves in an attempt to raise awareness about how one sees themselves versus how others see us. She explained that with a sense of astonishment:

And I was shocked by, like, how many [peers] like [identified me as] Greek, Middle . . . Eastern Middle . . . [and] Greek. I got some Whites. I got Spanish I got I was shocked . . . Actually, by like how I wasn't as White to people as I thought I was.

Khloud was discovering about her identity while studying at the university and how others see her. In fact, she mentioned that no one told her that she was an “Arab,” in
response to my question if she identified herself as “an Arab American.” She was open to identity as an Arab American but she was never called/labeled so by anyone before.

**Studying Arabic and Its Impact on Identity.** Studying Arabic impacted Khloud’s identity and continued to do so during the interviews. She expressed that her “bond” with Arabic and the Arab world started before studying Arabic, but also continued after her studies began. I asked her about her translanguaging practices and their relation to her identity. As mentioned in the translanguaging section, Khloud practiced translanguaging with her community members, which included switching from one Arabic to English, and using Arabish [Arabic and English mixed together or Arabic words written in English and vice versa]. She answered:

> It's all over the place! . . . I mean, what that tells me about my identity? I don't know. I think I definitely identify a lot with The Arabic language and kind of how that affects my identity? I really love it. I really want to start using it more. I really want to practice it more. I mean, I really like typing in Arabic, even if I'm saying things in English, like it's just fun for me. It's nice. I just want to use it. I'm like, I just want to use Arabic, even if it's not Arabic words. I just want to use it. I definitely feel a really tight kind of bond or something to the Middle East in the Arabic language. A lot of my family has noticed that too. They're like, you're a lot more in tune with it wanting to be a part of it than your siblings and other family members.

Here, Khloud’s words revealed her strong connection with the Middle East and Arabic, and how both are important for her. Her family observed her bond with both as well as she was more “in tuned” and engaged with both than her siblings, especially that she was the only one among them studying Arabic at the university, and her siblings chose Spanish and French instead.
In addition to feeling a powerful bond with Arabic and the Middle East, Khloud felt more at ease with her identity after studying Arabic. She explained this feeling saying:

I mean, I think it definitely made me feel more comfortable in my identity. You know, I kind of used to like, I don't know, I used to be super proud and I love the fact that I was Middle Eastern and Egyptian but I just was like, You know, the first thing people would always ask: Do you speak Egyptian well? Egyptian isn't really a language people speak. Now, you know we speak Arabic, actually, like, oh, can you speak Arabic? No [low intonation], I can read it right though. So it just makes me feel more, I don't know, more comfortable with sharing my identity being more comfortable in the identity and just feel more part of it, I think.

After studying Arabic, Khloud felt more belonging to the Arab identity. It seemed that she did not feel that before her studies at the university. Developing the feeling of being comfortable with her Arab identity was a result of a transformative impact of studying Arabic. This transformation was replicated with M.J.—another participant—whose sense of Arab identity emerged after studying Arabic at the university.

**Outside in One’s Identity.** Although Khloud developed more comfort in her Arab side of her identity after studying Arabic at the university, she still felt that she was an “outsider” to this identity because of her perceived inability to speak Arabic. This feeling was present when she answered my question on how she would describe her identity when reaching fluency in colloquial Arabic in the future, she explained:

Wow, that's interesting. Um, I mean I feel like I wouldn't feel as much of an outsider to my identity as I do now, like, I feel like, why I identify as this, but I don't speak the language? And I don't know if this is like an identity, but I, you know, right? And I think that I wouldn't feel as much of an outsider to that identity.

The complexity of Khloud’s feelings about her Arab identity were tied to her ability to speak Arabic. She perceived that her speaking ability was not strong enough to qualify
her to identify herself as Arab and she viewed herself as an outsider to the Arab identity even after reaching third year Arabic, succeeding in her writing skills, and participating in Arabic-speaking communities on campus.

However, when I asked her the same question if she would feel fluent in Arabic using MSA only, instead of colloquial Arabic, her answer was less straightforward. She described how she viewed herself in that situation saying:

Maybe, maybe the same, I would still say like I can speak Arabic; it would be a bit funny to be like, I mean, I can only speak in the way that you'll hear in the news or read an academic text, but like, hey, I can speak that! [laughs].

I think that, honestly, just knowing some part of the language, like, being able to communicate in the language, whether it's fusˤha.[MSA] or Ammeya [Colloquial Arabic] it's going to make me feel more of someone, who can actually identify with my identity, which is so weird, but yea.

Her answer showed awareness of how MSA did not provide the same linguistic functionality for everyday Arabs as colloquial Arabic, but she still welcomed any speaking ability including speaking in MSA. Actually, she used the adjective “funny” to be speaking in MSA, which was what she spoke in the classes, as required by her three instructors in her third-year Arabic classes. At this point, I noticed a desperation on Khloud’s part to speak any form of Arabic to help her feel that she can identify as an Arab and communicate with the Arabs in her community. Here, I noticed that both focusing on the grammar at the expense of speaking in Arabic classes, while dedicating speaking to be only for MSA resulted in hindering Khloud’s Arab identity development. This identity stagnation took place with Sarah whose lack of speaking abilities led her to defend herself against her Arab peers, saying that her struggles with learning Arabic did
not make her less of an Arab. In both cases of Sarah and Khloud, classroom practices of privileging MSA harmed their identity growth.

*Identity and Arabic Class: Revelations and Stresses.* Since classroom practices impacted Khloud in a way that sometimes she was not aware of, I explicitly asked how she thought the classroom shaped her identity. She mentioned two important aspects: one was how the classroom learning helped her understand some things about the Arabic language she always wondered about when she was younger. The second aspect was how she was aware of her Arab heritage, leading her to speak less in class. Both aspects detailed below. Regarding the first aspect, she explained the following:

> And there's a lot of different oh moments, and which makes it really exciting to, you know, you get so excited. You're like, oh my gosh, this thing that I've been hearing all my life finally makes sense.

Khloud’s Arabic studies assisted her in understanding some parts of her life that she did not comprehend before. For example, her father used to tell her different Arabic phrases and words while growing up. After learning Arabic at the university, she could now understand them. Thus, she felt that she developed more awareness than before. This awareness was similarly developed for M.J. who could understand more Arabic words around her family after studying Arabic.

The second aspect of the Arabic classroom’s impact on Khloud’s identity was her awareness of her connection to the Arab world. Unlike the first aspect, her connection resulted in speaking less Arabic in class. She explained why she decided not to speak as much in the Arabic classroom:

> Also, I think that I don't know, there's like some sort of thing where I feel like I have to speak less though because I don't want people to assume, like, oh, she
knows the language, so she's talking even though she knows the answers, right? Like she *knows* the answer is not because she's studying, but because she's Egyptian. And, we had a girl in our class who did speak at home. She spoke all the time at home, like . . . She was raised speaking Arabic and . . . it bugs me too because she would just spend the entirety of the class, like, answering the professor's questions, right off the bat, doing this, and not giving like any of us time to think. And [it is] annoying was, like, really? And I even noticed that now in [instructor’s] class, he has the speaking portion and the woman, who speaks Arabic at home, she's just sits there and has a full conversation with him. And then he expects the same out of us because he's like oh, she's in [third year] and she can speak this well and then when the rest of us in the class can't, It's really like, oh my gosh. Like, I can't. It's super stressful.

Khloud mentioned three important points. First, she did not want to speak more Arabic so that her peers would not judge her ability, thinking that she had more access to practice with family because they were Arab. Consequently, she did not speak in class as much Arabic. Second, when she saw another heritage student speaking a lot in class, quickly answering the instructor’s questions, Khloud considered that behavior as inconsiderate to other students who could not think and give answers as quickly as this heritage student. Thus, Khloud’s avoidance of speaking Arabic was out of consideration of others and not to repeat what her peer was doing. Third, the reaction of the instructor, who was the third one to teach Khloud that term, to the heritage student with strong speaking skills led to his thinking that the other students were not studying enough. This inexperience in working with heritage students resulted in making Khloud feel stressed along with her non-heritage peers who felt equally frustrated.

Overall, Khloud’s journey learning Arabic had been complex, and it would almost certainly continue to be. Undoubtedly, whether she realized it or not, Arabic classroom learning impacted her identity and how she connected to the Arab world. On one hand, she developed more awareness in understanding her Arab community, while on the other
hand, she struggled with feeling like an outsider due to her challenges with speaking. After seven classes of Arabic, constituting 3 years of intense Arabic studies at the university level, Khloud gained more comfort in connecting with being an Arab, and contrastingly, was still questioning if she could identify with that identity based on her speaking skills.

**Conclusion**

In sum, Khloud continued to specialize in Arabic at the university level, beyond second year classes. She was a very successful student of Arabic, who sought opportunities to learn inside and outside of the Arabic classroom. Despite her exceptional Arabic learning progress, she was still unable to successfully communicate with her father, grandfather, and other family members in colloquial Arabic because classes focused on MSA and grammar. When she started learning Arabic at the university three years ago, her original goal was to be able to learn and speak Arabic with her family; her struggle continued as family members did not communicate in MSA. That being said, Khloud continued her success, motivation, and passion for learning Arabic. She viewed her journey as a success and was happy with her professors and classmates.

**M.J.’s Profile**

“Moving forward” with Arabic despite the “pressure,” because for her, Arabic is “more than a picture”

**Background**

M.J., as she referred to herself, was in her second year of Arabic, majoring in Marketing, and she was thinking about minoring in the language. She was the only one
among her siblings who was pursuing Arabic. Her dad was Syrian. He immigrated to the U.S. when he was five. Her mother had German and native-American roots. M.J. pursued German in high school, but at the university, she signed up for Arabic classes. She would love to travel to the UK, Syria and Germany. She wants to see her father’s hometown in Syria and her mother’s hometown in Germany. While the other three participants studied Arabic before taking Arabic at university level, M.J.’s Arabic exposure was mostly during her interactions with her grandparents when they babysat her when she was young, using a few words referring to food, greetings, and numbers, as M.J. explained: “I knew a few words because of my family but that's about it” before taking Arabic classes at the university. Thus, out of the four interviewed participants, M.J. had the least prior knowledge of Arabic language before taking Arabic university classes.

**Speaking Arabic at Home.** M.J.’s father almost never spoke to her in Arabic at home. As mentioned, he moved to the U.S. when he was five and rarely spoke Arabic, but he knew the language and interacted with the elderly people in his family using Syrian Arabic. She said about her father’s Arabic:

I know my dad will still speak Arabic with them [family]; I think a lot of my relatives still don't really know English much . . . I remember one time, I visited, I think it was like his aunt or something, and I honestly had no clue what they're saying, but they were speaking Arabic, like the whole time.

In this respect, M.J. was exposed to Arabic directly when her grandparents interacted with her as a child, and indirectly when she listened to conversations between her father and family members in Syrian Arabic even when she was not participating or understanding the language.
In addition to Arabic, M.J. learned German as a heritage language, but she did not continue with it. Her mother did not speak Arabic, but her family was German immigrants as previously mentioned. M.J. learned German but did not maintain it as she explained, “I learned a little bit of German in high school, and that was like four years ago I don't know that much anymore from it.” However, her learning Arabic journey was different and was sustained through her university Arabic classes.

At first, M.J. only spoke Arabic shyly with her grandparents when she visited them in the U.S. When she was young, her grandparents would babysit her and her cousins together. Her siblings and cousins were not learning Arabic. In fact, her extended family immigrated to the U.S. in the 1970s, and they were a well-established family in North America, but they visited Syria frequently, but then stopped after the war began. They still used Arabic in their conversations. Her early exposure to Arabic was during childhood when her grandparents babysit her with her cousins. M.J. described her early memories of Arabic: “With my setto ستة [grandmother] basically, like she would say a few words. Whenever she got angry, she would just kind of spout in Arabic and I don't know what she said.” Many years later when she started her Arabic university classes, she could communicate more with them and understand some of the phrases her grandparents used.

Her grandparents were very interested in her learning Arabic at the university. They asked her to tell them what she learned in her Arabic classes when she met them, and they greeted her and her family in Arabic. She shared how encouraging and curious
they were of her learning Arabic, as the only granddaughter who was pursuing learning
the language:

This last year, like, I came home during winter break and they [grandparents] were like oh show us the Arabic you learn, so I tried to just, like, basically introduced myself. So, yeah I think every now and then they try to like test me a little bit like, oh, show us what you learned . . . um well, I remember, at one point, this happened in the summer, and it was after I like haven't studied for a while, so I was a little stressed; I was like I don't remember everything exactly, but I think they're usually like satisfied and happy. Like at least I know something. And now it's like I feel like I gotta be ready, every time I'm [at grandparents] home in case they asked like I gotta give a better answer.

M.J.’s grandparents revealed their excitement to see their granddaughter learning Arabic and they were involved in her learning. She wanted to impress them which sometimes could be a little stressful, or as she playfully explains a “tiny bit” stressful, quantifying the stress with-index finger and thumb, while smiling. Overall, M.J. was proud of her progress, saying “I'm really proud of, like, what I've learned too.” Additionally, she wanted to share her learning with her grandparents. Her parents were happy that she chose to pursue Arabic but did not speak to her in Arabic and continued to do so at the time of the interview, making English as the dominant language for communication.

In the interview, M.J. expressed her desire to learn Arabic as “a life goal” because Arabic language and culture had surrounded her throughout her life so it is logical for her to seek learning Arabic. M.J. revealed two main reasons that motivated her to study Arabic. One was growing up around the Arabic language and culture. The second was her appreciation of the beauty of the language, leading her to consider having a tattoo in Arabic on her body. Growing up listening to her family members on her father’s side
interact in Arabic motivated her to take Arabic classes when they were offered at the university.

Her motivation to learn Arabic was intrinsic, as her parents did not encourage nor discourage her from learning Arabic. Her decision to learn Arabic in college was solely her decision, as she explained:

I don't think there was any like attachments or anything they're pretty much I just went to [university's] orientation like before freshman year, And I like realize, I was doing a Bachelor of Arts, and I was like oh, I need a language, and then I saw that as an option, so I signed up for, and then I came home, and I was like oh, by the way, I'm doing this now, very independent.

M.J.’s comments on her decision to take Arabic classes at the university by saying “very independent,” showed her awareness of herself as a learner, as well as her understanding of her life goals. Her reason for studying Arabic was because “Arabic is less for, like, career, life but more for personal life accomplishment; still, I want to do that.” It was impressive to observe such maturity in her decision making at a young age and situating Arabic in her life goals, not career ones.

In response to her decisions, her parents were happy including her father and “excited” as she described his emotions. Although she knew that she would not use Arabic with him, she planned to use her Arabic with her grandparents, which was enough reason for her to take Arabic at the university. She said: “I like never used Arabic with him. I don't know, he just doesn't like speaking much for some reason, so I’d be like I would use it more with my grandparents honestly.” Thus, all her family were supportive of her choice to learn Arabic, but not all of them communicated with her using the language, which did not affect her motivation at all.
Moving from her general life goals in relation to Arabic to her specific goals of the language, she shared with clarity her language needs which include: maintaining a conversation in Arabic without stress, especially when communicating with her family, learning new vocabulary, and creating complex sentences. She explained,

Right now, specifically, I think I realized I need to work better at like memorizing vocabulary and stuff like that, so like right now that's kind of the main goal, but in general it's like I feel like I'm just here to like learn the language and continue like learning to make sentences that are like more complex . . . I just want to like be able to hold conversations and not stress out during them, so I don't know how to say something . . . [speak] with family or just in general, like I do want to travel over there, eventually in my life I don't know when that's going to happen, yet, but like for that case like being able to like hold conversations and actually survive over there with the language.

Communicating with family and traveling to the Arab world shaped her learning needs to converse and acquire more words in Arabic. In the classroom experience section, I explored to what extent her language needs relate to her Arabic classroom learning experience. In sum, her Arabic learning goals were aiming toward her connecting with people from the Arab world, whether her family or for her future travels in Arab countries.

**Classroom Experience**

**Victories.** M.J. was pleased with the progress she was making in Arabic and felt she was “moving forward.” She shared with me a long Arabic essay showing how quickly, in less than two years, she was writing and reading Arabic. While learning Arabic, she noticed that her “cultural connection” to the language was showing in class when studying from the textbook. For example, during one of her lessons that talked about how Arabic families meet once a week with the grandparents, she could relate
because her family did the same thing when she was younger. I asked if the picture in the textbook, referring to the family gathering, means more to her since she actually lives the Arabic culture. She immediately responded that the lesson was surely “more than a picture.” For her, seeing in the textbook the picture of an Arab family gathering on the weekend was more than a picture because this was actually what her family did. Consequently, she connected that lesson about Arab families with her life.

**Cultural Connection.** M.J. repeated many times having cultural connection to Arabic throughout the interviews. Her bond with Arabic and her family increased after studying Arabic for her first time in college. She confirmed saying: “I think the connection [with the Syrian side of the family] was already there, but with the Arabic, it’s getting stronger.” She gave the example that when her parents greeted her family members in Arabic, she would get excited realizing that she could now understand what “little things” mean. It was obvious that studying Arabic increased her awareness of the culture, and understanding of communication in her family, and as a result, she felt more connected to the Arabic language and culture.

**Connecting Arabic Class With Her Family Life.** When I asked M.J. in what ways the Arabic classes built on what she knew about the Arabic language and culture, she answered:

Yeah, I think they [class activities] are build a lot on it [her prior knowledge of Arabic and culture], because now it's like I can make those little connections with like oh this cultural thing makes sense, or like these words, I know, like all makes sense it's like everything's becoming more clear . . . I feel pretty good about it, it's really nice.
Here, M.J. positively expressed how her knowledge of the language and culture expanded and that she was creating connections between what she was learning and her family life. In fact, she was connecting a puzzle of trying to understand phrases and words her father’s side of the family used, and now “all makes sense” as she expressed the clarity ensuing after taking Arabic classes. She explained more saying that “like I'll look back on my memories on words that they've said and be like oh my God, this is like that is basic Arabic that I finally understand.” Thus, M.J.’s experience learning in class significantly broadened her Arabic and strengthened her connection with her Arab side of the family. It is important to highlight that M.J.’s prior knowledge of the Arabic language, compared with Fatima, Sarah, and Khloud who had many years of schooling in Islamic school, was very minimal. Consequently, contrasting all the participants with M.J.’s experience and least prior knowledge, she probably had the most discovery of connections to her Arab identity as I explain in the coming identity section.

In fact, M.J. was happy with her progress in the Arabic class with regard to writing and some aspects of speaking. She said, “When I was writing I realized that I could like there's a lot more that I know how to express than I thought I did. Like I wrote, like, a whole mini story and so I'm, like, really happy with that.” Her confidence in expressing more in Arabic writing was increasing and she noticed it, resulting in an overall satisfaction with her progress. She highlighted her advancement in speaking saying that “It's taken me less attempts to actually, like, get through and say stuff fluently,” referring to one of her Arabic presentations. Overall, M.J.’s learning experience was rewarding and steadily progressing.
Challenges. Despite M.J.’s linguistic development, she faced some challenges while learning Arabic, including learning Arabic and English grammar at the same time, and learning remotely on Zoom. Classes went online after the COVID 19 pandemic broke out. She described her experience learning Arabic on Zoom, saying:

It feels like there's just so much more pressure for some reason. I don't know why; it's just, it's like weird on Zoom. It's like, for whatever reason, it's like scarier on zoom, and I feel, like, I comprehend stuff a little bit better in person . . . Overall, I think I've had a good experience.

Changing the platform of teaching from face to face to on Zoom impacted M.J.’s experience where she perceived facing more pressure to produce Arabic in less time than learning Arabic in person. Although she could not exactly point to the reason behind her perception, she said that some of her peers, specifically in the previous term, were more “advanced, like they just knew more words, so it was, like, easier for them to just like carry conversations and stuff.” Consequently, she felt behind or at least less comfortable than learning in person. It was clear that despite highlighting earlier in the interview that her speaking was progressing, she compared herself to her peers. She perceived them on a higher level because of knowing more vocabulary and speaking for a longer time than her.

The way the Arabic class sessions on Zoom progressed shaped how M.J. perceived the difficulty of learning Arabic on Zoom. She said that the class sessions did not include breakout rooms or a chance to work in a pair or group. M.J. explained:

Doing activities [on Zoom] as a whole, big group, instead of just like with the person next to you and how it's like you can only really speak one person at a time on Zoom; it's just those little things like that.
In discussions of M.J.’s class learning experience, several factors lead to how M.J. experience of the “scarier” Zoom class sessions than face to face ones. These factors might not actually relate to the online platform itself, but rather to the logistics of class activities. M.J. ranked her learning preferences from most preferred to least preferred. The first was face-to-face classes, followed by asynchronous classes, and lastly was learning on Zoom. As I witnessed her progress in my classes, M.J. did succeed while learning. However, the design of the Zoom sessions contributed to M.J.’s perception of not learning as she would like. This could be due to the lack of opportunities for students to work in small groups in the Zoom sessions before sharing their outcome with the class. As a result, she sometimes felt scared in the Zoom learning environment. This conclusion on Arabic classes Zoom sessions could provide an insight to understand why M.J. felt that she was on the spot or pressured to speak Arabic.

Despite these challenges in Zoom classes, she successfully dealt with such a pressure of language production in Zoom classes by preparing more before class and studying the material before they are taught. She described her efforts:

I think I'm getting better . . . I think it was just worse for me last term because it was like I ended up getting busy in the summer, so I didn't have, like, too much time to study Arabic, so I was, like, scared that I was behind everyone. But I think at this point we're like easing into it . . . so it has been getting easier. And, I'm just like I'm realizing that I just prep more before class and, like, really, like, look at stuff, and write stuff down, that it becomes a lot easier.

M.J. took control of her learning and added more to her workload by studying before class to prepare for an uncertain learning environment. It helped in making the class material “easier.” As an independent person, she was proactive in her learning, which helped her progress in navigating the class learning environment.
In addition to navigating Zoom sessions, M.J. also specified struggling with English and Arabic grammar. When I asked M.J. to specify challenges she was facing while learning Arabic, she explained her struggles with English and Arabic grammar:

Challenges and what I realized is, like, I never really learned English grammar . . . and, like the terms like what they were. So, now that, like, I feel like I'm learning English grammar through Arabic because they, like, give an English term, and then I have to, like, remember what that is in English and then apply it. So, mainly, just like grammar stuff like that I like I didn't know what it was called. Now, I know what it's called.

M.J. took control of her learning, and added more work load to study before class to prepare for an uncertain learning environment, and it helped in making the class material easier. As an independent person, as I mentioned before, she was proactive in her learning, which helped her progress in navigating the class learning environment.

Similar to Sarah’s case, M.J. faced difficulties learning Arabic grammar because of the way it was taught in relation to English grammar. However, unlike Sarah, M.J. managed to overcome this obstacle and learn both grammars. The grammar approach to teaching Arabic caused some of the participants in this study hindrances to learning the language; while M.J. managed to learn both English and Arabic grammar simultaneously, Sarah was not able to, which negatively affected her Arabic learning.

Another challenge faced by M.J. was how instructors divided class time activities. Although she did not present it to me as a challenge, I considered it as one because it hindered M.J.’s learning goals to communicate with family and during her future travels in the Arab world. M.J. explained that class time:

It's [class time] like a 40 or like a 35 to 40% speaking, then the rest is mainly grammar. And I think so far that's been great; I think it would maybe be nice to do
a little bit more speaking I guess the 50-50 mix is good so everyone can just learn
to like be comfortable speaking and stuff like that.

Despite how M.J. did not seem to be too bothered by the unbalanced class time in
dedicating most of it to grammar learning, this focus on grammar without incorporating it
in speaking could have impacted her speaking ability, which was one of her learning
goals as previously mentioned. In addition, this unbalance might have contributed to her
feeling scared or pressured to speak during Zoom classes. The class might demand
students to speak without allocating the right time for practicing speaking. That is,
focusing mostly on grammar could make some students feel they were not successful in
their learning especially when trying to speak Arabic. Moreover, for M.J., Sarah, and
Khloud, speaking with family was their main goal in learning Arabic, which created a
disconnect between their learning goals and the grammar focus of the Arabic class. Sarah
immediately realized it, but M.J. did not.

Over all, despite the many challenges M.J. faced in the Arabic classroom, her
positive and independent learning style made her view her learning in an overall positive
light, as she pointed out, “I know it's been a good time [learning Arabic] I'm like really
excited with what I've learned, and I really like all the professors to that I've met, like,
everyone in class is really nice.” And when I asked her specifically to describe her
journey learning Arabic, she replied, “I say it's, like, steady, and it's going forward, like,
it's going I'm still learning.” Therefore, M.J.’s perception of her learning, despite
uncomfortable class moments, was developing at the right pace for her.

Although M.J. perceived her Arabic journey as positive, she did not show a
consistent connection between her life and her Arabic assignments. M.J. shared two
assignments; a handwritten essay in Arabic about her life and a typed assignment in Arabic discussing what the students learned from different units in the textbook. In the second assignment, students were required as well to record a presentation on what they typed and shared in the written format of the assignment about the same topic. M.J. chose these assignments because they were “good examples of, like, where I'm at [in her language progress].” Therefore, M.J. selected these artifacts because of her belief that they represented her Arabic language level at the moment of the interview, which gave these artifacts more importance in understanding and voicing her experience in class and outside of it.

I asked M.J. about the classroom artifacts and if they connected with her life, and more specifically if they were helpful when she communicated with her grandparents. Her answer regarding the essay was “I know I could do it, and express it, but we [she and her grandparents] haven't actually physically done that yet.” In other words, she did not get the chance to communicate similar content to her grandparents but she believed in her language abilities in relation to expressing this particular essay to her family. When I asked her the same question regarding the typed assignment, she said: “so I think like again I haven't [made the connection]; like I guess, I've spoken with them [grandparents] a little bit so kind of yeah, but, just in general I think speaking practice is great and helpful.” M.J. took the responsibility of creating the connection on herself between classroom learning and her life. She did not put the responsibility on her instructors nor class activities. Although M.J. described that “I feel like since I started [Arabic in] college, I'd like noticed at the very least those greetings a little bit more [with
grandparents]’’ revealing her slightly connecting between her overall learning in class and her life, I noticed that in both classroom artifacts, M.J. showed no tangible and consistent connection between the assignments and her life. That is, the overall learning of Arabic helped her understand some aspects of communicating with her grandparents, but a consistent deep growing connection between class and her life was not established.

It is worth noting that M.J. did not have a wide community with whom to practice Arabic. During the interview, she said:

They [her cousins] may know some [Arabic] words, but they do not know what the [Arabic] letters are at all. So it’s, like, I don’t think texting them . . . [although] I’m tempted to, but I just know that they would not understand.

These words demonstrated M.J.’s desire to connect with her cousins in Arabic, but she was more advanced with her Arabic writing than her cousins, who did not get the opportunity to take Arabic classes in school or in college; thus, she could not communicate with them in the Arabic she was learning at the university. Although taking university classes helped her with her language skills, having a community to practice with was missing for M.J.

Despite not showing a consistent connection between her Arabic assignments and her life, M.J. demonstrated creativity and independent Arabic learning, even when she could not access a community in which she could practice. For example, one of the artifacts M.J. shared was a screenshot of a communication between her and her classmates on Snapchat, a social media platform. M.J. together with her first year colleagues chose Snapchat, to practice Arabic, while translanguaging in English with each other. Unfortunately, they did not continue communicating as the two other students
stopped their Arabic studies after their first year. However, M.J.’s artifacts—including naming her computer files and family member’s phone number in Arabic—revealed that she was trying to use her Arabic, but did not have a community who spoke Arabic to practice with. Another example of her creativity and initiative was her use of social media to practice reading and connecting with people from the Arab world. She used Instagram posts to measure where her Arabic. In fact, she explained that she was “trying to incorporate it [Arabic] a little bit more” in her life. Consequently, she explored ways to expand her Arabic and continued to do so at the time of the interviews. In sum, M.J.’s home artifacts revealed how she wanted to integrate Arabic in her life, despite the limitation of not having people with whom she could practice.

**Dialects and Translanguaging**

During the interview, M.J. translanguaged when she talked to her grandmother and grandfather, referring to them as setto (Set-to) ستتو, and geddo (Ged-do) جدتو, which is a common way in the Arab world to address grandmother and grandfather. She explained why she used Arabic terms to talk about them saying “we've always called them setto and geddo, instead of grandma and grandpa. So just, like, little stuff like that.” Thus, despite knowing few words in Arabic, still translanguaging occurred when referring to family members because these words were part of her linguistic repertoire. These translanguaging moments, during the interview, demonstrated unique closeness to these individuals, highlighting relationships that were unparalleled with others. In other words, M.J.’s translanguaging showed exceptional closeness to family members.
M.J.’s family members and cousins practiced translanguaging with the little Syrian Arabic they knew. They wrote the Arabic words they knew, particularly of food items using English letters, in addition to referring to her grandparents with their Arabic equivalents. She described:

I feel there's been some stuff we had to learn how to, like, write out in English, like, setto ستو . . . and also, like, a lot of the foods that they [grandparents] make we just like figured out how to write them in English. As a multicultural family, M.J.’s family used translanguaging practices when talking about food and cooking, despite English dominance in their communication. M.J.’s case showed that no matter how little Arabic her family used, translanguaging between English and Syrian Arabic took place.

Moving to M.J.’s perspective on colloquial and MSA, she valued both equally. She explained:

I feel like a lot of it is kind of like what we've been talking classes; it's like, no matter where you go in the Middle East, people will mostly understand fusˤha . . . I will usually I haven't had time to actually like study the colloquial stuff like so I can memorize it, but I feel like I always look at those columns [in the textbook] and there isn't like too many differences either, which is nice. So, that's always great, and then I feel like for learning colloquial. I mean I feel like a lot of times it's just a convenience thing, like they say things quicker and easier, which is like really nice; And also, I feel like it's good to know them, because I do want to travel to like we have the Masri [Egyptian] and Shami [Levant] in there, so I'm going to travel to both of those places eventually so it's important for me to basically understand them.

In this quote, I observed that on one hand class discussions with the Arabic instructor played a part shaping her view about the importance of Al'fusˤha/MSA. On the other hand, M.J. was developing enough awareness of her linguistic needs as she wanted to travel to Syria and Egypt, making learning colloquial Arabic important for her.
Identity

When I asked her how she would define an Arab American, she answered: “someone who had, I guess, like connections to both places . . . or like ethnically speaking and culturally speaking like they're connected to both [American and Arab cultures].” M.J. emphasized “cultural connection” as she repeated this term throughout the interview to refer to connecting to the Arabic culture, and here she included the culture as part of her definition of who is Arab American.

I followed up with a question of how she would describe her identity. She replied: “Probably Arab American mixed with other stuff cause I have other stuff from my mom ['s side], but mostly that.” She was referring to her mother’s German and Native American roots. Although she identified more with the Arab American side, she felt the need to learn more about the German side of her family. She elaborated: “Right now, I'd be mostly Arab American because I feel like I still have some learning to do with the whole German side of things,” and she added “I always love the German side too.” M.J.'s identity belonged to many different identities as the case with first and second generation immigrants. Consequently, she was still making meaning of who she was, and this was clear in our conversation.

One of the most important moments in the interview when M.J. revealed that a year after she started taking Arabic classes, she began to identify with being Middle Eastern. When I asked her “Would you use White to describe yourself?” she replied:

Yeah, I usually do exactly like that's what incorporates in like the German and the other stuff in there, so I usually will click like the white and if there's a Middle Eastern option I'll click that now . . . I do now [check both White and Middle
Eastern boxes], I feel like I never noticed that option when I was little, and I had to do stuff, but better I did, and I was just like, oh, I don’t know.

I specifically asked her when she started including the Middle Eastern option, she clarified that it was “last year, when I started taking Arabic classes.” This was a very recent change in viewing herself having an Arab identity as part of her identities. After only three quarter terms of taking Arabic classes, which was one academic year, M.J. discovered a new identity. In addition to taking Arabic classes, she also got the chance to reflect on her identity when she was invited to speak in a symposium on campus about her experience learning Arabic while having connection to the Arab world. This opportunity was an extracurricular activity, which was not part of the Arabic class curriculum that helped her reflect and identity more with the Middle Eastern option.

Although the symposium was canceled because of COVID 19, M.J. did the preparation and reflection for it that helped her now identity as an Arab American. M.J. explained that she was “figuring out my identity or like what I want to put in those boxes.” The second interview captured an exciting moment in M.J.’s life where she was learning about who she was and gradually sharing it with the world.

She suggested that there should be an Arab American club on campus for students to connect, especially because she had never interacted with Arab Americans other than her family members. She explained:

I think the main thing is like I know there is the one [social university] club that's there, but just like I think the main thing I thought of was just connecting. Those of us who are Arab American so I know, like, for me, I never, besides family, I never really saw anyone else is like that . . . they have a similar childhood that I did, and we can, like, connect on all these different levels.
Currently, one Arabic club existed on campus and its focus was on the language and culture of the Arab world. M.J. suggested that either they can have two clubs—one for the language and one for the Arab Americans to meet or connect—or they can combine both clubs in one. The purpose of the Arab American club (or the subsection of the Arab club that focused on Arab Americans) which M.J. suggested was to create connections and friendships among those students.

In conclusion, M.J. experienced a transformative change in learning about her multiple identities after taking Arabic classes and reflecting on who she was in an extracurricular activity. This significant change is an invitation to language educators of heritage students to think about their contributions to students' lives on a deeper level beyond the four language skills. Moreover, M.J.’s desire to have a community to practice Arabic with as well as interact with more people connected to the Arabic heritage, who are Arab American, beyond her family members, continued to consistently reveal itself—throughout the interviews—in the artifacts, in the repetition of cultural connections, and with her suggestions to create a space outside of class for Arab Americans to meet and interact.

**Conclusion**

M.J.'s interactions in Arabic were mainly through her grandparents, which motivated her, together with traveling to the Middle East, to learn Arabic. Although she could not understand everything while growing up, she had gradually begun to understand more Arabic at the time of the interviews, after taking university language classes. Studying Arabic made her connection with the language stronger, as she
reported. This connection was emphasized through M.J.'s artifacts, showing her consistent attempts to use Arabic in her life. Despite challenges like the lack of a community of practice, the struggles with learning grammar, along with the less practice time dedicated to speaking in her Arabic classes, M.J. persisted in learning Arabic. Moreover, she continued to discover and connect with her Arab American identity at the time of the interview in a transformative way. Finally, she viewed her Arabic learning journey as successful and progressing at the right pace.

**Cross-Case Comparison**

After discussing the participants’ profiles and experiences learning Arabic in details, in the coming section, I compare and contrast the participants based on their prior learning of Arabic when they attended university Arabic classes. Khloud and M.J. had the least prior knowledge versus Fatima and Sarah, who had the most prior knowledge of Arabic. The analysis revealed how prior knowledge of Arabic shaped the participants’ learning.

**Khloud and M.J.: First Cross-Case Comparison**

Khloud and M.J. had many commonalities, with the most noteworthy commonality being that they both began their classes with less prior knowledge of Arabic than Sarah and Fatima. To elaborate, Khloud knew how to read and write before enrolling in the university Arabic classes, but without further knowledge of speaking or understanding what she read. Similarly, M.J. had heard Syrian Arabic when her grandparents spoke to her and her parents, but she did not speak nor had she studied Arabic before taking university Arabic classes. On the other hand, Sarah and Fatima each
had more than five years of Arabic learning in Islamic schools before taking Arabic university classes. Thus, I clustered Khloud and M.J. together as the two cases with less prior knowledge of Arabic when they started their university learning, which played a significant part in their progress and motivation to continue learning Arabic.

Below, I first explain the commonalities between Khloud and M.J. in terms of the following: their prior learning, their parents’ role in their Arabic learning, their goals for Arabic learning, their views on MSA and colloquial Arabic, their progress in Arabic, and their motivation to continue learning Arabic. Following explanations of the commonalities between them, I describe the differences between Khloud and M.J. in terms of having a community with which to practice Arabic, and their senses of identity.

First, as noted, one of the primary commonalities between Khloud and M.J. was that both enrolled in the Arabic classroom without an ability to speak Arabic, and without formal continuous years of Arabic learning. Although Khloud had some Arabic lessons in Sunday Islamic school, her knowledge was limited to recognizing and reading letters in Arabic without understanding what was written. M.J. did not have any lessons in Arabic, and her first official Arabic lessons were at the university.

Another commonality between both cases was the role of parents and family in encouraging Khloud and M.J. to learn Arabic. Both had parents that did not push them to learn Arabic, but their fathers received the news of Khloud’s and M.J.’s decisions to learn Arabic at the university with excitement and happiness. Thus, both fathers played the supporter role while taking a hands-off approach from Khloud and M.J. during their university Arabic study. In fact, Khloud’s and M.J.’s fathers, despite knowing how to
speak colloquial Arabic fluently, did not speak Arabic to Khloud and M.J., and persisted in not speaking Arabic with them as their studies progressed. These two cases’ households were English dominant, and the fact of their studying Arabic did not change this reality. To sum up, the fathers, who were connected to the Arab world, did not push their daughters to learn Arabic, but supported their decision to pursue Arabic at the university level.

Another commonality between Khloud and M.J. includes the learning goal of speaking Arabic to travel in the Middle East. They both enrolled in Arabic to achieve this objective. Khloud wanted to travel to Egypt, interact with her family on her father’s side, and discover the Middle East; as she explained: “I love the Middle East. I want to go to the Middle East; I want to be in Egypt. I want to be everywhere!” Similarly, M.J. wanted to travel to Syria to see her father’s village, as well as Egypt. She explained, “I do want to travel to, like, we have the Masri [Egyptian] and Shami [Levant] in there [Arabic textbook], so I'm going to travel to both of those places eventually so it's important for me to basically understand them.” In other words, her Arabic studies made her equally interested in visiting Egypt and meeting more people from the Arab world.

In addition to speaking Arabic as a common goal for Khloud and M.J., they both viewed MSA as important and useful to their learning, although they struggled with Arabic grammar. Khloud considered MSA as a way to commonly communicate with people in the Arab world, despite their different dialects—possibly without realizing that not all educated Arabs can communicate using it. Similarly, M.J. saw the value of learning MSA, as she perceived it as the first step toward learning Arabic and that later,
when she became more advanced, she could learn colloquial Arabic. Thus, they both believed that MSA was useful in their learning and accepted it as a step toward learning Arabic, postponing acquiring dialects for a later phase. Part of learning MSA was grammar, and both M.J. and Khloud considered Arabic grammar difficult. As Khloud explained, “I still struggle with some grammar concepts,” while for M.J., the cause of her struggle was that she had not learned English grammar and its terminology. Eventually, she figured it out and overcame this difficulty. She was happy with her learning. For Khloud, she continued to work on grammar, and asking for help from her instructors when needed.

Despite their understanding of the value of MSA, they both appreciate colloquial Arabic. For example, Khloud emphasized learning colloquial Arabic as a prerequisite for being fluent in Arabic. For M.J., colloquial Arabic provided for more efficient communication, saying, “I mean I feel like a lot of times it's just a convenience thing, like they say things quicker and easier, which is, like, really nice.” In other words, M.J. considered colloquial Arabic as opening a path for easier communication. In sum, M.J. and Khloud had awareness of the usefulness of learning colloquial Arabic, but this did not stop them from accepting learning MSA, leading to a more satisfactory Arabic learning experience.

Khloud and M.J. expressed their happiness with their Arabic learning progress and their commitment to studying Arabic beyond the university language requirement of two years of language study. Actually, they both shared their pride at how far they made it in their Arabic language development, particularly writing. Khloud, for example, said
about her writing development, “Most definitely I'm kind of proud of, especially the first one [essay] I sent you.” Similarly, M.J. felt proud of her progress, saying, “I feel pretty good about [how] it's really nice, like, I'm really proud of what I've learned too.” Both of them expressed pride in their progress in written Arabic and were impressed with their own ability to express themselves in written MSA. Consequently, it was logical to see them—unlike Sarah and Fatima—pursuing Arabic beyond the second year. Both Khloud and M.J. were specializing in Arabic, which clearly demonstrated their motivation and determination to continue learning this language. As noted, I am using the general term “specializing” to protect the students’ identities.

After graduation, they both planned to continue Arabic as a result of their success in their university language studies. Khloud had plans to travel to Egypt and continue studying Arabic at one of the language institutes in downtown Cairo. In a similar vein, M.J. planned to travel to Egypt and Syria, if she had the financial means, but her plans were not as specific as those of Khloud, whose grandparents had already connected with the language institute to help realize her plans.

**Differences Between Khloud and M.J.**

Although Khloud and M.J. had a lot in common, there are some clear differences between their two cases. These differences include having access to a community with whom to practice, and how they perceived their Arab American identities in relation to studying Arabic. Below, I explain both differences in detail in an attempt to fully compare and contrast these two cases in order to understand the role of prior knowledge in helping heritage students’ learning in the Arabic university classes.
One of the differences between Khloud and M.J. was being able to practice Arabic within a community. For Khloud and M.J., their fathers did not speak Arabic to them at home, so they both needed a community of people with whom to practice using their Arabic language. Khloud made friends with classmates, and actively participated in Arabic-speaking communities on campus. Additionally, she sought membership in a linguistic community through group text messages with friends in Egypt, despite not understanding Egyptian Arabic. Consequently, she had more access to a community in which to practice Arabic, or at least listen to it. In contrast, M.J., despite her attempts to develop a meaningful language community, suffered several setbacks that limited her access to a community of practice. For example, she started a Snapchat group with her peers, but one of her peers graduated, and the other stopped taking Arabic. Additionally, M.J. could not attend the Arabic club because of a schedule conflict, but she expressed interest in trying to participate in the future. Finally, she shared that she could not text her Arab American cousins in Arabic because they did not share M.J.’s level of Arabic literacy. In seeking to find community, M.J. tried to utilize Arabic Instagram accounts to read Arabic and practice the language. In sum, Khloud was able to surround herself with more opportunities to practice Arabic, while M.J. was still searching for opportunities.

The second main difference between Khloud and M.J. was how they viewed their identities in relation to their Arabic learning. Regarding Khloud, she viewed herself as an outsider, as discussed in her profile. Although she was open to describing herself as an Arab American, she still questioned herself as a Middle Easterner and Egyptian because of not being able to speak Arabic. In other words, she could not claim her Arabic identity
because she considered her Arabic speaking skills rudimentary. This did not happen with the White part of her identity, where she claimed it confidently and without doubt. Although she was in third year Arabic, and an active participant in Arabic activities on campus, she did not see herself as an insider to the Arab identity.

In contrast, M.J., who was in second year Arabic, did not link her Arabic language skills to her own sense of self and identity. She comfortably identified herself as German, American, White, and more recently Arab American. After taking Arabic classes, she started checking the box Middle East as one of her identities. What helped her choose that identity was that she knew that she had strong cultural connections to Syria, without doubting that as part of who she was. In sum, although several differences such as having a community in which to practice Arabic and their own sense of identity as Arab Americans, separated the experiences of M.J. and Khloud, they had much more in common.

**Fatima and Sarah: Second Cross-Case Comparison**

Fatima and Sarah had many commonalities, particularly in that they began their university studies of Arabic with more than five years of Arabic language study, which represents a significant body of prior knowledge of Arabic which Khloud and M.J. did not have when beginning Arabic university classes. To elaborate, Fatima had studied Arabic at Islamic school for elementary and middle school; additionally, she was tutored in Quranic Arabic on the weekends. Similarly, Sarah went to Islamic school for elementary and middle school, and then switched to public school for high school. Moreover, Sarah used to go to Syria each summer on extended visits to see her father’s
side of the family. These years of Arabic in official and unofficial settings resulted in solid prior knowledge of Arabic and its culture for Fatima and Sarah. Consequently, Fatima’s and Sarah’s prior knowledge of Arabic played a significant part in their progress and motivation to continue learning Arabic.

Below, I first explain the commonalities between Fatima and Sarah in terms of the following: having motivation and investment, learning colloquial Arabic as a goal, dropping Arabic as a minor, engaging in translanguaging practices, their self-perceptions, and having a strong sense of their identities.

In addition to a strong prior knowledge and study of Arabic, one of the key commonalities between Fatima and Sarah was that both started studying Arabic at the university level with a great deal of motivation and investment, both planning to minor in the language. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Norton (2013) explained that learners can be less invested in the practices of their language classroom when learning, despite being very motivated to learn the language. Thus, students’ investment differs from students’ motivation to learn languages. During the interviews, both Fatima and Sarah expressed that several factors motivated them to study Arabic. One of these factors included speaking colloquial Arabic to the people in their communities, which represented an important learning goal for them to establish ties with their friends and family members who spoke Arabic. Fatima had family members who spoke fluent Arabic and Somali, in addition to many Arab friends and teachers in her secondary school with whom she wanted to speak Arabic. Similarly, Sarah wanted to communicate with her grandmother in Syria and her other relatives who live there. She also had Arab American friends in the
U.S. who spoke Arabic with fluency, and she wanted to have stronger communication with them, as well.

For Sarah and Fatima, their motivation to pursue Arabic was clearly revealed when they both chose to pursue Arabic, instead of other languages at the university. For example, Sarah had strong ties with Spanish because her mother is from Latin America; however, rather than focusing on Spanish, she instead chose to study Arabic. As for Fatima, she believed that no other language would be more beneficial for her than Arabic. Although Fatima and Sarah had almost no choice as children about whether to study Arabic, this was not the case at the university where it was entirely their decision to pursue this language. In sum, Fatima and Sarah were very motivated to study Arabic at the university by choice, even though they had other languages to choose from.

Another factor that motivated Fatima and Sarah to study Arabic was their religion. They were both Muslims; consequently, learning Arabic helped them with understanding faith-related texts and practicing their faith with more depth. That being said, when I interviewed them, I noticed that they were both focused on spoken Arabic to communicate with their communities, while Classical and MSA were not part of their learning goals. As explained in her profile, Sarah stated that “I want to talk to my grandma in the way that she talks to my dad, you know. That part of my culture with my family, that's my main focus.” In other words, her learning goal was to speak and communicate with her family. Likewise, Fatima wanted to learn to communicate through speaking, as she explained: “It's always been replying back in Arabic, that was the most challenging part and I've always struggled with that . . . that was one of the main reasons
why I actually took that course [spoken colloquial Arabic].” What these quotes showed was that communicating with their community in colloquial Arabic, not Classical or MSA, was what Fatima and Sarah needed most from their Arabic university classes.

Both Fatima and Sarah were planning to minor in the Arabic language; however, neither took all the classes needed to accomplish that goal despite their strong prior knowledge of Arabic and its culture. They were both very motivated to acquire Arabic and were initially very invested in their learning. Two main reasons led to their decisions to change their plans for minoring in Arabic. The first reason was that they changed instructors when moving up a level, and neither Fatima nor Sarah felt they could learn with their new instructors’ teaching style and focus on grammar. Surprisingly, both Sarah and Fatima used the same descriptor when I inquired about their challenges, explaining that the instructor’s “vibe” was one of the reasons they dropped the class. Fatima elaborated more, saying that she could not feel comfortable in the class, as she sensed that the instructor made her feel he was on a higher pedestal, which gave a clearer idea that the instructor's vibe might refer to a distant or disconnected style of teaching and content to Fatima and Sarah’s ways of learning and goals/needs. Fatima dropped this instructor’s class during the first week and decided not to continue taking MSA. Instead, Fatima took a colloquial Arabic series which I taught, and did not continue to third year Modern Standard, nor fourth year. On the other hand, Sarah did not have the choice about taking colloquial Arabic, and stopped after finishing the second-year Arabic courses needed for the language requirements.
The second reason for dropping the Arabic minor for both Fatima and Sarah was the difficulty they both experienced with the grammar of MSA. As mentioned in her profile, Fatima felt MSA was “more like a chore” at both the university and in Islamic school because instructors prioritized accuracy, and she felt judged, which was not the case when she took a colloquial Arabic class with me. For Sarah, she did not learn to identify the explicit rules or use the terminology of English grammar when she was growing up, which created a big hurdle for her when her Arabic instructor taught Arabic grammar using English terminology. As noted earlier in her profile, Sarah explained that “I am really struggling with grammar, because [the instructor] is really teaching that, I feel, like, I'm getting an English grammar lesson, when he's teaching Arabic grammar.” She perceived that her immigrant parents’ English, as non-native speakers, contributed to her lack of knowledge of the terminology used in English grammar. In contrast, her prior knowledge of Arabic from many years of traveling to Syria and six years of Arabic classes before college put her behind her peers—and not ahead—because of her lack of specialist English grammar. As noted, the instructor failed her several times as a result of her use of dialects and his disbelief that she could have possibly answered all of her homework questions correctly.

Outside of the Arabic language classroom, both Fatima and Sarah engaged in translanguaging practices with their families and communities. Both of them translanguaged between three languages. Fatima translanguaged between Somali, Arabic, and English, depending on who she spoke with. With her parents and grandparents, she spoke Somali, and with her siblings, she spoke English. She used Arabic words and
Somali ones with her friends when she spoke English with them. When she was studying Arabic at the university, she used more Arabic words than she usually did when not studying Arabic. In the same way, Sarah translanguage between three languages: Spanish, Arabic, and English. Her father’s side of the family used Arabic when texting and leaving voice messages to the family. When she spoke to her siblings, it was mainly in English, and her mother engaged in translanguaging using Spanish, Arabic and English when speaking to her and her siblings.

Although Fatima and Sarah translanguaged and engaged in multilingual communication with their communities, they both saw these linguistic skills in a negative light. They even used the same word to describe their perceived inadequacies: “broken.” Sarah described her mother’s English as broken, while Fatima described her Somali as broken at least twice during the second interview. In this way, their choice of words revealed a form of perceived incompleteness in their use of language(s) or their families’ use of language(s). In other words, neither of them view their translanguaging nor that of their families in a positive light.

Finally, Fatima and Sarah both demonstrated a strong sense of identity that remained unchanged after taking university Arabic classes. Fatima, as stated in her profile, felt Somali at home and American outside of it. Moreover, she did not identify herself as Arab despite Somalia being an Arab country in the Arab league. Instead, she identified herself as a Black Somali American woman. In the same way, Sarah had an unshaken sense of who she was. She identified herself as Arab American, Syrian, and Latina. However, I noticed that she emphasized the Arab part of her identity more, as she
elaborated: “I'm like, I know what it is to be an Arab because I, I used to go to Syria for three months out of the year and, like, live with my only my family and speak only Arabic.” This quote was not the only incident where she confirmed her Arab identity as explained in her profile.

In sum, both Fatima and Sarah had a strong sense of who they were, and their identity, which was dissimilar from Khloud and M.J., who were still figuring out who they were at the time of the interviews; for M.J., she transformed after taking university Arabic classes and identified as an Arab American for the first time in her life, while Khloud felt like an outsider to her Arab identity, as she explained. In fact, the data emerging from my interviews did not point towards any transformation in Sarah’s and Fatima’s cases, as in M.J.’s case, or any confusion about their sense of self, as in Khloud’s case.

Differences Between Fatima and Sarah

Although Fatima and Sarah had a lot in common, I note some dissimilarities between their two cases. These include differences in concluding their Arabic learning journey, the level of impact Arabic classes had on their views of themselves as learners of Arabic, the roles of parents, and their agreements on the term “Arab heritage students” to describe them. Below, I explain these differences in detail in an attempt to fully compare and contrast these two cases in order to understand the role of prior knowledge in helping heritage students’ learning in the Arabic university classes.

Despite the fact that both Fatima and Sarah terminated or changed their plans to minor in Arabic, Fatima continued to the third year colloquial Arabic series, when the
An Arabic program offered it, while Sarah planned to stop her Arabic study at the end of her second year, as a means to fulfill her language requirements. Fatima chose to continue her third year Arabic, taking the colloquial Arabic series, not the MSA series, which were both offered in the program.

Fatima had three main reasons for her decision to stop her formal Arabic studies. First, her priority was to speak colloquial Arabic, and not to study MSA grammar. Second, Fatima was getting busier with her major requirements and did not want the added stress of language study. Third, she did not want to change instructors, and wanted to continue to take classes with me. I had taught the colloquial Arabic series for 8 years, and it was a well-attended series, but it was canceled after 8 years to align the program with other languages’ requirements. In contrast, when Sarah took second-year Arabic, she did not have the choice to pursue colloquial Arabic for a third year—with a third-year Arabic course being required for both major and a minor—as colloquial Arabic was not offered. Thus, she had no option but to take only the MSA track. Even though it may seem that Fatima and Sarah’s learning trajectories were different, ultimately, both of them dropped their Arabic minor because they felt they could not continue courses that focused mostly on studying Arabic grammar, sidelining spoken colloquial Arabic, and learning in environments where they did not like the vibe of the instructor.

Another dissimilarity between Fatima and Sarah was that Fatima had an overall more positive learning journey with Arabic than Sarah. In fact, Fatima described her Arabic learning journey as “rough at the beginning and then better at the end,” because she did not want to study Arabic when she was a child, but after taking colloquial Arabic
classes at the university, she felt positively about her Arabic learning. Actually, she stated that these classes were “motivational” and that my feedback was helpful and encouraging, as detailed in her profile. This way of teaching resonated with Fatima, as she expressed that she especially appreciated that there was no judgment. Moreover, she felt that the whole class was learning together, which helped make her Arabic learning experience positive.

On the contrary, Sarah’s experience was the exact opposite. She started on a good note, then her journey took a turn for the worse. She enjoyed her first year learning Arabic, saying, “I love my teacher, like I'm really enjoying how I'm learning. And I feel like I actually am learning stuff.” Then, when she switched instructors and the focus of class was more on grammar, she began to struggle and her grades suffered, as she explained: “But this year, it's, like, completely different, and he [her father] even sees it. That I'm, like, struggling and I tell him like my teacher wants it this specific way. And I have to follow [the instructors’] instructions.” As detailed in her profile, Sarah repeated many times that she was not learning in the class and that she would not continue studying Arabic at the university. Additionally, she doubted her ability to continue to learn Arabic. Consequently, Sarah’s Arabic learning journey was the exact opposite of Fatima’s despite the common end of not minoring in Arabic.

Another difference between Fatima and Sarah was the level of stress each experienced when learning Arabic at the university level. During the interviews, Fatima did not show any kind of distress remembering her experience taking colloquial Arabic classes and second year Arabic classes with me. On the other hand, Sarah repeatedly
shared how stressed she was taking second year Arabic classes and how she worried about her grades. As mentioned in her profile, Sarah said:

I feel, like, very confused [about the taught material], and I feel like in class, I'm not learning anything, like I feel like, okay, I have to do this. I have to get an A, it's only for the grade for me . . . And I want to learn Arabic, but at this point, he's making it more of a grade and not me learning.

This quote showed how Sarah’s motivation to master Arabic did not help her remain invested in her learning because of the classroom teaching environment and her stress about her grades. Consequently, classroom practices affected students’ investment in continuing their learning, as Norton (2013) argued.

Another important dissimilarity between Fatima and Sarah was the impact of classroom environments on their learning investment. Even though both dropped their Arabic minor, they each concluded their Arabic studies on a different note, level of investment, and view of themselves as learners. As explained above, Fatima’s learning journey “was better at the end” with her colloquial Arabic progressing in judgment-free classes and a supportive learning environment.

On the other hand, Sarah questioned her ability to learn Arabic in a surprising way during the interview. As a follow-up question on Sarah’s description of her instructor “blocking” the teaching of colloquial Arabic, I asked how she felt when her instructor did that. In response, she said: “Um, it's just making me feel like I'm never going to learn Arabic.” Thus, her experience in the classroom had a damaging impact on her investment and view of herself as a learner, while Fatima did not convey any of these emotions or thoughts when talking about her struggles with Arabic.
Besides the level of impact on Sarah’s view of herself as a learner in contrast to Fatima’s, the role of parents was another point of contrast between the two. Fatima’s mother played an important role in her language development during her childhood, as she encouraged and planned for Fatima to study Quranic Arabic every weekend, in addition to enrolling her in Islamic school. Her mother was keen that Fatima would know how to read the Quran. However, Fatima’s mother’s role stopped during college as Fatima continued her Arabic studies. On the other hand, Sarah’s father’s role expanded when she took Arabic at the university classes where he acted as her tutor, supporter, and advisor. As explained in her profile, Sarah’s father played a crucial role in her learning at the university, shaping what she thought should or should not be taught. For example, he questioned why she was not learning colloquial Arabic or writing in it, because in the Arab world people have limited use of MSA, which was the main focus of Sarah’s Arabic classes. Thus, while Fatima’s mother’s role shrank when she enrolled in university Arabic, Sarah’s father’s role expanded.

In addition to very different academic and emotional support, Fatima and Sarah identified with the term “heritage learner of Arabic” in relation to themselves in very different ways. As noted previously, for Fatima, despite the membership of Somalia as one of the 22 countries in the Arab league and the similarities between Arab Americans and Somali Americans with their upbringing in the U.S., she did not feel the terms Arab or Arabic heritage described her. However, she agreed with the term “Arabic speaker” to refer to herself, because even though her speaking skills were developing, she and her grandparents spoke Arabic, making this term more adequate than others to describe her.
Conversely, Sarah embraced the term heritage learner of Arabic without reservation, saying, “Yes, I definitely believe I am [a heritage learner of Arabic] since I’m not fluent in Arabic but I’ve had a background of speaking and learning Arabic.” Clearly, Sarah did not let her struggles learning Arabic inhibit her from using this term to describe herself. Thus, both Fatima and Sarah had different views when using the term heritage learner of Arabic to refer to them.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, Fatima and Sarah had at least six years of Arabic study and exposure to the Arabic culture that made them come to Arabic university classes with strong prior knowledge. However, this prior knowledge did not assure they would pursue a minor or major in the language. Both chose not to continue their Arabic learning at the university, and both struggled with MSA grammar. Despite the strong similarities between both, some differences exist, including a happier ending to Fatima’s Arabic learning at the university than Sarah’s, and a more damaging self-perception for Sarah with respect to her ability to learn Arabic. Consequently, prior knowledge of Arabic played a role in shaping their learning in university Arabic classrooms.

**Recurrent Themes and Their Relations With Research Questions**

In this section, I explain four main themes that appeared in the data: engaging in translanguaging practices for all participants; privileging MSA in Arabic university classes with an over-emphasis on grammar and writing; learning speaking as a common goal among participants; and the role of prior learning and its impact on identity
formation among the participants. For each theme, I explore the connections between the four themes and the three main research questions.

**Theme 1: Presence of Translanguaging for All Participants**

The first recurring theme is the presence of translanguaging practices for all participants in this study. I discuss the following points when exploring translanguaging for them: listening to bilingual songs as a common practice, translanguaging regardless of participants’ prior learning status, understanding the importance of translanguaging for the participants, and connecting translanguaging in participants’ lives with research question 1: To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities?

The four participants engaged in translanguaging practices in their home communities regardless of their prior learning of Arabic. In fact, all of them listened to songs in different languages. Fatima listened to English-language songs, but she felt the need to connect to her heritage culture and so listened to Somali and Arabic songs, too. For Sarah, she listened to English, Spanish and Arabic songs. Similarly, Khloud listened to songs in those three languages. In the same vein, M.J. listened to songs from all over the world including those in Arabic on Spotify, which helped her focus when she studied. Accordingly, listening to songs in a variety of world languages as a common practice among all the participants showed they were global citizens who engaged in translanguaging practices as part of their daily lives. Further, they sought to understand and connect with others who speak languages other than English.
Fatima and Sarah engaged in translanguaging practices that involved three languages, and sometimes more. For Fatima, she spoke Somali to her parents, English to her siblings, and Syrian and Egyptian Arabic to her Arab American friends. Similarly, Sarah listened to her mother’s Spanish at home, her father’s translanguaging in Syrian Arabic using some Arabic words with her mother, while Sarah spoke English to her siblings and was included in her Syrian family group texts in Syrian Arabic.

In fact, the artifacts Fatima and Sarah shared showed their translanguaging practices in their home communities. I discuss Fatima’s artifacts first then Sarah’s.

Fatima shared a text message with an invitation to a friend to watch a movie in English, but the person declined in order to sleep. All the interactions were in English, except for Fatima’s response to the invitation rejection and her friend’s going to bed by saying “Miskeen” meaning poor you, in Arabic and written in English letters, showing translanguaging between both languages and Somali. When I asked Fatima about these words, she said that they were also used in Somali and that she frequently used them in her everyday life. Another artifact she shared was text messages from a group texting Fatima. All messages were in English except for one that included one word in Arabic. The text message wished the participant happy birthday; it said “Happy birthday and many more to come inshalla! Hope it was a good one!” Fatima’s friend wished her happy birthday and used one Arabic word “inshalla.” Fatima explained that like miskeen (poor you), she also used inshalla (God willing), in everyday conversations in Somali. This artifact was another example of translanguaging as a part of Fatima and her friends’ daily interactions.
The third sample Fatima shared were her Twitter posts. All of them were in English. In fact, if one looked only at Fatima’s messages on Twitter, one would not know that she used multiple languages in her life. From the three samples, it was clear that English was the dominant language she used to communicate in her daily life. However, with her inner circle, Somali and Arabic appeared in communication, as in the first and second sample, using one or two words in messages with friends. In other words, her translanguaging practices showed when she communicated with close friends and family, where she could move fluidly between languages, which was not the case when speaking to the world through Twitter.

Similar to Fatima, Sarah engaged in translanguaging practices with her communities, as demonstrated by her artifacts. Sarah shared three text threads with family and friends which showed her interacting in Arabic, English and translanguaging between both languages and cultures. In the first thread, she was writing in Arabic **عيد مبارك** (Have a blessed Eid), wishing her friends a blessed holiday. Her friends answered back in English. Some of them said the same words but written in English, which showed the translanguaging practices in which Sarah and her peers easily and fluidly engaged. The second thread was titled “عيلتنا” which means “our family.” This thread was obviously with her family in Syria on a phone application where they exchanged messages. The messages were all in Arabic, greeting each other and welcoming the individuals in the group, which is a common Arab way of starting a conversation. The third thread of texts was between Sarah and her group of friends, showing only English texts and emojis talking to each other about going back to school and seeing each other
after a long time. From the review of the three threads, translanguaging between Arabic and English and using Arabic to connect with her family in Syria were part and parcel of Sarah’s daily life, in an attempt to communicate with her family and friends. To sum up, both Fatima and Sarah translanguage among several languages when communicating with their communities.

Despite having significantly less prior knowledge and coming from predominantly English-speaking households, Khloud and M.J. — like Fatima and Sarah — translanguage between Arabic dialects and English in their communities. As mentioned in their profiles, Khloud’s and M.J.’s fathers spoke to them only in English, despite them speaking in colloquial Arabic with other relatives. However, both Khloud and M.J. still engaged in translanguaging. For Khloud, she spoke MSA to her grandfather, who partially spoke back in MSA but mostly in Egyptian Arabic. She also spoke MSA to her significant other, who was a native speaker of Arabic from North Africa where French is widely used. Additionally, she spoke MSA with her peers and was included in many text message groups with friends in Egypt who spoke colloquial Egyptian Arabic. Although she did not understand much, she shared with me that she faked understanding what they were saying. I sensed she was hoping that one day her Arabic would improve and she could understand what they said in Egyptian Arabic.

Likewise, M.J. engaged in translanguaging practices with her grandparents when she visited them where they all spoke Syrian Arabic. Also, she used Arabic words with her cousins when referring to Syrian recipes and counting numbers. Additionally, she only referred to her grandparents using Arabic words for grandmother and grandfather.
Although she struggled with speaking, she listened to her father speak to his aunts in fluent Syrian Arabic. Ultimately, Khloud and M.J. did engage and continue to do so in their communities using colloquial Arabic, despite their limited prior knowledge, compared with Fatima and Sarah.

A quick examination of the artifacts Khloud and M.J. shared confirmed their translanguaging practices as part and parcel of their daily lives. Khloud showed me four home artifacts, two of which were group text messages; one with friends in Egypt and one with her cousin in Egypt. The third artifact was a message to her friend while they were giving a virtual presentation, while the fourth was a request to one of her instructors via email fully in MSA about academic matters.

Translanguaging in Khloud’s communication was very prominent in her home artifacts as she used MSA and English, Arabic letters for English words, as well as received text messages in Egyptian dialect written in English. Each social situation required different communication needs. For example, when communicating with her instructors for a recommendation letter, she used MSA; while texting her cousin in Egypt, she used English. Her friends in Egypt used Arabic written in English letters, which she did not understand, but hoped to comprehend in the future. Moreover, Khloud used Arabic letters to write English sentences, when she was communicating with a friend in the U.S., which she described as a “secret message” to prevent others from understanding what she wanted to communicate.

Along the same lines, M.J. translanguaged in her life despite her not knowing much Arabic. M.J. shared three different home artifacts with me. One was a screenshot of
her naming her computer files in Arabic. The second was a list of Arabic movies written in English on which she commented, “I now have an Arabic keyboard on my phone and computer, with a list of movies in Arabic on Netflix I intend to eventually find and watch.” She also reported that this Arabic keyboard on her phone allowed her to save her grandmother’s phone number in Arabic. This was a sentimental step on M.J.’s part to connect in Arabic with the people she loved.

The third artifact was a chat group on Snapchat, that was called “بالالفصحى” (In MSA) written in Arabic. She described the group’s purpose:

I'm on Snapchat basically; I took a picture [of the artifact]; it's like a chat that I have on there, and I think it was last year. So, other Arabic students and I like created a group chat so we can talk a little bit, and we put the name of the chat in Arabic.

M.J., together with her first-year colleagues, wanted to connect and practice their Arabic and chose a social media platform on which to connect. The groups started when they were in Arabic 101 and 102, and they communicated in both English and Arabic. M.J. explained, “I think we would do a little bit both [Arabic and English], but it was mostly English, because this was back in like [Arabic] 101 or 2, so we're still kind of learning.”

Despite the promising outcome of this idea of connecting peers to communicate and learn together Arabic on social media, M.J. told me that they did not continue communicating as the two other students stopped their Arabic studies after their first year. Only she, out of the three in the Snapchat group, continued studying it, as one of them graduated and the other had to fulfill other degree requirements. Nevertheless, she was persistent and creative in finding ways to use Arabic in her life as shown in the artifacts—like naming
her computer files in Arabic and her family contacts in Arabic. Additionally, she used social media to practice Arabic:

On Instagram, I don't know how this happened, some like people from the Middle East, I think, just follow me. So, I follow them back. [Their] older posts are in Arabic, so I always just, like, for quick practice, and it's all on my feet, trying to, like, read it real quick to see if I understand anything.

Again, M.J. demonstrated creativity and independent learning, along with a desire to seek a community to practice Arabic with, lead her to use social media to learn Arabic. After demonstrating the home artifacts which both Khloud and M.J. shared, what is evident is their use of translanguaging between MSA Arabic, Arabic dialects, and English in their daily lives as a second nature to express themselves and connect with people in their communities.

After revealing how the four participants translanguaged in their communities, the next step was to connect this theme with the first research question: To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities? The answer to this question is simply the classroom practices that mostly emphasized the use of MSA and penalized the use of dialects—with the exception of colloquial Arabic series which Fatima was the only participant to take—did not match AAHL students’ translanguaging practices in their home communities. In other words, the class reality of the participants was a mono-registered linguistic reality, which was not in harmony with the reality of AAHL students' communication with people in their communities and when expressing themselves.

That being said, the university Arabic classroom still provided moments of discovery for Khloud and M.J.—the participants with the least prior knowledge—to learn
about vocabulary words and expressions they grew up hearing whose meanings they did not recognize. Khloud for the first time could understand some of the expressions which her father used to tell her when she was a child, and M.J. could finally understand more of the greetings which her grandparents said when she and family arrived in their household. It is important to note that the participants did not share these moments of revelation with their instructors, but instead kept them to themselves. Finally, these discovery moments, despite their value in deepening the awareness of the Arabic language and culture for Khloud and M.J., were not diverse enough to create consistent and strong connection with these students’ linguistic realities outside of the classroom.

The over-emphasis on grammar and MSA contributed to this disconnection between students’ linguistic realities of translanguaging and the classroom. As mentioned in their profiles, Sarah was corrected when she used her Syrian Arabic in class; Khloud witnessed her Arabic speaking class professor consistently asking her heritage students' peers to switch their spoken dialect in a very stressful learning environment; and M.J. believed that she had to study colloquial Arabic on her own, while struggling with Arabic grammar, and waiting to learn about Arabic culture in third year. Fatima skipped taking third-year MSA; instead, she took a colloquial Arabic series to avoid studying grammar. What the participants faced in their learning demonstrated that many of the Arabic classes they took did not allow for the diverse linguistic realities in these students' communities, instead focusing solely on grammar and one form of Arabic: MSA.
Theme 2: Privileging MSA in Arabic University Classes With an Over-Emphasis on Grammar and Writing

In this section, I discuss how over-emphasizing MSA grammar and writing in Arabic classes appeared in the data for each participant, showing MSA as a privileged form of Arabic among many Arabic instructors in this study. I start with Sarah, then move on to Khloud and M.J., then discuss Fatima last as her case was slightly different because of taking colloquial Arabic series in her last year of classes, which were not offered when the rest of the participants took classes. Additionally, I connect the theme on privileging MSA and unbalanced focusing on grammar with the second research question on AAHL students' perception of how MSA impacted their linguistic skills development.

Interviewing the participants and analyzing their artifacts pointed toward this current theme: instructors concentrated too much on MSA grammar and writing in many of the Arabic university classes which the participants took. Many of the classroom activities and assessments, together with the requirement that students speak MSA in most of the classes, revealed privileging MSA over dialects in the setting of the research. When MSA was the priority in the classroom, MSA grammar and writing took the lion’s share of class activities, assignments, and assessments.

Prioritizing MSA and focusing on both grammar and writing accuracy were strongly present when interviewing the participants. Starting with Sarah, as demonstrated in her profile, she was confused on why the instructor gave them the option to speak dialects, but then corrected her when she spoke Syrian dialect, asking her to speak MSA. To elaborate, she stated that he was “blocking out” colloquial Arabic. She was perplexed,
asking: “Why would you try and give us the option?!!” As a result, she did not feel she could participate fully in the class. What complicated the situation for her was the exaggerated focus on MSA grammar. The instructor explained Arabic grammar in English terms about which Sarah had no strong background knowledge. Meanwhile, she noticed that her mono-lingual peers easily followed this form of explanation because of their prior knowledge of English grammar. Consequently, her grades suffered and her investment in learning diminished.

Her artifacts, similarly, verified the preference for MSA accuracy in grammar and writing in the Arabic classroom. For example, in one of Sarah’s writing artifacts, the instructor asked the students to use the answer key to correct their homework and show him their work. When she submitted her work without mistakes, he marked her down, assuming that she did not do the work independently, and not knowing that her prior knowledge enabled her to complete the homework correctly. As a result, she fabricated mistakes in her homework, and corrected them in red to get the points. Following this, she received her full grades. Accordingly, Sarah’s artifacts and the interviews pointed toward favoring speaking MSA in class, punishment for using dialects, and unbalanced focus on grammar and accuracy in her assignments.

Similarly, Khloud’s interviews and classroom artifacts supported the recurrence of privileging MSA, writing, grammar, and allowing less space for practicing colloquial Arabic. Khloud repeated in the interviews that she was “proud” of her MSA writing progress, when she presented her classroom artifacts: two long well-written complex essays in MSA. The essays were exemplary and her instructor strongly praised her
writing. Though she felt immense pride in her writing progress, she expressed difficulty in achieving success in speaking. She said that speaking, “is the hardest thing for me still.” This fact was surprising because she was immersing herself in Arabic activities inside and outside of the classroom, and in touch with her Egyptian family in Cairo.

Khloud’s speaking was suffering despite her taking a third-year class focused on speaking. However, as mentioned in her profile, the instructor instead said that everyone spoke MSA, even other heritage students who could not. In fact, the instructor would ask them when they say something in their Arabic dialects: “hey, now, can you say that again in fusʕha [MSA]?” Therefore, Khloud’s classes privileged MSA in speaking and assignments.

In a similar vein, M.J.’s interviews and classroom artifacts demonstrated favoring MSA, writing, and grammar. M.J. shared two assignments: a handwritten essay in Arabic about her life in the city and a typed assignment in Arabic discussing what the students learned from different units in the textbook. In the second assignment, students were required as well to record a presentation on what they shared in the written format of the assignment about the same topic. I asked M.J. about the classroom artifacts and if they connected with her life, and more specifically if they were helpful when she communicated with her grandparents. Her answer regarding the essay was, “I know I could do it, and express it, but we [she and her grandparents] haven't actually physically done that yet.” In other words, she did not get the chance to communicate similar content to her grandparents but she believed in her language abilities in relation to expressing this particular essay to her family. When I asked her the same question regarding the typed
assignment, she said, “So I think like again I haven't [made the connection]; like I guess, I've spoken with them [grandparents] a little bit so kind of yeah, but, just in general I think speaking practice is great and helpful.” Here, I can see the focus on MSA writing and presentation did not help M.J. in communicating with her grandparents. That is her uncertainty of establishing consistent communication in Arabic with her grandparents, while writing well, demonstrated the classroom learning priorities: writing and using MSA above other skills.

Lastly, Fatima’s case, unlike other participants, revealed the recurrent theme of over-emphasizing grammar and privileging MSA in most Arabic classrooms in a different way. As the only participant who took a full year of colloquial Arabic classes, her interests and artifacts uncovered that learning colloquial Arabic helped her progress in her speaking in a supportive learning environment. In her interviews, she compared and contrasted MSA versus colloquial Arabic classes based on her experiences at both the university and Islamic school. She significantly favored learning colloquial Arabic and positively described her experience as “fun” and “enjoyable” versus “chore” and “rigid” for MSA.

In her artifacts, she shared the assignments that were more valuable to her because she invested a lot in them, as she reported. She shared an essay from her second year written in MSA, a report reviewing an Egyptian movie for her colloquial Arabic, and slides for the presentation she gave in the last colloquial Arabic class she took. Two out of the three artifacts were related to authentic, real-world Arabic learning. As a reminder, Fatima did take a full year of classes in MSA and a full year in colloquial Arabic. Despite
the same length of classes, the artifacts were not shared in equal numbers: two colloquial ones and one in MSA. Because Fatima studied for the same length of time period both MSA and colloquial Arabic at the university, and because she shared the artifacts she valued most, in addition to her consistent favoring of colloquial Arabic classes in her interviews, I concluded the following: MSA learning was useful to Fatima, yet, her colloquial Arabic artifacts were more meaningful and valuable to her. Thus, colloquial Arabic learning was more meaningful to Fatima than MSA, which she consistently juxtaposed with her Arabic classes in MSA in the Islamic school and at her first years in the university, where MSA and grammar were the sole focus of her Arabic learning.

At this point, I would like to highlight two main points when connecting the recurring theme on privileging MSA and its grammar in Arabic classrooms with the second research question: How did AAHL students perceive the impact of MSA on their development of their linguistic skills? The first point is regarding how all the participants viewed Arabic grammar to be difficult.

All of the four students expressed that Arabic grammar was difficult for them; Fatima took colloquial Arabic to avoid studying more of it, especially after her experience in the Islamic school where grammar lessons and MSA learning were “rigid, giving less room for error making.” For Sarah, she continued to struggle with grammar and her grades suffered. For Khloud, although she acknowledged her struggle with “some grammar concepts,” she felt that she knew a lot and was moving forward with her learning. Similarly, M.J. faced her challenges with grammar; however, she overcame them. Her strategies were studying more especially before class to prepare for material
that was yet to be taught in class. Thus, the four of the participants did find MSA
grammar difficult, but Khloud and M.J. managed to overcome this difficulty, while Sarah
and Fatima did not.

The second point is how Fatima and Sarah viewed that MSA negatively affected
their development of their linguistic skills, whereas Khloud and M.J. did not—despite
their awareness of what changes they need in their Arabic learning to improve. To
elaborate, Fatima and Sarah did not see studying MSA as helpful to their speaking skills,
which they prioritized to communicate with their communities. Fatima avoided taking
further MSA classes at the university and Sarah decided not to continue studying Arabic
at the university. Instead, she would seek her father’s and mother’s friends' help to learn
Syrian Arabic.

In contrast to Fatima and Sarah, Khloud and M.J. did not see MSA as an
impediment to their learning. They were both proud of their writing progress.
Nevertheless, Khloud wished to develop more speaking skills; she imagined that in an
ideal Arabic program—where resources to hire more professors existed—both MSA and
colloquial Arabic would be taught from the first year onwards. Along the same lines, M.J.
saw MSA as step one in her learning, but waited for third year to learn more about the
culture. Additionally, she wished that the class was not 60% grammar and 40% speaking.
In other words, both Khloud and M.J. did not directly see MSA having a negative impact
on their learning, but wished more time dedicated to speaking and learning colloquial
Arabic.
Theme 3: Learning to Speak Arabic as a Common Goal Among All the Participants

The third recurrent theme in the data was how all the four participants wanted to learn speaking and develop this competency as their common learning goal. In this section, I explain this unifying goal among the participants and connect it to the second research question: How did AAHL students perceive the impact of MSA on their development of linguistic skills?

First, all of the participants purposefully chose to study Arabic at the university level, hoping to improve their language skills, specifically for speaking Arabic. For Fatima, she wanted to communicate with her community members who spoke Arabic. She gave the example that she wanted to speak with her Arabic teacher if she met her in the local mall without struggling and beyond the greetings. Also, she planned to live in Dubai and work there for a few years, for which spoken Arabic would be an asset. For Sarah, she wanted to speak with her grandmother like she spoke with her as a child when she used to visit Syria. Additionally, she wanted to make her father proud by learning Arabic and being fluent. As for Khoud, she planned to independently travel in the Middle East without the help of her father or other family members. She wanted to discover different Arab countries and speak with the locals. Similarly for M.J., she wanted to travel to Syria and Egypt, seeing where her father grew up in Syria and exploring Egypt. Moreover, she wanted to communicate with her grandmother and grandfather in the U.S. To summarize, the participants in this study had a strong desire to speak with their community members in the Arabic language and travel in the Arab world.
Connecting the common learning goal of speaking among the participants with the second research question on how AAHL students perceived the impact of MSA on their development of linguistic skills, Fatima and Sarah had a common view about MSA, which contrasted with Khloud’s and M.J.’s perspectives. For Fatima and Sarah, they both considered learning MSA, particularly grammar, as cumbersome. To be more specific, Fatima considered learning MSA and its grammar as a “chore” and experienced classroom settings that discouraged risk-taking with the language when learning MSA both in Islamic school and at the university. Consequently, when she was able to choose between MSA and colloquial Arabic at the university, she elected to study colloquial Arabic when it was offered as its own series. She enjoyed it and felt it was “fun.” In addition, she was able to make progress in a non-judgmental learning environment, without the rigidity of pedagogy focused on MSA.

In a similar vein, Sarah had a negative perspective on solely learning MSA as she saw it as irrelevant to her learning goal of speaking with her family. As mentioned, unlike for Fatima, the colloquial Arabic series was not offered at the time she joined the Arabic program. She felt that she was not learning anything and repeatedly mentioned this throughout the interviews, as several factors created learning blocks for her: struggling with Arabic grammar, perceiving a disconnection between what she was learning in the Arabic language and how her family communicated, and being forced to use MSA in class when she used her Levantine Arabic. Her Arabic learning stalled, as she explained, “I feel, like, very confused and I feel like in class. I'm not learning anything.” Consequently, her investment in learning declined, and her confidence as a capable
learner of Arabic diminished. In short, Fatima and Sarah—with their solid prior knowledge of Arabic—did not perceive learning MSA as helpful in developing their linguistic skills, specifically speaking.

On the other hand, Khloud and M.J. had a different, yet complicated view on MSA and CA in relation to their linguistic skills. They both saw that it was on them to learn colloquial Arabic from the textbook that gives them colloquial Arabic alongside MSA words and expressions. Additionally, they were both content and happy with their progress in their learning, particularly writing Arabic, despite struggling to speak Arabic in the classroom and with their community.

Moreover, a sense of waiting to learn more in the future was common for both Khloud and M.J. Khloud planned to go to Cairo after her graduation, take more classes at a language institution, and immerse herself in the Arabic culture to learn the colloquial dialect, after 4 years of Arabic studies at the university that focused on MSA. For M.J., she was expecting that once she finished her second year, she would learn more about the Arabic culture in third year. To my knowledge as a previous instructor in the Arabic program, such a focused study of Arabic culture, whether in a separate course or as part of a language course was at the time of writing not a consistent part of the program design. Therefore, both M.J. and Khloud were waiting—possibly in vain—to learn more to reach their learning goals.

In addition to Khloud’s and M.J.’s hopes to learn more speaking and culture in the future, a sense of contradiction existed in their thoughts on defining fluency in Arabic versus their contentment with their learning. As explained above and in their profiles,
Khloud and M.J. were happy with their Arabic learning progress. However, an underlying contradiction about how they think surfaced in the interviews. I asked them the following questions: If they reach the level of fluency in colloquial Arabic, in a dialect of their choice, would they consider themselves fluent in Arabic? Then, I asked the same question but changed colloquial Arabic to MSA. They both answered that they would consider themselves fluent when they speak colloquial Arabic similar to the way people in the Arab world speak, not in MSA. Khloud even explained that: “I would not say fluent, if I were able to do that, you know in Alˈfusˤha [MSA], I think fluency comes with some colloquial speaking.” This was a clear-cut answer that in her mind, fluency equaled speaking colloquial Arabic. Along the same lines, M.J. explained that if she learned MSA only, she would still make the effort to learn colloquial Arabic; and that she would consider herself a multilingual person, if she spoke colloquial Arabic. To sum up, Khloud and M.J. were content with their learning progress, particularly writing Arabic; however, they considered speaking colloquial Arabic as their pathway to being fluent, showing a contradiction in their hopes of what they want to learn, versus the reality of the content they actually learned.

In an attempt to understand this contradiction between Khloud and M.J.’s hopes and their reality, my conclusion is that prior knowledge played a role on how they perceived the impact of MSA on their development of their linguistic skills. As their households mostly speak English, and neither came to the university with a solid understanding of the dynamics of colloquial and MSA use in the Arab world, Khloud and M.J. were almost like first time learners of Arabic, who did not experience immediate consequences of not
being able to speak Arabic with family, nor a preference for a particular teaching style—although later in her studies, Khloud did develop a more sophisticated view of Arabic use and expressed that she wished MSA and colloquial Arabic were introduced at the same time. However, she remained happy with her learning and progress.

Khloud and M.J. were from almost mono-lingual households and had little prior knowledge of Arabic; in contrast, Fatima and Sarah translanguaged more in their communities between at least three different languages, had multiple teachers of Arabic during 6 years of Arabic schooling, traveled, and interacted with many Arabic speakers in their families. As a result, not speaking Arabic had immediate consequences for communication in their communities. Moreover, they had a pool of teachers and learning experiences with which to compare their Arabic university classes. Thus, I argue that Fatima’s and Sarah’s strong prior knowledge of Arabic resulted in greater dissatisfaction than Khloud and M.J. experienced in regards to their perception of the development of their linguistic skills, where MSA did not play a significant role in their communicative lives, whereas speaking colloquial did.

Overall, the solid prior learning of Arabic which Fatima and Sarah brought to their Arabic university classrooms played a role in their perception of their learning progress. They did not perceive learning MSA as helpful in developing their linguistic skills, namely speaking. This dissatisfaction was not the case for Khloud and M.J., who were pleased with their development in their linguistic skills, mostly writing. At the same time, they continued to struggle with their speaking, while believing that knowledge of spoken colloquial Arabic was the main factor to being fluent in the language.
Surprisingly, these beliefs did not diminish Khloud’s and M.J.’s happiness and satisfaction with their perception of MSA’s impact on their linguistic skills development.

**Theme 4: The Role of Prior Learning and Its Impact on Identity Formation**

In this section, I explain the emergence of the theme on the role of prior learning and its impact on identity formation. Then, I answer the research question that inquired how AAHL students perceived the impact of MSA on their identities as Arab American multilingual speakers. I have found that the more prior learning students have before coming to Arabic university classes, the stronger their sense of identity and less impact the classrooms have on their perception of their identity, yet the opposite is true for participants in my study.

In the cross-case comparisons, the data showed that prior learning played an important role in shaping the learning experience for the participants. I would like to add that prior learning, as well, was a factor in identity formation for the participants with less prior knowledge. As explained in the cross-case comparison between Fatima and Sarah, both had a strong perception of who they were before coming to the university, and they did not have transformational experiences regarding their identity. However, for Khloud and M.J., who had less prior knowledge of Arabic, the situation was different. The participant with the least prior knowledge, M.J., identified herself for the first time as Arab American and Middle Eastern after studying Arabic at the university. For Khloud, although less transformational experiences took place, she developed more comfort in her Arab identity after taking Arabic classes at the university, while continuing to see herself as an outsider because of her underdeveloped Arabic speaking skills. In sum, the less
prior knowledge of Arabic students had in this study, the more transformation took place in their sense of identity as a result of classroom learning, and vice versa.

Connecting the fourth theme with the third research question on AAHL students’ prescription of MSA on their identities as Arab Americans and multilinguals, I explore their identities as Arab first then multilinguals second. After interviewing the four participants, each one was going on their journey of discovery. Starting with Sarah, she perceived learning and over-focusing on MSA, while dismissing colloquial Arabic in her classes, as negative and detrimental to her learning. Although learning MSA did not impact nor shape her pride in her Arab and Syrian identity, it prolonged her struggle to prove herself “Arab enough” to her Arab American friends. As explained in her profile, her Arab American friends denied her being an Arab because she could not speak Arabic, which she rejected and resisted. Thus, Sarah’s learning of MSA did not impact her unshaken sense of her Arabness, but negatively impacted her speaking development, which her friends considered the one and only condition to being an Arab. Consequently, and indirectly, focusing only on MSA learning for Sarah was not positive to her identity formation and development.

Moving to Khloud, answering the research question about her perception of MSA on her identity is divided into two parts. The first part is that she acknowledged that after studying Arabic at the university, she developed more comfort in her Arab identity, which she could share with others more than before joining the university Arabic classes. The second part was her on-going struggle with speaking Arabic and how it made her feel like an outsider to her identity—as explained in her profile and in the cross-case
analysis. For Khloud, MSA learning, which she mainly studied in her Arabic classes, helped her in being comfortable in who she was, but did not foster a strong sense of Arab identity.

Unlike Khloud, M.J.’s and Fatima’s experiences were very different. First, M.J.’s perception of the effect of studying MSA on her identity was positive. She believed that MSA was the right step in her learning, as she first learned Arabic at the university. As a result of her learning Arabic at the university, she identified for the first time in her life as Arab American. She saw her connection to Arabic culture as a stronger indicator of identity than language. Thus, M.J.’s description of her Arab identity as a result of studying Arabic in general—where she mainly studied MSA—was transformation.

For Fatima, answering the research question is the most complex among the four participants. Fatima was very much connected to the Arab world: her grandparents and uncles spoke Arabic; she was strongly connected to the Arab community; she planned to work and live in Dubai where she had family; and she worried about the status of Arabic and Somali as minority world languages that are suffering attrition. In spite of her strong connectedness to the Arab world, and Somalia being one of the 22 countries in the Arab league, she did not view herself as Arab. She thought that the two cultures (Somali and Arab) were different. Before and after studying Arabic at the university, her sense of identity as a Black, Somali, Muslim woman remained unchanged. However, she realized after taking Arabic at the university that Arabic, like Somali, are languages that are being lost among young people, and that her generation and those younger than hers are most likely to lose it. This feeling of language loss for both languages, Arabic and Somali, was
strong for Fatima, who wanted to protect them by continuing to learn and use them. Thus, Fatima showed that her sense of identity was not impacted by MSA nor colloquial Arabic; what was changed was her desire to protect Somali and Arabic from being lost.

Regarding the participants’ sense of identity in terms of being multilingual, they all confirmed that they did not see themselves as multilingual speakers. Their answers were surprising, knowing that all of them at least know, or have been exposed to, three languages. Fatima and Sarah, who translanguaged between three languages on a daily basis, considered themselves not multilingual, even after more Arabic study at the university. Similarly, Khloud, who knew Spanish fluently, and focused much of her studies on Arabic in the last three years, did not perceive herself as multilingual. M.J., as well, despite studying German in high school, studying university Arabic for two years, and being a native speaker of English, did not see herself as multilingual. Thus, what is common among the participants is clear: they did not see themselves as multilingual, and they lacked Arabic speaking skills. Thus, underdevelopment of speaking skills could affect the participants’ sense of identity as multilingual speakers, and create a feeling of insecurity in this regard.

In conclusion, prior learning impacted the participants’ sense of identity each in her own way, yet highlighted that the less prior learning students had, the more MSA impacted their sense of self as an Arab. However, the positive impact of studying MSA was limited, as seen in the case of Khloud, where it helped her to be comfortable in her Arab identity, but overemphasis on MSA did not nurture a sense of “insider” Middle Eastern identity; speaking colloquial Arabic for her was what she waited for in order to
belong. The data also showed a consensus among the participants that they did not see themselves as multilinguals, despite living in multilingual communities and translanguaging between different languages.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Multiple Case Studies**

In this section, I focus on exploring the limitations of this multiple case study, as well as its strengths. The limitations include the setting, number of instructors, and number of participants. Conversely, the delimitations of this study are: the strength of the frameworks to understand AAHL students, diverse ideologies of the Arabic instructors, and the fresh perspectives of the participants, who I interviewed while they were still studying Arabic. Below, I explain each in detail.

**Limitations**

This multiple case studies research presented information about AAHL students that could not be generalized to all students of Arab American roots. The cases solely represented themselves in their setting. Thus, this study, like other case studies, cannot be generalized to other universities in the U.S. nor to other students of Arabic. In fact, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the purpose of case studies is to add to theoretical propositions, not to generalize for individuals, or groups of people (Yin, 2018). This is one of the limitations of conducting case studies. However, this limitation does not diminish how case studies allow for deeper understanding of the case studies. In other words, case studies provide an understanding that is universal to the studied groups and cases (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015).
In this study, the focus was on one setting: a medium-sized Arabic section in an urban university in North America. This setting did not cover other smaller or bigger Arabic sections, where the learning experience could be different or share some similarities. I observed that the setting allowed for students to pursue a minor or major or just fulfill the requirements of finishing two years of studying a language. Additionally, the courses were mostly offered in MSA. Consequently, in other programs, these requirements could be different. Additionally, the course offerings differ in giving more or less options to students to study Modern Standard and Colloquial Arabic or offering different dialects courses. These variables can affect heritage students of Arabic in different ways that were not covered in these multiple case studies.

Another limitation was the number of instructors who taught the participants and the number of participants. The total number of instructors of Arabic was four (including myself when I formally taught in the setting), about whom the students shared their learning experience in this study. Although the interviews showed criticism towards some of the instructors’ class practices, the volunteer participants could have been more critical of my pedagogy. The politeness in Arab culture when delivering face to face criticism could have hidden some aspects of the participants’ views of my classes. Four is a small number of instructors and cannot be representative of all other Arabic instructors’ pedagogical practices and beliefs. That being said, as an exploratory study, this research hopefully begins to offer insight into learning more about instructors’ ideologies, and patterns of teaching that can help AAHL students acquire Arabic more effectively.
Additionally, the number of students was also four, which was another limitation to this case study. These students represented themselves and their feelings at the moments of the interviews. They cannot represent other students, who might have different circumstances or other contexts affecting their learning. However, their rich experience provided a window to their complex cognitive and social learning processes, without generalizing to other AAHL students.

**Delimitations**

This study has several strengths. One of them is using multiple frameworks that, to my knowledge, have not been used together before to understand AAHL students’ experiences. These frameworks are mutually complementary, as explained in detail Chapter 2, to capture the subtleties of interactions AAHL students had inside and outside of the Arabic classroom. The frameworks include: FOI, with tactics of intersubjectivity embedded under its umbrella, and CRT that focuses on prior knowledge of students including translanguage, and Arabic language and its culture which AAHL students bring to the Arabic classrooms.

Another strength of this research is the diverse ideologies and pedagogical beliefs, which the four Arabic instructors exhibited through AAHL students’ experiences. The first one required students to speak only MSA, seeking “pure” production of this linguistic register. Another believed that colloquial Arabic could be spoken in class, and MSA used for writing, allowing students more flexibility and less stress when speaking a dialect of Arabic; however, the classes focused mostly on MSA grammar. The third instructor was new and started with a focus on MSA, demanding students produce a high
form of MSA; in the following term, however, the instructor changed positions, allowing colloquial Arabic use among students. The fourth instructor was myself when I taught in this academic setting; I taught both colloquial Arabic and MSA; and in the spoken courses, I focused on teaching dialects. When students mixed colloquial and MSA in writing, I highlighted the difference to them without penalty. Students were allowed to choose dialect or MSA, as the focus was clarity of communication.

Finally, the last delimitation of this study is the updated and fresh perspectives of the participants when the interviews were conducted. Three out of the four participants were enrolled in Arabic classes when I interviewed them, sharing recent stories happening in class, and reflections of their learning experiences. That is, this research pictured fresh experiences, feelings, and thoughts in the participants' minds parallel with their learning. Regarding the fourth participant, Fatima, although she had finished classes at the time of her interviews, only a year had passed since she had graduated from the Arabic program. Consequently, the interviews captured relevant events and recent learning experiences for the participants, which added a strength to this study as representing the contemporary voices of AAHL students during their learning of Arabic.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described in detail each participant in their profiles to draw a vivid picture of each. Each of them has followed a unique path, yet despite the differences, some commonalities emerged. Following the profiles, I offered cross-case comparisons based on their prior knowledge of Arabic when they took Arabic classes at the university. Prior knowledge was a crucial factor that impacted their learning and thus,
it was the factor that separated Khloud and M.J. from Fatima and Sarah during the cross-case analysis. After this analysis, I explained four main themes that appeared in the data and connected them with the three main research questions, while using artifacts and interview data to guide the answers.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The field of heritage language teaching and learning of AAHL has not addressed much about AAHL students’ Arabic learning journey at the university level. Within classrooms privileging the teaching of MSA over dialects (Al-Batal, 2018a; Younes, 2018), though this study, I explored AAHL students’ learning, identities and linguistic practices outside and inside Arabic classrooms to help answer the following questions:

1. To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities?

2. How did AAHL students perceive the impact of teaching Modern Standard Arabic on their development of linguistic skills?

3. How did AAHL students perceive the impact of teaching Modern Standard Arabic on their identities as Arab American multilingual speakers?

This study aimed to explore how AAHL students viewed their experience in Arabic language at the university level in relation to their use of Arabic in their home communities in order to achieve three goals: expand the body of knowledge on AAHL students in the field of heritage language teaching, inform theory, and inform instructors and curriculum developers about linguistic support and inclusive practices which AAHL students may need when learning Arabic at the university.

In the following sections, I synthesize my findings and explain their relations to the larger context of my frameworks and literature. In addition, I discuss recommendations and implications of this study on theory, the training, preparation, and practice of Arabic instructors, the field of heritage language teaching, and higher
education support for minoritized students. Finally, I share questions that remain unanswered and next steps for future research.

**Synthesis of Findings**

Four main themes emerged in the data among the four participants that connected to the three research questions. The first theme was the presence of translanguaging for all participants and its relation to the first research question that asked: To what extent did the Arabic language practices in course curricula and instructional practices match those of AAHL students in their home communities? Despite the different levels of prior learning of Arabic and exposure to Arabic they had at home, all four participants engaged in translanguaging between MSA, English, and dialects of Arabic. For Sarah, Fatima, and Khloud, Spanish and Somali were included in their translanguaging repertoire, as well. The artifacts, as well as their daily practices like texting family members and listening to world music, emphasized their translanguaging engagement. Consequently, when Arabic classrooms only allowed for MSA—except for Fatima’s third year colloquial Arabic classes—the answer to the first research question become clear: Arabic language course curricula did not match the speaking practices of the participants, which created a gap between their learning in the Arabic university classes and their communication in their home communities.

The second theme was privileging MSA in Arabic university classes with an over-emphasis on grammar and writing and in its connection with the second research question, which inquired about AAHL students’ perception of how MSA impacted their linguistic skills development. Most of the participants’ instructors focused their
classroom learning on MSA and grammar, leaving less room for colloquial Arabic and speaking. For some of the instructors, the participants reported them not allowing colloquial Arabic altogether in class. Additionally, all participants expressed difficulty learning MSA, repeating the word “difficult” to describe what they experienced learning MSA grammar. Answering the second research question, Fatima and Sarah considered MSA negatively impacting their linguistic skills: they wanted to learn speaking, yet they were almost exclusively taught MSA grammar. However, not all of the participants saw learning MSA in a negative light like Sarah and Fatima. Khloud and M.J. considered learning MSA grammar (written and spoken) important and of value, although at the time of the interviews they wanted to focus more on their speaking. For example, M.J. desired more class time to focus on speaking than grammar, and Khloud would have appreciated more classes offered to teach her spoken dialects. Thus, prioritizing MSA negatively impacted the two participants who had more prior knowledge, and positively impacted the students who had less prior knowledge of Arabic—while stressing their need to learn more speaking.

The third theme was learning speaking skills and acquisition of spoken language as a common goal among participants, which is related to the second research question on how MSA impacted their linguistic skills development, from AAHL students’ perspectives. All four participants desired to develop speaking skills in the Arabic language, and consequently, they all chose to study at the university to reach this goal. Answering the research questions, Fatima and Sarah—who had more prior knowledge of Arabic than Khloud and M.J.—did not perceive learning MSA as assisting their speaking,
which they mainly cared about developing. (For these students, “speaking” meant dialectical Arabic, not spoken MSA.) In contrast, Khloud and M.J. were satisfied with their development of linguistic skills, mostly writing, despite their challenges with speaking. Their struggles with speaking Arabic did not impact their satisfaction with their progress, which was not the case with Fatima and Sarah, who viewed MSA as an obstacle. Thus, prior knowledge of Arabic did play a role in the level of satisfaction about MSA’s role in the linguistic development as AAHL students perceived it. The more prior knowledge Arabic students had before taking Arabic classes, the less satisfied they were with their progress, as the cases of Sarah and Fatima demonstrated.

The fourth theme was the role of prior learning and its impact on identity formation. This theme connects with research question three, which focused on how AAHL students perceived the impact of MSA on their identities as Arab American multilingual speakers. Prior learning played a role in identity formation for the participants. The more prior learning students had before coming to Arabic university classes, the stronger their sense of identity, as in the case of Fatima and Sarah; thus, the classroom had less impact on their perception of their identity. The opposite was true for M.J. and Khloud, leading to the following summative answer to the third research question: For AAHL students who had less prior knowledge of Arabic before taking university Arabic classes, they perceived MSA to have positive impact. In terms of the participants’ identities as speakers of multiple languages, they unanimously agreed that they did not perceive themselves as multilinguals at the time of the study despite all of them having access to Arabic, English and a third language—Spanish for Khloud and
Sarah, Somali for Fatima, and German for M.J. Considering themselves not multilingual means that the participants—on an unconscious level for Khloud and M.J., and with a greater degree of awareness for Sarah and Fatima—did not see MSA as enriching their multilingual abilities at least at the time of this study.

**Situated in a Larger Context**

In this section, I explain the connections between my theoretical frames—CRT and FOI—with the findings as well as the research literature. I discuss the role of prior knowledge in CRT as appearing in the data and the literature. Additionally, I highlight the different types of FOI which the participants demonstrated.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, CRT pedagogy and research aim at distancing learning and teaching from deficit approaches to teaching (Paris, 2012). Prior learning—analogous with FOK—and pedagogy of listening are two pillars for CRT, which both appeared during the interviews and the artifacts. Starting with prior knowledge requires instructors to focus on what students can do and their ways of knowing in order to be academically successful (Gay 2002).

Whether in the interviews or through the artifacts, little to no evidence pointed toward a consistent Arabic classroom learning identifying or building on AAHL students’ prior knowledge of the Arabic language. For example, Sarah was marked down for her homework when she responded correctly because the instructor thought she copied the answers from the answer key. This situation would not have happened if the instructor had known that she received six years of Arabic schooling before taking Arabic at the university. Additionally, she perceived that her peers, who were monolinguals, did better
than her in the class because of their English grammar understanding and the instructor’s use of grammatical terminology to explain Arabic grammar. In her case, her prior knowledge worked against her in her class performance and grades.

The participants did not confirm that their classroom learning was consistently and clearly built on their prior knowledge of Arabic and its culture. For example, the instructor ignored Fatima’s prior knowledge. She mentioned that when she started studying Arabic at the university, a lot of the information was familiar. However, when Fatima took the colloquial Arabic series, it was all new information to her. I argue that in her situation, MSA classes reviewed what she already knew from Islamic school without necessarily adding to her knowledge or understanding. As for M.J. and Khloud, they experienced some moments during class where they connected the words and expressions they learned in class with some of what they heard at home. These moments of connection were absent in Sarah’s case, who took the same class as M.J. but repeatedly said she was not learning anything. Ultimately, participants interviews did not consistently reveal that their classroom experience built on what they know of the Arabic language and culture in their home communities.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, translanguaging is part of students’ prior knowledge. Despite engaging in translanguaging practices prior to and while enrolled in these courses, as this study showed, the classroom practices focused on MSA, which ranged from sidelining MSA (M.J.) to correcting dialects in favor of MSA (Sarah) to prohibiting its use (Khloud). All of the participants who learned under a total of four instructors, except for Fatima who took a colloquial Arabic series, experienced instructors over-
emphasizing MSA and its grammar. Even Fatima experienced this learning situation during her Arabic studies in Islamic school before the university. My study results confirmed the findings of Al-Batal (2018a) and Younes (2018), who discussed the ways Arabic instructors emphasized MSA over dialects in universities.

As a result of privileging MSA at the expense of dialects, translanguaging practices which AAHL students engaged in in their home communities had no place in the participants’ Arabic classrooms. In this study, the classroom linguistic situation allowed for only one form of the Arabic language: MSA. Thus, a gap existed between how students communicated with their friends and family, and how communication happened in the Arabic classroom. I argue that it is difficult to establish a strong and sustainable connection between these students' learning and university learning.

Two main repercussions result from privileging MSA, and not allowing translanguaging between MSA and dialects in the manner educated native Arabic speakers, or between translanguaging between Arabic and other languages. The first repercussion is in relation to creating the ZPD. The second repercussion is regarding language reclamation’s relationship with translanguaging. With respect to the first point, instructors can utilize translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in their curriculum and teaching in order to build on students’ prior knowledge (S. Thorne, personal communication, June 14, 2021). Referring to Chapter 2, translanguaging pedagogy facilitates heritage students to reach ZPD (S. Thorne, personal communication, June 14, 2021). Students can use what they know (e.g., Arabic dialects or English) in order to
learn what they do not know (other Arabic dialects and MSA) through the help of the instructors.

Regarding language reclamation and translanguaging, young people use translanguaging in their lives to protect their identities (Wyman, 2012), which the Arabic classroom dynamics in this study could be denying. As explained in Chapter 2, language reclamation requires “feeling and asserting the prerogative to learn and transmit the language . . . in a way that reflects the community needs and values” (W. Y. Leonard, 2011, pp. 154-155) in addition to acquiring the language. Just like prior learning in CRT, and FOI, language reclamation aims at connecting home with learning at the university. In addition, language reclamation centers youth in its efforts. In fact, youth employ translanguaging and creative expressions in order to preserve their identities and adapt in difficult situations (Wyman, 2012). In this study, with the exception of the colloquial Arabic series which Fatima completed, most of the Arabic classes which the participants in this study took over-emphasized MSA at the expense of supporting the acquisition and use of dialects. Ultimately, the AAHL students in this study did not have a chance to reclaim any of their Arabic language in the ways they used it in their home artifacts. This finding is consistent with another study (Chew et al., 2015) that focused on language reclamation, young people, and university learning. Chew et al.’s ethnographic study explored the experiences of three indigenous graduate students who revealed that their universities did little to create connections with their communities in real, helpful, and direct ways. Thus, the AAHL in this study, like other minority heritage students, experienced diminished language reclamation efforts due to the disconnection between
the learning that happened in university classes and their communities; this disconnect was manifested when translanguaging practices at home had no room in Arabic classes.

Listening, like prior knowledge, is a pillar in CRT learning and a foundation pedagogical tool which FOI emphasizes. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that listening to AAHL students is direly needed as a pedagogical practice in this study’s setting. Although there are many examples that show a need for adopting listening as a pedagogical tool in Arabic classes, I chose two examples as they are most related to privileging MSA. The first example is that all the participants expressed speaking Arabic as their main goal for enrolling in Arabic language university classes. However, all of them—except for the third-year colloquial Arabic classes Fatima took—mostly taught MSA grammar and writing. The second example is correcting students’ use of dialects across classes which the participants—save Fatima—took, including classes that focused solely on speaking. Yet a clear pattern emerged of students using dialects, and instructors correcting that use that revealed a need for listening to AAHL students. What these examples really demonstrate is that the Arabic curriculum and instructors’ pedagogical direction—adopting MSA writing, speaking, and grammar as the main focus in teaching Arabic language—were not aligned with AAHL student participants’ goals and linguistic prior knowledge, creating a critical need for developing a pedagogy of listening to AAHL students.

**FOI in This Study**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, FOI aims at confirming students’ identities (Poole, 2017), and to achieve this goal, educators must take three steps. The first step is
legitimating students’ knowledge, culture, and voices (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2017), as well as the language and skills they possess (Hogg & Volman, 2020). In discussions of the first step, I observed that only two of the participants, Sarah and Khloud, experienced both legitimation—or authorization—and illegitimation in their learning. I explain in Table 6 how these situations occurred for them; these incidents are described in the participants’ profiles in full detail.

The incidents listed in Table 6 show how both instructors’ authorized language use and delegitimized it. Instructor 1 and 2 privileged MSA use, while delegitimating colloquial Arabic speaking among students. Consequently, Khloud and Sarah did not feel they could use their dialects. Sarah was angry and frustrated about not being able to use Syrian, while Khloud accepted it. However, Khloud realized that she needed to study it for her travels in the Arab world because she cannot be fluent without it. This study confirms what Al-Batal (2018a) and Younes (2018) explained, namely that Arabic language curricula and instructional practices in universities tend to privilege the teaching of MSA over dialects. Thus, illegitimation as “process of removing or denying power” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 387) took place in several classes Sarah and Khloud took when colloquial Arabic was used.
### Table 6

**Authorization and Illegitimation Experiences of the Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactics of Intersubjectivity Occurring in the Arabic Classroom</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Kh loud</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legitimation/authorization</strong></td>
<td>When she experienced learning Arabic with instructor 3 who did not correct her use of Syrian Arabic; she was proud of her progress and shared it with her father in her first year of Arabic at the university.</td>
<td>When instructor 2 complimented her on her writing and validated her progress, mentioning that her writing was much superior to the level she was studying.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Illegitimation**                                                | - When instructor 2 corrected her use of the Syrian dialect favoring MSA use, despite giving the students the options to choose between MSA, Syrian and Egyptian  
  - Her perception that instructor 2 “blocked” the use of colloquial Arabic altogether from their teaching |  - When she witnessed instructor 1 consistently correcting the use of dialects used by her AAHL peers; the instructor continued requesting students to correct what they said in dialects by using MSA in the speaking class.  
  - Her perception that she cannot use dialects when communicating formally with her instructors 1 & 2; and only MSA is the register to use with them  
  - When instructor 4 returned her composition with excessive red markings. Following this, she felt she was not as good as she thought in Arabic. |

In addressing the issue of illegitimation of dialect use in Arabic language classes, Joseph (2004) clarified a crucial point about standard language purposes. He explained that standard languages are artificial, and, thus, maintaining standard languages necessitates having institutions like schools, dictionaries, examinations, rewards, punishments, and other establishments (Joseph, 2004) to make standard languages a real, if artificially imposed, medium in speakers’ lives—such as MSA being standard when
colloquial Arabic is the language of everyday life. In fact, MSA has limited uses and is rarely spoken with consistency without using dialectal words and structures. For some, MSA is not a spoken language (R. Bassiouney, personal communication, August, 17, 2020), meaning MSA is a performative, rather than conversational language for native Arabic speakers. Thus, when some instructors privilege MSA use in the class, they could be denying students’ learning to communicate and speak the way native Arabic speakers interact.

**Discontinuity Between Class Learning and Participants’ Prior Knowledge and Lives**

The second step in FOI—as stated in Chapter 2—is having a connection between students’ lives and their learning through building on their prior knowledge (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2017). FOI and CRT center students’ lived experiences and prior knowledge in building empowering pedagogies. Overall, a continuous and consistent relationship between learning Arabic in the classroom and the participants’ lives was entirely absent. Although only M.J. and Khloud highlighted that they experienced moments where they realized some of the words and expressions they learned in class were said to them in their households, Khloud straightforwardly denied any connections between her classroom learning and how she communicated with her family.

In a similar vein, M.J. did not directly confirm that a connection existed between her classroom learning and her communication with her family. For Sarah, she repeated that she was not learning anything in the class, and for Fatima, the colloquial Arabic classes were the peak of her Arabic learning. She said that she would translanguage into
colloquial Arabic with her friends when she was studying colloquial Arabic. As a result, the participants did not confirm a continuity between their learning in the university Arabic classes and how they communicated in their home communities, except for Fatima’s colloquial Arabic classes. What this means is that the first step in FOI and a pillar in CRT, building on students’ prior learning and continuity between learning and students’ lives, was not utilized in the Arabic classroom at the case studies setting. Peto (2018b) reported a similar lack of continuity in Spanish heritage language teaching, saying, "if there is one area where many schools fall short, it is probably in developing strong home-school interactions" (p. 130). Paired with Peto’s observations, these findings suggest a need for heritage language education that fosters FOI’s and CRT’s goals of connecting learning formally with students’ lives.

Motivation: The Less Prior Learning the Participants Had, the More They Were Invested in Learning Arabic

In Chapter 2, I explained that the third step to reach FOI’s purpose of affirming students’ identities (Poole, 2017) and empowering learners is: motivating students in their learning (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2017) and developing their new identities (Poole, 2017). I first discuss the data in relation to motivating the participants, then explain the data in regards to identity development. Table 7 demonstrates the relationship between prior learning and its impact on students’ investment in learning Arabic, along with the impacts of both on the participants' identities.
Table 7
Participants’ Prior Learning and Motivation Before Taking Arabic University Classes, and Their Investment and Identity Development After Taking Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior learning of Arabic before taking university Arabic classes</th>
<th>Motivation to learn Arabic before taking Arabic university classes</th>
<th>Investment after studying taking Arabic university classes</th>
<th>Impacts on identity after taking Arabic university classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fatima 6 years in Islamic school</td>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>Less invested and decided not to pursue Arabic minor</td>
<td>Not significant; she still viewed herself as a Somali Black woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah 6 years in Islamic school</td>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>Significantly less invested and decided not to pursue Arabic minor</td>
<td>Not significant; she still viewed herself as Arab and Latinx. She resisted any labeling by her Arabic speaking peers who told her she was not Arab because she did not speak Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khloud Only learned how to read aloud without decoding what was read</td>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>Very invested and motivated to continue studying Arabic and specializing in it</td>
<td>More comfortable in her identity as an Egyptian Middle Easterner; however, she viewed herself as an outsider because of her speaking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.J. None (The least among the participants)</td>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>Very invested and motivated to continue studying Arabic and specializing in it</td>
<td>Transformational—started identifying herself as Middle Eastern for the first time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As explained in Chapter 2, there is a difference between language learners' investment in a language and their motivation to learn it according to Norton (2013). Students can be very motivated in learning a language; however, some learning environments can negatively impact learners’ language investment (Norton, 2013). From Table 7 it is clear that all the participants were motivated to learn the Arabic language and found the university Arabic classroom as a precious opportunity to either continue learning and/or improving their Arabic. In other words, they had strong hopes to learn
Arabic when they electively enrolled in Arabic language classes. Another point Table 7 demonstrates is how the participants who had the least prior knowledge (M.J. and Khloud) continued to be invested in learning Arabic and pursuing it, while the students with the most prior knowledge (Fatima and Sarah) dropped their Arabic minor despite having plans to complete it. Both Fatima and Sarah did not see value in pursuing classes that offered only MSA, without colloquial Arabic to facilitate their learning to speak the way their families speak.

These findings shed new light on how Arabic classes in this study setting were designed for first time language learners of Arabic. M.J. and Khloud were almost like new language learners with their limited prior knowledge of Arabic, and they excelled the most. The findings of this study expand on what Li and Duff (2008) highlighted (noted in Chapter 1) regarding how foreign language textbooks are unsuited for heritage language students in North America; this study argues that this misfit extends to the curriculum and pedagogy.

With regard to identity development after taking Arabic classes at the university, my findings showed a clear pattern. The less prior knowledge, the more transformative Arabic classes were, as in the case of M.J. and to a lesser extent Khloud. Khloud felt more comfortable with who she was after studying MSA for a few years at the university, but still experienced an outsider identity to being Middle Eastern. This, in fact, relates to what Peto (2018a) highlighted regarding his Spanish adolescent heritage students, saying that their speaking abilities in Spanish were tied to their sense of identity. Although the participants in this study were not adolescents, Peto’s experience with Spanish students
seem to resonate with the young adult participants in this research. Table 7 and Chapter 4 showed that the more prior knowledge students had, the less impactful MSA learning was. In fact, some damage was inflicted on Sarah, in that she continued to defend her Arabic identity when her friends told her she was not Arab because of her limited Arabic speaking skills. These findings affirm that participants’ Arabic university classrooms were designed for first time language learners, and not for AAHL students with extensive prior knowledge of Arabic and its cultures. Accordingly, FOI’s goals of motivating students in Arabic classes in this study failed the students with strong prior knowledge, and had a profoundly detrimental effect on their development as Arab Americans, possibly halting—and in Sarah's case even reversing—their identity development.

**FOI Types**

*FOI Types Appearing in the Data*

In Chapter 2, I detailed the FOI types and here, I explain the ones that occurred in the data. I focus on the geographical, cultural, practical, digital and existential. The lands, regions, countries, landscapes, rivers and other locations which students affiliate themselves with are geographical FOI (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). As for the cultural FOI, the term defines the artifacts—like tools and symbols—that form students’ experiences; for example, smart phones, religious symbols, gender, language, and the like (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Practical FOI refers to students’ hobbies and activities that are meaningful to them, which include music, sports, and work (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Regarding the existential FOI, it is used to point to the negative experiences which students go through that could be unnoticed in the classroom and learning settings (Poole & Huang, 2018).
Lastly, digital FOI refers to the use of technology through which young people develop new identities and share them with others, which occurs often out of formal learning settings (Poole, 2017). Table 8 reports the types of FOI I observed in the data.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOI Types Appearing in the Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S., Somalia, and Dubai (UAE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria, U.S., and Spanish speaking world including Spain and Latin America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S., Egypt, Maghreb region, and Spanish speaking communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S., Germany, and Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural (including religious symbols, tools, social categories, age, ethnic group, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing a headscarf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting the category: not an “Arab heritage speaker” but embracing “speaker of Arabic”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing a headscarf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting the category: “Arab heritage speaker” to describe herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not accepting the category “heritage speaker”; she does not let herself identify with it because of her speaking abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting the category: “Arab heritage speaker” to describe herself, despite her emerging speaking abilities—she emphasized her cultural and heritage affiliations as the main category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to Somali and Arabic music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to Spanish and Arabic music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother and family cook Syrian and Latin American dishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in Arabic-related events on and off campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to Arabic and world music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in Arabic-related events on and off campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to Arabic and world music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking Syrian dishes with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating on Twitter, and communicating with Arab and Somali friends in group texts in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being part of group texts with Syrian family members in Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passively participating in group texts with Egyptian friends and family in Egypt—wanting to participate but linguistically she cannot because of not knowing colloquial Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Instagram to connect with other Arabs and practice reading Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving some of her grandparents’ names in Arabic in her cell phone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Khloud</th>
<th>M.J.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existential</td>
<td>Avoiding studying MSA and grammar by taking colloquial Arabic classes when offered; her learning Arabic at the university ended on a positive note</td>
<td>Struggling learning grammar and continuing getting low grades; cannot use her dialect in class. She felt she was not learning</td>
<td>Pleased with her learning and progress; proud of her writing skills; aware of the need to learn colloquial Arabic; could not speak with her father who did not know MSA; feels like an outsider to her Arab identity because of not being able to speak</td>
<td>Pleased with her learning and progress; proud of her writing skills; waiting to learn about Arabic culture in future classes; hoping that more time in class would be dedicated to speaking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 demonstrates the rich and diverse FOI AAHL students in this study brought to university Arabic classrooms, which contradicts the uni-dimensional experience they actually had in Arabic classes. In addition, Table 8 points to emerging identities using technology—texting and using social media—which some of these students used to learn and practice Arabic, connect with their families and beyond in the Arab world, and affirm their identities. Simply, AAHL students in this study were global citizens in the true sense of the term. Their complex and rich FOI is juxtaposed with many classes that were focused on one level of Arabic when privileging MSA. That is, an imbalance exists in these students’ learning environments, where their lives were rich with Arabic—and other languages and dialects—whereas Arabic classrooms overemphasized mostly MSA. In this way, achieving a balance and continuity between AAHL students’ wealth of knowledge and their classroom learning would likely result in a more meaningful learning experience for them.
Implications and Recommendations

In the following section, I discuss the implications of this study on theory. I also share recommendations for Arabic instructors and Arabic training programs. Furthermore, I include recommendations for higher education and heritage language studies.

Implications for Theory

This research has implications for the FOI approach. Although many kinds of FOI exist, none to my knowledge and at the time of this study’s publication include a separate FOI focused on language resources students bring to the classrooms. Esteban-Guitart (2016) embedded language among social categories, age, and religious symbols under cultural FOI. However, I argue that the FOI approach needs to include linguistic/language FOI as a separate type in order to analyze data that include translanguaging and complex linguistic situations. Furthermore, adding linguistic FOI decreases blind spots for researchers and educators, maximizing the visibility for the linguistic repertoires students have and develop. The term “cultural FOI” is too general to include language under it.

Recommendations for Arabic Teaching and Training Instructors

Based on the findings of this study, the Arabic teaching field and instructors' preparation can incorporate the following recommendations. I include four steps that the training and practice of Arabic instructors need to incorporate based on CRT and FOI’s pillars. I suggest how translanguaging can be used in the Arabic classroom. In addition, I detail a balanced approach to teaching Arabic that includes MSA, dialects, and translanguaging. Finally, I recommend for instructors' preparation and professional
development to raise awareness of the urgency and social justice importance of including AAHL students’ FOK in the curriculum.

**Utilizing CRT and FOI’s Stress on Prior Learning and FOK**

Instructors of Arabic and training programs need to incorporate CRT’s and FOI’s principles, with a focus on building on students’ prior knowledge, especially when preparing the curriculum for mixed classes. In these classes, AAHL students are taught alongside those learning language for the first time, as is the case with most Arabic programs in the U.S. Inspired by guiding pillars of CRT and FOI, I recommend the following four main steps that instructors and training programs can include and develop.

The first step is designing a mechanism for knowing student’s prior knowledge before or during teaching the students, to identify AAHL’s FOK and linguistic repertoires. This can be done through short interviews before the term starts, or early in the term. Another option is to include surveys at the beginning of the term for the same purpose. This information can then be incorporated in the curriculum. Thereby, instructors would be equipped to validate these students' knowledge during learning.

The second step is developing more hands-on approaches for different students’ levels that build on students' prior knowledge. This can be done through incorporating differentiated classroom instruction with students in mixed classrooms. The third step is integrating the pedagogy of listening in CRT and its principles in the preparation of instructors. Hands-on approaches for incorporating listening—despite challenges in teaching—need to be part of training for Arabic instructors. The trainings can aim at practical advice for implementing the steps for listening in CRT to give students focused
attention when they speak; develop an understanding of the fe*elings behind students’ words; withhold judgment when listening; and respect the various cultural backgrounds from which students emerge and express in the classroom (Hammond & Jackson, 2015).

The fourth step is making space in the curriculum and teaching time for AAHL students to share the connections they make in class with their lives. It can be as simple as sharing with the class when they make a connection with what they are learning and their home communities, and making the learning environment ready for such participatory moments. But, instructors can also encourage, assign and/or welcome journal entries, identity texts, and other creative multimodal tasks where students can share who they are, and the connections they are forming between their classroom learning and their lives.

**How Translanguaging Can be Used in the Arabic Classroom**

The findings of this study point toward a crisis some AAHL students experience when they are not allowed to use their dialects in the Arabic classroom. Translanguaging can be used as a pedagogical tool to honor and build on the complexity of knowledge AAHL students come with to Arabic classrooms. As mentioned, translanguaging helps students reach the ZPD, where they use their prior knowledge of dialects or English as a steppingstone to learn what they do not know. Thus, instructors, using the information they acquired about students’ prior knowledge, are highly recommended to allow translanguaging between Arabic dialects, English, and MSA to take place into their classrooms in order to empower AAHL students to believe in their abilities to learn Arabic. Moreover, translanguaging practices in the classrooms can allow for students’
healing in case of past trauma where some could have wrongfully labeled as unable to learn Arabic. In fact, I urge instructors of Arabic to revise their approaches of privileging MSA, and head toward a balanced approach of teaching MSA and dialect(s), along with allowing translanguaging.

In addition to incorporating translanguaging into teaching Arabic, instructors and teaching training programs need to develop an understanding that translanguaging is part of the new diverse linguistic reality in the Arab world and among Arab American youth. This understanding will lead into designing curricula that connect AAHL students’ lives with classroom learning. This linguistic reality is based on translanguaging, global connections, social-media linguistic practices, and multilingual speakers’ communicative repertoire. Consequently, native and non-native instructor of Arabic must adapt and consider such questions as: How much knowledge do I have of how my students speak in their communities? How can the curriculum bridge the gap between MSA and students’ linguistic practices to teach what students do not know, while incorporating what they do know? How can instructors support students who speak dialects that the instructors’ do not know? Although this research does not provide immediate answers to these questions, it manifested students’ struggles when these issues were not resolved. Moreover, this research urges training programs and instructors to think, adapt, research, and plan for such challenges and opportunities, which the diverse linguistic reality among Arab American youth present in the university Arabic classroom.
Toward a Balanced Approach to Teaching Arabic. I urge Arabic instructors to think of incorporating a balanced approach, where MSA, along with Arabic dialect(s), are given pedagogical respect. The goals of this balance are having Arabic classrooms that reflect the communicative realities of the Arab world and honoring AAHL students’ linguistic diversities in order for them to succeed in Arabic classes. As a result, any approach to teaching Arabic needs to include a three-part dynamic in instructing the language: teaching a dialect (or more), teaching MSA alongside one or more dialects, and allowing for translanguaging between them and English. Instructors of Arabic should guide students into developing an intercomprehension of MSA, similar to the linguistic reality of educated native speakers of Arabic, meaning students will understand MSA but not necessarily produce it in written or spoken form. Intercomprehension is “a form of plurilingual communication in which those who participate in the event do not speak the languages of their interlocutor but understand them and speak the language(s) they know” (Bonvino et al., 2018, p. 2). For example, students will learn to read MSA but not necessarily speak it. Additionally, instructors can introduce MSA vocabulary, which educated native Arabic speakers use in their conversations, while allowing for colloquial forms in which the MSA vocabulary is used, reflecting how educated native speakers speak in their daily interactions.

Raising Awareness Among Arabic Instructors of Social Justice Issues When Teaching AAHL Students. Finally, it is urgent to include in Arabic instructors’ preparation the awareness and implications of not incorporating AAHL student FOK and prior learning in their classes. Additionally, concepts like language reclamation and
healing for heritage students need to be at the forefront of such instructors’ training. For example, in the case of training for Spanish language instructors, the University of Minnesota training focuses on critical approaches to heritage language education for educators led by Dr. Jenna Cushing-Leubner and J. Diggs, assisting faculty in helping students reclaim their language and heal. It is crucial that instructors understand the consequences of not allowing AAHL students to be empowered to use their varieties, alongside MSA, in the classrooms, as a result of privileging MSA teaching and grammar. Colloquial Arabic and dialects are as important as MSA and allow speakers to express themselves in a similar way to MSA, if not more so. Thus, while the teaching of MSA should not be eliminated from the Arabic curriculum, privileging MSA over dialects and its impact on AAHL students’ learning must be critically interrogated in Arabic instruction training.

**Recommendations for Higher Education**

Higher education and universities' plans for inclusion need to implement in practical terms FOI’s and CRT’s focus on creating continuity between classroom learning and students’ lives. This continuity is pivotal for minoritized students’ learning and sense of self. Students in this study emphasized in particular the role of culture clubs and groups and culture events on campus, along with communities on campus, to help them connect socially and thrive.

**Recommendations for Heritage Language Teaching and Learning Field**

The heritage languages field needs to consider the consequences of the labels “heritage speakers” and “Arab heritage students,” as well as develop additional terms to
describe Somali and non-Arab affiliating students. In fact, I urge Arabic heritage languages experts to experiment with different labels and terms to refer to the various student populations with Arabic heritage we are teaching. This is a very complex issue as the term heritage speakers alienated Khloud, who did not see herself as a speaker of Arabic, while the term Arab heritage students did not resonate with Fatima, who did not see herself as Arab, despite including Somalia as one of the 22 Arab countries. However, Sarah and M.J. embraced both terms without any reservations. When I asked Khloud to share her perceptions on terms like “students affiliated with Arabic” or “students with Arab roots,” she found them appealing and applicable to her, while Fatima accepted “Arabic speaker” to represent her, and rejected the other two. I acknowledge that this issue is very complex. As I explained in Chapter 1, defining heritage students is an unclear process and is marked by “definitional fuzziness” (Duff, 2008, p. 108) because heritage language literature defines students either based on ethnic and sociopolitical perspective, or on students’ existing competence of the language and their family connections to it (Li & Duff & Li, 2008). Adding to this complexity, my study shows that students define themselves differently than their instructors or their programs. Thus, I invite experts in the field to allow multiple terms to describe those students we currently refer to as heritage Arabic speakers even if it means a longer title(s). However, with the goal to include as many students as possible and make them feel a sense of belonging in Arabic classes, I recommend that field experts pursue an inclusive label(s) of our AAHL students’ diverse populations.
Unanswered Questions and Future Research

First, it is important to stress that these research findings need to be explored with respect to larger populations. The four cases in this study only represent themselves.

Second, this study has generated many unanswered questions that invite future research. Such questions include:

1. How do instructors of Arabic perceive mixed classes of heritage and non-heritage students?

2. How do heritage students experience the transition between learning Arabic in Islamic schools and university Arabic classes?

3. To what extent do heritage students’ parents shape their views when learning Arabic?

I urge future researchers to consider and pursue research to investigate these questions, and how heritage Arabic teaching field can learn from other heritage languages, such as Chinese and Spanish. Additionally, I propose conducting additional studies that examine the enactment of the central principles of FOI and CRT in university Arabic classrooms, and their impact on AAHL students’ identities. These future studies can include instructors’ perspectives and their understanding of AAHL students’ learning goals, motivations, and hopes when learning Arabic. Future studies need to include both qualitative and quantitative methods to uncover additional beneficial insights as related to AAHL learning and identity development.

Conclusion

Shoman (2016) highlighted that little research on Arab American students at the university level exists. My study aimed at increasing the body of knowledge about AAHL students, their learning, and their identity development in relation to their acquisition of
Arabic in university classrooms. Through the multiple case studies discussed in this study, I uncovered how prior learning was a factor among the participants in their feeling of fulfillment in learning, investment in continuing to study Arabic, and impact on their identities as Arab Americans. The less prior knowledge AAHL students had, the more likely they could successfully navigate Arabic classes, revealing that Arabic classrooms in this setting were mainly designed for first language learners of Arabic. Moreover, the participants shared their classroom experiences that indicated a dire need among instructors of Arabic to learn and train in CRT practices and FOI’s identity approaches to minimize unnecessarily (and, often, unintentional) harmful learning experiences for AAHL students. In fact, many of the issues facing AAHL students of Arabic stemmed from instructors' privileging MSA and focusing on its grammar, while AAHL participants' main learning goal in this study was speaking with their families and friends. Thus, most of the university Arabic classrooms in this research became a space where some AAHL students were hoping or expecting to learn spoken Arabic, whereas others gave up learning or avoided learning MSA altogether.

As a result, Arabic educators and instructors' preparation programs, together with universities and experts in the heritage language fields, need to: (a) create a balanced approach to teaching MSA, engaging dialect(s), and incorporating translanguaging; (b) create a continuity between minoritized students’ lives and their learning in universities generally and in Arabic classrooms specifically; and (c) respect, honor, and build on AAHL students’ languages, dialects, and prior learning that they possess when they enroll in Arabic classes. These recommendations, among others detailed in this chapter,
can affirm AAHL students’ beliefs in their language abilities, increase their enrollment, and help them develop a strong Arab American multilingual identity that aids in establishing and developing a healthy pluralistic society.
References


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Appendix A

Participant Information Letter and In-Depth Interview Questions

Dear participant,

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this research study. This study is designed to learn about your experiences learning Arabic at [name of the university] and your Arabic use in your home community. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions I will ask. You have the right to refuse at any point to answer any of my questions you feel uncomfortable answering. Additionally, you may choose to withdraw from this research study at any point, with no penalty or consequence. You will be compensated with a $25 gift card after each interview.

I will be using a semi-structured interviews protocol for the two times we meet. After answering the questions, I may ask you a follow-up question to clarify your response. The purpose of my research is to explore Arab American heritage students’ classroom experiences in relation to their use of Arabic in their home communities, and their linguistic development as well as their identity formation. In the first interview, I will ask you to bring two or more items used in the classroom, such as a textbook, a written assignment(s), an audio/video you used or created, etc. Simply choose any meaningful object you used in the Arabic classroom and feel comfortable sharing with me. In the second interview, I will ask you to share any written text you have composed at home or with friends or family. This text can be from social media posts or texting with friends and family or other writing done at home that is meaningful to you and you feel comfortable sharing with me.

The data from this interview will be used as part of my final dissertation research. Your name and all personal identifying information will be removed before sharing any of my research findings. You will have access to the interview transcription files at any time. I will also share the transcriptions of the interview with you to make sure it was transcribed accurately.
First Interview: Learning about the Participants’ Life History and Details of Their Lived Experience

We will begin with the following questions:

1. What is your name? (students can choose their own pseudonym)

2. What is your major and minor?

3. Which level of Arabic are you currently taking or have recently studied?

4. Do you speak a dialect in Arabic or are you familiar with one of the Arabic dialects? If yes, which one?
   a. Do you have connections with the Arab world? Any family members who speak or understand different varieties of Arabic language?
      i. Are they living in the U.S. or abroad?
      ii. Do they use Arabic in their daily lives? How often do they use Arabic?
      iii. How many generations has your family been in the U.S.?
      iv. Are there any monolingual speakers of English or of Arabic or other languages in your family?

(1) And how are they communicating with the outer world?

5. In which language(s) do you communicate with family members and friends? And why?
   a. What languages do you use when communicating using texts, social media, and at home?
      i. Where are the people you communicate with living?
      ii. What kind of social media do you use?
   b. What kind of music do you listen to? And in which languages?
   c. What appeals to you about this kind/these kinds of music?

6. Tell me about your choice of studying Arabic.
   a. What kind of knowledge did you have about Arabic before joining Arabic classes at the university?
b. Have you studied or do you speak other languages?

c. Was Arabic your first choice of a language to study?

d. What are your goals in studying Arabic?

e. What motivated you to study Arabic? Had you studied Arabic before you started studying it at [university]?

f. Did your family or others you know directly or indirectly encourage you to study Arabic? How?

i. Did anyone directly or indirectly discourage you from studying the language? Why/how?

7. How would you describe your learning journey with the Arabic language?

8. How would you describe your classroom experience learning Arabic? And why?

a. What is the most engaging aspect of the classroom experience?

b. What is the least engaging aspect of the classroom experience?

9. How comfortable are you in speaking and writing in your home dialect in your Arabic classes? And why?

10. How do you feel about your instructors’ response to your use of your home dialect in class?

11. Can you think of a story that happened to you when you were learning Arabic that is memorable to you?

12. In what ways is your learning Arabic, from your perspective, similar to or different to other students who do not have connections with the Arab world through family?

13. Describe a bit about your experience using Arabic in the Arabic classroom and with your friends and family. How would you characterize them?

a. If you could change one thing about the Arabic classes you had, what would it be?

14. What has been the most challenging part of learning Arabic?

15. What has been the most rewarding part of learning Arabic?

16. Anything you would like to add?
Second Interview: Reflecting on Participants’ Meaning of Their Experience

1. How do you perceive your Arabic learning progress after joining Arabic classes at [name of the university]?

2. What is it like to learn Arabic in the classroom and communicating with family and friends at home and on social media?

3. How would you describe a multilingual person?

4. How would you describe an Arab American?

5. How would you describe your identity with respect to ethnicity and race?
   a. Would you use “Arab American” to describe yourself? Why/why not?
   b. Would you use “White” to describe yourself? why/why not?
   c. Would you use “a multilingual person” to describe yourself? Why/Why not?

6. What is it like to be an Arab American in the Arabic language classroom at [University name]?
   a. Can you tell me a story or a memorable experience from class or outside of it that was meaningful to you?

7. Did your experience in the Arabic classroom helped you learn about Arab Americans that you did not know before?
   a. How do you think Arabic classes might do a better job of helping both Arab Americans and students of Arabic generally learn about the situation of Arab Americans?

8. Do you plan to continue studying Arabic at [university name]? Why (not)?
   a. Do you plan to continue to study Arabic after your graduation?
   b. If yes, what motivates you to continue? If not, why do you think you will not continue studying Arabic?

9. Do you think your experience studying Arabic at [university name] has affected your sense of identity?
   a. If yes, how?
b. If not, why do you think not?

c. Did you expect studying Arabic would make a difference? Why or why not?

10. Has your experience studying Arabic at the university affected your view of yourself as someone who speaks multiple languages? Did you expect this to happen?

11. In what ways do you think Arabic instructors, Arabic textbooks, and classroom activities can better benefit Arab American students who know Arabic before joining classes?

   a. What are the practices in the Arabic classroom that are the most meaningful to you? And why?

   b. What are the practices in the Arabic classroom that are the least meaningful to you? And why?

12. If you were to teach Arabic at [university name]? what would you do for your Arab American students to help them have a rewarding learning experience?

13. Anything else you would like to add?