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# The language policy of trilingual transnational families living between Antioch, Paris and Berlin

*Suat Istanbullu*

## Abstract

In this article I analyze the family language policy of trilingual transnational families (Arabic, Turkish, French or German) through a comparative study of their intergenerational language practices in France and Germany. This study is based on a multi-sited ethnography, with recordings of individual interviews and socially situated heterogeneous language practices involving two families of three generations with similar trajectories and socioeconomic and linguistic profiles. The analyses of their language practices demonstrate that family language policy is based on individual freedom of choice; it is not explicit, fixed or rigid but unconstrained and fluctuating. With respect to the inherited familial languages, contrary to expectations, I observe that they are maintained relatively well, especially in the case of Arabic; this is true even for the youngest participants, the third generation. I show that the factor supporting the maintenance of Arabic in the third generation is the grandparents' alignment with the youngest participants' language choice as well as their caring attitude, expressed mainly in Arabic, but also, though less regularly, in Turkish.

**KEYWORDS:** family language policy, trilingual families, transnational families, intergenerational language practices, linguistic variation, multilingualism, corpus linguistics

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## 1 Introduction

While considerable research exists on the languages spoken by Turkish migrants living in Europe (Akinci and Akin, 2003; Backus, 2006; Yılmaz and Schmid, 2012) and Australia (Yağmur, 1997, 2006), few studies are dedicated to their Family Language Policy (FLP) (but see Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yağmur, 2018a, 2018b). They address the acquisition of the national, majority and dominant language (van Tubergen and Wierenga, 2011), or the maintenance of the so-called heritage or familial language, Turkish (Yağmur and Akinci, 2003; Willard, Agache, Jäkel, Glück and Leyendecker, 2015; Biedinger, Becker and Klein, 2015; Bayram and Wright, 2017). They also focus on the effects of contact with the majority language (Backus, 1992; Queen, 2001; Backus, Demirçay and Sevinç, 2013), on the consequences for the status of the language that sometimes becomes a lingua franca (Auer, 2003; Dirim and Auer, 2012), and on educational issues (Akinci, 2010). All these studies concern bilingual families (heritage language vs. national language). Very few address the situation of families in which more than one inherited language is present in the linguistic repertoire.<sup>1</sup>

On the contrary, this article documents the FLP of transnational families where two inherited languages, Arabic and Turkish, coexist in addition to the national language of the country of primary residence, French or German. Their older members were bilingual speakers in Turkey, with Arabic as first language of socialization and Turkish learnt at school or in contact,<sup>2</sup> and have become multilingual in France or Germany. What kind of FLP can be observed and how is it developed between three generations in these families with members having diversified repertoires? By observing intergenerational interactions, how does the FLP present itself and how is it inferred?

The first part of this article is a review of the literature on FLP. The second part explains the methodology used in fieldwork and data collection. The third part gives examples of statements collected during individual interviews about the subjects' relation to languages and their transmission. The fourth part is an analysis of participants' ordinary practices, giving particular attention to the micro-alignments between the first-generation and third-generation participants. The last part is an analysis of the affective expressions which strengthen communication among the members of the different generations.

## 2 Family language policy

The Family Language Policy field of research developed during the 2000s (King and Fogle, 2013; Curdt-Christiansen, 2013) after pioneering studies (Deprez, 1996) aimed at understanding families' attitudes toward languages and their

motivations with respect to language practices (King, Fogle and Loga-Terry, 2008; Spolsky, 2009, 2012; Schwartz and Verschik, 2013). Researchers initially focused on societal questions and ideology at the macro-sociolinguistic level (Spolsky, 2004; Wright, 2004). They have viewed FLP as a kind of waterfall with the state at the highest level, which enacts laws that shape the linguistic landscape, implemented then through institutions like administrations and schools which operate as a means to reach the families who are experimenting these laws in their society. On a more micro-level, FLP focuses on families' beliefs about languages and their uses, on their management, and on their efforts and strategies for maintaining and developing particular language resources (Spolsky, 2004, 2012), showing numerous factors influencing FLP and operating both outside and inside the family, linked to societal reality but also to affective reality (Tannenbaum, 2012).

How language is managed within families is one of the most important questions in FLP research: whether it is done explicitly, clearly, and consciously, with planning and implementation (see especially Spolsky, 2004, 2009, 2012), or more implicitly, without discussing what families want or what they do (Deprez, 1996:35). In this 'dynamic system', parents, grandparents, and any others who interact with a multilingual family play an important role, and everyone involved may have an impact of some kind (King and Fogle, 2013). Members of the same family may make different choices, influenced by a different ideology, for a variety of reasons, according to their age, rank, position, and status. Distinct roles for different family members have also been demonstrated, in the case of fathers and mothers (Evans, 1987; Harrison, Bellin and Brech'hed, 1981), children (Deprez, 1996; Tuominen, 1999; de Houwer, 2007), children's friendship networks (Deprez, 1996; Caldas, 2006), and their wider circle (Barontini, 2013).

Research has also shown that ideologies and beliefs about languages and language practices within the family influence FLP, with significant consequences for the children (Spolsky, 2012), 'and collectively determine the maintenance and future status of minority languages' (King, Fogle and Loga-Terry, 2008:907). These beliefs are woven into the recent or more distant history of the family in its sociological, economic, political, and religious context. The degree of success of transmission of a heritage language seems also to depend on the status of the language in the country of origin in which it is the majority, official language (Yates and Terraschke, 2013).

On the one hand, a number of families view the heritage language as a form of capital and transmit it effectively (Curd-Christiansen, 2009:351). Attachment to the heritage language is often associated with belonging to a high social class, stemming from an advanced education (Canagarajah, 2008). From another

perspective, some parents fear harmful consequences, such as ‘delayed language acquisition and/or social exclusion, if they use multiple languages with their children’ (Ghimenton, 2015:116), which pushes them to join the mainstream language (Canagarajah, 2008). Some families make a different choice, abandoning the dominant language of the country they have left in order to adopt what was a minority language there, a choice supported by the family still living in their former country (Zhu and Li, 2016).

The feature common to many of the families studied is that they are split between the desire to live in a society and be totally accepted by it on the one hand, while on the other hand they still want to practice their inherited language: they are caught between new acceptance and old loyalties.

The literature on FLP covers mainly the ideological and practical aspects. Studies on the role of affection in the FLP is missing (as underlined by Tannenbaum, 2012, who followed a psychoanalytic theoretical framework, discussing studies about the relations to the languages). But these studies are not based on three-generational interviews and an intergenerational interactional corpus, like the one presented here, where the aim is to see what FLP, if any, is followed, and how it appears through the interactions between three generations of the same families.

### **3 Methodology: collection of interviews and ordinary language practices**

For this study I took a transnational ethnographic approach, staying at the homes of the families in order to talk with them and observe and record their ordinary interactions. I chose transnational families who continue to move regularly between two (or sometimes more) countries (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc, 1995). In the interests of getting comparative data, I chose families living in several locations: the Greater Paris region in France or Berlin in Germany (as their primary residence), and Antioch<sup>3</sup> in southern Turkey, where the oldest family members were born and lived before coming to Europe, and where the whole family returns regularly depending on their options, preferences and status (retired, working, in school).

#### **3.1 Individual interviews for understanding FLP**

I met family members individually, asking them a series of open questions about their personal biography and language biography (Thamin and Simon, 2011; Nekvapil, 2003), focusing on their relationship to languages. The questions related to FLP were formulated differently according to the subject’s generation,

status and rank in the family: I asked for different information depending on where each lived (in Turkey, France or Germany), starting with their parentage and spouses and continuing to their offspring (children, grandchildren) if there were any. For example:

In which language(s) do you speak to your mother?

In which language(s) does your mother speak to you?

I asked the same questions about father, grandfather, grandmother, children, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, cousins and so on. Then I asked:

What do you think about languages?

What do you think about your heritage/familial languages, Arabic and Turkish?

Where and with whom do you speak Arabic? Turkish? French? German? Why?

I expanded the questions to subjects other than the family, to find out if they read books or newspapers, listened to the radio or music or watched TV or movies, and if so, which ones, why and in what languages; if they went to Turkey, to Antioch, how often, for how long and for what reason; what languages they spoke, with whom and where (in the private family space, in the public space, in stores). Through this detailed approach to asking questions I collected diverse answers from members of the same family, for example: 'To my grandmother I speak French/German, sometimes Arabic, a little, not a lot, I have trouble', then 'My grandmother speaks to me in Arabic and French because I don't understand everything in Arabic'.

These individual interviews were intended to bring out what different family members thought about languages in general and their use of languages in their family in particular, to get at the question of the practice of familial languages, their transmission or non-transmission and of what they think, what they (think they) do and finally how they (think they) do it. The statements were collected from grandparents, their children and grandchildren, that is to say three generations of the same family.

### **3.2 Recording ordinary language practices**

The men in these families, who were already married with children, began to leave Turkey either for Germany in the late 1960s or France in the early 1970s. They were reunited with their wives and children over a period of several years. The first- and second-generation<sup>4</sup> family members described a 'difficult, poor' situation in Turkey and their dreams of getting away from it financially. Their departure for Europe was to be temporary, and everyone expected eventually to return home for good. They were all born in the countryside, in the Antiochian

region, where they lived until they went to Europe. Both the northern suburbs of Paris and the central districts of Wedding and Kreuzberg in Berlin where these families now mostly live are national capitals, densely populated and superdiverse, where one can encounter multiple cultures and languages (or varieties) in addition to those of France or Germany (similarly to Jørgensen, Sif Karrabaek, Madsen, and Spindler Moller, 2016).

In France, the population who either experienced immigration themselves or have family elders who did is of the order of 5.7 million (INED, 2016); 5 million people are of North African origin and 400,000 originate from Turkey. For Germany, the equivalent figures are over 18 million, of which 12.5 million originate from Europe, nearly 3 million from Turkey and 700,000 from Arab countries (Schmidt, 2012; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015, 2017, 2018). This means that there are two majority immigrant languages in each country, Arabic in France and Turkish in Germany.

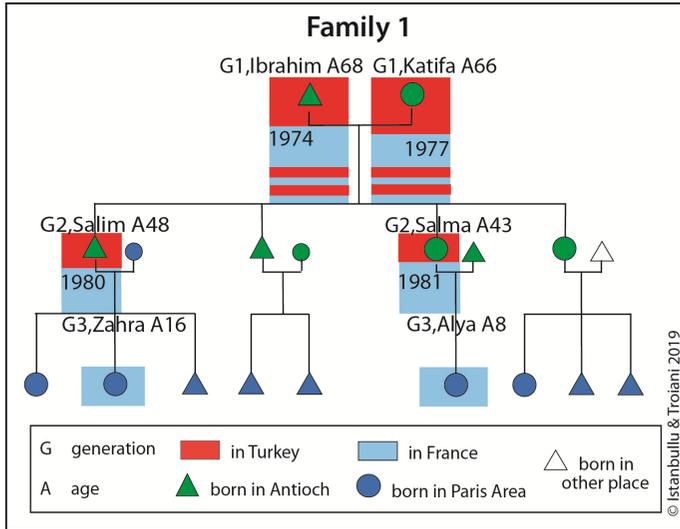
### 3.3 The selection of corpora

The corpus type is that of spontaneous interactions within the family in the form of polylogues, that is to say conversations among several participants. I chose to make recordings in Paris and Berlin using as similar criteria as possible, so as to ensure that the corpora are comparable: they included a telephone conversation among family members in France and Germany and other members visiting Turkey, reflecting the continuing mobility of these families (Corpus 1 Paris, or C1, and Corpus 3 Berlin, or C3), as well as a family conversation in person in the grandparents' living room, during a visit by their children and grandchildren (Corpus 2 Paris, or C2, and Corpus 4 Berlin, or C4), in two families<sup>5</sup> (3 hours in total).

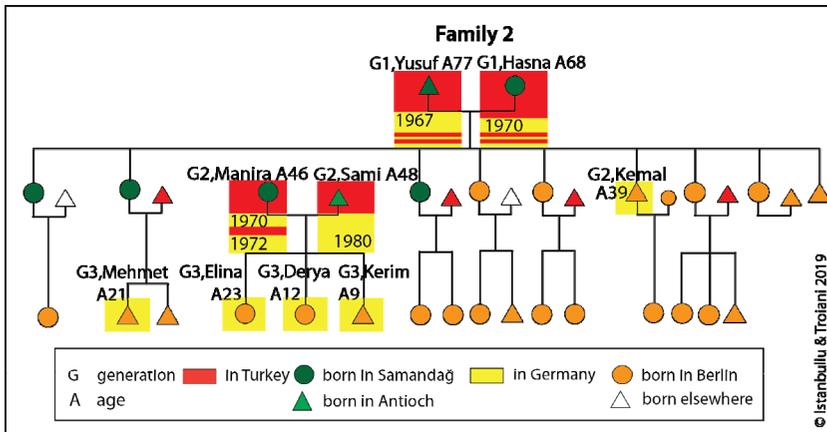
Six members of Family 1 (see Diagram 1) in Île-de-France participated in Corpora 1 and 2. They include the grandparents (grandfather G1, Ibrahim and grandmother G1, Katifa), their daughter (G2, Salma), her daughter (G3, Alya, 8 years old [YO]) and her niece (G3, Zahra, 15 YO). Another family member (G2, Salim), the father of G3, Zahra, only participates in the second corpus.

In Berlin, the participants from the different generations of Family 2 (see Diagram 2) include the grandmother (G1, Hasna), her daughter (G2, Manira), the latter's husband (G2, Sami), their three children (G3, Elina 22 YO, Derya 12 YO and Kerim 8 YO), a son of G1, Hasna (G2, Kemal 39 YO), a grandson (G3, Mehmet 23 YO) whose participation was less extensive, and a nephew of G1, Hasna (G2, Emir 41 YO).

**Diagram 1.** C1 and C2 Paris: Participants from Family 1 by generation.



**Diagram 2.** C3 and C4 Berlin: Participants from Family 2 by generation.



The profile of the participants in Berlin differs in some respects from that of the Paris corpora. Only the grandmother represents G1, along with the two G2 parents and two other family members who participate during the visit. The G3 members are siblings with a significant age difference between the eldest daughter and the two others (11 and 14 years' difference). This seems to have an effect on their resources in the various languages, as we will see in detail in the following sections.

#### 4 Statements about languages and transmission

Through the individual interviews it was possible to get an understanding of the relationship these families have to languages, trilingualism and the question of transmission. One of the key statements made in the interviews is the importance of speaking different languages and being trilingual, which was systematically asserted by both older and younger participants with respect to family, national and foreign languages. Both family groups found this necessary in order to communicate according to the contexts (the private and public spheres, at work, for leisure).

For G1 members, the grandparents, languages are enriching, 'because the more you learn in life, the broader your life becomes' (G1, Katifa). The grandmother is happy to be able to speak languages other than Arabic, because she needs them, and then 'when you see people speaking and you don't understand them, you feel yourself getting more diminished'. G1, Ibrahim watches television channels in Persian and Kazakh although he has never learned these languages, but is driven by his curiosity about other cultures. G1, Hasna would like to speak all the languages needed in order to communicate in her environment.

The youngest family members also state that knowing languages is enriching. Thus, G3, Alya (8 YO) finds languages interesting, and thinks it a shame that children don't know how to speak their native language because they can be subject to ridicule. G3, Zahra (15 YO), says that since she was quite small, as she learned languages at school, she became used to seeing 'languages as something very important for the future', showing here how the school influences the family (Spolsky, 2012). She sees her family's multilingualism as a strength, because 'the more knowledge you have, the stronger you are'. The relationship to otherness is emphasized: for her, to be multilingual is important because 'it's communication, it's love. You can learn about the other person's culture, it's enriching'. G3, Derya and Elina sometimes use Arabic and Turkish as 'secret languages' in the public space so that other people do not understand them; they find this amusing.

Their way of speaking their inherited languages (by G3) and their national language (by G1) is discussed. G1, Ibrahim chooses to say nothing for fear of speaking bad French. G1, Hasna would like to speak German better, but in contrast G1, Katifa has overcome this 'fear of speaking [French] badly, as I saw that other people had the same problems'. G3, Elina sometimes avoids speaking Arabic with 'native speakers' of other varieties of Arabic, because her girlfriends whose parents cannot speak German laugh at her, saying that what she speaks 'is not real Arabic'. In Antioch, she is told that her Arabic is 'totally different', and

that she ought to ‘think about this and come back to local Arabic’. G3, Kerim is not afraid to speak Arabic and Turkish. His grandparents and parents do not force him to communicate in any particular language and in any particular way.

With respect to the subject of transmission, the tendency is towards speaking the two inherited languages (wishing to), then adding other languages, learned at school or elsewhere. G1, Ibrahim speaks Arabic to his grandchildren to ‘teach them’. Replying to the question of what he would like to transmit to them, he does not begin by answering ‘languages’ but ‘giving them intelligence, patience and politeness so that they will be very good people, I pray for them so that they can learn in every language’. He would like them to learn and know everything. G1, Katifa states that she speaks to her grandchildren in Arabic and that they reply to her in French, but very little in Arabic. G1, Hasna speaks in Arabic but switches to German so that the child can understand, with the help of gestures because she does not speak German ‘well’. G2, Salma tries to teach her child Arabic and Turkish, although when her child entered kindergarten the teaching staff advised her to speak only French to her. But she admits she has ‘a lot of trouble’ because the child uses French systematically. She says, ‘It’s an effort to speak Arabic. To think of speaking Arabic. When the child answers me in French, this automatically pushes me to speak French without thinking, and so it is very, very complicated to – I would really like to transmit Arabic and Turkish but I don’t manage to’. For her (and all other members), having a place where she could see the familial languages taught or simply hear them, such as at school or within an organization of some kind, would be a solution to learning the familial languages and cultures, but there is none accessible in the area ‘unfortunately’.

The grandchildren would all like to pass on familial languages and cultures to their children, if they have any, in order, for example, to understand, speak and so get along when in Turkey.

Some members of these families described various kinds of strategy for communicating successfully, such as the use of gestures and facial expressions that ‘help even if you don’t speak a language (...) in fact you don’t need to speak the same languages to communicate, it is the desire to go towards the other that counts’ (G3, Zahra). They all wish to reconcile knowledge of their inherited languages and their national languages (as already noted by Deprez, 1996), as well as other languages, learned formally or through contact.

## **5 Micro-alignments between the G1 and G3 in Paris and Berlin**

To find out which FLP these transnational families adopt, four corpora of ordinary language practices were studied and then checked against the statements collected from the speakers. We observe alignment phenomena in the language choices of

the various family members, especially those of the grandparents with respect to their grandchildren. These alignments coexist with a caring attitude, which we see in the recurrent use of loving expressions, especially in Arabic and sometimes in Turkish (mostly on the part of the grandparents), which enriches communication between them and leads to alignment. These mutual language behaviors are the expression of a FLP in which the relationship to the other is constituted by the acceptance and freedom of choice of language and language variety.

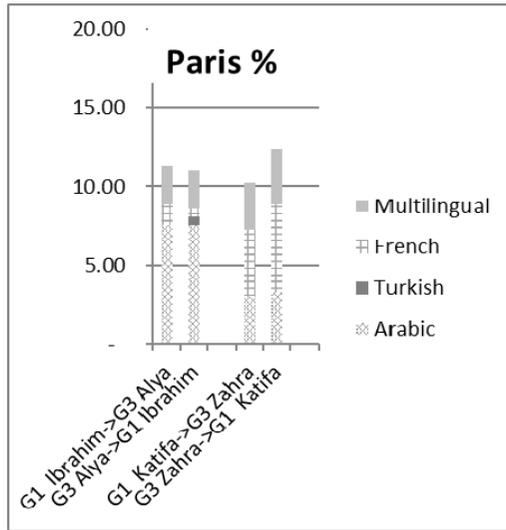
The hypothesis we have adopted is that the choice of a language relative to the one initiated in the previous speaker's speech turn gives us information about the participants' positioning. When the previous language choice is followed, we say that the speaker aligns himself or herself with the choice of the interlocutor. By alignment we mean cooperation at the level of the structure that facilitates the exchange (Stivers, 2008:31; Steensig, 2012), defined as a means to facilitate cooperation among interlocutors (Stivers, Mondada and Steensig, 2011:20).

A systematic method for annotating heterogeneous corpora, based on Auer's sequentiality principle, has been proposed by Léglise and Alby (2016) and applied to the interactions of transnational families (Istanbullu and Léglise, 2014). Alignment is visible in the choice of languages or language varieties in the speech turn (ST). Thus, when the language of a ST differs from that of the previous ST, we say that the participant is misaligned. When the next speaker speaks the same language in his or her ST, the participant is said to be aligned with the language of the ST.

These alignments can be determined by a sequence of STs, while others can be constructed in interactions, in the same way as the speech rate, which may need several STs before it adjusts to that of the interlocutor. Some authors believe that alignment can occur outside the initial context of the interactions in which this phenomenon occurs for the first time; this occurs with the use (and hence the diffusion) of certain terms with other interlocutors (Brooks and Kempe, 2014), as in the case of 'salam aleykum' in France. Here I mean by alignment the choice of language in relation to an interlocutor. A remarkable feature of two of my corpora is the almost systematic alignment of the G1 with the language choices initiated by the G3, these being mostly the national languages the latter know best, namely French or German.

This alignment appears in our qualitative and quantitative analyses. It is visible, for example, in the proportion of each language spoken (Figure 1), where there is roughly the same amount of each grey pattern, in the interactions between the G1 and G3 when they talk together. This shows that each group aligns with the other group's language choices, regardless of which generation they belong to.

**Figure 1.** Comparative distribution of language among interlocutors from G1 and G3 in Paris.



These alignment phenomena also appear in the qualitative analysis. In Excerpt 1, from Paris, G3,Alya initiates the use of French in C2,89 ‘c’est qui ça↑?’<sup>6</sup> [*who is that↑?*] and G1,Katifa aligns with it in C2,91 ‘les méchants’ [*the bad people*]. The result of this alignment is to stimulate communication between the two of them for another 20 STs.

**Excerpt 1.** C2 phone call Paris: Alignment of G1,Katifa to G3,Alya.

C2, 89	c’est qui ça↑?	}	Alignment of G1 in French to G3 → Communication lasting 20 STs
G3,Alya	who is that↑?		
C2, 90	<b>ma bašref</b>		
G1,Ibrahim	<b>I don’t know</b>		
C2, 91	les méchants	}	
G1,Katifa	the bad people		
C2, 92	ah d’accord / moi je me disais c’est un prénom↑ ça↑		
G3,Alya	oh, right / I was thinking it was a first name↑ that↑		

We have also observed the phenomenon of alignment on the part of the G3. In fact, in both Paris and Berlin, G1 and G2 participants (grandparents and parents) sometimes initiate Arabic in their interactions, and we then observe alignment by the G3.

In Excerpt 2, from Berlin, a G1 participant, the grandmother G1,Hasna, speaks to her granddaughter G3,Derya in Arabic to ask her how she is doing, in C3,656 ‘[ʃki:fi:k sahti:k ya: bitte Derya↑?]’ [*how are you your health my daughter Derya↑?*]. G3,Derya either does not understand or does not hear what is said because of noise on the phone line, and communicates this in German (C3,657) softly ‘was↑?/[what↑?]. She thus misaligns herself with her grandmother’s Arabic. But her mother, G2,Manira, restates the question in Arabic in C3,658, repeating exactly what the grandmother said. This time G3,Derya aligns herself with Arabic and responds in C3,659 ‘mli:ha: u inte↑?’ [*I’m fine and you↑?*].

**Excerpt 2.** C3 phone call Berlin: Alignment of G3,Derya to the Arabic initiated by G1,Hasna, restated by G2,Manira.

C3, 656	ʃki:fi:k sahti:k ya: bitte Derya↑?	} Alignment of G3 in Arabic to G1 and G2
G1,Hasna	<i>how are you your health my child Derya↑?</i>	
C3, 657	(softly) was↑?	
G3,Derya	<i>what↑?</i>	
C3, 658	ʃkif sahti:k ya: bitte Derya↑?	
G2,Manira	<i>how is your health my daughter Derya↑?</i>	
C3, 659	mli:ha: u inte↑?	
G3,Derya	<i>I’m fine and you↑?</i>	} (underlines C3,659 and G3,Derya)

A noteworthy feature of my corpora is thus the mutual alignment of the speakers with the language choices of their interlocutors. We see the alignment taking place between the G3 and the G1, both in Paris and Berlin. This enables them to keep their communication going and leads to the practice of speaking Arabic on the part of the youngest generation.

## 6 Affective expressions that encourage communication

In addition to the alignments that encourage communication and the use of familial languages, the corpora include a number of expressions of kindness and politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1978) that also encourage both these things, especially in Arabic. They can be part of what we call in discourse analysis ‘marks of appreciation’, ‘affective’ or ‘evaluative’ (Maingueneau, 2002), or ‘sweeteners’ that interacting speakers use to ‘maintain a minimum of harmony’ and reduce the force of face-threatening acts such as ‘orders, rebuttals, reproaches, etc.’ (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002a:28).

In particular, we find compliments, expressions of thanks and good wishes that constitute forms of politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002b). Here, the interacting participants are connected by feelings of

closeness and responsibility; the grandparents and parents are concerned about the welfare of their offspring, both children and grandchildren, and express this concern by the use of these terms. In fact, the STs that include marks of appreciation and affection are usually spoken by the G1 and are addressed to the G3, but they can sometimes be addressed by the G3 to the G1.

For example, we find the terms ‘**habi:be**’ and ‘**habi:bte**’ [*my darling*, masculine and feminine forms] and the Turkish ‘**yavrum**’ [*my baby*] in the ST of the G1 and G2 participants addressed to the members of the G3. They are used as terms of address (Traverso, 2006:112). In Excerpt 3 below, from Berlin, the grandmother G1, Hasna expresses her delight at hearing her granddaughter G3, Elina by lengthening the affectionate term in ST C3,461 ‘**hallo yavru::m ki:yfi:k ya: habi:bte↑?**’ [*hello my baby:: how are you my darling ↑?*]. G3, Elina tells her grandmother how much she has missed her and expresses her delight that she is coming back to Berlin ‘**ja↑ walla ştaqna: kti:r şaleyke bnifrah izen bti:ğe inte başd bikra**’ [*yes↑ we really miss you it would make us happy if you come the day after tomorrow*]. Also, during the recording of Corpus 3, she was physically closest to her grandmother, G1, Hasna, holding her hand, and at a moment when she saw that G1, Hasna was sad, as she was sitting on the floor with her arm round her grandmother’s knees, she got up to sit on the sofa and took her affectionately in her arms, gazing at her with her eyes full of tenderness.<sup>8</sup>

**Excerpt 3.** C3 phone call Berlin: G3, Elina makes contact with her grandmother G1, Hasna.

- C3, 460            **hallo nänä**  
G3, Elina        *hello grandma*
- C3, 461            **hallo yavru::m ki:yfi:k ya: habi:bte↑?**  
G1, Hasna      *hello my baby:: how are you my darling↑?*
- C3, 462            **e mli:ha inte şkifi:k↑?**  
G3, Elina        *yes things are good you how are you↑?*
- C3, 463            **u ana: kajjse kti:r↑**  
G1, Hasna      *and me too I’m very well↑*
- C3, 464            **ja↑ walla ştaqna: kti:r şaleyke bnifrah izen bti:ğe  
inte başd bikra**  
G3, Elina        *yes↑ we really miss you it would make us happy if you  
come the day after tomorrow*

In another example from Paris (Excerpt 4 below), G1,Ibrahim makes a compliment and asserts his affection for G3,Alya who immediately responds in kind. In C1,46 he congratulates his granddaughter and adds that she is beautiful: ‘**e \*bra:vo \*bravo \*bRavo<sup>9</sup> ʕlæjke inte kæjjse**’ [*yes \*well done \*well done \*well done you are beautiful*]. A little later, in C1,52, he congratulates her again and tells her he is going to love her: ‘[**ʕafa:ke ana: bædde hibbik**’ [*well done I’m going to love you*], and G3,Alya responds to this by telling him ‘**e↑ u ana:**’ [*yes↑ and me too*].

**Excerpt 4.** C1 phone call Paris: demonstration of affection by the grandfather to his granddaughter.

C1, 46	<b>e *bra:vo *bravo *bRavo ʕlæjke inte kæjjse</b>
G1,Ibrahim	<i>yes *well done *well done *well done you are beautiful</i>
C1, 47	<b>e: ana: kæjjse</b>
G3,Alya	<i>yes: I am beautiful</i>
C1, 52	<b>ʕafa:ke ana: bædde hibbik</b>
G1,Ibrahim	<i>well done I’m going to love you</i>
C1, 53	<b>e↑ u ana:</b>
G3,Alya	<i>yes↑ and me too</i>

Another example of a positive mutual declaration of feeling between the G1 and the G3 is in Excerpt 5 below, at C1,208, where G1,Ibrahim tells his granddaughter G3,Zahra that he loves her a lot and adds that she is \*beautiful \*fine<sup>10</sup>: ‘**ana: ktir bhbbik inte kæjjse**’ [*I love you a lot you’re \*beautiful \*fine*]. In the following ST, C1,209, it is G3,Alya who whispers to her cousin G3,Zahra the best phrase to use in Arabic to reply to this: ‘**u ana: bhbbek**’ [*and I love you too*].

**Excerpt 5.** C1 phone call Paris: mutual declarations of affection between the grandfather and the granddaughter.

C1,208	<b>ana: ktir bhbbik inte kæjjse</b>
G1,Ibrahim	<i>I love you a lot you’re *beautiful *fine</i>
C1,209	(Alya whispers to Zahra) <b>u ana: bhbbek</b>
G3,Alya	<i>and I love you too</i>

The use of affective terms and expressions or compliments such as ‘**habibte**’ [*my darling*], ‘**inte kæjse**’ [*you’re \*beautiful \*fine*] in Arabic, and ‘**yavrum**’ [*my baby*] in Turkish, or congratulations via ‘**bravo**’ [*well done*] all encourage communication. The fact that these terms and expressions are spoken in Arabic shows us that they function as facilitators and that they are followed by segments of utterances and by speech turns in the same language.

Thus, in the same way as alignment, affective expressions give children the assurance that they form an integral, unconditional part of the family; this then encourages them to communicate with their grandparents in the language they use the most (Arabic), even when they express themselves in it with less ease than the grandparents do and with less ease than they speak the national language of the country they live in (French or German). They want to be part of their group, to maintain the continuity of their family, those who have preceded them, these older relatives who were born and raised elsewhere and sometimes take them to visit that ‘elsewhere’ in Turkey. They talk about that place in their conversations, referring to it within the family circle in both France and Germany.

## 7 Conclusion

The FLP of these transnational families can be derived through the observation of their intergenerational interactions and their statements. Since these families interact using asymmetrical resources in three languages (two familial and one national), we might expect the adults to exercise linguistic authority (Spolsky, 2009; Duranti, Ochs and Schieffelin, 2011) over the youngest generation in order to maintain their heritage languages. However, we haven’t witnessed linguistic authority but collaboration, carried out with mutual and reciprocal caring. In contrast to our expectations, the youngest generation also actively influences the adults in their linguistic and communicative behaviors. A process of mutual socialization is clearly taking place.

The interactional analysis of the language practices reveals two noteworthy phenomena. The first is the phenomenon of alignment. When the G1 speakers align themselves with the language choices of the G3, the result is that the latter accept in turn the language proposed by the G1 and thus align themselves with the G1. These two types of alignment are unexpected because in the first case (G1→G3: 24 occurrences) it is surprising that older participants follow younger ones. In the second type of alignment (G3→G1), Arabic, a language said to be ‘difficult’ by the G3, whose resources are limited, is nonetheless chosen in order to align with the elders’ language choice (G3→G1: 30 occurrences). Alignment clearly functions to encourage the practice of Arabic here. The phenomenon of

mutual alignment between the G1 and G3 reveals the positive, motivating role in communication played by the alignment of the youngest and oldest participants, and has significant consequences for the use of Arabic.

The other remarkable phenomenon that emerges from this analysis is the recurrent use of affective expressions, in both Arabic and Turkish. These sweeteners (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002a) generate a feeling of trust, whose effect is to encourage communication between the youngest and oldest family members, and by extension the use of familial languages, chiefly Arabic (and Turkish to a lesser extent).

Contrary to the literature showing the predominant role of ideologies in family language practices, and an explicit, dominant FLP (Spolsky, 2012), our corpora show little evidence of an explicit FLP. What dominates is the desire to communicate, supported by the deep attachment that members of these families have to each other. What is predominant is the adults' effort to put the children at ease, even more present in the case of the grandparents than the parents, instead of imposing on them their choices as authority, owners of power (Spolsky, 2009: 15). The visible and important element is the affection that we find manifested in recurrent expressions used to the grandchildren (*my darling, my soul, my baby, I love you*, in Arabic and in Turkish), and that explains the alignment of the G1 with the language choices of the G3.

Here then the FLP is implicit and caring, 'positive' and encouraging, promoting communication among the three generations. During the interviews, the youngest members of the families mention not only the languages and cultures of the dominant society in which they live, but also those of their families, to which these youngest members have already given thought (Arabic and Turkish languages, and Antiochian Turkish and Arabic culture, mixed in with those acquired in Europe and imported by members of the G1 and most of the G2).

The literature also links the successful transmission to the status of the language in question, which is the majority and official language of the country of origin (Yates and Terraschke, 2013). In this study it would be Turkish, yet this is not the language mostly transmitted quantitatively (see Istanbulu, 2017); rather, Arabic is the more transmitted language, despite its status as minority language in the country of origin.

Furthermore, we often think of adults as socializing children through language (and languages) in a unidirectional process (Paugh, 2011; Howard, 2011). But children sometimes have more access than their parents to language resources (via the public space, schooling, spending time with peers with various familial languages, television, etc.). In Paris, G3,Zahra and G3,Elina use other varieties of Arabic within the family that influence their grandparents' practice (Istanbulu,

2017). Here we are seeing role reversal between parents and children (Luykx, 2005). Family socialization can be seen as a collaborative achievement (Goodwin, 2006). Children are active participants in the socialization of their parents (Tuominen, 1999); children and parents thus enter into a ‘doubly mediated’ relationship (Lüdi and Py, 1986). Socialization then is not a unidirectional process but a complex set of mutual familial influences (Luykx, 2003:41).

This shows that children play an important role in implementing language policy in transnational families. They choose freely where to position themselves instead of only following what their parents or other adults want, and the adults follow them. Here, it is not so much the case that dominant ideologies influence language policy, nor that adults impose it on children in a ‘totalitarian situation’ (Spolsky, 2009:15). Studying interactions reveals the impact of children’s successful agency in the course of their daily interactions across several generations, something that few studies have shown thus far.

## Notes

1. With the possible exception of Kurdish and Berber along with Turkish and Arabic respectively, as noted by Akinci and Akin (2003).
2. Historically, in Antioch, Arabic precedes Turkish (Istanbullu, 2017:4).
3. Called Antakya in Turkish, in the province of Hatay.
4. The term ‘generation’ is used here to make it easier to refer to different family members: the grandparents who migrated are the first generation (G1), their children are the second generation (G2) and the grandchildren of G1 are the third generation (G3). In order to identify the participants more clearly, the generation code precedes a first (fake) name, for example [G1,Hasna].
5. Represented below in diagrams by generation, inspired by Léglise (2019).
6. French, German and Turkish speech is transcribed in Western orthography, Arabic in IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet); comments are in brackets; translation is in italics. French is in normal font, German in underlined normal, Arabic in bold, Turkish in underlined bold. Other signs used are: [ / ] = pause; [ : ] = lengthening; [ ↑ ] = rising tone.
7. Multilingual STs are highlighted in grey.
8. I myself observed this: she looked at her with her eyes full of tenderness, empathy and attentiveness, mirroring her attitude with her eyes, mouth and angle of the head.
9. ‘Floating’, ambiguous (Ledegen, 2012) terms are attributable to several languages, and transcription is made accordingly in the possible languages with \* sign indicating this.
10. The term ‘**kæjjse**’ in Arabic is polysemous, and can mean both ‘[a person who is] fine’ and ‘beautiful’.

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