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## **Changing ideologies about Arabic in Turkey and the consequences in Antioch**

### **ABSTRACT**

Arabic was unwanted by the designers and founders of the Republic of Turkey (founded in 1923) and prohibited in public space in the 1980s. Its status started changing in the late 1990s and 2000s, when it became increasingly offered in state education as a foreign language. By looking at the place of Arabic and the impact of the language policies of the Republic of Turkey then and now, the aim of this article is to investigate the consequences of these recent changes on the language ideologies of Turkish citizens in southern Turkey whose inherited familial language is Arabic but who are experiencing language shift to Turkish, the national language. Rooted in the sociolinguistics of multilingualism, this article, based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted in Antioch, shows that due to their religious and language background these citizens have lengthy experience of minoritization. Qualitative analysis of their language ideologies shows on the one hand a desire to maintain Arabic, but on the other hand conflicting views about the variety of Arabic they speak and a tendency to be influenced by pro-Turkish language ideologies. The paper concludes by re-evaluating the language shift they have experienced.

Keywords: Arabic, Turkey, language ideologies, language shift, family multilingualism

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Language has been a subject of discussion from the founding of the Republic of Turkey to the present day. As in other countries, the monolingual ideologies of nation-states (Blackledge 2000) led to imposing a single official language, the modern Turkish spoken in Istanbul (Gökalp 1920), in keeping with a firm policy of Turkification. As a consequence, state policy toward speakers of languages other than Turkish has required their assimilation to the official national language (Aslan 2007). This has led linguistic communities speaking other languages or varieties to be minoritized (Yağmur 2001: 426). Originally non-Turkish speakers have experienced a gradual language shift from their home language toward bilingualism or Turkish only

(see for example Haig (2004) for Kurdish, Sofu (2009) for Arabic). Language shift is a linguistic consequence of power relations, in particular in the case of minority ethnic groups within a modern nation-state (Paulston 1994: 9). It occurs gradually across generations (Thomason & Kaufman 1988) through the youngest, formally educated generations (Öpengin 2012: 176). This language change creates awareness about language competition, and groups of speakers become concerned about the language maintenance question (Fishman 1966; Sofu 2009).

In Turkey there is strong pressure from the majority group and its dominant, standardized language on the minoritized languages and varieties. This has had a direct impact on southern Turkey, where a language shift from Arabic toward Turkish had already been observed twenty years ago (Smith-Kocamahhul 2003). Given this background, this article examines the changing ideologies relative to Arabic among Arabic- and Turkish-speaking families in the Antioch<sup>1</sup> region, and investigates whether the recent revival of Arabic in Turkey, offered via national education and through digital and international media, will reverse the language shift.

Section two gives some historical background about the Turkification of the country through language and education policies and legislation, and the situation of Arabic in Turkey, especially in education and the media. Section three presents a qualitative study conducted in multicultural and multilingual Antioch rooted in the sociolinguistics of multilingualism. Section four focuses on language ideologies relative to Arabic and Turkish in Antioch. Section five discusses the language shift by examining the changing place of Arabic in Turkey.

## **2. THE PLACE OF ARABIC, FROM THE MULTILINGUAL OTTOMAN EMPIRE TO THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**

### **2.1. Arabic in the Ottoman Empire**

Arabic has been present in Turkey for more than a thousand years. It had high status among the approximately 100 languages spoken in the multilingual Ottoman Empire (Strauss 1995: 221). Ottoman schools assigned great importance to Arabic, teaching it to intellectuals and administrators; during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries more of them knew Arabic than French (Özkan 2010: 1786, 1790-98). Arabic was a language learned and used by the elite, “a productive element in any well-educated speaker’s language” (Brendemoen 1990: 455). It was needed to access bibliographic resources and for professional activities. “Next to the religious sciences, many books were written or translated into Arabic in the fields of literature, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, music”<sup>2</sup> from Spanish or Latin (Şeşen 2002: 332). Arabic was used for scientific and technical neologisms, similar to Latin and Greek in the West. The Arabic alphabet was omnipresent, as it was used for the Ottoman language previously spoken in Turkey. At the same time, local varieties of Arabic were spoken by the population, but these were never prestigious, even in the Ottoman period, the golden age of Arabic (Strauss 1995: 237).

## 2.2. The linguistic consequences of the founding of the Republic of Turkey

The Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 in the name of progress and modernity, as one sovereign nation-state which sought to erase the flaws of its predecessor, the weakened and eventually defeated Ottoman Empire. The reasons given for its collapse were that it was not industrialized like European countries, and was insufficiently cohesive and educated (Reynolds 2011); the new republic considered everything from the past to be “useless, not important” (Harmancı 2010: 123). Radical reforms in all areas were presented as revolutionary and considered necessary for the republic’s survival; great importance was given to language and education,<sup>3</sup> although in fact the Ottoman Empire had already treated these as important from the eighteenth century (Somel 2001) up to the Tanzimat era, 1839-1876 (Gallagher 1971: 155). Primary school became compulsory for all children, with teaching in modern Turkish, the sole language of national and state education (Article 87, Constitution of the Republic of Turkey 1924). This new language, presented as “pure Turkish language” (öz Türkçe dili), was created by “filtering” out Arabic (and Persian) from Ottoman Turkish, which “was thought to be backward compared to Western languages, it was wanted to be simpler (sade), more natural (tabii)” (Strauss 1995: 246). Arabic was then considered to be a useless language linked to an archaic, decadent past and to Islam<sup>4</sup> (Reynolds 2011). The reform of the writing system with the alphabet (effective in 1928) and language by Turkish republicans was to affect literate people in particular, as “the more educated the speaker was, the more fundamental the change had to be” (Reynolds 2011: 454). By attacking the Arab-speaking elite (Strauss 1995: 222), nationalists were positioning their identity by means of their own ideologies and politics (Harmancı 2010: 122), intending to access power and status by creating a new language written in a new alphabet. Turkish speakers, former “ordinary people [...], the ruled,” became the “rulers” (Çolak 2004: 74). All this was decided in the capital by the technocrats and imposed on the population no matter what specific language they spoke.

This political engineering plan was to create a generation of schoolchildren and a body of state agents who conformed to the republican regime, in order to stabilize the linguistic and educational policy of the republic and make it impossible to return to the former Ottoman system (Birol & Szurek 2007: 54-63). The state policy of the new republic revolved around the Turkish language, Turkish ethnicity, and Turkishness in general,<sup>5</sup> assimilating the 30 to 40 non-Turkish-speaking groups (Yağmur 2001: 414) and 45 non-Turkish ethnic groups (Andrews 1989) from 1921 onwards (Cagaptay 2004; Ülker 2008). As a consequence, the madrasas, schools (in Arabic) with an Islamic-based religious curriculum, were closed and replaced by a so-called secular education system, and Arabic, seen as a language linked to the backward past, was not taught between 1927 and 1953, even in İmam Hatip<sup>6</sup> religious education schools (Güney 2014: 205). Education and language policy in multilingual and multiethnic Turkey has been changing the language practices and ideologies of the non-Turkish-speaking citizens since the creation of the republic in 1923 (Aytürk 2008; Lewis 1999). This has resulted in the minoritization of other

languages and their speakers, giving Turkish the legitimacy seen as essential to the success of the country as well as of its citizens.

### 2.3. Arabic in the Republic of Turkey until the end of the 2000s

Several local varieties of Arabic are still spoken in Turkey and have been documented in various regions such as Adana (Jastrow 1983), Mardin (Grigore 2009), and Antioch (Arnold 1998), and local varieties of Arabic spoken in Cilicia and Urfa have been compared (Procházka 2006).

In the last national language census in Turkey, held in 1965, out of 31 million inhabitants only 1.78% declared Arabic as a mother tongue (Dündar 2000: 64). Oran (2004: 41) claims there are one million historically “Arab-rooted Arabic speakers” in Turkey, including 300,000-350,000 Sunni Muslims and 200,000 Alawi Muslims living in the Mersin-Adana-Hatay area. Table 4.1 shows the effect of the language policy of the Republic of Turkey favoring Turkish language on the minority-language speakers’ practices,<sup>7</sup> with the daily language rate inferior to the mother tongue for Arabic (Konda 2006: 19).

**Table 4.1 Effect of the language policy on Arabic-Turkish speakers in Turkey in 2006.**

	Declaring this language as their mother tongue	Declaring this language as their daily language
Turkish	84.54%	87.46%
Arabic	1.38%	1.05%

A major consequence of the state ideology claiming “the superiority of the Turks throughout history” (Akturk 2010: 650) is that minority languages have been seen by the Turkish state as an identity label and a separatism threat (Virtanen 2003); as in many nation-states, some languages have been banned for the “security of the state.” A particular case is the banning of the use of Arabic in Antioch in public or during weddings, especially after the military coups of 1960 and 1980 which produced a highly unstable political situation, arrests, torture, and precarious social life (Arnold 1998: 3; Mertcan 2013: 302-303).

Arabic has been a restricted language and its speakers penalized since the beginning of the republic (Dündar 2000: 137-139). Laws were passed to make Turkish the only official language, the only one that can “be taught as mother tongue to Turkish citizens” (Article 42, Constitution of the Republic of Turkey 1982).

The prospect of EU membership in the 2000s pushed Turkey to reconsider the question of minorities in a more tolerant way, but without signing the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. With the support of the European Union the minorities, especially the Kurds, got some recognition from the present Islamic governing party, the Justice and Development Party<sup>8</sup> (Virtanen 2003: 5). In 2002

private courses were permitted to teach “the different languages and dialects used traditionally by Turkish citizens in their daily lives” (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti 2002), though under restricted conditions.<sup>9</sup>

#### **2.4. Standard and local Arabic in the fields of education and media today**

After an interruption between 1927 and 1953, Arabic has been taught at state and private educational centers, İmam Hatip schools, and universities; in the 1990s efforts were made to offer it as a foreign language in secondary state schools (Aydın 1996: 123). In İmam Hatip schools, pupils found Arabic too difficult, learning it by rote without understanding it. This has led to a new focus on making learning it more effective and attractive (Güney 2014: 207). In the 2010s a teaching program for Arabic as a foreign language was set up by the Ministry of Education<sup>10</sup> (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı 2011). Today, classical Arabic or *fusha*, “developed during the 19th and the 20th century” and now called “Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)” (Abdullah Al Suwaiyan 2018: 229), which is the written and official language of Arab countries, is taught in Turkey at state schools as a foreign language. Summer Quran courses are also organized by the government, offering activities like drama, music, and physical education for all (including disabled, deaf, and blind students); these have seen a growing number of participants, for example 44,286 in Hatay in 2013 and 55,581 in 2018,<sup>11</sup> more than half of them in the 10-14 age bracket (Dinç et al. 2019: 96).

Since minority languages are now more tolerated, including as an optional school subject, we might expect to see courses in local varieties of Arabic (yerel dil). But these do not exist. The dissemination of Arabic as a foreign language, in its modern standard form, is not intended to make it “a daily spoken language by Turkish citizens in the country” as a law specifies (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti 2002).

In the media, in 2004 the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) started to offer programs in Arabic (45 minutes of TV, 30 minutes of radio) five days a week. This was viewed as “a significant step,” but not sufficient for audience needs (Kurban 2007: 17). In 2010 the TRT Arabic channel was created. Mainly broadcasting in MSA, and sometimes foreign varieties, it is generally inaccessible to the peripheral colloquial Arabic-speaking people in Turkey, except for those who have studied it formally.

During the same period, informal local or personal audio and video production started to appear, especially after 2010, shared on social media. Some broadcasting (via private channels) in colloquial Antiochian Arabic has been done via YouTube by Hatay Radyo Televizyon; some broadcasters have even addressed the problems of religious minorities, formerly a taboo subject (Kilikya Nehir TV). TV programs with locals (Derbna by Nihat Çay, Meriç Gültekin'in Dünyası), comedy and theater (Tolga Antakya, Mesreh el Hirri, Mesreh il Emel, Çerçur Tiyatro Grubu), film (Hasan Fisso, Ye Şihhare), and documentaries (Evecen 2012) are produced by local Antioch artists using both Arabic and Turkish. These creators work voluntarily, and are rarely supported by local businesses.

## 2.5. The changing place of Modern Standard Arabic in Turkey

If local varieties of Arabic used to be discredited in the country, it seems that MSA is gaining esteem, in line with the religious tendency of the present AKP government and the increased visibility of Arabic in broadcasting and social media. According to a nationwide survey about the “Arab image in Turkey,” although the majority of people have “a negative attitude toward the Arabs,”<sup>12</sup> half of the respondents are interested in learning MSA (Küçükcan 2010: 14-17), just behind English (Güney 2014: 208).

Prime Minister Erdoğan declared in 2013 that he was in favor of MSA and Kurdish for sermons in mosques, so that the attendees could understand them better. Arabic is also the language spoken by some of the neighbor countries and one of the six official languages of the United Nations Organization, making it useful for trade and tourism (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı 2011). The state’s investment in Arabic aims to fulfill a political strategy in the Middle East, as is affirmed on the website of the national channel (TRT Haber 2010). The TRT Arabic channel, created in 2010, intends to contribute positively to Turkish international relations, strengthening ties with 22 Arab countries (with a total of 350 million people) and offering all types of programs for all ages and interests.

Behind this political decision, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan supports soft power: as soon as he became prime minister in 2003 he affirmed that “Secular, democratic Turkey is the only model country for the Islamic world” (Erdoğan 2003). He contributed to a mutual political and economic rapprochement with the Arab countries (Küçükcan 2010: 7), even though Arabs are still labelled “‘traitors’ who stabbed the Turks in the back in WWI,” with a generally negative image in cinema and in public-school textbooks (Küçükcan 2010: 8-9).

It is important to note that along with this development, the learning of Arabic is presented by language teaching centers as opening economically advantageous professional opportunities (see for example Tale Dil Okulu 2018). This is attested by employment advertisements on various sites, for example Indeed.com, which in 2021 advertised up to a thousand positions with the key term “Arapça bilen” (Arabic knowledge), in commerce, real estate, health care, and other fields, as in the examples in Figure 4.1.



Figure 4.1 Employment advertising on Indeed.com (2021) requiring Arabic (my translation).

### 3. A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY IN THE ANTIOCH REGION

The Antioch region has been known since antiquity as multilingual, multicultural, and multi-confessional (Doğruel & Leman 2009). The region formed part of Syria under the Ottoman Empire and was under the French mandate after the creation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. It was renamed the province of Hatay by Atatürk and attached to the republic in 1939. At that point 50,000 refugees (almost 30 per cent of the 170,000 inhabitants), who refused to be part of the republic, left their homes for Syria and Lebanon. They included almost all the Armenians, Kurds, and wealthy Sunni families; there remained only those who had nowhere to go, some Orthodox Christians, and “miserable” rural Alevis (Gilquin 2000: 142-143). More recently, different figures are given for Arabic speakers or those with “Arab roots” in the province of Hatay at different dates: Arnold (1998) claimed that there are 200,000 speakers of local Arabic (20%), while the Arab-Aramean Union (Beyt-Nahreyn 2022) estimates that 890,000 (67%) of the population has “Arab roots.”

The linguistic situation in Antioch has been documented through the study of the variety of Arabic spoken there (Ağbaht & Arnold 2014; Arnold 1998), the language shift from Arabic to Turkish (Smith-Kocamahhul 2003), cultural behaviors in Arabic such as blessings (Cengiz & Güzelşemme 2021), specific communities such as the Christians and their reading and writing skills in Arabic and Turkish (Arıkan et al. 2017), and the language mixing of bilinguals (Cengiz 2006). But to date no study has been dedicated to language ideologies and practices among Arabic-Turkish-speaking families. Within the sociolinguistics of multilingualism, as shown by Migge and Léglise (2013), immersive ethnographic fieldwork and the study of language ideologies (either through discourse analysis of interviews and/or interactional analysis of language practices) are important methodological steps for understanding the sociolinguistics of multilingual contexts and gaining access to the emic perspective of minoritized people. I present below these same methodological steps I followed during ethnographic fieldwork in the Antioch region as well as important issues at stake before turning to language ideologies in section 4.

#### 3.1. Ethnographic fieldwork through observant participation

Aiming at understanding of the current situation of Arabic- and Turkish-speaking families in the Antioch region, during several stays (2014, 2015, 2018), I focused on families ethnically defined as Arabs who are part of non-dominant religious groups, such as the Alevi, Christian, and Jewish communities. My access to these families was helped because of my own Arabic-Turkish background and ties in Antioch (see Istanbullu 2017: 106-120). As showed by Costley et al. (2010), being an insider researcher not only gives easy access to information, it also gives intuitions about the issues at stake and allows observant participation (Soulé 2007). Although observant participation might have been criticized, many voices call for decolonizing methodology in research as a “fruitful way to ensure that ‘the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalisation are given space to communicate from their frames of reference’ (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni 2019: 1)”



(Ndhlovu 2021: 196). My observant participation within eight families in two different villages near Antioch, focusing on their language practices especially during intergenerational conversations, showed that the use of Arabic or Turkish is dependent on the interlocutors. The grandparents who can speak both Arabic and Turkish speak mainly Turkish with their grandchildren, who interact systematically in Turkish with each other, using only some Arabic words such as names of food or good, bad, or supportive wishes, often containing the word “Allah”; this kind of code-switching has been documented as one of the last steps of language shift (Thomason & Kaufman (1988). During fieldwork, I also found that families did not watch the programs broadcast in Arabic by Turkish state channels. The first- and second-generation participants avoided the TRT state channels in general, because of the pro-government political orientation and the state’s dominant religion-oriented ambitions.<sup>13</sup>

### **3.2. Interviews on language ideologies**

In December 2014 and summer 2015, I was also able to conduct face-to-face interviews at home in a room with each participant, in such a way that they felt comfortable and free from the judgment of others. As usually practiced in the study of family multilingualism (Léglise 2019; Purkarthofer & Flubacher 2022), I recorded interviews with their permission, asking open-ended questions about their personal and language biographies, focusing on their relationship to languages and their education. As an insider, as it has been shown in other contexts (Costley et al. 2010), the families trusted me as someone whom they could talk to freely. Altogether I interviewed 80 members of five families composed of the grandparents (first generation, G1), their children (G2), and grandchildren (G3). Interviews lasted between 20 and 90 minutes.

The questions relating to languages were formulated according to each participant’s generation, status, and rank in the family, starting with their parentage and spouses and continuing to their offspring, and distinguishing between behavior in the private and public spheres. For example: “What do you think about languages?” and if the participant did not mention them, I added “about Turkish?,” “about Arabic?,” “about English?” Some questions were related to their school experience. Others followed common questions on multilingual settings such as “In which language(s) do you speak to your mother? In which language(s) does your mother speak to you? In which language(s) do you speak when you go shopping? In which language(s) do the shopkeepers speak to you?” Finally, I also asked questions about whether they read books or newspapers, listen to the radio, or watch TV, and in what languages.

During the interviews, they could freely use the resources of the different local languages (Arabic or Turkish) I also speak. Through these detailed questions, I collected diverse answers from members of the same family in order to find out what they think about the two local languages and how they practice them, to document the speakers’ ideologies with respect to their heritage language (Arabic) and their

language shift toward Turkish.

I refer below to the participants with pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity, for example “Neziha,G1,60” (Neziha, first generation, 60 years old). This is particularly important regarding their experience of discrimination.

### 3.3. The experience of discrimination

Before analyzing their language ideologies, I should note that the experience of discrimination was voiced by all participants, who felt that they were “otherized” and treated as inferior because they were different from the majority. By relaying their words, this article gives them a voice to speak for recognition as equals. It provides them, as absent or silenced agents, with knowledge, enabling them to move “toward an epistemology of seeing” (Santos 2014: 242).

All participants said they avoided speaking their heritage language (Arabic) in some places, for reasons of security and anonymity. The consequences of intolerance regarding the use of Arabic are still particularly painful, especially at school, since the 1980 military coup which banned Arabic in public spaces and ordered children to speak Turkish, even at home. Jamal (G2,44) remembers: “Teachers who came from the western side of the country forbade us to speak Arabic. For example, in the bus, as soon as we approached the school the drivers used to turn off the Arabic music and put Turkish music because it was forbidden.” The fact that teachers came from the majority group to teach in minority groups without considering diversity was mentioned in several contexts; it played an instrumental role in discrimination against the pupils, leading to language shift (for similar examples see Heinrich (2015: 617) in the Ryukyu Islands and Chen (2011: 27) in Taiwan).

Many participants have painful memories of the teaching staff, who used to call them “dirty Arabs” (*pis Arap*), “no brain” (*beyinsiz*), “miscreant faithless” (*dinsiz imansız*), “unbeliever” (*kafir*), or “pagan” (*gavur*). Jamal (G2,44) recalls:

They called us “dirty Arabs,” they despised us. But when someone spoke English, French, they did not despise them. But we were despised, “dirty Arabs, peasants” (*pis Arap, fellah*), especially at secondary school. Christians were treated in the same despicable way, they were also belittled, they were also Arabs and learned Turkish in school. As they were an even smaller minority, they were even more despised than we were. We had Armenian children too, they were also despised. They said “dirty Arabs” to all, because all spoke Arabic. They also had words like “unbelievers,” they even insulted them. And they went to Europe anyway because of that. They called us *kafir* (unbelievers) too, non-Muslims (*Gayrimüslim*), because the Alevis were not considered Muslim.

They remember that teachers told children to denounce those who did not respect the rule, and many obeyed and threatened them with “I will tell the teacher that you spoke Arabic” (*Öğretmenime Arapça konuştuğum diyecem*). They risked not only insults but also physical punishment, including kicking and face-slapping. Dalâl

(G2,37) remembers: "I didn't know a word of Turkish before going to school. I was beaten many times, just because I said something in the only language I could speak. It was horrible." These memories are still particularly alive and might have in part forged the language ideologies to which I now turn.

#### 4. ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

Selected extracts from the interviews were analyzed with respect to the language ideologies they convey, in order to "investigate how people are influenced by local traditional emic or national ideologies" (Léglise & Migge 2019: 4). Language ideologies are one of the main domains of study of family multilingualism and especially within the subfield of family language policy (Curdt-Christiansen 2016) because they do influence language use. They are "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein 1979: 193). Irvine (1989: 255) notes the importance of linguistic differentiation as it comes "together with [the] loading of moral and political interests." Various languages or varieties of the same language (as various varieties of Arabic or Turkish in our case) might be given different values "of what is 'true,' 'morally good,' or 'aesthetically pleasing'" (Kroskrity 2000: 8) at the national as well as a local and family level. Ideologies regarding three linguistic entities are investigated below: the Antiochian variety of Arabic in comparison with MSA and Syrian-Lebanese Arabic, Arabic as a hypernym, and their local variety of Turkish.

##### 4.1. Conflicting ideologies about the local variety of Arabic

Statements from bilingual families in Antioch express conflicting views about the local variety of Arabic. On the one hand, they like Arabic, which they sometimes call "our language" or "mother tongue." On the other hand, they are influenced by national ideologies which view Arabic as less valuable than Turkish.

They believe that their local variety of Arabic does not conform to other varieties viewed as higher-status, rating it as "bad" compared to what they imagine to be the prestigious Syrian-Lebanese and MSA versions, which are widespread and used in broadcast media. Antioch villagers aspire to conform to these varieties, seeing them as a way to acquire the benefits of social distinction (Bourdieu 1977). This linguistic stratification is related to the classes who speak them; for example, Ali (G2,38) calls the Syrian variety "pure Arabic" (*öz Arapça*), using the term "öz" of the Turkish-language policy-makers and diffusers. Having worked in Syria for a few months as an engineer, he is "happy to have learned there the true Arabic, better than the Arabic learned by ears, a little Turkified, a little assimilated (*asimile edilmiş*)."

The consequences of language contact are highlighted and the variety they speak is understood negatively. Wahid (G2,40) declares: "Our language is affected by others, essentially by Turkish and the environment." Melda (G2,23) reports that her teachers said "Arabic is piratical" (*korsan Arapça*), meaning that it is wild and has no

rules. Some participants noticed the general fossilization and attrition of their local variety. For Nejla (G2,33), "The Arabic we speak is flawed (*eksik olmuş*), weak, Turkified [...], a bit imperfect, we don't know the developed Arabic." Some participants feel ashamed and fear speaking Arabic. Dalâl (G2,37) avoids speaking it in front of those "who think they are advanced, modern."

While G2 participants think the Arabic spoken in Antioch is not good, G3 participants feel very proud of speaking Arabic (like Leyla, G3,12 and Iskender, G3,17), and view speaking it properly as a challenge. They want to learn more and better, and are ready to attend courses to progress and reinforce their "competence." They hope it will be possible to transmit it to their children, even if now they "do not speak it as well as our parents."

Some participants expressed their emotional link to Arabic, seeing it as a source of comfort, like Jamal (G2,44): "When I speak Arabic, I feel at ease, I feel I am myself." Leyla (G3,12) and her brother Iskender (G3,17) have a more emotional view of language, using "emotive terms" (Gal 2011: 32) with more warmth toward Arabic and less to Western languages (English and German), which are promoted by education and by people who undervalue Arabic. Leyla (G3,12) says, "For me Arabic is a beautiful language and it's the most beautiful language actually but not everyone thinks like this."

#### **4.2. Ideologies relative to Arabic as cognitively or economically profitable**

Some participants displayed a metalinguistic consciousness, noticing the usefulness of Arabic – given its grammatical structure – in learning other languages. Enis (G2,41) declared, "Arabic helped me in learning Romanian because there is gender in Arabic too. Those who speak only Turkish don't manage to learn Romanian like I did, they make mistakes for example." Jamal (G2,44), thinking of his children's future, declared: "Arabic is a difficult language. Once my children know it, they will learn other languages more easily." This ideology of cognitive and didactic advantage nourishes the vision of language as symbolic capital in the linguistic marketplace (Bourdieu 1977).

For some, Arabic is synonymous with "profit" (Duchêne & Heller 2011), or economic (Gal 2011: 29) and professional usefulness, especially for going abroad. Some G1 and G2 members have spent years in Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Libya), which helped them get out of poverty. They are grateful to Arabic, which enabled them to migrate under good conditions. Three G2 men (born between 1970 and 1980) had the same emigration experience in Gulf countries before coming back to Antioch with enough money to marry. One G2 man was sent by his company to Syria temporarily as a skilled engineer, to teach a Syrian company's employees how to work in the factory. Due to the arrival of Arabic-speaking patients in Turkey after 2012, a G2 (Antiochian) woman who was an accountant in Antalya started translating in hospitals and then in courts; a young G3 man who studied at university in Trabzon worked as a real estate agent with Arab clients. So, the use of Arabic for professional purposes is effective in these families, though on a very small scale.

In this context, all the interviewees declared that they appreciated Arabic and some justified the necessity or legitimacy of Arabic by quoting “one language, one person” (*bir lisan, bir insan*). This means that every language known is precious, including Arabic. For Neziha (G1,60), “If you know five languages, you are considered as five persons. If you know only one language, you are considered as only one person.” This proverb is also used to claim that it is useful to transmit Arabic (as well as Turkish) to children, not only because of “one person, one language”; they note that people pay a lot of money to learn foreign languages, so it is a shame that Arabic is not transmitted any more. Warde (G1,58) declared: “I’d like the grandchildren to learn Arabic and Turkish [...]; I mean we put a lot of money to learn a language.”<sup>14</sup>

### 4.3. Ideologies with respect to Turkish

All the participants described experiences of linguistic insecurity due to their status as Arabic speakers in public spaces like streets, shops, cinemas, beaches, or school, and during their military service. Because of what they have heard all their lives at school and in the media about how purely Turkish should be spoken, participants expressed their frustration about the Turkish they speak. They have negative feelings about their “competence” in Turkish, describing it as “weak” (*zayıf*), “bad” (*kötü*), “imperfect” (*bozuk*), “not like their Turkish” or “marked and damaged by Arabic phonetically.” This ideology convinces parents to speak Turkish to their children, so that they become “proper” Turkish speakers; this has already been observed in Antioch by Smith- Kocamahhul (2003).<sup>15</sup> The use of the national language becomes easy for some while remaining difficult for others, especially for grandmothers who did not benefit from formal education and know “little” Turkish by contact, as Neziha (G1,60) says in (transcribed) Arabic: “*baʿd ʿīrāq mā stiḥe, ʿa bādde tā ḥke, māsket, māfzāʿ lā yiḥakō ʿleyye*” (Sometimes I’m ashamed to speak, I remain silent, I’m afraid I’ll be mocked). Ideologies with respect to the use of Turkish depend on generation (G1 compared to G2 and G3) but also gender and education (similarly for Kurdish: see Öpengin (2012)).

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study reports evidence that Arabic-speaking families interviewed in Antioch show a high interest in languages in general and see each spoken language as a form of social and intellectual wealth. They estimate each language differently, depending on whether it is acquired and used within the family or outside, and on whether its status is national (Turkish), global (English), or local (Arabic). We saw that families are influenced by the national language ideologies that assign standard Turkish a dominant place and dialectal Arabic a minoritized place with a bad image. From one perspective, these families are at an advanced stage in the language shift toward Turkish, through – as shown in many multilingual contexts – “the dominant language ideology which emphasises the use of the dominant language” (Léglise & Migge 2019: 9). From another perspective, Arabic is gaining prestige again

throughout Turkey, as MSA is taught in some schools and some people see it as potentially profitable.

With respect to the question of language commodification (Heller 2010), viewing languages as marketable goods (Bourdieu 1977), on the professional market today in Antioch, Turkish and English are more important than Arabic. According to G2 parents, as the consequence of Turkish language policy, social actors are convinced that “it is for their good” and/or “it cannot be another way,” if they want to be “good Turks.” In this way they are drawn into the national hegemonic game, aligning themselves with Turkish education policy relative to foreign languages.

The normative, “mono-lingual, mono-ethnic, mono-religious, mono-ideological” ideology (Blommaert & Verschueren 1992: 362) of Turkish policy, based on secularism and maintained by the schools, is still producing a lack of consideration for minority languages and hence for their speakers, who experience linguistic insecurity.

Bilingual families in the Antioch region are in favor of the maintenance of their heritage language, Arabic: parents and grandparents have the desire to transmit it and children express the desire to learn it. But at the same time, they feel frustration because achieving this goal is difficult. They regret not having state support for introducing their local heritage language at school, a major factor of language shift as documented by Yağmur (2001: 426) in other contexts.

The discrimination experienced by all the family members interviewed in Antioch, especially at school and during military service and especially by non-Muslim men, might be explained by the bad image that Arabs still have in Turkey (Küçükcan 2010). Nevertheless, the image of Arabs and Arabic has started to change, as foreign policy tends toward reconciliation with the close regional Arab countries (especially the rich Gulf states). However, there seems to be a difference between the image of Arabic and Arabs in other countries and Turkish citizens as Arabic speakers in Turkey. The image of the Arabs in Turkey fluctuates according to Turkish foreign policy as transmitted in the textbooks, media, cinema, and elsewhere (Küçükcan 2010: 40). As a result of the political rapprochement between Turkey and the Arab world, people are more interested in learning MSA, and its image is improving. Nevertheless, the image of internal language diversity and especially of people of Arabic-Turkish background does not seem to have improved. There seems to be no reason why the ongoing language shift toward Turkish in the Antioch region will be reversed.

This ethnographic study, based on observant participation, confirms the language shift already documented from Arabic to Turkish in the Antioch region. Besides, the analysis of language ideologies through interviews showed on the one hand conflicting ideologies toward Arabic (pride and shame with respect to their local variety of Arabic and profit toward Arabic as a hypernym) and, on the other hand, the importance of national ideologies toward Turkish. As a consequence, I show that the occurring presence of MSA in education and the media in the country seems to have no effect on the language shift in progress. In order to investigate family language policy in Antioch, the analyses of recorded language practices could give further insight into their correspondence with the ideologies, particularly if we

focus on third-generation language practices. Further investigation of the place of Arabic would also be interesting at other sites in Turkey where local Arabic is spoken, in the eastern regions of Urfa, Diyarbakır, Mardin, and Siirt (Jastrow 2006) where the population has a different religious profile, with more Sunnis and Christians in Mardin than in Antioch, for example.

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This article was accepted for publication in January 2023, prior to the devastating earthquake that struck South Turkey on February 6, 2023. I dedicate this article to all those impacted by the catastrophic earthquake. In this catastrophe, all the participants of this study who reside in the Antioch area were impacted; regrettably, some have not been rescued. I extend my heartfelt sympathy to them and assure them of my unwavering support.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For the Antioch context, see Istanbulu 2017: 13-27.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from non-English sources have been translated by the author.

<sup>3</sup> "In those years [during the Ottoman period], the perception was created that the public could not speak and could not understand what was read" (Harmancı 2010: 130-131).

<sup>4</sup> Especially by the Republican People's Party (CHP), and from the 1970s on by its major leader, Bülent Ecevit (Brendemoen 1990: 457-458).

<sup>5</sup> For example, in 1934 everyone had to choose a Turkish surname (avoiding any mention of tribe, race, or nation). This reinforced the toponym policy of Turkification, applied nationwide.

<sup>6</sup> İmams are the prayer leaders in a mosque, who have a certain authority in the Muslim believers' community; "hatip" means preacher.

<sup>7</sup> The other minority languages face the same situation as Arabic.

<sup>8</sup> During visits to Mardin President Erdoğan spoke in Arabic to a woman who said to him that she could not speak Turkish (Radikal 2012), and he was welcomed with a placard in Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic (Barlık & Sincar 2019): see Appendix.

<sup>9</sup> See the ban on programs for children and political topics reported by Bozarslan (2005: 110).

<sup>10</sup> In primary education, for years 4-8 in 2012-2013, and for years 2-8 in 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Nearly 4 million children aged four or older participated in these courses in 2017-2018, with 2.5 million in age group 5-14. The Religious Ministry collaborates with the Health Ministry to improve the conditions of these courses by offering healthy food to all children, praising hygiene and physical activities, warning about the dangers of new technologies, and rewarding good learners with bicycles.

- <sup>12</sup> Arab nationalism is viewed as a disloyal ideology, which led to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire (Hut 2016).
- <sup>13</sup> As underlined by Kurban (2007: 17): “Minorities whose languages are selected criticize the content and time restrictions, and the outdated nature of news programs. They see the broadcasts as symbolic, and thus failing to meet the needs of their communities.”
- <sup>14</sup> “One language is one person” (*bir lisan, bir insan*) was quoted by Antiochian families in previous studies (G2 Manira in Istanbulu 2017: 217); Mehtap in Smith-Kocamahhul (2003: 146), when participants expressed their sadness about the language-shift process or their wish to transmit Arabic like any other language.
- <sup>15</sup> This has also been documented for other languages, like the Laz language, “on the grounds that being raised in a bilingual environment where both Laz and Turkish are provided might prevent them from being fully proficient in Turkish” (Kavakli 2017: 54), and Kurdish (Öpengin 2012; Sherwani & Barlik 2020).

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## APPENDIX

President Erdoğan is welcomed in three languages in Siirt on 7 March 2019 (Barlık & Sincar 2019). The first and second lines are in Turkish. The third line is in Arabic transcribed according to Turkish orthographical rules. The fourth line is in Kurdish, transcribed in the Latin alphabet.

