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## Agency through conversational alignment in transnational families: Shaping family language policy

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### Abstract

In this paper I analyse agency through conversational alignment within trilingual transnational families living between the Antioch region in southern Turkey, where the eldest members were born, and France or Germany, where they migrated and where the members of the youngest generation were born. Focusing on language practices across three generations, based on conversational analysis of multilingual corpora recorded during ethnographic fieldwork, I explore agency within family language policy. The language repertoires of the members of these families include resources in Arabic, Turkish and the national languages of the country where they live (mostly French or German). In this transnational context, participants present varied profiles and asymmetrical language resources in their different languages. The analyses of their intergenerational conversations show the use of all languages, even the heritage language Arabic, by the youngest participants, encouraged by mutual alignments of language and of choice of varieties between grandparents and grandchildren.

**Keywords:** conversational alignment; child agency; transnational families; family multilingualism; family language policy

### Introduction

The sociolinguistics of multilingualism applied to European contexts has shown that the multilingual urban space and linguistic superdiversity are linked to migration (see among others Blommaert and Backus 2011; Yağmur and Extra 2011). The field of family language policy (hereafter FLP) has concentrated on how languages are managed within multilingual families, and on how ideologies and beliefs about languages influence their family language practices (among many others see Schwartz 2010; Spolsky 2012; Báez 2013; Fogle and King 2013; Curdt-Christiansen 2013; Istanbulu 2021). The place of heritage languages in families has been observed in the parent-child dyad (Schwartz and Verschik 2013; De Houwer 2007), for example observing codeswitching in conflict talk by children with their parents (Zhu 2008).

FLP in transnational families is mostly studied in terms of language heritage, its maintenance and transmission (Canagarajah 2008). Language planning strategies have been identified (Yousef 2022), the impact of national education has been highlighted (Correia-Labaye 2005), tensions between mothers and children's language beliefs have been observed (Bui et al. 2022), and how their multilingual experience affects their social life has been explored (Zhu and Wei 2016). Moreover, recent studies investigating FLP through digital means has revealed the role of mobile app-mediated communication in shaping FLP and the mostly oral use of minority languages (Palviainen and Räisä 2023).

Although research on FLP has become an increasingly topical and important field of research (Curdt-Christiansen and Palviainen 2023), relatively few studies address language practices across more than two generations. Most of them concentrate on the parent-child dyad (Borland 2006; Caminal et al. 2018; Forrest 2018). Few studies involve more than one heritage language (Istanbulu 2021; Zhan 2021). To fill this gap, this article not only focuses on intergenerational language practices but also specifically addresses the phenomenon of agency (Ahearn 2000) through conversational alignments (Auer 1995) observed in the daily language practices of transnational families. Language choice plays a role in family members' subsequent practices (Spolsky 2007). Alignments and misalignments through language choice have been treated as convergence or divergence (Léglise and Sánchez Moreano 2017), or as resistance in the case of a child's response to her parents' FLP (Fogle and King 2013). Language practices thus have the potential to change FLP 'from below', particularly in the case of families where no explicit FLP has been formulated (Istanbulu 2017). This is particularly the case in multilingual transnational

families from the Antioch region in southern Turkey. In this region, Arabic is still the language of first socialization<sup>1</sup> of nearly half the population (Istanbullu 2024), despite an ongoing language shift in favour of the national language, Turkish (Arnold 1998; Smith-Kocamahhul 2003). These bilingual families have acquired other languages since coming to Europe, at least national languages such as French in France and German in Germany, which has dynamically changed their linguistic repertoires (Istanbullu 2021).

In this article I will show how alignments and agency occur during interactions between grandparents and grandchildren. The first part of the article reviews the existing literature about FLP and the intergenerational language practices of transnational families in order to address the question of agency and alignment. The second part clarifies the methodology used while doing fieldwork and data collection. The third part analyses the intergenerational language practices, showing alignment and agency. The final part offers a discussion and concluding remarks on FLP in transnational families.

## 1. Agency in transgenerational communication among transnational families

### 1.1 Grandparent-grandchild communication in FLP studies

FLP studies generally focus on interactions between parents and children; research on interactions between grandparents and grandchildren is less common, although some pioneer work was conducted forty years ago (Schmidt and Padilla 1983). Studies have focused on the role of grandparents, and on their practices especially with respect to concern for the heritage language; for example, Braun (2012) identifies the affective factor of grandparents in language maintenance. Tan Jun Hao and Ng (2010) observe that in Chinese families in Singapore, where vernaculars are less used, the nature and frequency of interactions with grandparents living in extended families explain grandchildren's attitudes towards vernaculars. Ruby (2012) demonstrates the role of grandparents in the social, educational and professional life of their grandchildren, as well as their maintenance of the family language, Bangla, by sharing their 'funds of knowledge' (ibid.: 67) as educators as well as grandparents. Wei (1994, 180) evokes the variations in language choice and speaker variables by generation due to speakers' Chinese and non-Chinese ties. Istanbullu (2021) shows the importance of kindness (of grandparents towards children) and freedom in implicit FLP, which allows for the use of various linguistic resources and the use of two heritage languages by grandchildren (Arabic and Turkish).

### 1.2. Agency in intergenerational communication

The concept of agency emerged in the 1970s as a way to explain human behaviour. It makes it possible 'to explore the capacities of individuals to act independently of structural constraints' (Rapport and Overing 2000: 1). Parallel to other social action, in the context of language, agency is identifiable in the way the agent uses unusual linguistic features (Ahearn 2000: 14). Agency related to language has been studied in various contexts: with respect to grammar, semantics and gender, in both oral and written forms (Ahearn 2001; Kang 2020); in formal education (Kang 2020); in early language development (Schwartz and Yağmur 2018); and in language socialization in multilingual families (Kheirkhah and Cekaite 2018).

Individuals' agency has been studied in conversation. The active role of parents (Deprez 1996; De Houwer 1999; Spolsky 2012; Curdt-Christiansen and Wang 2018) and grandparents (Zhan 2021) has been observed, as well as the active role of children (Fogle and King 2013; Said and Zhu 2019). Fogle and King (2013) observed the agentive role of children in shaping FLP through interactions, though in a national rather than transnational context. Later, agency has been observed in the narratives of the speakers interviewed about how they lived their language experience (Obojska and Purkarthofer 2018). An intergenerational analysis of agency during interactions between Mandarin-speaking grandparents and their grandchild has also been studied, with a Chinese mother and a Japanese father using English as the lingua franca in the family living in Japan (Zhan 2021: 21).

### 1.3 Alignments in language practices

In language practices, speech turns are the smallest conversation unit. Each interlocutor can align or misalign to the language choices and language varieties of the previous speech turn. Alignment or misalignment consists in adopting or rejecting, in a more or less unconscious way, the language, variety, gestures and mimicry of an interlocutor. This can vary according to the socio-cultural context (Coupland and Giles 1988). Although alignment

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<sup>1</sup> In the sociolinguistics of multilingualism this term is largely preferred over 'mother tongue' or 'heritage language' when studying family multilingualism and family language practices (see Léglise 2019, 2023); it builds on previous studies of language socialization (Schieffelin and Ochs 1984).

originally emerged in the field of discourse and communication (Giles 1973: 197) and was developed in social psychology within the theory of accommodation (Giles et al. 1991), it is now widely used in conversation analysis as a way to describe cooperation between interlocutors (Stivers et al. 2011: 27).

The analysis of sequentiality in bilingual conversation (Auer 1995) provides a basis for analysing alignment between participants. Léglise and Alby (2017) have proposed a methodology for annotating speech turns in multilingual corpora based on Auer’s proposals. Speech turns are codified according to the language used. Alignment is thus observable in the language or variety chosen in the speech turn.

Although some authors argue that alignment can take place outside the context of interactions with other interlocutors (see Brooks and Kempe 2014), here I use alignment to refer to the choice of language by a speaker in relation to their interlocutor. I argue that misalignment, or initiation of another language or variety in a speech turn, shows the agency of the speaker in multilingual conversation. By examining alignment and misalignment in conversation we can look at micro-processes of agency. In what follows we will look at how agency emerges during intergenerational conversations within multilingual, transnational families in superdiverse environments, in two European capitals.

## 2. An ethnographic sociolinguistic study in Paris and Berlin

Most studies concerning FLP in Turkish families focus on first- and second-generation parents and third-generation children (Bezioglu-Goktolga and Yağmur 2018; Et-Bozkurt and Yağmur 2022), and observe a language shift through the greater use by the second generation of the national language of the country that their parents immigrated to, where they were born and now live (Bezioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur 2022; Bohnacker 2022).

In this ethnographically-oriented sociolinguistic study, I behave and act as an insider researcher (Costley et al. 2010: 3). During the last decade I worked with families from my personal network whose background I shared (Antioch in southern Turkey). Arabic was a language of first socialization for the grandparents, who belong to various confessional minorities. That means their language and religion were not part of the dominant majority group in Turkey (Turks, Sunnis) before migration (Arnold 2000; Smith-Kocamahhul 2003).

Immersive ethnographic fieldwork started when I asked the families for permission to stay at their homes. Observation and data collection were conducted intermittently in several stays of up to two weeks in each family between 2013 and 2015. I recorded language practices among three generations<sup>2</sup> of each family, supplemented with individual interviews. For this article, two families with similar social, structural and linguistic characteristics have been selected for analysis.

### 2.1 Data collection within transnational families in Paris and Berlin

This study follows two families, one in Paris and one in Berlin. Three generations are included – the grandparents, their children and their grandchildren. Unlike the studies cited just above, both the first and second generations were born in Turkey. The grandparents and their children lived in Antioch before they came to Europe in the 1970s or 1980s. The grandchildren were all born in Europe. The grandparents are retired. Their children and their children’s spouses are gainfully employed. Their grandchildren follow successful formal education. The different members of these families meet at least monthly at each other’s homes (for more detailed context and background, see Istanbulu 2017: 115–135 for Paris and 207–225 for Berlin).

As presented in Table 1, 16 hours of intergenerational conversations were recorded in order to observe family language practices.

**Table 1. Data collection in Paris and Berlin**

Place	Family	Participants	Recordings in hours	Corpora used for this paper
Paris area	4	33	4	Family 1 Corpus 1 (telephone call) Total 25 minutes
Berlin	3	22	12	Family 2 Corpus 2 (telephone call) Total 40 minutes
Total	7	55	16	65 minutes

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘generation’ is used here to make it easier to refer to different family members: the grandparents who migrated are considered to be the first generation, their children to be the second and their grandchildren to be the third. In order to identify the participants more clearly, a generation code precedes a pseudonym, for example [G1,Katifa], where G1 signifies ‘first generation’.

By including the grandparents, the parent-child dyad that is standard in FLP studies can be avoided and an intergenerational analysis pursued instead.

## 2.2 Transcription of plurilingual corpora

The data used for this study come from recordings of intergenerational conversations conducted by phone (from Paris in 2013 and Berlin in 2015) while the retired grandparents were in Turkey for two four-month-long holidays. At that time, the third-generation members rarely used the telephone (they had no access to smartphones), and only spoke occasionally by landline telephone with their grandparents when they missed them.

These intergenerational conversations constitute concrete examples of family multilingualism (Léglise 2023). They are instances of heterogeneous language practices (meaning the use of different linguistic resources in multilingual conversations), elsewhere also categorised as languaging (García and Wei 2014). For the transcription, annotation and analysis, I follow the methodology set up for plurilingual corpora (see Léglise and Alby 2017).

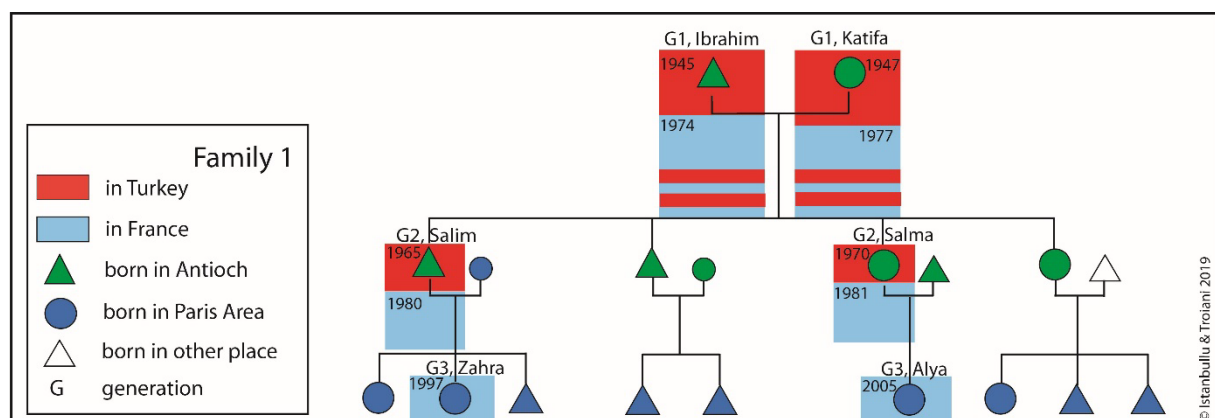
## 2.3 Data selection in Paris and Berlin

From all the conversations in each family in Paris and Berlin, I have chosen two telephone calls (Corpus 1 and Corpus 2) because of their intergenerational relevance, and to document language practices by telephone from a period when little research in this area focused on phone conversations (2013–2015).

Following Léglise (2019), who suggests documenting the trajectories of transnational families via genealogies, including long-life biographical contexts for each member, in order to understand the different profiles and background of members of the same family, I present the genealogies of these two families (Diagram 1 and Diagram 2).

These representations enable us to understand the contexts of families over three generations. In comparison with nuclear families who stay in the same country, for example, the families in this study are complex; they shed light on individual linguistic repertoires and on language practices during family conversations due to the different linguistic resources that transnational family members have acquired in different places (Wei 2012; King 2016). The differences between members are linked to the places where they were born and grew up, which gave them different linguistic profiles and also different social profiles: the eldest members were born in an Arabic-speaking rural area of Turkey, while the youngest – belonging to the third generation – were born in Paris or Berlin, big, superdiverse urban environments. In both families, the parents try to take their children to the Antioch region during the summer holidays as often as they can (every two or three years), and the grandchildren enjoy this very much. The diagrams are designed to show the different trajectories of the members of the same families.

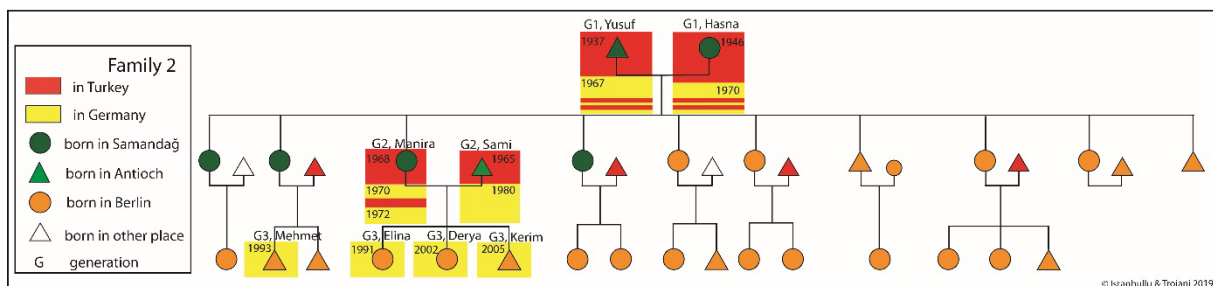
**Diagram 1. Family 1 by generation in Paris, Corpus 1**



The top of Diagram 1 shows the eldest members of these families, the grandparents (G1); a triangle stands for a male, here G1,Ibrahim, a circle for a female, here G1,Katifa; green stands for birth in Antioch, in the Arabic-speaking environment, blue for birth in France; a red rectangle means birth in Turkey on the date indicated (Ibrahim was 68 years old and Katifa 66 during fieldwork in 2013). The blue rectangle with the date indicates the first trip to Europe: Ibrahim came in 1974 when he was 29 and Katifa in 1977 when she was 30. The red and blue lines represent their transnational life, with stays in both Europe and Turkey. Below are their children, the second

generation (G2). Salim and Salma were also born in Turkey and came to France aged 15 and 11 at different dates, Salim in 1980 and Salma in 1981. Their daughters, G3,Zahra and Alya, were both born in Paris; they were 16 and 8 years old in 2013. Five members of this family participate in Corpus 1.

**Diagram 2. Family 2 by generation in Berlin, Corpus 2**



Family 2 in Berlin, represented in Diagram 2, has a similar configuration. The eldest members, the first generation, were also born in the Antioch region. G1,Yusuf was 30 years old when he came to Berlin in 1967. His wife G1,Hasna was 24 when she joined him two years later in 1970 with her two-year-old daughter G2,Manira, who was sent back to Turkey for two years before the parents could bring her again to Berlin in 1972, where she then stayed. Her husband G2,Sami was six years old when he came to Berlin in 1970. Their daughters and son were born in Berlin. G3,Elina was 24, her brother Kerim 9, and their sister Derya 12 years old during the data collection. They all now live in Berlin. Five members of this family participated in Corpus 2.

These different trajectories and profiles result in asymmetrical resources in the different languages in family members' repertoires. In the following section, we will describe how agency and alignment phenomena occur in language practices within the families.

### 3. Data analysis of multilingual intergenerational conversations from Paris and Berlin

Language choice and alternations in the corpora were examined through both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative part is based on the systematic counting of speech turns and language units in multilingual language practices (see Léglise 2022 for a discussion). The qualitative analysis consists of observing what participants say, to whom they say it and how they say it. As agency during conversations between grandparents and grandchildren is the main focus in this study, I was particularly intrigued by language alignment with respect to intergenerational language practices. Alignment shows how participants use their linguistic resources and position themselves in relation to each other. In what follows, therefore, I focus on ways of reacting to others through the phenomena of alignment and agency, following the identification of 'remarkable phenomena' (Léglise and Alby 2017), in particular non-standard linguistic forms and phenomena attributable to contact-induced variation in plurilingual corpora.

#### 3.1 Mutual alignment between the grandparents and their grandchildren

The assumption is that language alignment or misalignment relative to what was initiated in the previous speech turn provides information about the positioning of the participants. When the previous language is followed, the speaker is said to be aligned with the choice of the interlocutor. A particularly remarkable feature of the corpora is the almost systematic alignment of the G1 to the G3, that is, to the language choices initiated by the third generation, which is mostly the national language they know best, either French or German. In Illustration 1, we can see that in speech turn 4 G1,Ibrahim, the grandfather, aligns himself with the language initiated by his granddaughter G3,Alya in speech turn 3.

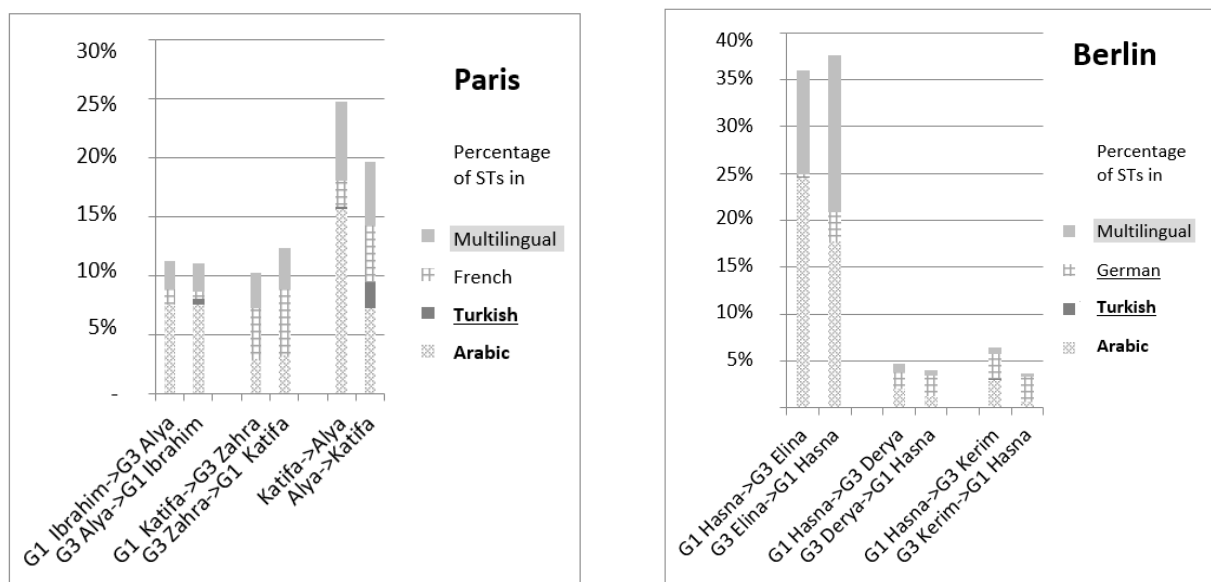
**Illustration 1. Example of alignment of language choice between a grandfather and his granddaughter**

Speech turn 1	G1,Katifa speaks in <b>Arabic</b>	
Speech turn 2	G1,Ibrahim speaks in <b>Arabic</b>	
Speech turn 3	G3,Alya speaks in French	
Speech turn 4	G1,Ibrahim speaks in French	=>The grandfather G1,Ibrahim aligns to the language initiated by his granddaughter G3,Alya

This alignment phenomenon is also visible in the quantitative analysis based on the transcription of the speech turns (STs) of the four corpora collected from Family 1 and 2 in Berlin and Paris. In Figure 1, the proportion of each language spoken is roughly the same in G1 and G3 when they speak to each other. This shows that they are mutually aligned with each other's language choices, regardless of generation. The analysis of the interactions of these families shows that there are speech turns in Arabic, French, German and Turkish, but also in a multilingual mode, which is a strategy in endolingual plurilingual settings, meaning settings where the interlocutors share the same linguistic background (De Pietro 1988; Léglise 2022). Both in Paris and Berlin the multilingual mode is obviously an important linguistic resource for communication between the participants. We notice a different distribution of languages according to the interlocutor. There is some use of Arabic by the G3, and of Turkish only between a grandmother and a grandson (in both directions) in Berlin (Figure 1).

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the interactions in these families reveals the phenomenon of alignment to language choices, especially between the G1 and G3 (see Istanbulu 2021 for detailed results). It indicates that family language policy is managed 'from below', first according to the interlocutor and second by means of alignment to language choices. Its status as a lingua franca explains the use of Arabic in France (Barontini 2013; Caubet 2008; Istanbulu and Léglise 2014; Istanbulu 2017) and of Turkish in Germany (Dirim and Auer 2012).

**Figure 1: Alignment of G1 and G3 in Paris and Berlin**



We have also observed these alignment phenomena in the qualitative analysis of the interactions. In Paris, in Excerpt<sup>3</sup> 1 below, while talking about two grandchildren, Myriam and ‘Ale, who are absent from the corpus, G3,Alya initiates French in C1,419. The grandmother G1,Katifa aligns herself in C1,420 to the language choice of her eight-year-old granddaughter, the national language that she is less at ease with than Arabic.

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

C1,418	G1,Katifa	<b>e::j waʃla: // maligne ya: ʃəhɦata: la: Myriam / uw ʃAle ʃa:r bʃid mæ hijke bitte↑ ?</b> <i>yes wallah // smart poor Myriam / and ‘Ale he lives far away doesn't he my daughter ↑ ?</i>
C1,419	G3,Alya	il dit Aya Aya (she imitates the way an absent cousin pronounces the name Alya) <i>he says Aya Aya</i>
C1,420	G1,Katifa	il dit [Aya↑] Aya↑? <i>he says [Aya↑] Aya↑?</i>

<sup>3</sup> In the excerpts presented, French, German and Turkish speech is transcribed in Western orthography, Arabic in IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). French is in normal font, German in underlined normal, **Arabic in bold**, **Turkish in underlined bold**; multilingual speech turns are highlighted in grey, with their translation below in italics. Other signs used are: [ / ] for pause; [ : ] for lengthening; [ ↑ ] for rising or [ ↓ ] for lowering tone.

We observe the same alignment in Berlin. In Excerpt 2 below, the participant G3,Kerim initiates German in C2,574, and the other participant, the grandmother G1,Hasna, aligns herself in C2,575 – which is remarkable, since she declared during the interview how difficult it was for her to speak German, the national language of the country where she mostly resides.

**Excerpt 2. Corpus 2 Berlin phone call: G3,Kerim gets in touch with his grandmother G1,Hasna**

C2,573	G1,Hasna	<u>[ʃki:fək ya: Kərim ʃki:fək ↑? mli:ħ↑?</u> <i>[how are you o Kerim ↑? are you well ↑</i>
C2,574	G3,Kerim	<u>gu:t und Dir ↑?</u> <i>well and you ↑?</i>
C2,575	G1,Hasna	<u>ich auch gut</u> <i>I well too</i>

We have seen two examples of the same alignment, one in the Paris region where the grandmother aligns with the language choice of her granddaughter G3,Alya, namely French, and the other in Berlin where the grandmother aligns with the language choice of her grandson G3,Kerim, namely German. This kind of alignment by G1 to G3’s use of national languages provides an illustration of how language shift can appear slowly, from turn to turn, during tangible interactions.

We will see in the following excerpts how in turn G3 participants align to Arabic, the language used by their grandmother. This mutual alignment was observable in all corpora, with as its consequence the use of Arabic by the youngest participants.

**3.2 Alignment with adult language choices by the third generation**

The second remarkable phenomenon observed in the corpus is the returned alignment from the third to the first generation. In both Paris and Berlin, participants from the first and second generations (grandparents and parents) sometimes initiate their language of first socialisation, Arabic, in the interactions, and we can observe the occasional alignment of the third generation to this.

In Excerpt 3, the grandfather G1,Ibrahim initiates Arabic in C1,206 by speaking to his granddaughter G3,Zahra. In the next turn Zahra aligns to Arabic, a language she has difficulty using, as she declared in the interviews, Arabic being the language of first socialisation of her father while French is her mother’s.

**Excerpt 3. Corpus 1 Paris phone call: Alignment of G3,Zahra to Arabic initiated by G1,Ibrahim**

C1,205	G3,Zahra	[ah merci [hh thank you
C1,206	G1,Ibrahim	voilà <b>tāmām habibe Zahra ↑?</b> <i>here you go okay my darling Zahra ↑?</i>
C1,207	G3,Zahra	e <b>yes</b>

Similarly, in Excerpt 4, C2,656, the grandmother G1,Hasna addresses her granddaughter G3,Derya in Arabic to ask her how she is doing. G3,Derya does not understand and conveys this in German in C2,657, misaligning herself with her grandmother’s Arabic. But in C2,658 her mother G2,Manira repeats the question in Arabic, saying what the grandmother said. G3,Derya aligns herself to Arabic in C2,659 by answering her grandmother’s question, saying that she is fine.

**Excerpt 4. Corpus 2 Berlin phone call: Alignment of G3,Derya to Arabic initiated by G1,Hasna, repeated by G2,Manira**

C2,656	G1,Hasna	<u>[ški:fik saħħtik yā bitte Derya ↑?</u> <i>[how is your health o my daughter Derya? ↑</i>
C2,657	G3,Derya	(in a low voice) <u>was ↑?</u> <i>what ↑?</i>
C2,658	G2,Manira	<u>ški:f saħħtik yā bit[te Derya ↑?</u> <i>how is your health o my daugh[ter Derya? ↑</i>
C2,659	G3,Derya	<u>[mlīhā u inte ↑?</u> <i>[I am fine and you? ↑</i>



We also see some alignment phenomena supported by affective terms, as in Excerpt 5 below. In C1,516, the granddaughter G1,Zahra speaks in French. In the following speech turn, C1,517, the grandmother misaligns herself from her granddaughter and initiates Arabic with a term of endearment addressed to the female interlocutors, **'habiba:te'** [*my darlings*]. Then in C1,518 we see the granddaughter aligning herself with the Arabic initiated by the grandmother, returning the traditional expression of wishing good evening.

**Excerpt 5. Corpus 1 Paris phone call: Demonstration of alignment to Arabic by the granddaughter**

- C1,516 G3,Zahra bon↑  
good↑
- C1,517 G1,Katifa ja:l̩a:h ʔabiba:te t̩asbaʔo bi xe::r  
go my darlings good evening/night to you
- C1,518 G3,Zahra u ʔinta bi xe::r  
and to you too

A notable feature of the corpora is thus the mutual alignment of speakers to the language choices of their interlocutors. We observe the alignment process between the third and first generations both in Paris and Berlin. In all the corpora, as a consequence of the alignment of G1 to the language choices of G3, G3 speakers imitate the acceptance of the language proposed by G1 and thus realign themselves with G1 (G3 ->G1: 30 occurrences) when speaking Arabic.

These two alignment phenomena were surprising to me, and quite remarkable. In the first case (G1 -> G3: 24 occurrences) it is unexpected that older participants would follow younger ones. Istanbulu (2021) has already shown that in these families, the elder members do not usually follow the younger ones, and would not align to their language or variation choices. In the second type of alignment (G3 -> G1), what is surprising is that the language concerned, Arabic, is said to be difficult by the third generation, who nevertheless accept the language choice of the elders.

This seems to show the positive and encouraging role in communication played by the alignment between the youngest and oldest participants in these corpora. The practice of Arabic by the third generation is not negligible, despite their relatively limited resources.

**3.3 Agency through the use of innovative resources in Arabic by G3**

In the analyses of the interactions within the same family, agency is observed when social actors use innovative linguistic resources. This innovative use is not what is usually expected in these families. We will illustrate it here with the use of varieties of Arabic different from the Antioch variety, which is usually spoken by these families. We will see that these varieties are initiated by the G3 participants with their grandparents, who align to these forms even if they are not supposed to know or use them.

In Excerpt 6, the transcription of a telephone call between G2 and G3 participants in Paris and G1 in Turkey, G3,Zahra opens the interaction with her grandmother G1,Katifa in C1,6 by greeting her with **'salām ʔalæykum'** [*peace be upon you*]. This greeting form is number- and gender-conditioned in Antioch Arabic: it is not used by girls or women, only by boys or men to greet each other. Basically, she should have chosen another formula used in Antioch. But in the excerpt the granddaughter uses it with her grandmother, who answers with the full expression in C1,7, which is also unusual in the Antioch variety of Arabic.

**Excerpt 6. Corpus 1 Paris phone call: agentive greeting form**

- C1,5 G1,Katifa (picks up the telephone and says) \*ʔalo \*alo \*allô  
\*hello \*hello \*hello
- C1,6 G3,Zahra (voice louder) salām ʔalæykum  
peace be upon you
- C1,7 G1,Katifa ʔalæykum assala[:::m  
and upon you be peace

In Excerpt 7 G3,Zahra again interacts with her grandmother G1,Katifa, who asks in French for news of her mother in C1,286, to which G3,Zahra answers with a set expression in Arabic in C1,287. The grandmother reacts and continues the routine questions about the rest of the family in C1,288, still in Arabic. G3,Alya intervenes in C1,290 by whispering to her cousin G3,Zahra to say something in Arabic, using the verb in the imperative in French. She

repeats this twice insistently in C1,292 and G3,Zahra obeys in C1,293, saying the word that her cousin Alya told her to say. In C1,294 the grandmother reacts with the full expression and all the participants laugh for six seconds. Then in C1,295 G3,Alya's mother G2,Salma explains in French that Alya has initiated Zahra's participation in Arabic, while still laughing. Finally in C1,296 Alya confirms this.

In fact the linguistic feature 'læbes' is never used in Antioch Arabic, and is not even understandable by its speakers, because it comes from another variety that they do not know (see Istanbulu 2024), North African Arabic. G3,Alya likes playing with language resources, as confirmed here by her agentive use of linguistic features that she has learnt outside the family in the Paris area, where this greeting formula has been introduced by speakers of Maghrebin Arabic. This has acquired lingua franca status among Arabic speakers in the Paris area (Istanbulu and Léglise 2014), and has had the status of a language of France since 1999.<sup>4</sup> This use of linguistic resources is amusing for the participants: they laugh because the word is not in common use, and signals the speaker's originality and agentive behaviour.

This is an example of Bakhtin's observation that 'There are no "neutral" words and forms ... Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life, all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word' (Bakhtin 1981: 293).

### Excerpt 7. Corpus 1 Paris phone call: amusing agentive greeting form

C1,286	G1,Katifa	maman ça va: ?↑ <i>is mum fine: ?↑</i>
C1,287	G3,Zahra	<b>ḥamdulla:h</b> <b>thank god</b>
C1,288	G1,Katifa	<b>e: lḥamdillāh / killejtīn ça va kəjjsi:n ↑? / u inte kəjse ↑?</b> <b>yes thank god all of them are fine you [plural] are fine / and you are fine</b>
C1,289	G3,Zahra	<b>h:m?</b>
C1,290	G3,Alya	(whispers to G3,Zahra's ear) <b>læbes / dis dis</b> <b>læbes [fine] / say say</b>
C1,291	G1,Katifa	<b>u inte kəjs[e]↑?</b> <b>and you are you fine ↑?</b>
C1,292	G3,Alya	[dis dis [say say
C1,293	G3,Zahra	<b>læbes ↓</b> <b>læbes [fine] ↓</b>
C1,294	G1,Katifa	<b>læbes ʕləjke ?↑ (laughs)</b> <b>are you fine you ?↑ (laughs)</b>
C1,295	G2,Salma	<i>c'est Alya qui lui dit (everybody laughs for 6")</i> <i>that's Alya who says to her (everybody laughs for 6")</i>
C1,296	G3,Alya	<b>c'est moi qui lui dis læbes ↑</b> <b>it's me who says to her læbes [are you fine] ↑</b>
C1,297	G1,Katifa	<b>e:ij (laughs) nšallāh jā bitte læbes nšallāh / allāh jisʕidik</b> <b>ye:is (laughs) I hope læbes [fine] my daughter I hope / god makes you happy</b>

### 3.4 Agency through the initiation of Turkish by G3 in conversation

A second example of the agency of G3 participants is taking the initiative to speak Turkish even although they are not fluent (as do-it-yourself *bricolage*). We will see here how this is initiated in conversation with their grandparents, who align to these forms.

In Excerpt 8, G3,Alya uses Turkish with her grandmother. She practises 'bricolage', since she is not used to speaking Turkish within her family. She wants to show her cousin G3,Zahra that she can speak Turkish: she starts in C1,475 by asking in Turkish the age of the young neighbour Yusuf who lives next door to her grandmother. In C1,476 the grandmother G1,Katifa answers in Arabic that she does not know. In C1,482 we see G3,Alya explaining to her cousin Zahra in French the meaning of what she said in Turkish.

<sup>4</sup> Arabic is recognised by the 1999 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which is the European convention for the protection and promotion of languages used by traditional minorities.

Yet '**kaç yaşındasın**' means 'how old are you' in Turkish. G3,Alya uses Turkish in an unexpected way, in accordance with her linguistic resources, without any correction or other remark by her mother or grandmother. This alignment to her *bricolage* by her mother G2,Salma and grandmother G1,Katifa is also noteworthy.

#### Excerpt 8. Corpus 1 Paris phone call: demonstration of Turkish ability by the granddaughter

C1,473	G3,Alya	<b>nænæ</b> ↑ <i>granny</i>
C1,474	G1,Katifa	<b>naʕæm</b> <i>yes</i>
C1,475	G3,Alya	<b>Yusuf kaç yaşındasın</b> ↑? (her neighbour) <b>how old are you Yusuf</b> ↑?
C1,476	G1,Katifa	<b>walla: ʔabaʕref</b> <b>well I don't know</b>
C1,477	G3,Alya	<b>u Zeyne:b</b> (her neighbour) ↑? <b>and Zeyne:b</b> ↑?
C1,478	G1,Katifa	<b>u Zeyne:b</b> ↑ // <b>aʕqæd ʕimra:: u Zeyne:b Zeyne:b Zeyne:b ʕimra:: yirmi bir</b> ↑? <b>yirmi iki</b> ↑? <b>ʔabaʕref yirmi</b> ↑? / <b>ʔabaqa baʕref</b> (laughs) <b>and Zeyne:b</b> ↑ // <b>how old is Zeyne:b Zeyne:b Zeyne:b is twenty-one</b> ↑? <b>twenty-two</b> ↑? <b>I don't know twenty</b> ↑? / <b>I don't know</b>
C1,479	G2,Salma	<b>hə?</b> <b>oh</b>
C1,480	G3,Alya	<b>maʕleʕ</b> <b>it doesn't matter</b>
C1,481	G1,Katifa	<b>ʔabaʕref ʔaʕqad ʕimra:</b> <b>I don't know any more how old she is</b>
C1,482	G3,Alya	(in a low voice to her cousin G3,Zahra) <b>kaç yaşındasın</b> ça veut dire elle a quel âge↑ <b>kaç yaşındasın</b> that means how old is she [how old are you]
483	G3,Zahra	<b>h::m</b>

In other excerpts, the grandchildren G3,Alya and Zahra talk about their ability to read Turkish, as in Excerpt 9, indicating their desire to know Turkish.

#### Excerpt 9. Corpus 1 Paris phone call: demonstration of Turkish ability by the granddaughter

C1,403	G3,Alya	<b>oui mais une fois dans l'avion j'ai vu</b> ↑ <b>lütfen</b> et je l'ai lu↑ <b>yes but once on the plane I saw lütfen [please] and I read it</b> ↑
C1,407	G3, Zahra	XXX [dans un- ] il y avait marqué <b>çay salon[u]</b> XXX [in a- ]there was written <b>çay salon[u [tea house]</b>

#### 4. Discussion and concluding remarks

During grandparent-grandchild phone calls in these families, speaking in a multilingual mode (using various linguistic resources in the same speech turn) is an important strategy. Most of the time, in all the corpora, we see the alignment of G1 to G3 language choices: the grandchildren misalign and initiate a codeswitch to another language (mostly the national language) or to a variety, and their grandparents align to their choices. But we also saw that grandchildren align by imitation, mainly to their family heritage languages (Arabic or Turkish) initiated by the grandparents. These family language practices are instances of FLP from below: we saw very clearly how language choices appear in family conversation, as here on the phone.

Analysing the transcription, we also observed the use of other varieties of Arabic, both in the Paris region and in Berlin (see Istanbulu 2017: 313–334 for many more occurrences). This is linked to the fact that language is 'inextricably embedded in networks of sociocultural relations' (Ahearn 2001: 110). In our case these are instances of the agency of G3. G3 participants who have learnt other varieties of Arabic with or from their relations, function as influential connections: 'language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world' (Bakhtin 1981: 293).

Alignment, meaning the acceptance of the other person's way and style of speaking or 'language choice' (such as a multilingual mode or another variety of Arabic) is in my opinion the most notable phenomenon identified in the corpora. We have evidence that grandparents do not force their grandchildren to speak Arabic, but help and support them: in our corpora they never make negative remarks on the way they speak and their use of heritage languages, or on differences that could be interpreted and described as mistakes. In the same way, the grandchildren do not make negative comments about the way their grandparents speak the language of their main country of residence (French or German (Istanbullu 2017)). We can see a phenomenon of dual agency here. The G1 and G3 participants do not do what is expected of them based on their status in the family as grandparents and grandchildren. The youngest participants do not necessarily follow the language choices of their grandparents, but sometimes misalign to a language and initiate another one, and even insert linguistic features from other varieties. G1 adults do not behave linguistically as might be expected, for example by speaking only Arabic, even though it is their first language of socialization and the one they speak most easily, as they declared during the interviews. They follow the children, without any comment, in their language choices and in using linguistic features from a different variety from the one the group normally uses. This is the most noteworthy phenomenon on the interactional level. Not only do agents use unusual linguistic features, they also adopt the unexpected alignments that we see in the interactional analysis.

Fogle and King (2013: 3) also report that parents support the agency practised by their young children by using the children's way of speaking, which leads children to 'raise' their speech (on the basis of Schieffelin and Ochs 1984; Zentella 1997). Here we encounter something similar. Grandparents' alignment to languages initiated by their grandchildren encourages children to do the same thing, and align in a similar fashion. In this way, reciprocal alignments to language choices and agency are factors favouring communication. The study of these interactions brings out the phenomena of agency, linked to the profiles of the social actors, and a degree of freedom of language choices. The presence of these alignments explains the tendency to open up relations to otherness and the acceptance of the agentive language practices of the young members of these families.

The essential role of children who are active participants in the socialisation of adults, as shown by Tuominen (1999), Luykx (2005) and Zhan (2021), is clearly demonstrated in these intergenerational interactions: socialisation is thus not a unidirectional process but a complex set of mutual family influences (Luykx 2003: 41). Analysing language practices over several generations enables us to move away from the parent-child dyad and look at the mechanisms of language acquisition and maintenance in the family as a whole. The methodological approach, based on the analysis of family multilingualism through language practices, illustrates that these practices are instances of FLP 'from below', since interactional alignments, language choices and practices have an impact on family members' subsequent practices (Spolsky 2007). This is achieved, as I have shown, through micro-interactional phenomena such as alignment from one speech turn to the other.

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