

DESIGN OF A SURVEY TO EVALUATE LANGUAGE USAGE AND ATTITUDES OF
SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TUCSON

By

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Abstract

This paper comprises the design of a survey to evaluate the language usage of Syrian refugees resettled in the U.S., and a report on the pilot test of that instrument. The demographics of the study population are described, followed by a discussion of literature concerning language maintenance and language shift, and how that literature applies to Syrian refugees. This is followed by the rationale for the survey design and the methods, results, and discussion of the pilot test. Finally, necessary steps for a full-scale implementation of the survey instrument are discussed.

Introduction

“America, the Great-melting pot”—this ubiquitous nickname for America in the era of Ellis Island was meant to herald the vast diversity of our hodge-podge nation. In actuality, it describes a pressure-cooker of assimilation, where immigrants are forced to conform outwardly, and ultimately inwardly, to an increasingly homogenous national image. For most, this means sacrificing huge parts of their cultural identity, and all too frequently, their native language. Studies overwhelmingly demonstrate that children of immigrant parents typically understand their native language, but prefer speaking in English, and children in the next generation frequently do not speak their ancestral language at all.¹

‘Language shift’ is a phenomenon in which a community transitions from a heritage language to a new language, without maintaining proficiency in the heritage language – that is, the community shifts to a new language rather than integrating the new language into a bilingual or multilingual community of practice. The phenomenon of language shift is well studied, and while general trends have emerged, there is no “one size fits all” way to describe the conditions under which it occurs. In the US, immigrant populations tend to show language shift, as well as a variety of non-immigrant minoritized language populations. The way minority communities use their languages varies because each situation and each community is unique, as are the factors influencing their choices. For immigrant populations, some of these factors may include the reason for immigration. Refugee groups might be subject to different forces than immigrant populations whose relocation to the US is driven by other forces.

¹ Calvin Veltman, "Modelling the Language Shift Process of Hispanic Immigrants," *The International Migration Review* 22, no. 4 (1988): 545-62. doi:10.2307/2546345.

Refugees from different language and cultural groups will also bring different beliefs, attitudes and values with them, and may be expected to differ in terms of the patterns of language shift vs. multilingualism.

The purpose of this investigation is to develop a greater understanding of the linguistic elements of the Syrian refugee experience, with the potential application of helping resettlement organizations better serve refugees by equipping them to shape their community's language landscape to match their desires and goals. This paper describes the development of a survey that can be used to effectively investigate the language attitudes, values and practices of Syrian refugees in the U.S., as well as their views concerning language, culture, and identity. This investigation describes the survey design and pilot test, and analyzes how successfully the survey elicited the desired data.

The project focuses on Syria because the protracted conflict in Syria has generated a significant population of refugees, some of whom are resettled in the United States. Syria is home to a variety of people groups and languages, so there is no one ethnolinguistic background that will encompass the entire community of Syrian refugees. They bring with them unique, often multilingual, language backgrounds and attitudes, influenced by their unique circumstances. The future of their languages is yet uncertain, and we have an opportunity to better understand the way this group of refugees use their languages proactively, instead of retroactively. This could also allow the refugees themselves the singular opportunity of shaping their own language story.

One of the factors which makes the study population so interesting is that the community it focuses on is traditionally multilingual and multi-ethnic, and it is facing a variety of challenges with regard to language, culture and identity. Any refugee community is a group of displaced individuals thrown together by chance and powerful but inaccessible forces such as those of warring groups and international organizations such as the U.N. Refugee community members may not share the same linguistic or ethnic backgrounds. In the case of Syria, the conditions under which refugee communities are formed are likely to be characterized by chronic as well as acute forms of trauma, and for those who are resettled to the US, subject to intense pressures to rapidly assimilate in ways both visible and invisible.

Many Syrian refugees have arrived in the country only recently, making it possible that insufficient time has passed for any sort of equilibrium to be established within the community. Moreover, the demographics of the populations are unnaturally skewed by the criteria used to determine who is resettled, since a majority of refugees resettled in the U.S. are women and young children or individuals with pressing medical needs.² Complicating the use of the word 'community' for this group is the fact that, unlike a those populations resettled to countries more linguistically and culturally similar to their homes, Syrian refugees in the US live within a larger community in which the dominant language is likely to be unfamiliar to them, and in which there is an ideology of monolingualism in that dominant language. Refugees do not live in isolation; they are very much members of the wider community whose opinions and language attitudes will almost certainly influence their perceptions and experiences.

² Jeanne Batalova and Jie Zong, "Refugees and Asylees in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute*, June 07, 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states>

This paper is organized as follows. First, the demographics and linguistic background of the population of interest will be discussed. Next, the theoretical basis for the study of language shift is reviewed. Since there is very limited research that focuses specifically on the language usage of refugees, the theoretical basis will be established by discussing the extant research on language maintenance and language shift, and applying it to the case of Syrian refugees, and by comparing the elements of refugees' situation with those of (non-refugee) immigrant and indigenous populations. Next is an overview of the literature concerning the construction and development of language surveys, key principles of which are incorporated into a survey design which includes a base questionnaire. This instrument is used to conduct a small number of interviews, the results of which are discussed in the next section. Finally, these results are analyzed and discussed, with an eye to recommendations for a full-scale implementation of the survey

Background

Demographics

In total, there are 18 languages with significant native speaker communities in Syria. Arabic is identified as Syria's national language, but this designation requires explanation. Arabic is a 'macro-language-', meaning that it is a cover term for a large number of related varieties which vary in the extent to which they are mutually intelligible. It is typical for Arabic speakers to refer to these different varieties as 'dialects'.³ In Syria, as in most Arabic speaking

³ Gary F. Simons and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). "Arabic." *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Twentieth edition*. 2017. <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/SY/languages>.

countries, there is a standard form - Modern Standard Arabic, or MSA,⁴ which is the written and formal register used across all dialects of Arabic.⁵ MSA has been carefully preserved across centuries, and carries many grammatical and phonetic features that have faded from the modern dialects.⁶ Dialects of spoken Arabic are often somewhat mutually intelligible.⁷ The various spoken dialects each have their own unique accents, and many vary hugely in their day to day vocabulary. In some instances, they even vary in their grammatical structures.

Most of the Syrian population speaks at least one of several dialects of Arabic common to the region, often as a second language. Northern Levantine Arabic is the most widespread in Syria, and is considered the de facto national language by Ethnologue, with 14,700,000 speakers. Other dialects of Arabic found in Syria include Levantine Bedawi, Mesopotamian, Northern Mesopotamian, and Najdi.⁸

In addition to the various forms of Arabic, several other languages are present in Syria as the result of significant immigrant populations. These include Armenian, Southern Azerbaijani, Turkmen, Ossetic, Assyrian Neo-Aramaic, Kabardian, and a small remaining population of Domari speakers.⁹ Several indigenous people groups also make their home in Syria, adding Northern Khurdish, Western Neo Aramaic, and Turoyo to the already diverse linguistic landscape.¹⁰ It is also important to note that, while English does not have a large enough native

⁴ Gary F. Simons and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). "Syria." *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Twentieth edition*. 2017. <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/SY/languages>.

⁵ Kristen Brustan, Mahmoud Al-Batal, and Abbas Al-Tonsi, *Alif Baa: Introduction to Arabic Letters and Sounds* (District of Columbia: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 8.

⁶ Find something to cite

⁷ Brustan, Al-Batal, and Al-Tonsi, *Alif Baa*, 14.

⁸ Simmons and Fennig, "Syria."

⁹ Simmons and Fennig, "Syria."

¹⁰ Simmons and Fennig, "Syria."

speaker population to be listed as one of the country's languages, many educated Syrians speak English as an L2.¹¹

The U.S. accepts a large number of Syrian refugees; last year alone, 12,587 Syrian refugees were admitted to the U.S, and 18,000 have resettled in the U.S. since October of 2011, making Syria the third most common country-of-origin for refugees resettled in the U.S.¹² Within the country, seven states comprise the largest resettlement destinations: California, Texas, New York, Washington, Ohio, Michigan, and Arizona.¹³

The U.S. resettlement program focuses on members of vulnerable populations (those with critical medical conditions/disabilities, women, children, etc.), and those with the best chances of long term integration into their new home. As a result, 67% of refugees in the U.S. from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, or Syria are either women or children under the age of 14.¹⁴ Several other factors influence whether individuals are resettled in the U.S., and where they are placed. Those with family ties in the U.S. are likely to be resettled where their family members are. Factors like family composition and native language also impact resettlement locations—individuals are likely to be resettled in an area that has an existing community with a shared language background if possible. In addition to characteristics of individuals applying for resettlement, characteristics of potential resettlement destinations are considered. These include: cost of living, job availability, and the types of

¹¹ Aaron Rabby, "Syrian Refugees and the Need for English Language Training," *Cambridge Center for Social Innovation*, November 16, 2017, <http://www.blogs.jbs.cam.ac.uk/socialinnovation/2015/11/16/syrian-refugees-and-the-need-for-english-language-training/>.

¹² "Refugee Admissions Report" (Department of State report, Arlington: 2017).

¹³. Batalova and Zong, "Refugees and Asylees."

¹⁴ Batalova and Zong, "Refugees and Asylees."

housing/educational/health services available.¹⁵ *Language Maintenance, Language Shift, and Syrian Refugees*

When two different language groups start to share the same geographic space, there are three potential outcomes. First, the two languages can influence each other, giving rise to a new variety. Such varieties begin as limited-use codes, or ‘pidgins’, and over time can emerge as fully-fledged natural languages, known as ‘creoles’ or Koine.¹⁶ This is most common when the two languages were especially close to begin with (like two dialects of Arabic coming into contact and creating a new dialect), or when members of different language communities are forced to interact with each other in a context with no dominant language (in contexts of slavery or forced migration). Second, both groups can continue to speak their respective languages. They may learn the other language, but they continue to pass on their language to future generations. This is called language maintenance, and results in bilingualism or multilingualism.¹⁷ Third, sometimes one language fades from use, and the other becomes the sole or primary language of both groups. This is referred to as language shift.¹⁸ Which of these outcomes occurs depends on a variety of factors.

Some communities are tolerant of multilingualism, and many favor it. This is common in areas where national borders do not align particularly strongly with socio-cultural boundaries, like in Africa where national borders correlate loosely at best with cultural and linguistic ones;

¹⁵ Batalova and Zong, “Refugees and Asylees.”

¹⁶ Catherine Miller, “Variation and Changes in Arabic Urban Vernaculars,” In *Approaches to Arabic Dialects: A Collection Presented to Manfred Woidich on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2004), 179.

¹⁷ Joshua A. Fishman, “Language Maintenance, Language Shift, and Reversing Language Shift,” In *The Handbook of Bilingualism*, Eds. Bhatia, Tej K. and William C. Ritchie (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

¹⁸ Fishman, “Language Maintenance.”

or in areas with many distinct linguistic communities that have long histories of contact and trade, as in much of Europe. Multilingualism can arise in minority language contexts as well. The Arizona-Tewa provide an especially interesting example. The Arizona-Tewa originated as a refugee population from more Eastern Puebloan groups who were welcomed by and settled among the Hopi people. Arizona Tewa culture places a high value on multilingualism and actively pursue mastery of additional languages – notably Hopi, English and Spanish, while still reserving the highest status for their own language. The Arizona Tewa community persists in this practice even within the U.S.'s strongly nationalistic language ideology.¹⁹

On the other hand, some communities' identities are intimately entwined with monolingual adherence to a single national language; this is most prevalent in strongly nationalist countries, and is the dominant attitude in much of the United States.²⁰ Ideologies of monolingualism can produce language shift, but the dynamics of the interaction between various language groups also heavily affect the outcome. When there is a severe power imbalance, the less powerful group is likely to shift to the language of the more powerful group.²¹ The environment resulting from the contact also affects language shift. If the two groups readily intermix and intermarry, then language shift is more likely, but if one group isolates itself from the other, either geographically or through strictly endogamous marriages, then it is more likely that each group will maintain their own language.²²

¹⁹Christina Bratt Paulston, *Linguistic Minorities in Multilingual Settings* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), 36.

²⁰ Nancy C. Dorian, "Minority and Endangered Languages, In *The Handbook of Bilingualism*, Eds. Bhatia, Tej K. and William C. Ritchie (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 17.2.

²¹ Paulston, *Multilingual Settings*, 11.

²² Paulston, *Multilingual Settings*, 20-21.

The rate at which shift occurs varies greatly, depending on the many variables described above. The typical pace is three generations, with the first generation being monolingual in the minority language; the second being bilingual, but preferring the majority language, and the third being monolingual in the majority language.²³ Sometimes, the bilingual stage is prolonged for two or more generations. Rarely, the shift never completes, and some individuals will continue to be bilingual, and some may even be monolingual in the minority language.²⁴

Research that centers on language usage and language shift tends to categorize communities in various ways to help predict their language behavior. Communities which are superordinate to the majority (such as a colonizing force) are unlikely to shift to the majority language, but communities that are subordinate to the majority typically do shift their language to match the majority. However, depending on the circumstances, they may not shift quickly, since language shift can be seen as an abandonment of ancestral culture.²⁵ The persistence of more than 100 Native American languages in the U.S. in spite of tremendous pressures over more than 200 years to shift to a monolingual model is evidence that swift language shift is by no means inevitable.

Minority communities can be either separatist or assimilationist. Separatist communities typically function independently within the larger community, maintaining their language and culture.²⁶ Assimilationist groups typically adopt the majority language (and culture, to varying

²³ Veltman, "Modeling the Language Shift Process."

²⁴ Paulston, *Multilingual Settings*, 12.

²⁵ Paulston, *Multilingual Settings*, 13.

²⁶ Paulston, *Multilingual Settings*, 20.

extents) quickly because doing so confers economic or social benefits. Many immigrant groups, particularly to the U.S., are a classic example of this.²⁷

While these categorizations are helpful, they fall short in adequately picturing the refugee experience. As described above, subordinate groups tend to be either colonized majorities or immigrant minorities. While refugees do fall under the latter category, the unique experiences of a refugee may impact the way they experience language shift in a couple of ways. First, the fact that refugees are forced out of their homes creates a situation akin to a colonized community—their lives are forcibly disrupted, and they find themselves surrounded by a foreign culture and language, which may be hostile to their own. They may even spend years in the limbo of refugee camps in countries of first asylum before being resettled.²⁸ Circumstances like these sometimes encourage people to cling more fiercely to their native languages and culture. Indeed, in certain circumstances, language loyalty can be used by a community as a means of self-preservation²⁹ Other times, the overwhelming pressure can encourage a rapid language shift.

Just as the minority community can be characterized with various labels, there are several ways in which the nature of the majority community can influence the patterns of language usage. First, they can be either pluralist or militant in their view of other cultures. A pluralist society readily tolerates cultural and linguistic variation within itself, while a militant society views such diversity as a threat and demands conformity to the national identity.³⁰

²⁷ Fishman, "Language Maintenance."

²⁸ Batalova and Zong, "Refugees and Asylees."

²⁹ Paulston, *Multilingual Settings*, 22.

³⁰ Paulston, *Multilingual Settings*, 11.

The U.S. has demonstrated a pattern of ebbing and flowing militant nationalism, which at its height is nearly always accompanied by strong and organized efforts at imposing English monolingualism as a kind of patriotism measures. The English Language Amendments exemplify this—in the 1980's, several states passed statutes or amendments to their constitutions designating English as the state's official language, in response to a fear that English would lose its status amidst the plethora of minority languages. For some states, this was largely symbolic, but for others, including Arizona, it allowed for the designation of English as the language of government the ballot, and public education.³¹ Giving this official status to English necessarily reduces the status of minority languages. An interesting case study in this effect is found in Arizona's educational policy. There are bilingual schools (mostly Spanish-English) scattered throughout the state. However, since English is "the language of education," these bilingual schools are focused on ensuring that the Spanish speakers become fluent in English, rather than striving for all students to become bilingual.³² What makes this so interesting is that it takes a tool that could easily be used to foster linguistic pluralism, and instead manages to use it to advance militant monolingual ideology.

Despite the fact that every attempt to establish English as the U.S's national language has failed, many in the country continue to view linguistic diversity with suspicion at best, and, more often than not, with outright denouncement as un-American, and a threat to national unity.³³ Educational initiatives, much like the bilingual schools of Arizona, tend to be focused

³¹ Richard Ruiz "Language Policy and Planning in the United States," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 14, (1993): 114-15.

³² Ruiz, "Language Policy," 115.

³³ Ruiz, "Language Policy."

on facilitating English fluency in minority populations, even if equires suppression of the population's linguistic and cultural heritage.³⁴ This certainly does not present favorable soil for the maintenance of minority cultures. Indeed, many of the more than 200 languages indigenous to the U.S. have been lost to this hostility, and many immigrant languages have been all but lost to the current generations within the U.S. Fishman point out that the U.S. is unique in its degree of monolingualism, especially given that immigrants make up such a large portion of the population, and multilingualism in the U.S. is often considered a marker of recent immigrant status.³⁵

Still, in spite of this, small communities of immigrants around the U.S. have successfully created communities of practice within the country, where the language and culture of their home countries not only exist, but thrive. Fishman points out several shining examples of this. Many of these are religious groups for whom language is inseparable from their religion, like the Pennsylvania Dutch.³⁶ In addition to the tie between religion and culture, several of the factors Paulston describes which encourage language maintenance are at play: these groups frequently self-isolate from the larger community, and practice endogamous marriage. However, there are minority language communities who survive without fitting this description. In fact, the Hispanic community in the U.S., which is the most-well-known minority language community in the U.S., has achieved its success based on entirely different factors. This community has two unique advantages. First, they exist in much closer proximity to a country where their native language is the majority language than most others. Partly because of this,

³⁴ Ruiz, "Language Policy," 112-13.

³⁵ Fishman, "Language Maintenance," 407.

³⁶ Fishman, "Language Maintenance," 409.

they are a much larger community than others, which may contribute to their success. While there is no exact “critical mass” for a community of practice succeeding in maintaining their language, larger communities seem to succeed more often.³⁷

Extensive research has been conducted on immigrant language usage and attitudes in the U.S., and refugees are a type of immigrant. However, there are many factors unique to the refugee experience which make applying the research conducted with other immigrants to refugees difficult. First, the majority of immigrants are voluntary immigrants who choose to leave their home country, and choose the country to which they emigrate.³⁸ As a result, they often assimilate readily, not only for the pragmatic reason of economic and social success, but because they take pride in their new country. A refugee does not have this luxury of choice. They did not choose to leave their home country, but were forced out as a result of violence. They likely did not choose their country of first asylum, and while they can request a particular location for resettlement, they do not have the final say in what city they are relocated to, or even what country.

The linguistic dilemma faced by Syrian refugees also bears resemblance to those faced by the Indigenous people groups of North America, both historically and today. Historically, Indigenous people were forcibly removed from their homes, stripped of control over where they lived, and forced to abandon their languages in favor of English as a means of survival. Similarly, refugees have been removed from their home countries by situations out of their

³⁷ Veltman, “Modeling the Language Shift Process,” 56.

³⁸ It is true that people are pushed to emigrate as a result of social/political conditions without being considered refugees, but a full-fledged discussion of the nuances of these classifications is beyond the scope of this paper.

control, and sent to a location they did not choose.³⁹ Upon arrival, they must learn the language of their host country in order to function, and often their native language (and culture) are met with suspicion and prejudice, discouraging them from passing that language on to their children.

This disruption proved devastating to the vitality of indigenous languages. Many of them are now extinct, and a great many more are struggling to survive. Many tribes have retroactively begun striving to regain the elements of their cultural identity lost with the disappearance of their languages through language revitalization. While the refugee community in view here has not existed long enough to have experienced language loss, the challenges faced by refugees' heritage languages can still be likened in many ways to those faced by Native American communities seeking to revitalize or even resurrect their languages. The most obvious parallel to be drawn is that of dispersion—Native Americans today do not live exclusively in isolated communities, but all over the country, some with communities which share their heritage, some without. Likewise, refugees are settled all over the country. While many are lucky enough to be settled in a city like Detroit or Phoenix where others from their country live in large numbers, others are settled in small groups in relative isolation, separated from other speakers of their language and members of their culture. When a community of practice is especially small, it can increase the pressure to shift to the majority language, as there are limited opportunities to use the minority language

Of course, there are also notable differences between these two groups. Most significantly, the languages of indigenous communities are constantly threatened with the possibility of

fading from existence. Of course, the massively powerful world language that is Arabic is not in danger of extinction as a result of the political unrest in Syria. Still, for those who are forced out of their homeland, language loss is a real and present danger, and as whole areas are threatened, the unique varieties of Arabic which thrive in those areas are threatened along with them.

Given the resemblance between the two situations, it follows that this research will also be similar to the investigations performed in endangered language communities like the Native American Language communities. When a community which has undergone language loss seeks to reverse the shift, they must first assess the status of the language in question. Frequently, this is accomplished by designing and implementing a survey.⁴⁰ With Native American communities, retrospective inquiry is the only option, but with Syrian refugee communities, who have been displaced recently, it is possible to research attitudes and patterns of language use before a significant shift occurs.

Like other immigrants, Syrian refugees have left their home country and immigrated to the U.S., thus becoming a minority community which is socially and politically subordinate to the majority. This creates immense pressure to assimilate and adopt the majority language, in order to survive in their new environment. However, while voluntary immigrants tend to be amongst the fastest shifting groups, it is not reasonable to assume that Syrian refugees will follow this trend because there are several important distinguishing factors. Some of these are comparable to the experiences of Indigenous people groups in North America. They were

⁴⁰ Leanne Hinton, "Language Planning." In *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, ed. Leanne Hinton and Kenneth Hale (San Diego: Brill, NV, 2008), 54.

forcibly removed from their homes, and resettled in locations not of their own choosing. As Paultson demonstrates, circumstances like this can encourage language maintenance as a means of cultural self-preservation.⁴¹

However, there are still other factors specific to the Syrian refugee population which are bound to impact language shift or maintenance. Some of these are specific to the Arabic-speaking population, but others apply more generally. For those who speak Arabic, there are several factors which favor language maintenance. First, since Arabic is a major world language, speakers have access to huge amounts of media in their native language, which creates a domain where the language can still be used, even when there is no ambient speaker population. Second, previous research has demonstrated that languages with a prestigious standard dialect are apt to be maintained for longer in minority populations.⁴²

Additionally, a majority of Syrian refugees identify as either Muslim or Christian. Like many other religious groups, many denominations of both Muslims and Christians place a strong emphasis on endogamous marriage, which can help preserve language transmission.⁴³

While there are many factors favoring language maintenance, the situation remains complicated, as numerous other factors favor language shift. As discussed above, just like any other minority language in the U.S., the languages of Syrian refugees will be subjected to the predominant ideology of monolingualism, which has resulted in sustained, often violent, efforts to silence all but the most persistent minority languages. Like other immigrants, Syrian refugees are entering this environment as a foreign minority with a pressing need to learn the

⁴¹ Paulston, *Multilingual Settings*, 22.

⁴² Paulston, *Multilingual Settings*, 15.

⁴³ Paulston, *Multilingual Settings*, 16.

majority language in order to access necessary economic and social resources, which can give significant momentum to language shift. Many immigrants face some form of xenophobia, but Syrian refugees, along with other Middle Eastern refugees, have been the center of a national debate over whether they pose a threat to the U.S.⁴⁴ This attention could push them to abandon their native languages in favor of English in order to avoid persecution.

All of these elements create a complex situation, with no certain outcome. By understanding the language attitudes of Syrian refugees, and building a portrait of their language usage as first generation immigrants, it will be possible to track the way both the environment and people's personal attitudes shape the outcome, and possibly even to prevent or mitigate an outcome that the refugees themselves consider undesirable.

Rationale

This study develops a tool that can be used to assess language vitality in the Syrian refugee population in the U.S. This section explores the rationale for developing a tool that uses both survey and interview methodologies and that will produce insights into participants' 'language posture' and 'language attitudes'. The relationship between attitudes and behaviors is key to connecting this project to the study of language vitality, so scholarly work relating to that connection is discussed here as well.

⁴⁴ Shibley Telhami, "American Attitudes on Refugees from Syria and Iraq," *Brookings*, June 13, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/american-attitudes-on-refugees-from-the-middle-east/>.

Survey and Interview Methodologies

Just like there are a variety of ways to study language usage, there are a variety of ways to study language attitudes. However, the most common and best developed form of language attitude study relies on questionnaires.⁴⁵ These are akin to surveys, and participants complete them on their own. Frequently, early versions contain many open questions, allowing participants to describe their thoughts or reactions to a proposed scenario.⁴⁶ However, open questions pose some problems—participants can completely miss the critical element of a question and give an answer which is unusable to researchers. For this reason, open questions are typically used to develop later versions of questions that have many more closed questions—those that use scaled responses. Scales can be yes/no, Likert-type (5 pt.), or Osgood et al-type (7 pt).⁴⁷ Questionnaires provide many benefits—they are easy to administer, well-researched, and can be designed to provide easily analyzable results. Unfortunately, they are also limited. The researcher does not have the opportunity to ask for clarification, or for more information on an interesting answer. Questionnaires are especially useful for building quantitative analyses. However, quantitative analysis is better understood when it is based on a clear qualitative picture.

Interviews are another form commonly used for language attitude studies.⁴⁸ While they are similar to questionnaires in some ways, their strengths are somewhat opposite. Where a questionnaire leaves itself open to misinterpretation and limited answers, an interview gives

⁴⁵Rebecca Agheyesi and Joshua Fishman, "Language Attitude Studies: A brief Survey of Methodological Approaches," *Anthropological Linguistics* 12, no. 5 (1970), 147.

⁴⁶ Agheyesi and Fishman, "Language Attitude Studies," 147.

⁴⁷ Agheyesi and Fishman, "Language Attitude Studies," 148.

⁴⁸ Agheyesi and Fishman, "Language Attitude Studies," 150.

the opportunity to correct both of those issues. Where a questionnaire can provide a convenient basis for quantitative analysis, an interview can be something of a mess for quantitative analysis, but a veritable gold mine for qualitative analysis.

Given the unique strengths of each, it seems like a reasonable approach to combine them, to maximize the utility of the research instrument. Therefore, the “survey” created as a result of this project is a sort of hybrid interview/questionnaire. It is made to be administered in an interview format, allowing for expansion and further investigation of interesting responses, but it includes scaled (likert-type and yes/no) questions to facilitate quantitative analysis as well. This allows for a qualitative, “story-like” picture, while still gathering data which can be statistically analyzed.

Language Posture

Scholarship on assessing language vitality within a speech community identifies at least three ways that the scholar can access relevant information. The first is by directly observing *language usage*, or what people are actually observed doing with a language (or languages).⁴⁹ This is difficult to describe accurately without the researcher living with the community for an extended period of time, observing the community in everyday life.⁵⁰ The second is by exploring *language image*, or what people think they do with language. It can be difficult, if not impossible, to elicit accurate information concerning language image if the researchers are not fluent in the language(s) of the community.⁵¹ This leaves the last mechanism, the investigation

⁴⁹ Blair, Frank *Survey on a Shoestring: A Manual for Small-Scale Language Surveys* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1996) 107.

⁵⁰ Blair, *Survey on a Shoestring*, 89.

⁵¹ Blair, *Survey on a Shoestring*, 108.

of *language posture*, which is what people say that they do with language.⁵² Given the resources available for this investigation, it is likely that the data gathered will reflect the community's language posture. In order to evaluate participants' language usage (or the image of it they wish to present), parameters need to be defined. These take the form of spheres of usage, which can include home, school, work, and social environments. Of course, since researchers have an exceedingly limited window into the lives of their participants, it is also necessary to ask participants if there are spheres in which they use each of their languages outside of what has already been listed.

Language posture communicates what participants want others to believe about what the community is doing with its languages. This, in turn, can provide unique insight into what the community desires. Just as people tend to portray an idealized version of themselves to the public, so a community may portray an idealized version of its language situation to a researcher, which blends reality with aspirations. This gives insight into another objective in view for this project: participants' language attitudes.

Language Attitudes

One of the chief difficulties in studying language attitudes is defining the critical term; what *is* an attitude? Many different definitions have been proposed, ranging from extremely behaviorist—an attitude is how people actually respond/act, to extremely mentalist: an attitude is “a mental state of readiness.”⁵³ Virtually everyone agrees that attitudes are learned

⁵² Blair, *Survey on a Shoestring*, 107.

⁵³ Agheysi and Fishman, “Language Attitude Studies,” 138.

from previous experience, and therefore tend to be relatively stable.⁵⁴ The difference lies in whether the attitude is considered a factor pre-disposing an individual to a particular response, or the response itself. Each of these poses its own unique problems from a research perspective. The mentalist approach poses analytical difficulties because it requires the research to measure something entirely intangible.⁵⁵ The behaviorist approach is easier analytically, but poses ideological problems, as a result of its reliance on outdated psychological theory.

This research will rely on a mentalist definition, but with some caveats. Past research has demonstrated that, while there is a correlation between findings of language attitude studies and people's actual actions, the correlation is not as strong as one might expect. Some point to this as a flaw in research methods, but it is likely that the issue lies not with the research's design, but with its subject. Human beings are complex and notoriously terrible at understanding themselves. Even if an individual (or community), holds a particular attitude, they may ultimately act in contradiction to that attitude as a result of factors they are not even aware of. Therefore, *language attitude* will here be defined as the *conscious* views held by an individual concerning the language(s) they speak, which inform their language usage decisions.

The Survey Instrument In order to build an instrument which creates an accurate picture of participants' language postures and language attitudes needs to elicit some key elements. First, it must collect information about what languages are spoken by members of the participants' communities. Then, it must collect information about which of these are

⁵⁴ Agheyesi and Fishman, "Language Attitude Studies," 139.

⁵⁵ Agheyesi and Fishman, "Language Attitude Studies," 138.

participants' first languages, or L1's. A person's L1s include the language or languages that the person acquired naturally in the course of early childhood development. It must also collect information about which are second languages, or L2's. A person's L2s include any language or languages that the person learned later in life – usually L2 learning is effortful and to some extent incomplete. For participants' L2's, the instrument must gather information about the contexts in which the L2's were learned, and what degree of proficiency the person has attained. In addition to L2's learned in their home country, many refugees are temporarily settled in a country of first asylum before they arrive at their final resettlement destination, where they may need to learn that country's language or languages to survive, much they do when they are finally resettled.⁵⁶

Once participants' language backgrounds have been established, information concerning their patterns of language usage must be described. This concerns what many researchers in the field of bilingualism term "domains of use," including school, work, home, religion, and many others.⁵⁷ It also describes the rough portion of their time participants spend speaking each language, and which language they would be more likely to choose in a situation where either language would be acceptable.

Furthermore, the instrument must ask participants about the way they see their languages, and how those tie into their identities. This portion of the instrument includes the most abstract questions, designed to elicit associations subjects have with each of their languages. In addition to asking about this, the instrument also includes explicit questions

⁵⁶ Batalova and Zong, "Refugees and Asylees."

⁵⁷ Francois Grosjean, *Bilingual Life and Reality*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010), 31.

concerning what participants desire for future generations. More specifically, it asks whether participants have children, and what languages they are raising their children to speak, or what languages they plan to raise their children to speak. For refugees who already have older children, the same questions will be asked about grandchildren.

The elements described above could be used to describe the language usage and attitudes of any community, but there are elements unique to the study population which must also be considered. Arabic is by no means an L1 for everyone born in Syria, but it is the majority language, and even speakers of minority languages typically speak it and use it in their everyday life. Since Arabic proficiency typically includes both the use of the formal, written variety and at least one local spoken variant, the participants fluency and familiarity with the written dialect, as well as the spoken, must be ascertained. Additionally, attitudes toward both dialects and the standard form vary hugely, and are bound to impact transmission of the language in refugee families. Typically, children in Arabic speaking families are raised to speak their parents' dialect, and then learn the standard dialect when they attend school. However, for refugee families settled in the U.S. (and other non-Arabic-speaking countries), this formal education is not available. Nevertheless, mastery of the standard dialect is still considered an important skill, so many refugee parents take on the responsibility of teaching their children Modern Standard Arabic.⁵⁸

A complete picture of the situation must also include an evaluation of participants' background and fluency in English, since it is the language of wider communication in their new

⁵⁸ Joleen Kuzdas (Syrian refugee community advocate), in discussion with the author, February 2018.

home, and the greatest potential threat to the continued survival of their heritage languages within the immediate community context.⁵⁹

The dual dependent variables in this study are, of course the language posture and attitudes of the Syrian refugee community in the US. However, these are both influenced by a variety of independent variables, which must be taken into account in the study design. Much like language is not separable from the culture in which it arises, the independent variables which influence language usage and attitudes are not easily divorced from one another. The basic list of the variables considered in this study includes: age, gender, educational background, and language background. However, age, gender, and language background may all impact the education a participant has received. Thus, the independent variables are somewhat difficult to separate from one another, and it is best to ensure that participants are gathered from a wide variety of backgrounds to avoid unintentional interference.

Methods

The survey instrument devised as outlined above was formulated as a set of open-ended interview questions. These questions were produced as a script, which is included as [Appendix 1](#). The goal of the pilot study was to test whether the open-ended interview questions would be appropriate to elicit the kind of information outlined in the section above, and to identify gaps or problems in the interview script that would need to be revised in a narrower, more refined survey instrument.

⁵⁹ Ralby, "Need for English Language Training."

For this pilot, it was neither practicable nor desirable to recruit Syrian refugees – because of the small size of the population in Tucson, and because of their vulnerability. It was determined that the survey should be tested on a small number of participants who shared relevant characteristics of that community, but who were not currently experiencing traumatic relocation. Participants were therefore recruited through informal social networks, and four individuals were interviewed. All participants were female students at the University of Arizona between the ages of 18 and 21. Participant’s first languages were Spanish (1), Hindi (1), Mandarin (1), Malayalam (1), and English (2). The two participants who did not acquire English as an L1 learned it in school—one began in kindergarten, and one learned in secondary school in preparation for moving to the U.S. to attend school. These participants are similar to the Syrian refugee population in terms of age and gender, and in that each came from a language background including schooling in a prestige or standard language, but significant exposure to local vernaculars. Spanish, Hindi and Mandarin in particular have similarities to Arabic in that there are standard varieties used in writing and education, with very different forms of local spoken languages. All but one of the participants immigrated to the U.S. to attend college; the fifth participant was born in the United States, on the Mexican border. None of the participants were married or had children. Interviews were conducted in English.

The model population used for the pilot test was an imperfect representation of the intended study demographic. First, since they were from backgrounds different than the intended target population, portions of the survey instrument could only be tested by analogy with the participants’ own language and cultural backgrounds. None of the participants had children, and all of them were currently pursuing college degrees.

Participants were interviewed individually, at locations easily accessible to both the participant and the investigator, near the University of Arizona campus. Interviews were audio recorded using an Olympus WS-821 voice recorder. The basic structure of the interview followed the questions listed in [Appendix 1](#), with some exceptions. Questions that specifically referred to participant's backgrounds as refugees were substituted for more general questions about their background. For example, instead of "where in Syria were you from," participants were simply asked "where were you born?" Where relevant, follow-up questions were asked to clarify or expand on answers. Furthermore, the process of interviewing participants led to the development of more refined survey questions, as well as the addition of new questions. Entirely new questions have been marked with an asterisk in appendix 1, and questions which have been modified are marked with a footnote explaining the modifications.

The interviews were transcribed using standard English orthography, and these transcriptions, included as Appendix 2 were used to evaluate the survey instrument. Phonetic detail was not transcribed, and pausing patterns were recorded only incidentally. Each utterance was assigned a line number for ease of referencing, with each interview numbered separately. Common trends were evaluated, including how participants' responses reflected their interpretation of the questions, and the extent to which their answers addressed the research questions the survey instrument was intended to assess. Relevant excerpts of transcribed material are included inline in the following sections.

Results

A brief summary of the responses to each of the open-ended questions is given here, with a few illustrative examples.

Language Background

The first section, which asked about basic language background, revealed that two participants grew up in monolingual homes, and two grew up in multilingual homes. Both multilingual homes incorporated English as one of their languages, and the other two participants began learning English in school. Two of the participants reported additional L2's (Arabic [2] and French [1]), in which they had extremely limited proficiency.

The two participants who learned English as an L1 both reported excellent understanding and speaking abilities. Of the remaining participants, one identified her understanding as excellent, and her speaking as between good and excellent, and the other reported a fair spoken proficiency, and a limited understanding. Three of the four participants reported spending the majority of their times speaking English, and one reported that she divides her time equally between her two languages. All participants stated that they used English in educational and professional settings, and that their mother tongue was dominant in familial settings, and all participants reported mixed language usage within their social circles. Participants expressed notable divergence in their language usage where technology was involved. Two participants reported that when they use social media or digital communication, they do so primarily in their mother tongue, and the other two reported using English more.

Two participants reported that most of their music and movie consumption is done mostly in English, and the other two reported using primarily their mother tongue.

Language Attitudes

All participants demonstrated overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward their mother tongues. Participant 2 described her language like this:

58 P: I think it sounds really calming, but it can also be a super sassy language, which is what I like about it. Sometimes when I try to translate things over into English, they don't sound as funny. So, I'm so much funnier in Hindi, which is my opinion, but it's like a language that's really expressive. Um, there are so many words to describe the ways that you're feeling in so many different ways. And like, with our generation, there's so many different things, and like ways....like for example, with our generation, you have like hookup culture, which is like, you know, it's terminology that's relevant to the generation. There's like other things in Hindi that are relevant to our generation, which I think is really cool.

Regardless of what level of English proficiency participants had reported earlier, all but one participant described their language as more complex and expressive than English. The remaining participant felt that her language was easier than English, but also that she could express herself more eloquently in English than in her mother tongue, which she identified as resulting from having learned English in a professional setting.

Participants' attitudes toward English were also positive, but to a lesser extent than their mother tongues. They tended to describe it as a more rigid language than their mother tongue, as demonstrated by this quote from participant one:

54 P: English? I view English as very, like to the book, like, I have this view of it as just, like very straightforward. Um, it can be cool sometimes, but I don't think it's very beautiful to listen to.

However, while the other participants echoed participant one's assessment of English as "to the book," the other participants did state that they found English beautiful.

All four participants stated that passing on their mother tongue to their children was a priority. Participant 3 stated:

99 P: Definitely. Yeah, that's part of your culture. It's part of your identity. You can never escape it. And, like, if they ever, I would be heartbroken if my children did not learn Malayalam. I can't.

Like her, the other participants also associated knowledge of their language with connection to their cultural identity, and a desire to pass on both to future generations. When asked directly about the relationship between their languages and their cultural identity, each participant expressed that their mother tongue was important to helping them feel connected to their home and heritage, but that English had also shaped their identity as they used it more to communicate in their current context. One participant even felt like the use of her languages placed her somewhere in between her heritage and her American cultural identity.

Interestingly, although none of the participants were asked about bilingualism directly, three of the four participants expressed strongly positive attitudes toward bilingualism in general.

Discussion

Strengths of the instrument

Some elements of the instrument were quite effective. The interview format proved ideal because it provided the flexibility described earlier. It effectively elicited simple background data, but allowed the researcher to ask further questions about interesting answers, and to clarify questions where the participant needed. It also allowed for participants to share spontaneous information and attitudes that a questionnaire would not have elicited. The basic outline, which moved from simple questions to more complex ones, seemed to be effective in allowing the participants a chance to think through the more straightforward

elements of the instrument before they needed to articulate their thoughts on the more abstract questions. With a larger sample, the instrument would easily have provided enough data for a quantitative analysis of the language backgrounds and postures of participants. However, even with the small sample, it built an interesting qualitative picture of participants' language backgrounds and postures.

Weaknesses of the Instrument and Proposed Modifications

In this pilot test, all participants were females from a narrow age range (18-21), who were enrolled in higher education. This means that none of the independent variables which would ideally be controlled for were adequately accounted for, which could have skewed the results.

Of course, the limited nature of pilot testing creates some additional short-comings, which could easily be accounted for in a fully-fledged study. The first and most obvious of these is sample size. The small number of participants in this test render the results statistically insignificant. While this is frequently inherent to pilot testing generally, this specific pilot test possesses some extra limitations. First, the interviews were conducted in English, thereby excluding speakers who do not speak English, who may have different views than those who have learned English. Ideally, a survey of this nature would be conducted in a language native to participants, with a regional specialist who possessed a solid command of the relevant language.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Blair, *Survey on a Shoestring*.

However, the pilot test still yielded useful results which revealed which elements of the survey instrument to be solid in their design, and pointed out areas for improvement in others, including: re-ordering of some questions to create a better logical flow for the interview, re-wording of some questions to be easier to understand or elicit desired information more effectively, and addition of new questions to gather information which was lacking from pilot interviews.

During the pilot interviews, it became apparent that the logical flow of the questions was not ideal. Although questions were placed in order moving from simplest background questions gradually into more complex opinion and personal questions, the interviews did not always flow naturally, and felt disjointed at times. To remedy this, questions were organized such that they flowed from topic to topic more naturally. The interview still begins with basic questions about the subjects' basic biographical facts, and then moves to questions about language background. However, these have been somewhat re-ordered. The instrument used for the pilot test asked participants what languages they spoke and how they learned them (questions 8-9), then moved to asking about domains of use for each language (questions 15-16), followed by questions about proficiency (questions 10-11). The revised instrument places all questions about language background and proficiency together (questions 6-13) before moving onto questions about domains of use (questions 14-21). This question order is more logical, and better accomplishes the original intent for the flow of questions—to move from simple to complex, so as to build up the relevant background information needed to understand the answers to the more complex questions.

The basic questions regarding language background and language proficiency were effective in eliciting relevant information. However, new questions were added based on interviews. Below is an excerpt from participant one (lines 81-92), which pointed out the need for one such change.

- 81 I: Let me think for a second, if I have anymore.....Do you have siblings?
- 82 P: Yeah
- 83 I: What languages do your siblings speak?
- 84 P: We all speak Spanish and English. Spanish is all of our first language. Interestingly enough, we speak English with each other.
- 85 I: So mostly English with Each other?
- 86 P: Mostly...I think it's just to rebel against my parents, so...
- 87 I: Interesting.
- 88 P: Cause they only want us to speak Spanish in the house, but we move towards English.
- 89 I: Huh. That's really interesting. Do your parents still not speak English?
- 90 P: they learned, but they don't really try. It's...
- 91 I: Why do you think that is?
- 92 P: I don't think it's necessary, and where we live, we're so close to the border that there's lots of Hispanic people here that you can like really get around with just Spanish.

This section is from near the end of the interview, but it reveals critical information. The earlier background questions showed that the participant's family spoke both Spanish and English, but the nuance of the situation was not apparent. Based on the way the question was originally asked, it would be entirely possible that all members of the family spoke both languages equally and interchangeably. However, this not the case. The participants usage of English with her siblings as a means of challenging her parents' authority reveals a domain of English which question fifteen would never have elicited, providing unique insight into the role that English plays in her life. In order to ensure that details like this are captured, question

seven, which asks which languages the participants' families speak, now includes a set of sub-questions inquiring as to which members of the family speak which languages.

The questions about domains of use proved quite effective at eliciting information. Participants were able to accurately and thoroughly describe their patterns of language usage across different domains. However, some questions required initial clarification; most participants required examples of domains of use to answer questions 14-15. Because of this, this question has been re-worded to include examples. Furthermore, some areas which were considered a single domain in the original survey design appeared to be more accurately broken down into multiple domains. The example above from participant one shows that "family and the home" is not necessarily one domain. Thus, questions were added to reveal whether the larger domain includes smaller sub-domains where language usage differs (). Additionally, "technology and the internet" was considered a single domain in the original survey design. However, participants consistently had different patterns of language use, depending on how they were interacting with technology/the internet. Below is an excerpt from participant two which demonstrates this.

- 41 I: Okay. When you're using social media, or like, technology, internet things, like, which do you use more?
- 42 P: Umm.....English, again definitely more, but again, there's even this concept of typing Hinglish. You type, like Hindi phrases, but using English letters.
- 43 I: Interesting. And do you do that mostly in, like, interactions with people? OR do you do that mostly on social media posts? How do you do that?
- 44 P: Like, generally when I'm texting my family. So, like, on family group chats, text my dad something, you know like sometimes it's just more sassy.
- 65 I: Do you ever use the internet or radio, I know you mentioned texting with people in Hindi, but do you ever use any of those to, like, consume media?

66 P: Oh yeah, definitely. I watch a bunch of Bollywood movies whenever I get the chance. I pretty much listen to.....like 70% Hindi music, based, so I'm still keeping in touch with my language; I'm just not using it to communicate with someone else.

When this participant uses technology as a means of communication, she does so mostly in English. However, when she is consuming media, Hindi is the dominant language. It would be impossible for her to describe this well if both were treated as a single domain. Therefore, several new questions were created to allow participants to accurately describe the way they interact with technology and language (questions 19-21).

The depth with which participants answered these questions also revealed the need for new questions about which language participants would choose if either language would be acceptable in a given circumstance. This information can provide clues as to how a participant views the languages they speak, which may differ from what they would say when asked directly. This is demonstrated in the interview with participant one, where the question was asked incidentally (unfortunately, this was the only time the question was asked, so there is no data for the other participants).

43 I: No, that was great. That was excellent. Um, in a situation where you could speak either English or Spanish, which one would you probably choose?

44 P: It depends on the situation. For more professional situations, I choose English, and since I learned Spanish through my parents, um, it's very easy for me to go into slang and stuff like that, so with friends, um I would probably go with Spanish.

45 I: Why do you choose English in more professional settings?

46 P: Um, because I learned it in a more professional setting, in school, so I have...I think I have, my...my better words are in English. I can articulate better. I'm obviously having trouble with that.

This excerpt shows that the participant feels like she can articulate more eloquently in English, despite Spanish being her native language. This information would not have been

apparent with just the questions from the original instrument, so this question has been added to the instrument (question 16).

While the survey did gather good data about participants language use, and to a lesser extent, their attitudes, it fell somewhat short in exploring their desires for future generations. Participants consistently reported that they intended to raise their children to speak their mother tongue, as well as English, and the majority cited wanting their children to connect with their heritage as the primary reason. Thus, the questions did reveal *what* participants hope for the future but it fell short in eliciting a truly adequate explanation of *why*. Participants clearly made a connection between their language and their cultural identity, but what exactly is that connection? To address this gap, several new questions have been added to the instrument. Questions 28-30 ask participants about what they believe it means to be Syrian, how they believe future generations of their family will identify themselves, and how they feel about their prediction. While these questions likely are not enough to fully develop an understanding of the way participants associate language, culture, and identity, they do provide a solid starting place which an interviewer could build on.

The original instrument provided some good insight into the research questions, but did not fully address all of them. However, the pilot test made many of these shortcomings apparent, and facilitated appropriate improvements, resulting in a survey instrument much more capable of addressing all components of the research questions.

Proposal for Further Research

In order to use the instrument in a full-scale research study, several steps would need to be taken. First, an adequate study population would need to be recruited. This sample would need to be representative of the community being studied. Some data is available concerning the demographics of Syrian refugees, but the data is limited and specific communities vary widely. Thus, such an investigation would require some preliminary research into the demographics of the community, determining gender demographics and family composition, age, levels of education and basic ethnolinguistic backgrounds. From this data, an appropriate target sample size could be selected, and the appropriate controls implemented.

Ideally, the instrument would be implemented in participants' native languages, which would require enlisting the aid of translators. Due to the immense linguistic diversity of Syria, this may not always be possible. However, if the instrument could, at the very least, be administered in language with which the participant was highly proficient (such as Arabic, even if it is a participant's L2), this would improve the usefulness of the data by allowing participants to communicate their ideas more easily.⁶¹ In addition to translators, the research team would ideally include both male and female investigators. Female investigators would interview female participants, and male investigators would interview male participants. This shows respect for the cultural norms of participants.⁶²

The data collected would then be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis would build a profile of the prevalent language backgrounds in the

⁶¹ Blair, *Survey on a Shoestring*,

⁶² Joleen Kuzdas (Syrian refugee community advocate), in discussion with the author, February 2018.

community. It would also include the information concerning participants English proficiency. The various domains of use would be separated and the frequency with which participants associated a particular language with each would be counted. Participants' desires for future generations' language use would be codified into categories based on whether participants hope they will speak their mother tongue(s), English, or both. The qualitative analysis would serve to develop the above picture and "humanize" the data by articulating the story told by participants.

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Appendix 1: Basic Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What gender are you?
3. How long ago did you arrive in the US?
4. Have you lived in any other countries?
 - a. If so, for how long?
 - b. *What were the circumstances?*
5. Where in Syria are you from?
6. What language or languages did you grow up speaking?
7. What languages does your family speak?
 - a. *What language(s) do your parents speak?*
 - b. *Do you have siblings?*
 - c. *What language(s) do they speak?*
8. Do you speak any other languages/What other language(s) do you speak?
9. How did you learn _____? (repeat for each language spoken by participant, including MSA for Arabic speakers)
10. How would you rate your ability to speak English?

Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Limited	Poor
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11. How would you rate your understanding of English?

Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Limited	Poor
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12. Repeat questions nine through eleven for all L2's that the participant uses regularly.
13. For Arabic speakers, repeat both questions for MSA.

14. When do you speak _____? with parents/siblings, with friends, at school, work, etc.?⁶³
- a. Repeat for all languages spoken
15. When do you speak English?⁶⁴
16. *In a situation where you could speak either _____ or English, what would you speak?*
- a. *Repeat for all relevant combinations.*
17. In a typical week, what percentage of time do you find yourself using your native language(s)
(Repeat for other languages)?
18. What comes to mind when you think of (participant's native language)?⁶⁵
- a. Repeat for all languages used regularly
19. Do you practice a religion?
- a. If so, which one?
 - b. *What language do you use the most within your religion?*
20. *What language do you typically listen to music in?*
21. *What language do you watch television in most?*
22. *What language do you use most for social media and texting?*⁶⁶
23. What comes to mind when you think of English?⁶⁷
24. How do the languages you speak shape who you are?⁶⁸
25. How does your language factor into that?

⁶³ The examples were incorporated into the question because participants had difficulty answering it without them.

⁶⁴ Wording changed from "where" to "when"

⁶⁵ This question was originally worded "how would you describe your language," but participants found this wording confusing, and answers were erratic, so the question has been re-worded to be clearer and easier to answer.

⁶⁶ Questions 18-20 were originally one question, but were split into three because participants tended to have different answers for each.

⁶⁷ This question was changed to match the revised version of question 54.

⁶⁸ This question was originally worded "how does your language factor into your cultural identity?" However, this wording proved too formal.

26. Do you have children? Y/N
- a. How old are they?
 - b. What language(s) do you speak with them?
27. If no, what language(s) would you speak/do you plan to speak with your children?
- a. If participant has older children: Do you have grand children?
 - b. If yes, what languages are being spoken to them?
 - c. If you have grand children in the future, what language(s) do you hope they speak?
28. *What does it mean to you to be Syrian?*
29. *Do you think that future generations of your family will identify themselves as Syrian, American, or Syrian-American?*
30. *How do you feel about that?*

Appendix 2: Interview Transcriptions

Participant 1

- 1 I: So, how old are you?
- 2 P: I am 22 years old.
- 3 I: And what is your gender?
- 4 P: I'm a female.
- 5 I: Uh, where were you born?
- 6 P: In Nogales, Arizona
- 7 I: Okay, cool. And have you lived in Arizona your whole life?
- 8 P: Yes.
- 9 I: Have you ever lived in another country?
- 10 P: For a year, I lived in Denmark.
- 11 I: That's cool! How old were you when you lived in Denmark

- 12 P: 20 and 21
- 13 I: Nice. Okay, so what languages do you speak?
- 14 P: Spanish and English
- 15 I: And what languages does your family speak?
- 16 P: Spanish, mainly
- 17 I: How did you learn Spanish?
- 18 P: Um, Spanish was my first language. That's what my parents taught us, and that's what they speak, and then I just learned English in school. In kindergarten.
- 19 I: So, where do you...where do you speak English?
- 20 P: In academic settings.
- 21 I: Okay, and where do you speak Spanish?
- 22 P: At home and with friends and family
- 23 I: Okay. What language do you speak at work?
- 24 P: ...Both
- 25 I: Both?
- 26 P: Yes.
- 27 I: What, um, do you have friends you speak English with?
- 28 P: Yes.
- 29 I: Okay. Are there any other places you can think of where you use one language over the other?
- 30 P: Well, specifically in school. I hardly use Spanish here.
- 31 I: Okay. How would you rate your ability to speak English? Your options are: excellent, very good, good, fair or poor.
- 32 P: Um, I would say very good or excellent. Getting there.
- 33 I: How would you rate your understanding of English. Same options.
- 34 P: Excellent.

- 35 I: Excellent. In a typical week, what percentage of your time do find yourself using you, using Spanish?
- 36 P: Um, half.
- 37 I: Half? Well, that answers the next question, 'cause it was 'what percentage of time do you use English?'
- 38 P: Yeah, and I think that's accurate.
- 39 I: Good. How would you describe Spanish?
- 40 P: I think it's...Listening to it or speaking it?
- 41 I: Either, both.
- 42 P: I think it's very pretty. Um, it's fluent. I think it's easier than English. Um, I just really like it. I wha..el..like, I don't know.
- 43 I: No, that was great. That was excellent. Um, in a situation where you could speak either English or Spanish, which one would you probably choose?
- 44 P: It depends on the situation. For more professional situations, I choose English, and since I learned Spanish through my parents, um, it's very easy for me to go into slang and stuff like that, so with friends, um I would probably go with Spanish.
- 45 I: Why do you choose English in more professional settings?
- 46 P: Um, because I learned it in a more professional setting, in school, so I have...I think I have, my...my better words are in English. I can articulate better. I'm obviously having trouble with that.
- 47 I: Yeah, awesome. So, how do you feel like the languages you speak play into your cultural identity?
- 48 P: mmmm
- 49 I: Do you feel like they play into your cultural identity?
- 50 P: Um.....They do.....because I think they've created this culture identity for me where I don't know if I am either more Mexican or more American. In Mexico, I'm told that I have...that I speak Spanish with an American Accent, and in the U.S I'm told that I speak English with a Mexican accent, so, it just, it creates this whole new identity for me, I guess. I don't really know which one I'm more of.

- 51 I: Interesting.....um.....I don't know what the next question I was going to ask was....um.....do you think it would be different if you only spoke one or the other?
- 52 P: Yes. I think speaking two languages helped me reach, like, a broader audience, and yeah, it helps me communicate better, I think.
- 53 I: Yeah. How would you describe English?
- 54 P: English? I view English as very, like to the book, like, I have this view of it as just, like very straightforward. Um, it can be cool sometimes, but I don't think it's very beautiful to listen to.
- 55 I: If you, if you were, if you remember learning English, what was your experience learning English like?
- 56 P: It was easy. Learning English at the beginning, I think it was easy for me cause I was...because I didn't know otherwise. I think it got harder when I started noticing my accent, and people started pointing it out, which gets me nervous, and then I do worse, so I guess the learning was easiest. Like, actually speaking it in places I don't feel comfortable makes me nervous.
- 57 I: Do you feel like now you're comfortable with your accent, or does that still make you nervous?
- 58 P: Um, I'm comfortable with it.
- 59 I: Yeah?
- 60 P: Yeah, I've embraced it pretty much.
- 61 I: Good. Okay, do you have any children?
- 62 P: No.
- 63 I: Um, if you ever do have kids, what language or languages do you plan to speak with them?
- 64 P: Um, both. Should I be more specific?
- 65 I: I..I think...why would you speak both?
- 66 P: I think being bilingual is awesome, and even trilingual, like I just really love languages, so as many as you can speak, that's awesome.
- 67 I: Um...what....are there any specific of your own cultural identity and heritage that you want to pass onto your kids? Besides just your languages.

- 68 P: Um, yeah, values, and beliefs. I grew up with very strong Mexican values and beliefs, and I want that to keep going down the generations. Um, yeah.
- 69 I: Another, totally random question that has nothing to do with the line of questioning I was just talking about. Um, What, which language do you use more on the internet?
- 70 P: I think to chat and text, it would definitely be Spanish.
- 71 I: Mhmm.
- 72 P: But like, Facebook and Instagram, English.
- 73 I: IS that just cause more of the content on those is in English?
- 74 P: Yeah
- 75 I: And then what about, like, listening to the radio or watching TV or like general youtube type things?
- 76 P: It's always in English.
- 77 I: Interesting. Again, just content? There's more of it?
- 78 P: There's more of it and it's ju...well, for movies, for movies, for example, and videos, their mostly created in English, so if I listen to them in Spanish they don't really match with the lips, so I just think it's harder to watch something that was created in English.
- 79 I: Cool. Is there anything else that you wanna say about any of what we talked about? That was very vague.
- 80 P: No, I can't think of any. If you have any other questions...
- 81 I: Let me think for a second, if I have anymore.....Do you have siblings?
- 82 P: Yeah
- 83 I: What languages do your siblings speak?
- 84 P: We all speak Spanish and English. Spanish is all of our first language. Interestingly enough, we speak English with each other.
- 85 I: So mostly English with Each other?
- 86 P: Mostly...I think it's just to rebel against my parents, so...
- 87 I: Interesting.
- 88 P: Cause they only want us to speak Spanish in the house, but we move towards English.

- 89 I: Huh. That's really interesting. Do your parents still not speak English?
- 90 P: they learned, but they don't really try. It's...
- 91 I: Why do you think that is?
- 92 P: I don't think it's necessary, and where we live, we're so close to the border that there's lots of Hispanic people here that you can like really get around with just Spanish.
- 93 I: Cool.
- 94 P: Another cool thing, I don't know if it helps you—when I'm with like my friends in a setting that's full of like Hispanics like our Mexican friends, me and my best friend will switch to English. I don't know why, though. We just noticed this. And when we're here, and we go out in a party in the U.S, we speak Spanish. We just always switch the languages.
- 95 I: Is that like a privacy thing, do you think?
- 96 P: I don't think so cause we're not cause we're not talking about...it's just so weird.
- 97 I: That's so interesting.
- 98 P: It's very weird.
- 99 I: That's cool. Well, thank you very much for answering all my questions.

Participant 2

- 1 I: How old are you?
- 2 P: I am 20 years old.
- 3 I: Cool. And what gender would you consider yourself?
- 4 P: Female
- 5 I: where were you born?
- 6 P: India, Indor (SP?)
- 7 I: Okay, and at what age did you arrive in the U.S?
- 8 P: mmm, 18.
- 9 I: Okay, what other countries have you lived in?

- 10 P: The United Arab Emirates...The United Arab Emirates.
- 11 I: Good, um, okay. What, what languages did you grow up speaking at home?
- 12 P: Hindi and English.
- 13 I: Okay. Um...what languages does your family speak?
- 14 P: Hindi, English Kashmiri, which is a regional language, and some of them Punjabi
- 15 I: Nice. Uuum....what languages do you speak?
- 16 P: Hindi and English.
- 17 I: Good. How did you learn Hindi?
- 18 P: Just through my parents, so growing up they'd speak to me in Hindi, and a mix of English and just talking to them.
- 19 I: Okay, and where'd you learn English?
- 20 P: Umm, again, through my parents, but also formally through school.
- 21 I: Okay. Um, did you pick up any other languages living in the United Arab Emirates?
- 22 P: Um, I did pick up on Arabic cause that was mandated according to ours schooling. I'm not super fluent, but I can get away with the basics.
- 23 I: Okay.
- 24 P: In school, I also learned French.
- 25 I: How much French do you know?
- 26 P: I did three years of it, but I can read it. I can probably have a passable conversation.
- 27 I: Okay. So, where, like in what contexts do you speak English? So like, what do you...do you speak it at home, do you speak it at school, work?
- 28 P: So definitely at school, and um...at home, I think I speak both Hindi and English, just a mix, but it depends on how emotional I am. So when I'm like, in super emotional mode, my brain switches to Hindi.
- 29 I: Oaky. Umm...where do you speak Hindi primarily?
- 30 P: At home, with friends who understand Hindi, just like in a super emotional state with like grandparents and cousins.

- 31 I: With your immediate and extended family, which language do you find you speak more?
- 32 P: So, there's this concept of Hinglish, which is what I think I speak the most. It's like this really weird mix of Hindi and English that people just understand. So I don't know if there's like a percentage that could give you of which I speak more, but it's more like this idea of Hinglish where you communicate in both languages and people are still able to comprehend you.
- 33 I: Are there certain people in your family that you would only speak Hindi with?
- 34 P: mmm, Some of my aunts and uncles, cause they're not as fluent in English, and they prefer speaking in Hindi, so...
- 35 I: Are there people in your family who you would mostly speak English with?
- 36 P: Mmm, No. I would generally speak in a language that I was asked a question in. So, for example, sometimes I get asked questions in English, so I respond in English.
- 37 I: Okay. What...in a typical week, what percentage of your time do you find yourself using Hindi?
- 38 P: 10...15% cause there's not a lot of Hindi speakers over here and I generally only use that language when I'm calling home.
- 39 I: Okay. When you're...at home, what percentage do you spend speaking Hindi?
- 40 P: I'd say it's a 50/50 mix.
- 41 I: Okay. When you're using social media, or like, technology, internet things, like, which do you use more?
- 42 P: Umm.....English, again definitely more, but again, there's even this concept of typing Hinglish. You type, like Hindi phrases, but using English letters.
- 43 I: Interesting. And do you do that mostly in, like, interactions with people? OR do you do that mostly on social media posts? How do you do that?
- 44 P: Like, generally when I'm texting my family. So, like, on family group chats, text my dad something, you know like sometimes it's just more sassy.
- 45 I: Um, lest see. How would you rate your ability to speak English? Your options are: Excellent, good, fair, limited, or poor.
- 46 P: Excellent.

- 47 I: Excellent. How would you rate your ability to understand English? Your options are: Excellent, good, fair, limited, or poor.
- 48 P: Excellent.
- 49 I: How would you rate your ability to speak Hindi? You have the same options.
- 50 P: If there was something between excellent and good.
- 51 I: Okay. How would you rate your understanding of Hindi?
- 52 P: Same. Between excellent and good.
- 53 I: How would you describe Hindi?
- 54 P: A more Personal language than English. It's like, to communicate with the people I'm close to more often than I use it for like in a professional environment. So it's more of like a personal, and like an emotional language for me.
- 55 I: How would you describe like the actual language?
- 56 P: In what sense? Like how does it sound, how do you speak it?
- 57 I: How does it sound.....what...yeah. How does it sound? How does it feel? What are your feelings about it?
- 58 P: I think it sounds really calming, but it can also be a super sassy language, which is what I like about it. Sometimes when I try to translate things over into English, they don't sound as funny. So, I'm so much funnier in Hindi, which is my opinion, but it's like a language that's really expressive. Um, there are so many words to describe the ways that you're feeling in so many different ways. And like, with our generation, there's so many different things, and like ways....like for example, with our generation, you have like hookup culture, which is like, you know, it's terminology that's relevant to the generation. There's like other things in Hindi that are relevant to our generation, which I think is really cool.
- 59 I: Yeah! Now, how would you describe English?
- 60 P: It's a more formal language. Um, it can be poetic, but because it's become so commonplace, you only like the super basic elements, but like, look at poetry, or like old English. It's like, it sounds really beautiful.
- 61 I: Awesome. Uuuuummm.....How do you feel like the languages you speak tie into your cultural identity?

- 62 P: I mean, I grew up in Dubai, but Dubai doesn't really offer citizenship, or like any kind of a passport, for example. You only live on a visa, so, like, I've always identified as Indian, even living for so long and growing up in Dubai. I'm from Dubai, but I am Indian, so I feel like when I speak Hindi, I am able to connect to that cultural side of me more. Um, and I think, like growing up, I would go home, and I would probably be one of the only kids who spoke, like, super fluent English and all my cousins would be like, "what are you doing? Talk in Hindi." Um, so, like, that's like this bond between my family and me.
- 63 I: How...what am I trying ask.....How do you feel like...your languages....affect your cultural identity while you're living here in the U.S.?
- 64 P: I definitely feel a lot more disconnected with Hindi since I've been here, cause I haven't found, um so many people, so I feel like it kinda disconnects me from my Indian culture, but when I do find some who speaks Hindi, it's like, that's all I talk in. So it's a weird spot for me, um, there's not a lot of people. So maybe it's not like a U.S. thing, but maybe it's like a Tucson, Arizona thing, where I haven't found a lot of Hindi Speakers, and even though I have, they're not as super fluent. Um, so yeah, sometimes I feel like I'm missing out on the culture of mine, but I think it's fine.
- 65 I: Do you ever use the internet or radio, I know you mentioned texting with people in Hindi, but do you ever use any of those to, like, consume media?
- 66 P: Oh yeah, definitely. I watch a bunch of Bollywood movies whenever I get the chance. I pretty much listen to.....like 70% Hindi music, based, so I'm still keeping in touch with my language; I'm just not using it to communicate with someone else.
- 67 I: Do you have any children?
- 68 P: No.
- 69 I: So, if you have children, what language or languages do you plan to speak with them?
- 70 P: Hindi and English definitely, and depending on who I marry, if they have a regional tongue, that too, but definitely Hindi and English both.
- 71 I: Why, why do you wanna raise them to speak both?
- 72 P: English because that's what the entire world uses, but Hindi because I feel like they should have some sort of a connection. Like, even if they're born in some other country, I still want them to identify partly as Indian, to like have that connection to their culture and their roots. So maybe I hope, like speaking Hindi would give them that. Plus, like it's always a secret language to use when talking to people, which, like, I really like cause

- like if I want to bitch about someone, I just talk Hindi, and like, we can understand and communicate.
- 73 I: How do you feel like giving them the ability to speak Hindi would help them connect with their heritage?
- 74 P:They'd be able to consume more information and knowledge. I feel like they'd be able to understand the news in Hindi. I feel like they'd be able to understand lectures, or speeches given by politicians. They'd be able to, you know, communicate with the older members of the family who may not be as fluent in English. So, you know, they'd be connected with these different sources, and like understand the information, rather than me having to sit there and translate it for them, or them trying to read subtitles, so them trying to understand like, Oh, this word has this kind of a connotation, which doesn't necessarily come into a translation. So, like, helping them be aware of what their country is and what's going on there. A lot of the speeches, and like information that's spread is in Hindi, so if they didn't understand, they wouldn't know what was going on.
- 75 I: do you practice a religion at all?
- 76 P: I am Hindu, by religion, but I don't practice it as actively as I should.
- 77 I: Okay, do you find, when you're engaging, practicing that, at whatever level you do, does that happen mostly in English, or mostly in Hindi?
- 78 P: When I'm, like doing it out loud, then it's definitely in Hindi, but if I'm trying to like pray, and it's in my head, then it's definitely in English, but like, to an Indian god, so it's kinda weird. But like, you know how you have, like, carols? We have [not sure], which are in this form of Sanskrit and Hindi, and like I know those cause I was raised on those, and like they're like in my head. But if I'm like praying, like you know, if they're like "close your eyes and pray to God," or whatever when you're in a temple, it's like I'm praying in English.
- 79 I: Interesting. Would it be harder for you to, like engage with that, and to practice that externally, in English? Did that make any sense?
- 80 P: Like saying my thoughts out loud in English, or like praying?
- 81 I: well, like, praying, or just engaging, like in general, with other people—Would that be possible in English, or does that need to be in Hindi?
- 82 P: Definitely like the songs, or like the [not sure], or like the carols, they would be hard to transcribe, but like, talking to someone about the festivals, or like what was

happening in the background, like what the religious meaning is, that's easier...easy to communicate in English, but like, actually doing the ritual itself might be a little bit more complicated, mostly because there aren't like, direct translations for certain ceremonies.

Participant 3

- 1 I: Okay, first, how old are you?
- 2 P: 20
- 3 I: And what is your gender?
- 4 P: I'm a female.
- 5 I: Where were you born?
- 6 P: Abu Dhabi, U.A.E
- 7 I: At what age did you arrive in the U.S.?
- 8 P: Year?
- 9 I: Age, uh, what age were you?
- 10 P: Uhm, 17.
- 11 I: Okay, and what other countries, if any, have you lived in?
- 12 P: Um, India, and the United States, I guess.
- 13 I: Excellent. Uh, so what languages did you grow up speaking?
- 14 P: Um, so I grew up speaking honestly English, my mother tongue...Do I have to say it?
- 15 I: That would be helpful to me, yeah.
- 16 P: It's called Malayalam. I'll spell it out. It's m-a-l-a-y-a-l-a-m. Um, it's a language native to South India, and, um, I do know—I did know Arabic as well, but I lost proficiency in it after moving here because I have not like kept up, like the environment changed, so I have not kept up with it and kinda forgot it.
- 17 I: What would you say was your highest proficiency in Arabic, when you did speak it?
- 18 P: Um, so I am able to read and write in Arabic, but it's more of like understanding and vocab. I still understand the grammar, but...
- 19 I: there'll be more questions about that later. Um, what languages does your family speak?

- 20 P: Um, a couple. So, because my, my mother and father lived in the United Arab Emirates for way longer than I have, they are highly proficient in Arabic. Um, Malayalam, a couple of other Indian languages, and English as well.
- 21 I: What are the other Indian languages?
- 22 P: So, um, Malayalam, Tamil: T-a-m-i-l, Hindi...uhhh, yeah. I think, right now, those three.
- 23 I: ummm, I asked about other languages...how did you learn...this is a silly question...how did you learn Malayalam?
- 24 P: I learned, um, that was the language mostly spoken in my home, so I learned it from my family.
- 25 I: And how did you learn English?
- 26 P: From the school that I went to, which was an English-based...more of like a British-ish kind of system.
- 27 I: Okay. How old were you when you started learning English?
- 28 P: Um, how old are kids when they join kindergarten?
- 29 I: It's different from country to country.
- 30 P: Yeah, that's true. Umm, jeez....I probably started.....three years old? Four years old? Is that really young? When did you start kindergarten?
- 31 I: Five is the normal age in the U.S.
- 32 P: So it should be five. I'm sure it's five if that's the normal age, yeah.
- 33 I: It's six in the U.K, though, so if that might have also been it.
- 34 P: No, it's not—it wouldn't be that old. It's five.
- 35 I: Okay. Um, and how did you learn Arabic?
- 36 P: Uh, it was taught as a second language at school, and it was required from grade one 'til grade.....'til grade ten.
- 37 I: So, how many years of Arabic did you take? 10?
- 38 P: Mmhm
- 39 I: And did you, when you were little, and you lived in the U.A.E, did you speak Arabic, like did you speak it in your daily life?
- 40 P: Not really, it was more of like, how you would, like a second language learned here.
- 41 I: Okay.
- 42 P: Yeah.
- 43 I: Uhhh.....Where.....in what environments...do you speak English?

- 44 P: I speak it at school, with my friends.....and in professional settings.....mmm, anywhere apart from home, I would say would be my answer.
- 45 I: So, where do you speak Malayalam?
- 46 P: Definitely with my family....and....I guess....with other friends who also speak Malayalam, definitely.
- 47 I: What percentage of your week would you say you spend speaking English?
- 48 P: Since I've moved here, it's been....uhhh.....probably 80-85%
- 49 I: And the other 15-20, is with your family?
- 50 P: Mhm, yeah.
- 51 I: And you said you don't speak Arabic at all anymore?
- 52 P: Yeah, no.
- 53 I: How would you rate your ability to speak English? Your choices are: Excellent, good, fair, limited, or poor.
- 54 P: And how would you describe excellent?
- 55 I: Excellent would be fluent.
- 56 P: I guess excellent.
- 57 I: How would you rate your understanding of English? Excellent, good, fair, limited, or poor?
- 58 P: I would say excellent.
- 59 I: How would you rate your ability to speak Malayalam?
- 60 P: Excellent.
- 61 I: How would you rate your ability to understand Malayalam?
- 62 P: Excellent.
- 63 I: How would you rate your ability to speak Arabic?
- 64 P: What were the choices again?
- 65 I: Excellent, good, fair, limited, or poor.
- 66 P: Honestly, at this point, it's really poor.
- 67 I: and understanding?
- 68 P: How would you describe Malayalam?
- 69 I: Um, it's...it's, it's a very....for sure, it's a very complex language with more than 26 letters...alphabets, and, like, um, different....there are more words, um in Malayalam that

cannot be translated to English at all, and it's like, it's native to like the state I'm from in India, which is called South Karola, and um, what else would you want me to say about the language?

70 I: What comes to your mind?

71 P: Uh, it's very hard to mix in English with this language, but, uh, since I was born abroad, uh people, not just me—others as well, do mix in English as we speak this language, just because we aren't, umm completely native. Um...Uh, the accent is very different, especially in terms of rolling r's and like certain like, like to say certain words. It's definitely different from I guess the American accent, and my accent does change when I speak it. So yeah, it's odd. Like, even like the English, when I speak to my parents, the accent comes back, and when I pray...yeah, those are the two times my accent comes back, like my actual Indian accent. Yeah, I have no idea why. That's why I don't like to pray in when everyone is just like.....cause it comes out, and I'm just like oohh gosh. I guess, I know how to read, and to write it. I watch movies; I listen to music that is original to my country, I mean to my state.

72 I: wow, I was gonna ask about that, but now I don't even have to.

73 P: Cool. Yeah, I think that's it.

74 I: Cool. How would you describe English?

75 P: Um....English is definitely.....I would say that I am equally proficient in English. It's definitely...I would consider it an easier language to learn, read, and write than Malayalam. It...um...I think...um...the biggest way I learn English is through writing, and like, um...through watching...um...hearing people speak and watching movies, I guess. I don't think it's harder than Malayalam to learn.

76 I: How do you feel the languages you speak shape...your...um....cultural identity?

77 P: Um, if anything, like, it was more so emphasized after I moved here. Like, my language is definitely tied to my cultural identity because like, that's the prime, that's the way I communicate with, like, my family, and like people who are from my country as well, but English is the way I use, like the language I use to communicate with people from here who are not part of my cultural identity, so I would say my language is very much tied to my culture, and I place a lot of importance to it for that.

78 I: Do you feel like having the ability to speak your mother tongue has helped you stay connected with your cultural identity while you're here?

79 P: Definitely. I think that the day I lose, like the day I start becoming not so proficient in Malayalam would, I would be very, I would be very sad if that happened because it would be like losing...definitely losing part of my identity.

80 I: Do you....um, practice any religion?

81 P: Yes I do. I am Christian.

82 I: What language do you feel is more central in practicing that? I mean, I know we talked about prayer, but....?

- 83 P: Yeah, that's true. I mean, definitely....I would definitely associate English, I guess, with my religion, but I also, so I also go to a Christian church, right...okay? That's terrible, like Christian church, okay. But I also go to a church up in Phoenix that is, um, a Malayalam church...so, it's so weird, but I think, like, my, I can...yes. I associate both of my languages with my religion, generally.
- 84 I: That's cool!
- 85 P: That's, yeah. I'm sorry, that's so weird. It's just that no one has ever asked me that question, so I don't know.
- 86 I: I feel like probably no one has ever asked you several of these questions.
- 87 P: I don't it's weird cause like, the English Bible...it's different in different languages. IT's like, whatever you read, I don't know, I feel like it's more meaningful in my language. It's really weird, but it is.
- 88 I: Why do you feel like that?
- 89 P: Like I said, because there are more words in my language than in English, and certain words you cannot describe in English, and the mean something like, their meaning is very specific. I think that it's more like, uh personal, even. Yeah, I don't know how to explain it, but yeah.
- 90 I: What do you, if you're just, like, reading the Bible on your own, which language are you more likely to read it in.
- 91 P: Again, after moving here, definitely English, but I've done, like, honestly, I've taken an oath to, like, learn verses in Malayalam because it's so different. So, like, I'm like, Why can't I just do it? Cause I can read and write, so I should just do that.
- 92 I: Wow, yeah, that's really cool. Do you have any children?
- 93 P: Wow, what a question.....not to my knowledge.
- 94 I: If you have kids in the future, what language or languages do you plan to speak with them?
- 95 P: I would definitely, um, just like my parents did, um enforce speaking Malayalam at home, but I would also like want them to be proficient in English as well.....
- 96 I: Um, what is your reasoning for that?
- 97 P: I think being bilingual is...it's a very good skill....and so far, um, I think that being bilingual is...it's a really good way to like, I don't know, I think it's a very advantageous skill, and it gives you a lot of advantages in any area, particularly in professional settings with other people who speak the same languages you do, it could be more advantageous? I don't know.
- 98 I: Yeah! Do you feel like wanting...wanting your kids to share in the cultural identity you grew up with influences the language choices you make?
- 99 P: Definitely. Yeah, that's part of your culture. It's part of your identity. You can never escape it. And, like, if they ever, I would be heartbroken if my children did not learn Malayalam. I can't.

Participant 4

1 I: First, how old are you?

2 P: I'm 20.

3 I: And...What...What gender are you?

4 P: Female.

5 I: Where were you born?

6 P: China.

7 I: China? Okay, and what age were you when you arrived in the U.S?

8 P: Eight...wait, it's actually 18. No, 17. I'm gonna say 17.

9 I: Okay, um...have you lived in any other countries besides China and the U.S?

10 P: No.

I: Okay. What...uh...what language or languages did you grow up speaking?

P: Chinese, and to be more specific, Mandarin.

I: Okay. Um....what languages....language or languages does your family speak?

P: Uh, Mandarin.

I: Okay, and do you speak other languages?

P: Uh, no.

I: You speak English.

P: Except English.

I: Okay, this...this sounds like a silly question. How did you learn Mandarin?

P: Mandarin?

I: Yeah.

P: Ummm, since Kindergarten. Like, we would learn, like, when we were, like super young, like kindergarten, until high school. Like, we would have a class called Chinese class, and we would learn that until high school.

I: And then, is that also the language like your parents spoke with you when you were a baby?

P: Mmhmm.

I: How did you learn English?

P: Um, like, after I just decided to study abroad, then I started to learn English, but I've attended, you know, like some English tutoring sessions from other, you know, like other organizations. Kind of like uh tutoring organizations, to learn some like basic understanding oral English, stuff like that.

I: Okay, so did you learn English mostly from classes, or from self-study, or from immersion.

P: Class. We have an English class, but it's mostly about the grammar, not about the oral. Like after I decided to study abroad, I decided to learn more oral English, like listening, reading, that kind of thing.

I: Okay awesome. Um....how would you rate your proficiency in English? Your options are Excellent, good, fair, limited, or poor.

P: Uh, I would say fair.

I: Fair? Okay. How would you rate your understanding of English?

P: I would say still limited.

I: Okay. Why would you say limited?

P: For the understanding?

I: Yeah.

P: Um, I don't know, cause of the grammar rules? Cause when I ask my friend, like some of my American friends, they kind of don't know about a very strict grammar rules. I can understand that, cause if somebody told me, like, do you understand the Mandarin grammar rules, I'm like, no, I uhh...and also there's a lot words, like vocabularies that I don't know cause some vocabularies with have multiple use, like multiple meanings in different context. So that's kind of hard for me to understand all of them, and also for the oral, they have like some phrases, like oral phrases that they have to use every day. Not have to, but that they use every day, like when we, like it's kind of like a cultural thing. So I'm like limited to the understanding of like the English and the cultural part of the English.

I: What would it mean for you...like what would it mean for someone to have an excellent understanding of English?

P: What do you mean?

I: Like, given your choice of limited...how would you define...like, what would be different for someone who had an excellent understanding of English?

P: I would say first of all, you can understand the U.S. culture first, cause you're here in the U.S, cause otherwise, you cannot understand all of the meaning of the English like that. And I think like the use of the word choices and like the vocabularies can be like a great thing. Like those two things, I mean, are like what I think.

I: Yeah. Awesome! So, in what contexts do you speak English? So like, at school, at work, with friends, at home?

P: Umm, usually at work, and at school, yeah. And sometimes with friends, but I have like, I mean like a lot of Chinese friends, and at home I usually speak Mandarin.

I: Where else would you speak Mandarin?

P: Mandarin?

I: Yeah.

P: Umm...Facetiming with my family, like whenever the time when I contact with my friends in China, or like, my Chinese friends here, I just speak Mandarin. Otherwise, I just speak English.

I: Okay. Uh, what percentage of the week do you, uh, would you estimate that you spend speaking English?

P: 70%?

I: Okay, solid. Uummm.....How would you describe Chinese, specifically Mandarin?

P: Like, explain the language?

I: Like, what comes to mind when you think of it?

P: Complex.

I: Complex?

P: Mhmm. I feel it's like it's, no offense, I feel like it's more complicated to learn than to learn English. 'Cause I mean, I don't know, like, it's your mother language, like you don't feel it's kind of hard to learn, but I feel a lot when my friends try to learn it, and they said like once you learn the English, it's kind of hard, but once you learn Mandarin, you will feel it's kind of easy to learn English, you know? That's what I feel, and also, I love my mother language, so I don't wanna forget it. That's why I usually spend just at least a night to speak Mandarin.

I: Yeah, awesome! How would you describe English?

P: English?

I: Yeah.

P: Beautiful. It's a beautiful language, like a powerful language. Especially when I, after I learned about writing, uh, creative writing classes, I feel like it's a super powerful language to express you opinions, 'cause sometimes, I cannot even use my, you know, Chinese, to express what I'm thinking of.

I: Do you feel like you write better in English, or in Chinese?

P: Uh, right now, if I can deal with my word choices, you know, I would say it's better to write in English.

I: How do you feel like the languages you speak shape who you are?

P: Like, right now, or...

I: Yeah.

P: The Mandarin or English?

I: Both.

P: Um...you know, it's kind of like intercultural thing, like right now. Cause before I speak English like this, fluent, 'cause before I speak English like so bad, super bad. I cannot imagine how I did it before, but it's like right now, I feel...It's kind of interesting, you know. It can enhance both of my Chinese and English. 'Cause, like, I kind of change my mind when I am speaking Mandarin. Like, I have, like, old thoughts when I speak that. It's kind of like a historical thing that leave for us, but right now it's kinda like, uh, give like, uh, Western thoughts when you're speaking. It's kinda like a thought changing of it. When I am speaking English, it's kind of like a combination of my thoughts form when I am speaking Mandarin and when I am speaking English. It's kind of, it's super helpful when I'm writing things, especially. 'Cause sometimes it's kind of easy to come up with a new thought, when you're doing that, cause you have n interaction between both Western and Eastern culture. That's kind of what I find. It's odd; it's hard to explain, but it's kind of...it has both. Improved both.

I: Yeah. Um, do you have any children?

P: No.

I: If, if you ever do have kids, what, what language or languages do you plan to speak with your kids?

P: Um, I would say Mandarin first. 'Cause it's kind of hard. And then English also, like in the meantime. But probably, I will use Mandarin to start.

I: And, so you said you would start with Mandarin because it's hard. Are there any other reasons why you would do that first, or is that the primary reason?

P: Um, I would say mostly we would just live in China, so you know, it would be the most, like used language my kids will use. But for English, it's kind of like I want my kids to study abroad, so that's a great thing, if I let them to start early to learn English. Yeah.

I: Sweet. Um.....when you're using...sorry. This is a complete topic switch. When you're using social media, or the internet, or watching TV, or listening to music, what language do you find you do that in more?

P: Mmm. That's two separate things for me. Cause when I'm watching TV, and listening to music, it's mostly English. Especially the music. I only listen to English music. So, I know it's too abstract. And, what did you say?

I: Like social media.

P: Right, when I'm doing social media, or like chatting, it's kind of like a Facebook thing, I just do Mandarin.

I: Umm, do you practice a religion at all? If you don't wanna answer that question, it's fine.

P: No.

I: Okay, cool. Do you have any questions, or things you wanted to clarify, things you wanted to say about either of your languages that you feel are important for me to know?

P: Um, I would say bilingual is kind of a special case. I'm not that special, but it's kind of a special case, and I would recommend everyone to learn a language, to understand the culture of that country. Like, I wanna learn Spanish next semester so I can also learn something about Europe. So it's kind of like three cultures, and I feel that it can help me to understand, I don't know, how the world goes, I don't know. It's kind of like to expand myself, to improve myself.