Understanding ‘Community’ in the Globalised, Urban Diaspora: Arabic Language Practices, Maintenance and Provisions in Manchester, UK

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2021

Leonie E Gaiser

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures
# Table of contents

**Table of figures** .................................................................................................................. 6  
**Abstract** ............................................................................................................................... 7  
**Declaration** ............................................................................................................................ 8  
**Copyright statement** .............................................................................................................. 9  
**Acknowledgements** .............................................................................................................. 11  

1 **Introduction** ......................................................................................................................... 12  
1.1 Preamble .................................................................................................................................. 12  
1.2 Research aims and questions .................................................................................................... 16  
1.3 Methodological considerations and rationale ........................................................................... 18  
1.4 Research context: Arabic in Manchester .................................................................................... 20  
1.4.1 Brief history of Arab migration to Manchester ...................................................................... 20  
1.4.2 Arabic in Manchester today .................................................................................................. 22  
1.5 Conclusion and thesis outline .................................................................................................. 32  

2 **Exploring ‘language’ and ‘community’: Theory and methods** ............................................. 34  
2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 34  
2.2 ‘Language’, practice and repertoires ...................................................................................... 34  
  2.2.1 Language hierarchies at societal level: (Arabic) Diglossia .................................................. 37  
  2.2.2 Sociolinguistic hierarchies at the level of the individual ..................................................... 39  
2.3 Theoretical developments of ‘community’ ............................................................................ 39  
  2.3.1 ‘Community’ in Sociolinguistics, Ethnography, and Linguistic Anthropology .................... 40  
  2.3.2 Sociological approaches to ‘community’ ............................................................................ 43  
  2.3.3 Diaspora, transnationalism and community ....................................................................... 47  
2.4 Bringing ‘language’ and ‘community’ together ..................................................................... 48  
  2.4.1 Family practices as community practices .......................................................................... 49  
  2.4.2 Supplementary schools as ‘community spaces’ .................................................................. 50  
  2.4.3 Businesses and communities .............................................................................................. 53  
  2.4.4 Interpreting, translation and community .......................................................................... 54  
2.5 Norms, expectations and practices: Language policy and regimes ....................................... 56  
  2.5.1 Family language policy ...................................................................................................... 58  
  2.5.2 Language policy in education settings ............................................................................... 61  
  2.5.3 Interactional regimes ......................................................................................................... 62  
2.6 Methodological implications ................................................................................................... 63  
  2.6.1 Biographical dimensions .................................................................................................... 64  
  2.6.2 Observant participation and collaborative research ........................................................... 64  
  2.6.3 Language learning as ethnographic method ...................................................................... 65  
  2.6.4 Linguistic Landscapes: ‘language’ and ‘community’ in space ........................................... 66  
2.7 Conclusion .............................................................................................................................. 68  

3 **Methodology** ....................................................................................................................... 70  
3.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................... 70  
3.2 Research philosophy .............................................................................................................. 70
8.7 Implications and contributions ................................................................. 248

9 References .................................................................................................. 252

10 Appendix .................................................................................................. 287

Appendix A .................................................................................................. 287
  Initiatives teaching Arabic in Manchester ...................................................... 287

Appendix B .................................................................................................. 289
  Participant Information Sheet ........................................................................ 289

Appendix C .................................................................................................. 292
  Transcription conventions ............................................................................. 292
  Transcript family focus group ...................................................................... 292

Word count: 92,331
Table of figures

Figure 1. LinguaSnapp (2021) map, filtered for ‘Arabic’ on 28 January 2021 ........................................ 24
Figure 2. Private residential sign, Whalley Range (mā shā a-llāh, ‘as God willing’) ................................ 26
Figure 3. Private residential sign, Rusholme (mā shā a-llāh, ‘as God willing’) ...................................... 26
Figure 4. T-shirt with Arabic print (al-hub, ‘love’) .................................................................................. 27
Figure 5. Arabic newspapers, Rusholme .................................................................................................. 28
Figure 6. Facebook post, August 2019 (Arabic Community 2019) ......................................................... 29
Figure 7. Overview of methodological framework ................................................................................ 71
Figure 8. Map fieldwork sites (Google Maps 2021) ............................................................................... 78
Figure 9. Family members participant family ....................................................................................... 79
Figure 10. Data collected and methods of analysis ................................................................................ 87
Figure 11. Call-to-prayer alarm clock (Buegle 2020) ............................................................................ 104
Figure 12. Arabic labels on food jars in the kitchen ............................................................................... 106
Figure 13. Arabic labels on food jars in corridor ................................................................................... 107
Figure 14. Whiteboard (photographed on 26 February 2019) ............................................................... 109
Figure 15. South Manchester terraced houses (Scott & Smithers 2016) ............................................... 119
Figure 16. South Manchester alleyway (Peskett 2020) ........................................................................ 120
Figure 17. Manchester Libyan Community School facebook page (MLCS facebook 2021) .................. 135
Figure 18. McrAS facebook ‘About’ (McrAS facebook 2021) ............................................................... 141
Figure 19. School main entrance on a Saturday .................................................................................... 144
Figure 20. Direction signs at McrAS (‘Manchester Arabic School’) .................................................... 146
Figure 21. Door signs (‘sixth grade’; ‘fifth grade’) ............................................................................... 147
Figure 22. McrAS Parents notice ......................................................................................................... 149
Figure 23. McrAS Payment notice for parents ...................................................................................... 149
Figure 24. "Manchester Arabic School Only" sign ............................................................................... 150
Figure 25. Results of Arabic language activities displayed in corridors ............................................. 151
Figure 26. Traditional foods and decoration ......................................................................................... 152
Figure 27. "Iqra’ Arabic Reader 1", Beginners’ level (Abdallah 2007a: 51) .......................................... 154
Figure 28. "Iqra’ Arabic Reader 3", Advanced level (Abdallah 2007b: 3) .............................................. 154
Figure 29. McrAS website extract (McrAS 2021b) ............................................................................... 168
Figure 30. Video posted on McrAS facebook page (McrAS video 2021) ............................................. 171
Figure 31. McrAS banner at school entrance ....................................................................................... 172
Figure 32. McrAS image: multi-flags banner ....................................................................................... 174
Figure 33. McrAS facebook post British Council (McrAS facebook 2018b) ...................................... 176
Figure 34. McrAS facebook post Languages for the Future (McrAS facebook 2018c) ...................... 177
Figure 35. Façade Sheba Café ............................................................................................................. 186
Figure 36. Sheba Café facebook post (Sheba Café 2018) ................................................................. 186
Figure 37. Excerpt from Sheba Café’s menu ......................................................................................... 187
Figure 38. Laptop & Mobile Repair Centre .......................................................................................... 190
Figure 39. Monolingual English side of folding board ......................................................................... 190
Figure 40. Largely Arabic side of folding board ................................................................................... 190
Figure 41. Laptop & Mobile Repair Centre as open space for interaction ......................................... 193
Figure 42. Frurt trilingual sign: English, Chinese, Arabic ................................................................. 195
Figure 43. Façade Trafford Halal Meat ................................................................................................ 198
Figure 44. Poster indoors Trafford Halal Meat ..................................................................................... 199
Figure 45. Trafford Halal Meat business card, side 2 ........................................................................ 200
Figure 46. Trafford Halal Meat business card, side 1 ........................................................................ 200
Figure 47. Freelancer Profile Form, Sections 2 and 3 ........................................................................ 213
Figure 48. Five methodological pillars ............................................................................................... 242
Abstract

This thesis sheds light on two of the most heavily contested concepts in social sciences and sociolinguistics: ‘community’, in its inter-relation with ‘language’. I draw on the example of Arabic in Manchester, UK, to develop a comprehensive ethnographic approach to studying ‘language’ and ‘community’ in the diverse urban diaspora, focusing on four settings: family, supplementary schools, businesses, and public service interpreting and translation. The thesis explores language practices and accounts of practices, beliefs about language, and forms of language policy, to ask how these affect and shape formations and experiences of ‘communities’. The sociolinguistic complexity and variation of Arabic, the pan-Arab dimension of the Modern Standard variety, and the religious significance of Classical Arabic across Muslim populations make Arabic a compelling case to explore language users’ understandings of ‘language’ and ‘community’ in the global city. This thesis shows how beliefs and ideologies about language held at wider global scales play out locally, shaping imagined hierarchies of language resources. Drawing on previous scholarship on ‘community’ I explore how the use and maintenance of, as well as alignment with forms of language relate to doings and imaginations of communities.

I propose an ethnographic approach that is based on five methodological pillars: plurality of (inter-related) settings, plurality of types of data and data collection methods, plurality of researcher roles and modes of engagement, flexibility and versatility, and researcher reflexivity. I explore spoken and written language practices (offline and online) through longitudinal observation and participation, in-depth immersion and engagement across settings. Informal interviews and focus group interviews offer insights into actors’ perceptions and self-categorisations, ideologies, understandings of language policy and assessments of language resources. I explore Linguistic Landscapes as integral component of everyday communication practices and make a case for the study of ‘private’ Linguistic Landscapes as a form of practised language policy. My various researcher positions and positionings combine in a unique approach: I engage with my participants from the perspective of language learner, in addition to my roles as doctoral researcher, placement student and Multilingual Manchester (The University of Manchester) research assistant.

This thesis shows how imagined language boundaries and linguistic hierarchies are constructed dynamically through discourses and practices, as actors challenge others’ evaluations of repertoires or categorisations of ‘language’. I highlight the tensions arising when language ideologies are re-produced and re-defined in the global city, which in turn play a role in actors' positionings and social identification. A key argument is that policies are developed not simply on the basis of the expectations created by ‘members’ of a practice community who are in regular contact and negotiate their norms in interaction. Instead, people’s mutual identification with Arabic and shared practices create ‘imagined communities’ where norms and expectations are shaped by local and translocal factors. I propose an understanding of language policy and family language policy that emerge and operate within wider ‘interactional regimes’, encompassing declared and practised policies, actors’ dynamic understandings of their language resources, and ‘community’ dimensions.

I identify two opposing trends of community experiences and alliances in relation to language in the diaspora: a greater valorisation of linguistic forms associated with speakers’ places of origin on the one hand, and an orientation towards ‘universalisation’ and the diverse diaspora through flagging Modern Standard Arabic, on the other. Transnationalism, and within that pan-Arabism, is held together by ‘UK-ness’ in a perception of shared space. These opposing and simultaneous dynamics offer invaluable insights into how the complex understandings of ‘language’ link to the complexities of ‘community’ in the globalised, urban diaspora, and thus the research findings have significance beyond the case of Arabic in Manchester.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
Copyright statement

i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the "Copyright") and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

iii. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the "Intellectual Property") and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables ("Reproductions"), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

iv. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=2442), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library's regulations (see http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/) and in The University’s policy on Presentation of Theses.
To my parents Irmí and Jürgen
and my brother Kai
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Rebecca Tipton and Prof Yaron Matras for their constant support, invaluable insights, useful feedback, questions and guidance throughout the PhD.

I would like to thank Prof Stephen Hutchings for his insightful input, his enthusiastic support, and for motivating me to be more critical and ambitious.

Heartfelt thanks to my research participants and everyone who helped me learn Arabic. You made my fieldwork extremely enjoyable! Thank you for sharing your experiences, beliefs, stories and languages. I have learnt a lot from you and will continue to do so.

This research would not have been possible without the support and encouragement from my friends at Multilingual Manchester: Alex, Charlotte, Hazel, Millie, Clare, Steph, Katie, Huw and Viktor. Thank you for being the most encouraging and supportive colleagues one could wish for!

Sincere thanks to Britta, Kathleen, Khoi and María for your insightful comments and advice. Thanks also to my ‘English family’, Nicole, Paul, Isobelle and Callum, who will always be an important part of my life in Manchester!

Special thanks to Luani. Thank you for preparing infinite amounts of Sahraui tea, for cooking for me and preparing amazing lunches, for your patience, and for putting things into perspective. ¡Sáhara libre!

Last but not least: Heartfelt thanks to my mother Irmi, my father Jürgen and my brother Kai, who have always encouraged and supported me and my academic career, believed in me, and supported (and accepted) my decision to study away from home. Thank you for teaching me to never stop reading, listening, learning and, most importantly, questioning. Thank you for the many care parcels filled with home-made sweets, jam and love. It is for all these and many more reasons that I dedicate this thesis to you.

Research for this thesis was carried out with ESRC funding via the North West Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership
1 Introduction

1.1 Preamble

This thesis aims to develop an ethnographic approach to studying language users’ understandings and experiences of ‘language’ and ‘community’ and their inter-relations in the globalised urban diaspora, while challenging the very notion of ‘language community’. The study draws on the example of the linguistically and culturally diverse populations of users of Arabic in Manchester, UK, to explore language practices, maintenance efforts, and provisions. For its sociolinguistic complexity and variation, its pan-Arabic dimension and transnational reach that play out in the global city, and its significance in Islam linking to complex religious identities, Arabic is an interesting and informative case to study the connections between language and community in the diaspora. I take the perspective of ethnographer as language learner (see Abercrombie 2020) to explore practices and accounts of practices, as well as how and for what purposes notions of ‘language’ and ‘community’ are mobilised. The study focuses on various interrelated contextual dimensions: the family, supplementary schools, businesses, as well as a public sector-based interpreting and translation service. I draw on notions of practised language policy (cf. Spolsky 2004, 2007; Bonacina-Pugh 2017) to link language practices with dynamic hierarchisations of language resources, negotiated understandings of practised and imagined ‘community’ (cf. Anderson 2006 [1983, 1991]; Blokland 2017), and the city as a site of language ecology. The notion of ‘interactional regimes’ (Blommaert et al. 2005a,b) serves to contextualise various forms of (declared and practised) language policy in relation to actors’ perceptions of ‘language’ and ‘community’ and their positioning, embedded in the wider urban diaspora setting. The thesis proposes a methodological framework that combines longitudinal fieldwork across sites, different types of data and a range of research positionings and forms of engagement.

Delineating and defining social groups has been an old and persistent problem in sociolinguistics and sociology, with ‘community’ being one of the most heavily contested concepts (Bessant 2018; Rampton 2009; Silverstein 2015; Blommaert 2017). As Slembrouck (2020) has pointed out recently, “[t]he question of ‘language community’ is one that, following two decades of research which has stressed unprecedented linguistic diversity, needs to be re-examined and possibly re-thought” (2020:75). While there is no widespread agreement on how to define and understand ‘community’, the relevance and usefulness of the notion and its relation to language have been emphasised repeatedly (Blokland 2017; Slembrouck 2020; Li Wei 2014; Gaiser & Matras 2020a). Language is seen as fundamentally shaping social relations, and as playing a central role in the formation of individual and collective (national, ethnic, cultural) identities. Jørgensen (2008: 16) describes language as the “most important means to negotiate and disseminate the values and norms involved in group membership”. The use of and association with a given ‘language’ may
serve as a way of signalling in- or out-group membership and values, often used as a resource for drawing boundaries (see Fishman 1991, 1968; García et al. 2006). Accordingly, a language or speech ‘community’ was long thought of as an objectively identifiable, fixed group of people who share language structures as well as communicative practices, in a given space (Hymes 1972; Labov 1966; see Blommaert & Rampton 2011: 6 for a critique). In public discourse and among policymakers, the term ‘community’ is often used as an indicator for ethnicity, origin and/or linguistic background (e.g. ‘the Italian community’) when referring to immigrant groups and perceived as distinguishable from other groups or wider society, typically referred to as the ‘wider community’ (cf. Van Mensel 2020; Mills 2005). Moreover, ‘community’ is widely used to refer to local ‘neighbourhood communities’, i.e. defined geographically. In a recent statement on language provisions, Manchester City Council expressed their aims to “[i]dentify and promote an understanding of the linguistic needs [of] our communities […]” (MCC 2019: Section 3.3), using the term community to refer mainly to the city’s non-English speaking populations.¹

With growing awareness of the complexities of language practices and speakers’ repertoires, researchers have increasingly questioned traditional understandings of ‘community’ as mapped onto a single language and/or location. As Li Wei (1994: 50f.) points out, the traditional use of ‘community’ and ‘speech community’ as referring to rather homogeneous, cohesive and self-conscious social groups of speakers that share language knowledge and norms cannot capture the complex reality of social interaction and relations. Discussions around ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec 2007) have questioned assumptions of boundedness and linearity of ‘communities’, and the increasing everyday relevance of ‘online’ or ‘virtual communities’ (Androutsopoulos 2006, 2015) have further challenged place-based understandings of ‘community’. The shift away from territorially restricted notions of social relations in times of transnationalism and globalisation (Lanza & Svendsen 2007: 279) questions notions from early Diaspora Studies that view (group) identity as rather stable in its connection to the ‘homeland’ (cf. Cohen 2008). More recent literature has emphasised the complex processes of identity construction in diaspora contexts, and the central role of language in the negotiation of diaspora identities (Canagarajah & Silberstein 2012; cf. Hall 1990). Furthermore, ideas of a predictability of language use and proficiency among ‘community members’ are problematic. Speakers use language to various degrees of competency, and competency is not necessarily a criterion, or the sole criterion, for the recognition of social groups and individuals as members (cf. Riley 2007). Yet, researchers continue to rely on the notion of community as a (fuzzy) category to imply a pre-defined sense of belonging of people and place (cf. Gaiser & Matras 2020a for a discussion).

¹ The term community almost always has positive connotations in English, which is why compounds such as terrorist communities or extremist communities are rarely used. This is however not necessarily the case across languages: communautarisme has negative connotations in French, for example, typically referring to immigrant ‘communities’ accused of separating from rather than integrating into ‘mainstream’ society.
Approaches in the social sciences have aimed to de-essentialise ‘community’, linking it to practice rather than location or place of origin (e.g. Anderson 2006; Brubaker 2005). Anderson’s (2006) landmark work offers rich reflections on imagined constructions of ‘community’ used to express shared belonging or exclusion; it does so however from the perspective of Nationalism Studies and was not intended to capture the dynamic formations of group identities at the city level and in times of globalisation. More recently, there have been critical discussions on urban communities as social practice in sociology (Blokl and 2017) and a focus on the diversity and dynamism of social relations in Human Geography (Bessant 2018). None of these however pays attention to the power of language in constructing social relations and unity.

Cities are sites where complex globalisation processes assume concrete, localised forms (Sassen 2004, 2017; Simpson 2017), and language practices are an expression thereof (see Blommaert 2013a). With the notion of the ‘global city’, Sassen (2004) emphasises how the urban space becomes a nexus of multi-layered, translocal dynamics that allow for complex patterns of interaction and participation, shaping orientations to communication, identity, group membership and difference (cf. Blackledge & Creese 2017). As Smakman & Heinrich (2017: 25f.) point out, today’s large and complex “urban ecologies” require us to develop new theoretical and methodological frameworks, moving away from the traditional approach of the ‘sociolinguistic distribution’ that understand categories of ‘language’ and their users as clearly defined and permanently fixed.

Manchester is a linguistically diverse city, with a long history of migration and now home to more than 150 languages (Matras & Robertson 2017) among a population of just over 550,000. The city has been a centre of immigration since the industrial revolution and has attracted migrants and refugees from across the globe. With a recent shift towards a service-based economy, education and employment have increasingly motivated migrants to live and work in Manchester, while the city also remains a destination for people fleeing their countries from conflict and economic crises (see Bullen 2015).

Arabic in Manchester is a prime example of how migration processes have resulted in increasingly complex social structures and multi-layered linguistic repertoires, and how the globalised urban setting creates a space for dynamic negotiations and re-negotiations of language and identity. The city has seen a recent increase in numbers of Arabic speakers (see 1.4.2 below). Various colloquial varieties spoken in the Arab world, not all of which are mutually intelligible, come together in the global city, providing unique opportunities for polylectal communication. Furthermore, Arabic serves as a ‘Second’ language, e.g. for many Kurds and Somalis. Qur’anic Arabic enjoys a high status among Muslim populations, transcending traditional ‘community’ boundaries based on home languages (cf. Arthur 2004). Manchester’s Arabic-speaking
population comprises longer-established migrants as well as recent arrivals, with diverse motivations to come to the UK and different socioeconomic statuses. Among them are affluent and highly skilled professionals, university students intending to stay in the UK only temporarily, labour migrants, as well as skilled and unskilled refugees from war-torn countries with a desire for a better life. Complex migration trajectories (differing significantly across individuals) have expanded already complex linguistic repertoires. Language practices and proficiencies differ across diasporic generations and settings, which adds to such dynamics. Virtual communication platforms facilitate the creation of translocal networks, and access to worldwide satellite television creates virtual links transnationally, thus maintaining social, political, and religious connections with ‘communities’ globally (see Cadier 2013: 124). This multi-layered diaspora population is distinct from any population that exists in the Arab world, potentially encouraging (re-)negotiations of wider ideologies and understandings of ‘Arabic’ (and its varieties) locally. The complexity of Arabic speakers and varieties in the diaspora challenges traditional notions of ‘linguistic community’ (Li Wei 1994: 50f.; cf. Arnaut et al. 2016) and raises questions around categorisation and methodology in sociolinguistics.

This research is set in a highly charged political context of increasing public discussions and social turmoil around immigration and the alleged ‘incomplete’ assimilation of Muslim immigrant groups to the rather abstract notion of ‘British culture’ (Block 2006: 15; Waterson 2019; Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia 2018). The role of language skills has been highly debated in relation to questions of service access and identification with group membership. As suggested in the UK Government’s “Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper” (Dpt. HCLG 2018), poor English skills and the promotion of heritage languages are seen as among “root causes of a lack of integration” (2018: 7). The EU referendum campaign, the ‘Brexit’ result and related debates, Trump’s election as US president in 2016 and subsequent ‘Muslim travel ban’, UK policies perceived as anti-Muslim, Islamophobia (Marsh 2018; Hutchings et al. 2011), and the refugee crisis in Europe have added to heightened sensitivities in public discourse about the ‘conspicuous’ and growing presence of Arab communities (see Ferguson 2013: 132). Recent “Black Lives Matter” protests around the world have drawn attention to wider issues of racism and inequality. Accusations of terrorism have stigmatised Arabs and Muslims (Bichani 2015: 10, cf. Szczepak Reed et al. 2020a), contributing to a more general anti-immigrant sentiment in public discourse and media. In Manchester, the Arena bombing in May 2017 – an Islamist terror attack that killed 22 people, caused by two Manchester-born sons of Libyan refugees – has fuelled debates about the presence of Arab ‘communities’ in the city (Osuh 2017).

2 E.g. the UK Government’s Community Cohesion Agenda in the early 2000s, see Rose (2013), Worley (2005).
Such developments emphasise the need to better understand social and language practices of Arabic-speaking populations in the UK. They call for a renewed focus on and re-thinking of the relations between language and ‘community’, to offer insights into the plurality and variation that characterise language and social practices in today’s diverse urban spaces. Studies of Arabic in diaspora settings have typically focused on groups of Arabic speakers from one country-of-origin (and dialect) background (e.g. Ben Nafa 2018; Aziz 2017; Ferguson 2013; Jamai 2008; Convy & Monsour 2008; but see Rouchdy 2013). Sawaie & Fishman’s (1985) questionnaire-based study explored Arabic language maintenance efforts in the US across country-of-origin backgrounds, but largely disregarded (then) newly arrived immigration populations. Across languages, García & Fishman (1997) and Extra & Yaşmur (2004) offer general theoretical reflections on community language vitality in multilingual settings. Attention has also been paid to the written presence of ‘community’ languages on signage (e.g. Blommaert 2013b). There has, however, not been any study that provides a comprehensive picture for a particular language in a given diaspora setting. Research has mostly focused on one aspect of ‘community languages’ in one setting, e.g. language maintenance practices in complementary schools (Blackledge & Creese 2010), language maintenance and policies in family settings (Said & Zhu Hua 2017), or multilingualism in the workplace (Hewitt 2012).³ There is a need to explore various aspects of language and community in a more systematic way, studying linguistic and social practices across sites within one (urban) setting with a focus on one ‘language’, as well as its relation to the wider context and other relevant linguistic resources. Finally, understanding notions such as ‘community’ and ‘language’ as ‘social constructs’ that emerge in interaction (Heller 2007; Pérez-Milans 2016) requires explorations of language users’ self-reports about and reflections on their experiences and perceptions. This thesis is intended to fill these gaps.

1.2 Research aims and questions

This thesis draws on the example of a multi-layered and complex population of users of Arabic in Manchester, UK, to explore and challenge notions of ‘language’ and ‘community’ and engage with questions around policy and practice, agency, as well as power. Embracing recent understandings of ‘community’ as dynamically emergent in social practice, I ask how communities constitute themselves through and around language use and interaction patterns, language maintenance efforts, as well as the use of urban space. I explore how speakers of Arabic understand notions of unity and difference in the diverse urban setting, asking what kinds of practices create, negotiate and re-negotiate ‘community’. The research addresses theoretical questions around the connection between language practices, users’ assessments of their repertoire resources, and forms of language policy that shape language maintenance practices.

³ But see Robertson et al. (2013) on self-reported language practices across settings in Manchester.
I study local understandings and evaluations of ‘language’ and varieties, how they relate to wider ideologies, and the implications these have for language maintenance and provisions. I thus explore categorisations and self-categorisations of actors across sites in the city and ask how language users are positioned by discourses about language and ways of speaking, and how they position themselves in relation to these discourses and the local context. The research aims to explore beliefs about language and the tensions that arise when language ideologies are reproduced and appropriated, and how this may link to how language and/or community boundaries are reimagined in the superdiverse diaspora setting.

This research is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do speakers of Arabic in Manchester draw on and maintain their multi-layered language repertoires?

2. Which factors shape Arabic language practices and perceived hierarchies of language resources in the urban diaspora, and what forms of implicit and explicit language ‘policy’ become apparent (scripted, practised, reported)?

3. How do language resources and perceived hierarchies shape inter-personal (power) relations, and how do language practices, policies and beliefs affect the constitution, experiences and imaginings of ‘communities’ in the diaspora?

Finally, this research seeks to develop a methodological framework suitable to address the above questions and capture wider issues related to the complexities of language practices and beliefs in the global city, beyond the case of Arabic. My fourth research question reflects this aim:

4. What are the components and nature of a comprehensive approach to exploring ‘language’ and ‘community’ in the globalised urban diaspora?

I follow critical approaches in Social Sciences (Anderson 2006; Brubaker 2005; Blokland 2017) in understanding ‘community’ not as pre-defined based on shared location or place of origin; yet I aim to explore the potential relevance of the local (language) ecology, in this case the urban setting of Manchester, in which ‘communities’ are negotiated and re-negotiated. The global city is seen not merely as a setting, but as a relevant factor that plays a role in shaping communication patterns, identification of ‘self’ and ‘other’, encourages re-positionings, and allows for the development of a civic rather than national identity, to embrace the city’s diversity (see Matras & Robertson 2015).
This research contributes to discussions around categorisation in superdiverse urban settings (see Harries et al. 2016; Nazroo 2001). I ask how and whether it is possible and fruitful to define the 'boundaries' of a multi-layered community of Arabic speakers in the global city. I explore language users’ perceptions of whether and how language is core to performances and experiences of community, and how imagined boundaries relate to communicative practice. In terms of theory, this thesis shifts discussions around ‘community’ into new directions, creating meaningful links with language policy and ecology. In my explorations of language practices and users’ understandings and assessments of language resources, I study negotiations of policies and norms regarding language use, both declared and practised (Spolsky 2006). I advocate an approach to understanding language policies in their inter-relation with wider factors, emerging and operating within ‘interactional regimes’ (Blommaert et al. 2005a,b). In this way, my thesis aims to contribute to current debates on the nature and role of communities more widely. Methodologically, I develop a holistic framework for studying such complexities, based on innovative forms of researcher engagement and positioning. This study thus seeks to inform both theory and methodology within and beyond sociolinguistics.

1.3 Methodological considerations and rationale

My research questions require an integrative approach that takes into account the practices and perspectives of language users. The study is based on original empirical research that combines several current research strands and attends to different types of data. My approach is ethnographic, drawing on immersion and long-term engagement with a variety of actors. I aim to acknowledge the social constructedness and complex understandings of communities by studying ‘language’ and ‘communities’ as practised (through observations and participation), and as reported and negotiated (in focus group and informal interviews). I explore different modes of communication and representation (spoken and written language, private and public, online and offline), across settings: I engage with a recently arrived refugee family in informal Arabic tutoring. I explore language maintenance efforts and policies at three Arabic supplementary schools in Manchester, with long-term participation in one of the schools. I engage with business owners, staff and clients across four businesses in Manchester. Finally, through a placement with a Manchester City Council-based Interpreting and Translation (I&T) unit, I explore routines, practices and challenges related to language provisions for Arabic. These settings were chosen carefully, each adding a new dimension to the analysis of the relationship between understandings of ‘language’ and ‘community’. They are however not seen as isolated and separate, but inter-linked and part of the wider urban ecology (see 3.3.1 for the rationale of selecting these settings).
To address my research questions, I explore patterns of language choice and language variation, language policies and management (Spolsky 2009), participants’ self-reports about users’ own and others’ language practices, and their evaluations of these. Attention is paid to meta-linguistic commentaries and accounts of language practice. A more in-depth understanding of how multi-layered repertoires are used, and what beliefs and ideologies are related to such practices, help shed light on perceptions, negotiations, and constructions of community through and around language. Through my immersion and different ways of engaging with participants, I aim to better understand the role of ‘Arabic’ in practice, and with regards to social relations, which in turn help me understand notions of ‘community’. At the same time, the study gives systematic consideration to the use and perceived relevance of English among participants, which may not be obvious for a study of a ‘community’ language. A consideration of speakers’ full repertoires is directly in line with my holistic approach to practices: I explore to what extent English may, alongside other ‘languages’ or resources, be perceived as a central ‘community’ resource, as it is inherently part of the reality of the Manchester setting.

My interaction with actors and observations across fieldwork sites are shaped through my engagement as language learner, with interaction with participants being mainly in English (cf. Abercrombie 2017, 2018 for the piloting of the method). Contrary to traditional ethnography, where the researcher is expected to have acquired the ‘fieldwork language’ prior to data collection as a tool of observation, this thesis is based on the assumption that the process and activity of language learning itself offers rich fieldwork opportunities. I take the perspective of a language learner, learning (Standard and non-Standard varieties of) Arabic with ‘heritage’ learners as part of the ethnographic observation and engagement across settings, which provides access to fieldwork sites, creates trust with participants, and produces a wealth of data. Thus, the researcher’s process of acquisition becomes part of the observation context and offers rich opportunities for engagement. This puts me, across sites, in the position of observing participant (rather than participant observer), allowing me to gain insights into practices and beliefs otherwise available only to “insiders” (Moeran 2009).

My observations and participation are supplemented with explorations of written language practices through ethnographic linguistic landscapes analysis (see Blommaert 2013b), offline and online. Linguistic Landscapes (LL) and social media interaction are included in the research agenda as examples of practice and will be investigated not as self-contained dimensions but as part of the overall range of (spoken and written) practices of actors who serve as subjects of the analysis. Finally, I draw on my engagement with actors in the city in my capacity as Multilingual
Manchester (The University of Manchester) research assistant, co-ordinating a support platform for supplementary schools in Manchester.¹

Reflections on my complex positionings across the fieldwork sites played a central role throughout the research and features prominently in this thesis. My own identity as a female researcher and international student, who was born and grew up in Germany, may have had an impact on how I was perceived by participants during fieldwork and on the extent to which I was able to interact and build rapport with participants. This affected how I positioned myself and was positioned by others, shaping the ways in which I negotiated my ‘place’ in each of the sites and practices, in relation to ‘communities’. Furthermore, the potential relevance of gender issues guided my choice of fieldwork sites: Although mosques would have been rich sites to explore the uses of non-Standard and Classical Arabic varieties, potentially alongside additional ‘languages’, I made a conscious decision against using mosques as one of the key settings in my fieldwork. This was because my gender would have likely permitted only restricted access to certain spaces within mosques, specifically women’s prayer rooms, whilst excluding me from others for religious reasons. Moreover, my degree of proficiency in Arabic (Standard and non-Standard forms), my participants’ language proficiencies as well as how these were negotiated and aligned throughout fieldwork will have shaped the ways in which I interacted with others in the field. At the end of each of the main analytical chapters (i.e. in 4.7, 5.6, 6.6 and 7.5) I offer reflections on my positionality, including reflections on my role as female researcher as well as reflections on how my identity as a German learner of Arabic, who is not originally from the UK, may have figured in the research process.

1.4 Research context: Arabic in Manchester

The following sections offer an overview of the history and current presence of Arabic-speaking populations in Manchester, providing a rationale for the study. I discuss the wider visibility of Arabic in the city’s LL and efforts to maintain the language in Manchester.

1.4.1 Brief history of Arab migration to Manchester

As one of the world’s first industrial cities, Manchester’s social fabric has been shaped by immigration since the mid-19th century (Matras & Robertson 2015, 2017). There has been a

¹ My understandings of the phenomena discussed in this thesis have been enriched by wider work at Multilingual Manchester. Selected passages of the introductory text (in Chapters 1 and 2) build on collaborative works, which emerged during and draw on my ongoing PhD research (see Gaiser & Matras 2020a,b; Matras & Gaiser 2020; Matras et al. forthcoming). I refer to these works in the text where appropriate.
longstanding presence of Arabic speakers in the city, with migrants from across the Arab world and across faith groups contributing to its economic prosperity. In the late 1800s, Manchester’s cotton industry attracted increasing numbers of merchants from North Africa and the Middle East, who settled in the city to establish trading houses, while retaining family and economic links with the Arab world (MCC 2021; Halliday 1992: 161). Arab cloth traders set up their offices in Manchester city centre and established the first mosques and halal food shops in their neighbourhoods (MCC 2021). Yemenis arrived in Eccles (Salford) to work on British Navy ships during WW1 and later WW2, and gradually established themselves in the area (YCA 2020; Seddon 2012; BBC 2011). Middle Eastern seamen first settled near the docks in Salford and after WW1 moved to the South Manchester neighbourhoods of Moss Side and Rusholme (Youth Development Trust 1967: 6). With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, England started to receive Palestinian refugees, some of whom settled in Manchester. Between the 1960s and 1990s, Manchester witnessed a further growth and diversification of its Arabic-speaking population, including migrants who first came as international students and then stayed to seek better employment opportunities, as well as political refugees and asylum seekers following conflict in the Middle East (Seddon 2012: 17; Nagel & Staeheli 2008).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, political activists and asylum seekers opposing the Gaddafi regime in Libya arrived in Manchester (Ben Nafa 2018: 7). Since the Libyan Revolution in 2011, there has been an increasing number of refugees fleeing from war-torn areas and the instability caused by the ongoing civil war following Gaddafi’s death. Manchester’s “Libyan community” is believed to be the biggest outside Libya (Seddon 2012: 17). In addition, from the early 1990s, Manchester received increasing numbers of asylum seekers from Algeria, including Berbers, Algeria’s main ethnic minority group, who brought with them their own language in addition to Arabic (Ramanuj 2016).

Over the past decade, the arrival of refugees from war and conflict in Syria, Libya and Yemen have resulted in a further growth of Arab populations in the city. Manchester is now home to first, second and third generation migrants as well as longer-established populations with roots from across the Arab world, including Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Kuwait, Sudan, Algeria, and Western Sahara, constituting what is believed to be the UK’s second largest “Arabic community” (Ben Nafa 2018: 7).
1.4.2 Arabic in Manchester today

Speaker numbers and provisions

Today, Arabic is one of the most widely spoken languages in Manchester after English. Some 16.6% of Manchester’s population identified a ‘main language’ other than English in the 2011 Census, more than twice the national average (Matras & Robertson 2015). Some 7,000 Manchester residents declared Arabic to be their ‘main language’, with Arabic ranking third after Urdu and Chinese (including Mandarin, Cantonese and other Chinese languages). 80% of those reported to speak English ‘well’ or ‘very well’; only 4% reported that they could not speak English. According to annual School Census data, around 40% of young people speak a ‘first language’ other than English in the home. In the 2019/2020 School Census, some 4400 pupils are recorded as having Arabic as their ‘first language’, which is 5% of all pupils in the dataset and makes Arabic the second largest minority language spoken as ‘first language’ by schoolchildren in Manchester (after Urdu).

Manchester has seen a rapid and recent increase in the numbers of Arabic speakers. The School Census records a 23% rise between 2013 and 2015 in the numbers of Manchester pupils reported as having Arabic as ‘first language’ – from 2,500 pupils in 2013 to over 3,000 in 2015 – and a 46% increase between the 2015 dataset and the most recent data from 2019/2020. Between the 2,500 pupils in 2013 and 4,400 pupils in 2019/2020, we see an 80% increase in Manchester pupils with Arabic as ‘first language’.

Increasing demand for Arabic interpreter services in primary and hospital care between 2013 and 2016 reflects mainly the recent arrival of Arabic-speaking refugees from the Middle East (Gaiser & Matras 2020b). Data on the number of face-to-face interpreter requests for Arabic at Central Manchester Hospitals show a 30% increase between 2014 and 2015, up from 2,900 requests to 3,770 (Gaiser & Matras 2016a). This suggests a high demand among new arrivals with poor English language skills, which might be attributed to the recent arrival of refugees from the Middle East.

Similarly, data on interpreter use at Manchester City Council’s in-house interpreting services show an increasing demand for Arabic. The data I have had access to show an increase of 106% between 2012/2013 and 2017/18, from 870 requests up to 1,792 requests. In 2017/18 Arabic was the most frequently requested language for written translations (total of 277) at the City Council’s

---

5 Data from the 2011 Census are accessible at https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census. The data from the most recent Census, which took place in March 2021, are not yet available at the time of writing.

service. This partly reflects the arrival of individuals with professional qualifications who needed document translation (cf. Gaiser & Matras 2020b).

Currently, five Manchester libraries hold books or other items in Arabic, catering mainly for South Manchester populations. The number of library issues and renewals of items in Arabic across Manchester rose from 396 in 2014, to 738 in 2015, and 985 in 2016, showing both demand and an awareness of and engagement with municipal cultural facilities.

While the above data offers an overview of Arabic language practices and needs, quantitative census datasets must be taken with caution (Matras & Robertson 2015; Sebba 2018). The National Census asks participants to indicate their ‘main language’, a question based on the assumption that an individual can have only one ‘main’ language, using a term that is itself ambiguous. This cannot capture the complexities of language practices and, as Matras & Robertson (2015) show, leads to significant under-reporting of languages other than English. The School Census asks school staff to identify a pupil’s ‘first language’, again a term that can be interpreted in different ways and that ignores the possibility of multiple home languages. In addition, these data and data collection methods presuppose that languages can be defined as bounded categories, which ignores the complexities of language practices and repertoires. The category ‘Arabic’ is, due to dialect differences, itself ambiguous. There is by and large no differentiation by regional variety, except for the most recent School Census data (2019/2020) where a small number of schools differentiated between Sudanese, Iraqi, Algerian, Moroccan, Yemeni and ‘Any Other’ Arabic. Yet, such datasets can provide insights into patterns of language use and, in triangulation, they can help broaden our understanding of language needs in selected areas. Gaiser & Matras (2020b) propose a practice-based perspective on such data: each point in a statistical dataset can be seen as representing a real-life event, i.e. an act of identifying a person or self-associating with a ‘language’ category. Taken together, they add up to a pattern, spread among different people in an identifiable segment of time and space. This can inform strategic planning by practitioners and suppliers of interpreting services as well as research, if used cautiously.

---

7 See Multilingual Manchester Data Tool for datasets on language: http://datatool.mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk; For ‘Arabic’, see: http://datatool.mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/search?search=arabic.

8 See Multilingual Manchester Data Tool.
Visibility and ‘community’ performances

The relevance of Arabic in the commercial sector, as well as its religious significance among Muslim populations, becomes visible in the city’s linguistic landscapes (LL). There is currently no national language policy in the UK that prescribes language choice on signs (or elsewhere). In Manchester’s diverse LL, featuring more than 50 languages and 16 scripts (Gaiser & Matras 2016b), Arabic is one of the most visibly prominent languages. There has been a notable increase in the written presence of Arabic over the past years across the city (Gaiser & Matras 2020b), reflecting the practices of a growing population and thus confirming trends indicated in Census and School Census data.

The geographical distribution of Arabic on signage (see Figure 1) reflects residential patterns: Arabic is prominent in LLs across the city, but it has a dominant and growing presence in South Manchester, where a large presence of Arabic speakers is recorded in other datasets on language (see School Census of 2019/20; Census of 2011). In addition, there is a notable presence of Arabic on signs in North Manchester’s Cheetham Hill.

Figure 1. LinguaSnapp (2021) map, filtered for ‘Arabic’ on 28 January 2021
To some extent, the written presence of Arabic spatially correlates with clusters of Urdu in the LLs of these neighbourhoods, reflecting that these groups cohabit certain areas (see Gaiser & Matras 2016b). Arabic appears in combination with a diverse range of languages, most frequently alongside English but also Urdu, Sorani Kurdish, Farsi, Bengali and Somali. This reflects the multilingual traditions of these groups of speakers as well as the aim to capitalise on complex language repertoires to make information accessible to wider audiences. Furthermore, the widespread visual presence of Arabic is partly attributable to its widespread religious significance: The Arabic جَلَلَ (‘halal’) appears on outlet signage across Manchester. It serves as religious symbol that addresses wider Muslim populations and signals adherence to Islamic dietary laws, thus defining the target clientele based on shared Islamic principles (Matras & Gaiser 2020b). While it is not necessarily an indication of the sign-authors’ or intended readers’ language practices, it is widely recognised by audiences who cannot read Arabic.

The overwhelming majority of signs featuring Arabic are bottom-up signs (i.e. signs with no official status) displayed by businesses, community institutions or private individuals. Only a very small number of top-down (public) signage in Manchester use Arabic, where it occurs alongside English and/or Urdu to regulate behaviour. Manchester Airport displays signs advising on security provisions, tax refund, and prayer space (see Gaiser & Matras 2020b). In bottom-up signs, Arabic is used (often alongside other languages) to reach wider audiences, to address specific clientele groups, to signal owner background as form of “presentation of self” (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006), or to mark out cultural landmarks and third sector institutions. Arabic has a strong presence on restaurant signs, barbershops, supermarkets, and butcheries. Rusholme’s shisha bars feature Arabic to create a sense of authenticity, despite the fact that most of them have Kurdish owners (see Gaiser 2014).

Written Arabic enjoys increasing public visibility in residential areas, where private individuals choose to indicate their affiliation with the language (and its religious value) by displaying Arabic signage. Residential houses across South Manchester and Cheetham Hill display Qur’an quotes in Arabic to indicate their religious affiliation and background (Figures 2, 3). While such signs foreground primarily the religious value of Arabic rather than its communicative function, serving as a blessing of the house, the choice to put up such signs is an indication of the actors’ subscription to a set of (extra-linguistic and linguistic) practices and a wish to identify with others who share such customs and principles. The signs may be seen as performing the ‘difference’ of that population within the larger non-Arabic-speaking environment.
Figure 2. Private residential sign, Whalley Range (mā shā’a-llāh, ‘as God willing’)

Figure 3. Private residential sign, Rusholme (mā shā’a-llāh, ‘as God willing’)
Arabic writing on t-shirts, hats or jumpers, as well as jewellery and watches using Arabic script for numbers and brand names, are increasingly visible as part of Manchester’s “mobile LL” (cf. Coupland 2010; Reh 2004). Moreover, there is a growing presence of Arabic visible in “skinscapes” (Peck & Stroud 2015), i.e. people with body tattoos displaying their names or other texts in Arabic script. These are forms of self-identification with the language and possibly people’s countries of origin. Prints on clothing typically display positive messages, e.g. سلام (‘peace’), or حب (‘love’) (see Figure 4). Such products, which all follow a similar layout, are produced and sold locally (e.g. at the bookshop ‘Alexandria library’ in Rusholme), as well as online. In the T-shirt shown in Figure 4, the fact that an English translation is offered as part of a meta-linguistic commentary rather than as direct translation suggests that Arabic readers and others who are not literate in Arabic are addressed separately. Yet, the translation into English serves to create a ‘common ground’, arguably an explicit conciliatory message aimed to build mutual understanding and trust.

The popularity of such products may be a reaction to increasing negative media reporting and public discourse about Muslim and Arabs following the Manchester Arena Bombing, serving as a display of solidarity and association with positive values and beliefs.

Arabic newspapers displayed in corner shops or other businesses are further expressions of solidarity towards an Arabic-reading audience (Figure 5). I have encountered such Arabic texts, often alongside other non-English language newspapers, mostly in corner shops in South Manchester’s Rusholme and Manchester Piccadilly train station, both spaces where readers of Arabic may be expected as passers-by. The availability of Arabic language newspapers reflects the shop owners’ awareness of the presence of an Arabic-reading audience who are keen to
maintain their cultural and linguistic ties with the Arab world. It thus indicates local practices of reading Arabic news and possibly reading to others in people’s homes.

Figure 5. Arabic newspapers, Rusholme

Users of online spaces literate in Arabic and “anchored” in the Manchester setting mark their presence by using Arabic (and English) on social media platforms to connect with others. Facebook groups like “Arab in Manchester” and “Arabic community in Manchester” are used to advertise jobs with specific language requirements, marketing people’s businesses, and to ask for advice (e.g. on which Arabic-language TV channels can be received best, or which Arabic schools are located where) and support. In addition, users who are not yet living in Manchester but intend to move to the city from abroad or other places in the UK add posts to establish networks with people locally and ask for support (Figure 6):
The above (monolingual Arabic) post\(^9\) from August 2019 was published by a user on the facebook group "الجالية العربية في مانشستر" ('The Arabic Community in Manchester') and is an example of such international networking to establish local contacts prior to arrival in the city: The user indicates that they would like to move to Manchester but need some help finding accommodation. This online ‘community’ provides a virtual space for networking across geographic space, while oriented towards the Manchester setting.

**Arabic teaching and maintenance**

A British Council Report (Tinsley & Board 2013) defines Arabic as "the second most important non-English language for the UK's future" (following Spanish), based on a range of economic, geopolitical, cultural and educational indicators;\(^{10}\) however, as Tinsley (2015) reports, there is a clear lack of Arabic language teaching and support for maintenance in the UK. Yağmur & Extra (2011) emphasise the gap between the general recognition of the importance of maintaining

---

\(^9\) The English translation is an automated machine translation provided by facebook, based on the reader’s (rather than post-author’s) language settings. Any other translations in this thesis are mine, unless otherwise specified.

\(^{10}\) While a hierarchical ranking of languages according to their "importance" for the UK may be questionable, the report yet indicates the relevance and skills potential of Arabic locally (cf. Tinsley 2015).
‘community languages’ for social and economic reasons on the one hand, and their very marginal presence in the national curriculum (2011: 1186) in relation to the teaching of the so-called Modern Foreign Languages French, German and Spanish (cf. Salverda 2002). There is an option for pupils to take additional GCSE and A-Levels exams in a range of ‘other’ languages (and other subjects) in the UK.\(^{11}\) Across exam boards, the following languages are offered as GCSE and A-Levels subjects: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (Cantonese), Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Modern Greek, Gujarati, Modern Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu, as well as the ancient languages Classical Greek and Biblical Hebrew (see AQA 2021; Pearson 2021). If pupils do choose to take exams in any of these languages (i.e. in addition to their core GCSE and A-level exams taken as part of their mainstream school education), the relevant pupils and their parents are responsible for exam preparation and for covering any administration costs.

The widely cited Swann Report from the mid-1980s (Swann 1985) defined community language teaching in the UK officially as the responsibility of “communities” rather than the state (cf. Edwards 2001: 253). This is confirmed in a near absence of support from Local Education Authorities for the teaching of community languages, as reported by Salverda (2006) for London. For Arabic in the UK, Tinsley & Han (2012: 41) report that only 5% of state schools and 13% of independent schools include the language in their curriculum.

Manchester’s local authorities brand the city as linguistically diverse, publicly celebrating multilingualism and flagging inclusiveness (MCC 2019; Matras 2018). Recognising the skills potential of a multilingual workforce, the local authority seems to capitalise on the city’s ‘diversity dividend’ (Syrett & Sepulveda 2011). However, only two out of 29 mainstream state schools in Manchester offer Arabic as part of the curriculum at the time of writing. The two schools, located in South Manchester, are run by the same education trust and have a relatively large population of Arabic-speaking pupils. In addition, there is a small number of Muslim faith schools offering Arabic teaching. However, while being one of the most spoken languages in the city, Arabic is clearly marginalised or even excluded from the curriculum (see Gaiser & Matras 2020b). Its teaching – mainly for pupils who speak the language in their homes and want to acquire an ‘additional’ qualification – is delegated mainly to independent schools teaching language on the weekend.

Feeling a need to close gaps in mainstream curricula, and to create social spaces for children and adults with shared ethnolinguistic backgrounds to meet and interact, private individuals and

\(^{11}\) GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and A-Levels are UK school-leaving qualifications.
third sector organisations have set up supplementary schools that teach Arabic language and other elements of heritage (e.g. music, dance, religion) to children alongside mainstream education. The growing presence of Arabic speakers in Manchester, and the layering and interconnections between recent arrivals and longer established immigrants, have encouraged an increase in Arabic supplementary schools (see Chapter 5). At the time of writing, there are at least twenty-five supplementary schools teaching Arabic in Manchester (see Appendix A for an overview). At least three of these schools have been established since 2017, and their pupil numbers have grown quickly to more than 400 between the schools. An estimated 3,000 school age children regularly attend Arabic supplementary schools in Manchester (cf. Gaiser & Matras 2020b). The schools vary widely in size, logistics, as well as in contents and nature of teaching (cf. Gaiser & Hughes 2015). Teaching venues range from community centres, premises of state schools, places of worship, to public places such as libraries. Most schools cater explicitly for pan-Arabic populations originating from different countries, while a small number of schools target particularly families of the same (national) background (self-identifying as Libyan, Iraqi, Sudanese, Yemeni and Syrian schools). There is at least one ‘translingual’ school, where both Arabic and Kurdish teaching takes place in the same venue on different teaching days, with overlapping staff and close collaboration between the initiatives. There are a number of supplementary schools whose primary aim is to teach a language other than Arabic, but which teach Classical Arabic for religious reasons (notably a Malaysian school and a Bosnian school). Further Arabic teaching takes place in mosque schools, so-called madrasas, where the focus is mainly on reciting and memorising Qur’anic Arabic (cf. Thorpe 2020). Such schools are typically run by and cater for Arab or South Asian populations, who may or may not use Arabic for interaction outside religious contexts (cf. Clyne & Kipp 2011 for the Australian context). There are at least two mosques I have been able to identify – one in North and one in South Manchester – that offer both Urdu and Arabic teaching. During Arabic lessons, Urdu, Panjabi and English are used for classroom interaction, and Arabic is taught as a liturgical language. It is difficult to determine exactly how many madrasas there are in Manchester teaching Arabic, as these are often not publicly advertised but run informally and advertised through word-of-mouth; I estimate that there are between 30 and 40 such schools in mosques across Manchester, or in the form of informal tutoring in private homes.

There is at least one Arabic language Christian Church in Manchester, initiated in the 1990s by a group of Coptic Christian refugees from Egypt. The recent arrival of refugees has in the past 5-6 years resulted in a steadily growing congregation with members from across the Arab world, including Syrians, Jordanian, Algerians, Lebanese, as well as Palestinians. There is a shared aim among members to continue worshipping in Arabic, and there have been initiatives supporting the maintenance of Arabic among younger generations. Members of the Arabic Christian Church do not typically enrol their children in Arabic supplementary schools but make efforts to maintain
the language within their families or the congregation, as supplementary schools are run mostly by Muslims and often teach some religious content, as mentioned above. Such observations point to the relevance of religious identities in contributing to ‘collective identities’ (see Lanza & Svendsen 2007: 294).

This existence of the various supplementary schools and initiatives reflects the strong interest in preserving Arabic in the diaspora and passing it on to future generations of Arabs and non-Arab Muslims.

1.5 Conclusion and thesis outline

The longstanding as well as recent presence of Arabic in the city, its dynamic and multi-faceted uses across online and offline spaces and local practices to maintain Arabic make Manchester an ideal setting to study the complexities of conceptualisations of ‘language’ and ‘community’ among users of Arabic. In this thesis I address theoretical questions of how to understand and demarcate these notions, which at the same time raise practical questions. Acknowledging that categorisation is challenging yet to some extent inevitable, I draw on Brubaker (2013) who points out that there may be no good alternative to using analytical categories that are heavily loaded and deeply contested (cf. Busch 2017). Brubaker suggests that “as scholars we can and should adopt a critical and self-reflexive stance towards our categories” (Brubaker 2013: 6) and understand them as potentially dynamic ‘categories of practice’ rather than a priori defined, bounded and fixed. This emphasises the importance of reflexivity with regards to categorisation, continuously re-viewing and re-considering understandings of ‘community’ and ‘language’ throughout the research process.

Cornips et al. (2015) note the importance of attending to the ways language users themselves categorise and label their language resources. Accordingly, irrespective of the actual terms used, the very practice of labelling has “epistemological and ideological implications that must be addressed in sociolinguistic research” (2015: 45). Therefore, discussions of linguistic practice must not ignore categories such as ‘languages’ or linguistic labels, as they are commonly used among speakers and non-speakers navigating their social and cultural worlds (cf. Rampton 2013).

In this thesis I do make use of terms such as ‘languages’ and ‘communities’, yet I take a critical approach to rigid categorisation and am conscious of the fuzziness of boundaries; in fact, the problematisation of such terms and categories is central to this study. The local context and actors’ perspectives play a decisive role in understanding such notions. I take into account categorisations volunteered or explicitly suggested by my interlocutors as relevant to the research, as they can offer insights into their understandings of such notions.
This chapter is followed by a critical review of relevant literature: In Chapter 2 I engage in a theoretical discussion of ‘community’ independently of notions of ‘language’, before addressing their inter-relationship and methodological implications. In Chapter 3, I introduce the methodological framework developed to explore the complexity of Arabic language and community practices and related beliefs in the diverse urban setting. The methodology chapter is followed by four main thematic chapters, presenting the findings of this research: Taking the family as a starting point to explore ‘language’ and ‘community’ in the city, Chapter 4 discusses language practices and policies in one recently arrived Syrian family. Chapter 5 explores language maintenance practices in educational spaces, offering an overview of two supplementary schools and focusing on a third case study school, based on longitudinal immersion in that school. Chapter 6 draws on fieldwork in four businesses across Manchester to discuss the role of Arabic in commercial settings. Chapter 7 focuses on services for Arabic at Manchester City Council’s interpreting and translation (I&T) service. Each of these Chapters (4-7) discusses notions of ‘community’ that emerged in the respective setting, as well as offering reflections on methodology and researcher positioning. The concluding Chapter 8 draws together my findings from across settings to address my research questions, offers reflections on the methodology and discusses my contributions to knowledge.

The main chapters of this thesis are arranged by settings; this is however not to suggest that these settings are to be understood as four discrete units and chapters as being delineated by geographical boundaries. The settings are seen as inter-related contextual dimensions, and practices at individual sites are explored as closely inter-linked rather than independent of each other. The chapters serve to focus on settings by themes and differ from each other in terms of the degree of privacy and embeddedness in the city: Our explorations start with the private spaces of the family that the participants themselves identified as a more or less self-contained unit, before focusing on practices in supplementary schools, i.e. forms of ‘community’ institutions that show the wider role of Arabic in the diaspora, beyond its uses as ‘home language’. I then shift attention towards businesses as more public spaces anchored in the wider city setting. Finally, the chapter on Arabic in the City Council-based I&T service discusses language as a need in Manchester and highlights the role of English for communication; the setting of fieldwork is the city. Across settings, different beliefs and ideologies about ‘language’ and ‘community’ may prevail, yet they interlink and connect to each other.
2 Exploring ‘language’ and ‘community’: Theory and methods

2.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of key concepts and terms relevant to this thesis: I discuss major developments on how ‘language’ and ‘community’ have been theorised in previous literature, and I explore how such understandings have been adapted in light of the complexities brought about by increasing globalisation. For this, I first deal with the notions of ‘language’ and ‘community’ separately, before I bring them together. I then engage with language policy and review significant research conducted across the settings relevant to this thesis to help frame the present study. This is followed by a critical discussion of methodological approaches to studying ‘language’ and ‘community’, which serves as a starting point for the development of my own method (Chapter 3). Finally, I point to gaps in research, both in terms of theory and methodology, establishing the potential of this thesis in contributing to the field. Throughout this review, references are made specifically to research on Arabic where relevant.

2.2 ‘Language’, practice and repertoires

Increasing processes of globalisation have encouraged migration movements of growing speed, scale and spread, which has resulted in changing social conditions, patterns of interaction and linguistic repertoires (Vertovec 2007; Blommaert 2013c; Blackledge & Creese 2017). Diversity is a feature of both incoming migrant populations as well as longer established populations (Cadier 2013), and the complexities and dynamics of population structures, particularly in urban settings, have been described as going beyond the notions of ‘multicultural’ or ‘multilingual’ societies (Vertovec 2007; Heller 2008). Late-modern diversity cannot be understood as juxtapositions of homogeneous ethnically and linguistically defined groups (cf. Blommaert 2013c: 9). Vertovec (2007) has proposed the term ‘super-diversity’ to capture the unpredictability and complexity that is believed to supersede anything previously experienced. Superdiversity challenges traditional connections between language, ethnicity and territory, and their role as more or less stable markers of identity. Recent developments therefore call for a re-thinking of the very notions of ‘language’ and ‘community’, as the reality of everyday social practices transcends and breaks down boundaries between such traditional categories of difference (Silverstein 1998; Cadier 2013: 2). Change has become a “normal part of our existence” (Phillimore 2013: 3), and social structures are understood as dynamically emergent in situated interaction rather than fixed. Mobile subjects engage with a variety of groups and networks, and a combination of formal language learning and informal language ‘encounters’ (Blommaert & Backus 2013) allow for the dynamic formation of multi-layered linguistic repertoires of individuals and ‘communities’.
With growing awareness and consideration of the complexity of language practices in times of globalisation\textsuperscript{12}, scholars have increasingly problematised the notion of ‘language’ in its traditional sense whereby it is understood as a relatively bounded system shared among speakers. Instead, ‘language’ is increasingly understood as an emergent pattern of practices, in which semiotic resources are used in a fluid, dynamic and flexible way that often transcends traditional language ‘boundaries’ (Blommaert & Backus 2013; Creese & Blackledge 2010; Zhu Hua et al. 2017). Looking at language as a “local practice”, Pennycook (2010) understands language as a form of action located in a specific place and time. Pennycook draws on Lefebvre’s (1991) language as spatial practice, and notions of performativity, to emphasise that “language and identity are performed in ‘doing’, rather than reflecting a prior set of fixed options” (2010: 50). ‘Language’ and ‘community’ are thus understood as products of social activity, rather than pre-given, abstract entities. Accordingly, language operates as an integrated social and spatial activity rather than a structure, i.e. “something we do rather than a system we draw on” (2010: 2).

Notions such as ‘languaging’ (Swain 2006), ‘metrolingualism’ (Pennycook & Otsuji 2015; Otsuji & Pennycook 2010), ‘translanguaging’ (García & Li Wei 2014), ‘polylinguaging’ (Jørgensen 2008), or ‘heteroglossic’ and ‘translingual’ practices (Canagarajah 2013) have been proposed to capture the fluidity of language practices and challenge the fixedness implied by categories. There has been a shift away from long-established notions including ‘bilingualism’ and ‘code-switching’, which were traditionally used to describe interaction involving multiple ‘codes’, presupposing bounded language systems in juxtaposition.

A notion underlying recent terminology is the ‘language repertoire’, a loosely descriptive term used to refer to the full range of communicative resources at language users’ disposal (cf. Matras 2020 [2009]; Blommaert & Backus 2013; Busch 2017). The notion of the repertoire attempts to capture the fluidity of an individual’s (or group of language users’) linguistic resources and move away from ‘languages’ as bounded entities. In Gumperz’s (1964) early uses of the term, the linguistic repertoire was understood as forming a whole that comprises languages, dialects, styles, registers, and routines that characterise everyday interaction, and which language users may make use of as needed. The choice of resources depends on grammatical as well as social constraints, i.e. according to what is seen as socially accepted in a ‘speech community’ (see below). In this sense, Gumperz’s notion of the repertoire emphasises its social nature. There have been calls to re-think such an understanding of the repertoire as linked to speech communities, to capture the impact of increased mobility and transnational networks associated with processes of globalisation (Blackledge & Creese 2010; García & Li Wei 2014). In their re-conceptualisation of the ‘repertoire’, Blommaert & Backus (2013) move away from collectives towards subjectivities,

\textsuperscript{12} It has been pointed out that language practices have always been complex, and this is by no means a result of globalisation (Vertovec 2007; Blommaert 2010).
to define repertoires as “indexical biographies” that develop and change over time and space. Accordingly, repertoires are patchworks of resources, skills and competences learnt by (mobile) individuals along their life trajectories, both as part of formal language learning and informal ‘encounters’ with language. Pennycook & Otsuji (2014) propose the notion of ‘spatial repertoire’, to refer to the linguistic resources at language users’ disposal in a given place, derived from repeated language practices of the people involved in sets of activities (2014: 166). The focus is thus on the resources available and potentially mobilised in a place rather than in an individual (2014: 167; cf. Canagarajah 2018). Busch (2015, 2017) emphasises the biographical dimension of the repertoire: She urges moving beyond the realm of the speech community, understanding the linguistic repertoire as tied to one’s life trajectory and experience of language. Accordingly, the language repertoire is not something an individual possesses, but rather something “formed and deployed in intersubjective processes, thus located on the border between the self and the other” (2017: 354). Busch suggests that language ideologies and discursive categorisations (of others as well as self) have a major impact on linguistic repertoires. Busch (2015) thus takes the experiencing subject with their multi-layered repertoire as a starting point, rather than individual languages or varieties. Yet, language use and “linguistic variation can serve to construct belonging or difference” (2015: 3). Busch (2017) further expands the notion of the repertoire to include the dimension of the “lived experience of language”. Accordingly, emotionally lived experiences of singular and repeated interactions with others play a central role in the development of one’s linguistic repertoire throughout life, which changes in response to needs and challenges (2017: 349).

While the above notions of ‘languaging’ acknowledge the reality of flexible uses of repertoire resources and the complexities of linguistic diversity, language users may still separate and label ‘languages’ and ‘dialects’ and understand them as bounded units, thus reflecting and (re)producing wider socio-cultural values, assumptions and ideologies about language. Language ideologies and attitudes have attracted the attention of researchers for decades, emphasising the broader social, cultural and political contexts in which communication takes place and the values assigned to particular resources in these contexts (Woolard 1998; Irvine & Gal 2000; Kroskrity 2000; cf. Albury 2020). Shohamy (2006: 131) defines language ideologies as “the beliefs that knowledge of certain languages are indications of belonging to certain groups, to hierarchy and status of certain languages within given societies, to ‘how’ languages should be used as well as to how languages need to be learned and taught”. As Albury (2020: 360) points out, language ideologies may be shared or exist in competition within a given collective. However, what distinguishes ideologies from attitudes is that they are not merely an individual’s perception of language use or users but sets of beliefs that are shared across individuals (Albury 2020; cf. Lanza & Svendsen 2007). As Blommaert (2006: 510) argues, ideologies are “the unspoken assumptions that, as some kind of ‘social cement’, turn groups of people into communities,
societies, and cultures”. In this sense, ‘members’ of communities or other collectives attribute certain values or a specific importance to given sets of language resources. The following discusses the hierarchical assessment of language resources, first reviewing the notion of ‘diglossia’ with a focus on Arabic before discussing linguistic hierarchies held at the individual level.

2.2.1 Language hierarchies at societal level: (Arabic) Diglossia

The notion of ‘diglossia’ (Ferguson 1959; Fishman 1967) has traditionally been used to describe the functional relationship between different varieties of what is typically perceived as one language. The case of ‘Arabic’ (and its varieties) is an excellent example of how one abstract and bounded category of a ‘language’ can hardly describe the sociolinguistically complex reality of language use (Lucas & Manfredi 2020; cf. Bassiouney 2020). As Ferguson (1959) pointed out, different varieties of Arabic are used under different conditions and for different functions, within what has generally been understood as a single ‘language’ or ‘speech community’. Accordingly, two types of varieties are juxtaposed based on perceived prestige: A High form (H), the prestigious and standardised variety, and a colloquial Low variety (L), often considered a corrupted form of H by language users.

Classical Arabic (CA), the traditional language of the Qur’an, is used for religious purposes or poetic texts but not for spoken interaction or informal writing. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the written standardised variety and language of contemporary literature, journalism, formal education, and used for scientific, administrative and political discourse. It is also used for scripted spoken interaction e.g. in the media. CA and MSA are typically referred to in Arabic as al-fushā (الفصحى ‘pure’, ‘eloquent’) and juxtaposed with al-ʿāmmiyya (العَامِيَة ‘colloquial’), the non-Standard varieties. ʿāmmiyya varieties of Arabic are L varieties according to Ferguson: they are used mainly in informal contexts, e.g. for spontaneous spoken interaction in the home, and not typically taught in education settings. However, recent developments in communication technology and online language practices have resulted in greater use of colloquial forms in social media and mobile communication and given legitimacy to these varieties as a written code more widely, resulting in exposure to Arabic dialects across geographical space (Bassiouny 2020; Al-Batal 2017; Badwan 2015). CA and MSA, i.e. the H varieties according to Ferguson, are not used for spontaneous spoken conversation anywhere in the Arab world and not naturally acquired by children (cf. Zakharia & Menchaca Bishop 2013). The functionality of the H and L varieties is therefore understood as complementary.13

13 But see e.g. Wilmsen (2006), who reports the use of colloquial Egyptian Arabic, a ‘Low’ variety according to Ferguson (1959), in political speeches and university lectures in Cairo.
MSA, the written Standard recognised across the Arab world, is often seen as core value, “linguistically unifying” Arabic speakers across nation-state boundaries (Al-Sobh et al. 2015: 275; Al-Sahafi 2015), and therefore reflecting a pan-Arab identity (Albirini 2011; Chakrani, 2015). Colloquial varieties of Arabic on the other hand are subject to regional variation between as well as within countries. These colloquial varieties are not necessarily mutually intelligible. Distinction is frequently made between Middle Eastern and North African Arabic dialects to mark major linguistic differences between the groups of varieties (see e.g. Kaye 1994).

There has been widespread criticism of the notion of ‘diglossia’ (see Jaspers 2016), typically understood as a “relatively stable language situation” (Ferguson 1959: 336). First, in terms of associated prestige, it has been pointed out that the distinction is not as clear-cut as the binary distinction between H and L suggests, as levels of prestige may be given to colloquial varieties locally (Soliman 2014; Abd El-Jawad 1987). Second, in terms of linguistic structure, a binary distinction between two bounded varieties cannot capture the complex reality and dynamics of language use. For Arabic, researchers have referred to the sociolinguistic situation as ‘tri-glossic’, accounting for CA, MSA and colloquial Arabic as three levels, or indeed ‘multi-glossic’ (Al-Sobh et al. 2015): It has been suggested that there are several intermediate varieties, as for example ‘Educated Spoken Arabic’ (El-Hassan 1978; cf. Al-Sobh et al. 2015; Jaspers 2016), used by speakers with high levels of education and as a pan-Arab variety to bridge cross-dialect communication.

Ferguson (1959) points out that the described (socio)linguistic variation poses challenges for teaching Arabic, where decisions need to be made regarding which varieties should be taught. Kaye (1994) argues that, due to their lack of mutual intelligibility, particularly (geographically) peripheral dialects should be seen as different languages and not be “mislabeled” as ‘Arabic’. Al-Batal (2017), in contrast, argues that MSA should not be separated from dialects in teaching, pointing out that this separation is “artificial” and strongly contrasts with the linguistic reality across the Arab world, “where MSA and the dialects coexist harmoniously and interact and intersect constantly in a wide variety of spheres” (2017: 6). Al-Batal concludes that varieties of Arabic are not to be seen as separate entities but as part of “one language system” (2017: 7). There is thus a widespread lack of agreement in terms of understanding (the) Arabic language(s), and the notion of ‘diglossia’ seems to be increasingly unsuitable for capturing the complexities of (Arabic) linguistic variation.
2.2.2 Sociolinguistic hierarchies at the level of the individual

The notion of ‘sociolinguistic hierarchies’ has been suggested as a more flexible concept to discuss the ideological character of the relationship between varieties (Karatsareas 2020, 2018; Zhu Hua & Li Wei 2014). It differs from ‘diglossia’ and related notions in that it describes language users’ individual and dynamic perceptions and negotiations, rather than a functional relationship understood as stable over the long term and across so-defined ‘speech communities’ (cf. Zhu Hua & Li Wei 2014; Huang 2020). Exploring Standard and Cypriot Greek in their relation with Standard and Birmingham English, Karatsareas (2020) discusses the tensions experienced by multilingual and multidialectal speakers in urban diaspora contexts as a result of hierarchisation of language varieties. Accordingly, language users perceive their language resources as hierarchised in terms of how ‘good’ and ‘appropriate’ or ‘bad’ they are as a means of expression and communication, with the Standard typically associated with perceptions of ‘competence’ and non-Standard varieties with ‘incompetence’ (Karatsareas 2020; cf. Abercrombie 2018). Yilmaz (2018) discusses how varieties of Kurdish in the UK diaspora are hierarchised and differently valorised. Exploring heritage learners’ meta-linguistic discourses through observations and interviews, Yilmaz discusses how perceptions of “good” and “bad” varieties relate to identity alignments or “sameness” and “difference”.

As Karatsareas (2020) points out, educational institutions shape such hierarchies through specific narrative discourses and everyday practices, attaching different amounts of value to different types of linguistic resources (cf. Heller 2007). Such hierarchisation is even more complex in diaspora contexts, where majority languages are by default ascribed higher values of prestige in relation to minority languages (and dialects). Research on supplementary schools has generally suggested a widespread emphasis on Standard varieties as the focus of the teaching (Çavuşoğlu 2019; Karatsareas 2018; Lytra 2012; Matras et al. forthcoming). Blackledge & Creese (2010) discuss how the prestige of linguistic resources may be interpreted differently by different speakers (and learners) in the diaspora, drawing on their research across supplementary schools in the UK. ‘Language’ as a form of ‘heritage’ has thus been shown to be multi-faceted rather than straightforward, as are the values attached to linguistic resources. There is a need to further explore the role of the global setting in shaping actors’ perceptions of linguistic categories, as well as how they relate to social identification.

2.3 Theoretical developments of ‘community’

Ongoing discussions on ‘community’ across disciplines reflect the complexity of the notion while indicating its continuing relevance. The notion of ‘group’ as internally homogeneous and externally bounded is often seen as a basic, indispensable concept in social sciences and
fundamental unit of social life (Brubaker 2002). While ‘constructivist’ approaches see groups as socially defined rather than real, and postmodernist approaches have emphasised the fluidity of categories and fuzziness of boundaries, ‘communities’ continue to be used as common-sense, taken-for-granted categories in everyday talk, policy analysis, media reports, and academic literature (see Blokland 2018; Gaiser & Matras 2020a; Brubaker 2002). The below offers a review of literature on ‘community’ serving as a starting point for this study.

2.3.1 ‘Community’ in Sociolinguistics, Ethnography, and Linguistic Anthropology

From Speech Community to Community of Practice

In Sociolinguistics, the term ‘speech community’ has traditionally been used to refer to somewhat homogeneous, cohesive and objectively identifiable social groups who interact regularly and share language knowledge and norms (Fishman 1971; Labov 1972). Studies were typically based on patterns of language use of individual speakers, taken as representative members of a more or less socially coherent body (cf. Blommaert & Rampton 2011 for a discussion). Fishman (1971) understands ‘speech communities’ as a subtype of community “all of whose members share at least a single speech variety and the norms for its appropriate use” (1971: 28). Labov’s (1972) variationist approach allows for heterogeneity within the community, while emphasising the regularity of correlations between linguistic structure and extra-linguistic attributes or factors that act within it. Accordingly, different speakers among members of a geographically bounded urban speech community show orderly, systematic variability. Social norms are believed to shape the form and interpretation of a number of linguistic variables selected for analysis. Rampton (2010) emphasises the difficulties with this approach, as “the meaning of speech community becomes increasingly item-specific and therefore technical” (2010: 277), since linguistic features serve as criteria and social attributes are considered only afterwards.

Outside the variationist tradition, wider criticism that social processes and cultural factors have been neglected in linguistic analysis has prompted discussions around the notion of ‘community’, e.g. in what is often described as ‘traditional’ ethnography: According to Hymes (1972), shared rules underlying language use and variation are acquired through practice. The ‘community’ is defined as a social rather than linguistic entity yet seen as separable from the rest of society and to be studied in its own right. Gumperz (1964) considers the speech community as a social construct that is not limited to one language, yet relatively stable and clearly distinguishable from other communities based on a shared repertoire.

The notion of ‘communities of practice’ (CoP) was proposed in the 1990s, shifting attention to shared practices and activities rather than pre-defined, essentialist categorisations (Lave & Wenger 1991; Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999). Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1999: 186) define CoP as
“an aggregate of people who, united by common enterprises, develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, and values – in short, practices”. Members are connected by a common cause and learning need, where learning is believed to serve the production of identity, practice, and meaning (Wenger 2010: 9). The shift from ‘speech’ to ‘practice’ reflects the idea of an ongoing construction of communities, with a focus on situated activity and experience and shifting away from shared backgrounds.

Community identity is based on regular interaction and a shared domain of interest, and membership implies a commitment to that domain. The approach assumes multiple membership and an interaction of multiple identities in social practice. The notion has been applied widely and more recently in relation to new communication technologies, such as ‘virtual CoP’ (Dubé, Bourhis & Jacob 2005) and ‘mobile CoP’ (Kietzmann et al. 2013). However, the notion’s emphasis on repetitive affirmation of social ties through regular joint practical activities suggests that, to an extent, CoPs can be defined based on a number of pre-selected features. Questions arise around the extent to which practices must be routine-based or not, and how to define a shared ‘goal’ or ‘enterprise’.

From Social Network Analysis to the challenges of superdiversity

Social Network theory, adapted from psychology and anthropology, understands social relations as “a boundless web of ties” that links individuals across social and geographical space, and takes into account situational contexts in which language becomes meaningful (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 117). It thus differs from Variationist Sociolinguistics, based on relatively fixed categories of geographical space and social groups, and from approaches based on CoPs, whose members are interconnected by a common cause and joint engagement across the community. The Social Network approach focuses on the quantity, rather than quality, of interaction and the density and complexity of networks. Close-knit networks are believed to generate a certain normative pressure regarding language use.

Social networks are not language-specific; instead, people are seen as being in constant transition between places, institutions, and groups. Accordingly, individuals are organised in loosely defined networks based on a variety of factors (e.g., religious or cultural), often transcending the boundaries of conventional categorisations such as ‘ethnicity’ (see Li Wei 1994). As Glick Schiller (2009) points out, such networks are local but may at the same time be national and transnational. There has been some work on the role of media in transforming networks, e.g. Dekker and Engbersen (2013) exploring how social media transforms international migrant networks (cf. Bilecen et al. 2018). However, questions arise regarding the degree to which social relations can be defined, and the ways in which social ties can be measured, about reciprocity of relations, as well as their dynamics. Lanza & Svendsen (2007) emphasise that, while ‘language’
is often understood as a central part of collective identities, “multilingual communities present a more complex picture” (2007: 275). The authors point out that, while Social Network Analysis can help explain language choice and maintenance patterns, its quantitative focus cannot always shed light on the complexities of identity constructions and positionings in diverse communities (2007: 276). Lanza & Svendsen (2007) therefore advocate an approach that considers the qualitative aspects of social relations, exploring language ideological aspects and the (co-)construction of identities.

With increasing acknowledgment of superdiverse population structures and complexities of social relations, there has been a shift in focus towards randomness, disorder and unpredictability and away from internally constructed membership (cf. Rampton 2010; Arnaut et al. 2016). Heller (2008) reconfirms the power of language for constructing unity, yet emphasises that what is perceived as ‘community’ is actually an extremely heterogeneous body of individuals (cf. Li Wei 1994). It has been suggested that the reality of everyday social practices transcends and breaks down boundaries between traditional categories of difference (Silverstein 1998), and both social structures and the linguistic repertoires of individuals and collectives must be understood as dynamically emergent in situated interaction rather than as fixed (Blommaert 2013c; Pennycook & Otsuji 2015).

As Blommaert & Backus (2013) point out, the conditions of superdiversity require us to move away from the presumption of stability of communities, to replace these with more fluid understandings of networks across social and geographical space (Rampton 2010: 290; cf. Pennycook & Otsuji 2015). Lanza & Svendsen (2007: 279) explicitly shift attention away from place-based ‘communities’, arguing that “social relations are no longer territorially restricted”. There has been an emphasis on translocal communication networks among ‘diasporic communities’ (Appadurai 1996): Notions of transnational communities (Basch et al. 2005; Miller & Castles 2009) or transnational spaces (Faist 2000) have been used to replace the traditional idea of immigrant communities (Block 2006: 15), shifting away from nation-state boundaries and allowing for multiple membership. Such notions take into account that people can, through developments in communication technology, more easily and quickly be in (virtual) contact, shaping patterns of interaction and language use and facilitating the maintenance of cultural and economic links with people’s homelands. Urban settings have been emphasised as spaces with increasingly complex diversities and dynamics (Block 2006). Wood & Landry (2008) note that cities “should be seen less as places of distinct communities marked by clear and fixed boundaries but rather as local public spheres with multidimensional connections that overlap and conflict” (2008: 251). There has been a recent tendency to understand the urban ‘neighbourhood’ as a unit of practice (Blommaert et al. 2005a,b). Mac Giolla Chrios (2007) argues that diverse groups co-habit neighbourhoods in global cities, which shapes and re-defines the notion of
‘community’. Blommaert et al. (2005b) argue that at the level of the neighbourhood, people imagine communities based on interactional patterns and material-spatial contexts thus providing a “tangible reality to such communities” (2005b: 230). Wessendorf (2014, 2016) uses the notion of ‘conviviality’ to describe how people cohabiting superdiverse urban neighbourhoods in London navigate social interactions and engage with or ignore difference. Nowicka & Vertovec (2014) use ‘conviviality’ to explore how, and under what conditions, people constructively create “modes of togetherness”, by “considering individuals through the meanings of their interrelatedness” (2014: 342).

2.3.2 Sociological approaches to ‘community’

*Imagined communities*

Exploring the origins of nationalism, Benedict Anderson (2006 [1983]) defines shared language as a precondition of shared national imagining, where nations are understood as socially constructed ‘imagined communities’. Communities are imagined by individuals who perceive themselves as members, based on ideology, national myths, narratives, and interpretations of history. Anderson argues that, while people may not know each other personally and have not met face-to-face, there is a symbolic sense of connectedness and unity through shared language. Accordingly, “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (2006: 6). In this sense, while based on the nation-state, imagined communities transcend space and time, imagined even in the absence of physical contact among people. The author suggests that the rise of print capitalism and capitalist mass media enabled such a sense of community, generalising citizens as a public and giving new fixity to language. Anderson defines imagination as a social process. Accordingly, those in power do the imagining for the rest of their fellow citizens, offering them certain identity options and leaving other options “unimaginable”. Anderson points to the relevance of religious affiliation, which formed the basis of stable imagined communities preceding the imagined political communities of nationalism (2006: 169). These were ‘imagined’ based on sacred scriptures and narratives, and had disseminated a set of unchallenged sacred languages, e.g. Classical Arabic across Muslim populations. Yet, Anderson points out, such “classical communities” united by sacred scripts differed from the imagined national communities, as they created “a community of signs, not sounds” (2006: 13).

Anderson’s ‘imagined’ community has been applied across fields. Stuart Hall (1993) uses the concept to define imagined dichotomies between ‘we’ and ‘they’. In the context of language learning, Friedman (2016) explores how microlevel classroom discourses participate in the process of imagining national communities built around a standardised national language, and Pavlenko (2003) understands the language learning classroom as a space for students to
reimagine themselves as part of a multilingual community that legitimises new identity options. Papers collected in Blok et al. (2018) explore the transnational nature of ‘imagined communities’ and discuss the various processes and acts of imagining.

Self-defined perceptions of an individual or group’s own community experiences may differ from other-imposed categorisations, as used for example in public and political or academic discourses. Mills (2005) compares government and media views on ‘community’ with the lived experiences of UK-based mothers of Pakistani background who, while fluent speakers of English, maintain an allegiance to their other languages. In official and newspaper reports in the UK, English is understood as a crucial means of engagement with what is termed ‘the wider community’; a lack of English and use of a heritage language is described as possibly preventing such engagement. The perspectives of Pakistani interviewees suggest an alternative construction of community, where community values are mediated by the participants’ minority language. Mills suggests that the “heritage language represents community in being a crucial identifier and bond to the immediate and wider diasporic group” (2005: 253), endorsing aspects of culture and identity. Other imaginings of community may be based on the heritage country, or among fellow Muslims based on shared faith (2005: 261).

As Irvine & Gal (2000: 76) point out, “[m]issing from Anderson’s perspective […] is the insight that homogenous language is as much imagined as is community”. Accordingly, ‘language’ is seen as a bounded category, and the potential impact of linguistic ideologies on understandings of ‘language’ seems disregarded.

The ‘relational fabric’ of community

Emphasising the need to re-theorise ‘community’ in light of changing interaction patterns, Bessant (2018) offers a comprehensive overview of discussions of the concept of ‘community’ in social science. Bessant defines ‘community’ as a direct expression and outcome of social relations (2018: 241), thus seen as inherently relational and continuously created as well as transformed through ongoing social relations. However, as the author argues, community is not a product of social relations but a reciprocal process of social construction. Bessant draws attention to the de-spatialised (2018: 87) nature of contemporary dynamics of community, where modern communication technologies have “deteriorialized social communication and connectedness” (2018: 87).
Community as ‘urban practice’

Blokland (2017) shifts away from understanding community as a spatial concept, or as a fixed set of social relations. The author emphasises the role of agency in social identification and understands community as formed and maintained through cultural practice. Blokland’s urban community is defined as a “process, mechanism or phenomenon that is to some extent shared” (2017: 24). The meaning of ‘community’ is understood as an experience, rather than a place or fixed network. Accordingly, communities are sets of “public doings” (2017: 15), dynamically constructed through public practices or performances. Blokland (2017: 43) emphasises that “our backstage ideas of who we are may not coincide with the frontstage practices through which we do community”. Through the lens of performativity, belonging is understood as an outcome of social practices and performances ‘in front of others’, rather than simply a feeling. Blokland (2017) points out that urban spaces provide important stages for community performances, but that performances may or may not be anchored in a definable space or limited to the residential neighbourhood (2017: 33).

Blokland (2017, 2018) emphasises the relevance of everyday encounters and volatile ties between individuals for their understandings of community. She shifts the focus away from shared interests and long-term relations to take into account people’s ephemeral experiences of belonging and everyday practices of ‘doing’ community through their daily routines in public space (2018: 40). “[I]t is through conversations with people whom we do not know that public familiarity develops and brings about a comfort zone” (Blokland & Nast 2014: 1148). The notion of ‘public familiarity’ relates to daily routine encounters and practices in which we transact and communicate with people who are not part of more stable personal networks (2018: 37). Public familiars, people whom we know little about and do not expect to stay in touch with, may play a role in imaginings of community as they can shape our perceptions of public space, turning it into place that we can relate to. Urban settings provide a space that facilitates fluid encounters with some frequency.

Blokland’s notion of ‘durable engagements’ refers to the social relations between people who engage with institutions or an activity over time and form attachments. Such relations may not necessarily develop into close ties and “would no longer be there if the institution disappeared” (2018: 37). ‘Fluid encounters’ on the other hand are those brief and more superficial interactions people have with others, i.e. forms of being sociable when sharing public space. “Fluid encounters include all unplanned interactions that happen as a result of people being on their way or oriented towards something else” (2018: 37). Such fluid encounters may be highly instrumentally rational – for instance transactions in a supermarket, the local corner shop, or at a market stall – but they do include an orientation to the other and are thus seen as building social ties (Blokland 2017:
70). Such practices produce “everyday space”, neighbourhood and city space that people frequent and where they develop a sense of public familiarity and sense of belonging.

Blokland (2018) juxtaposes ‘routes’, ‘roots’ and ‘rootedness’: Particularly in times of diversity and inequality, there is a quest for community that focuses not only on one defined place and stability of residing in that one place long-term (associated with ‘roots’ and ‘rootedness’, based on the local). Instead, as Blokland (2018: 33) argues, “routes may matter as much as roots, depending on where we stand and where we are going”.

Boundary-making processes play a central role in experiences of community (Blokland 2018). This involves experiences and performances of inclusion and exclusion and negotiations of sameness and difference, which are inherent processes in any experience of identity. Moreover, as Blokland points out, it is important to distinguish an individual’s personal sense of belonging – one’s sense of being included, integrated or being part of (or not) – from shared notions of community (2018: 38).

Community as event

Brubaker emphasises that groups (based on ethnicity, race, nationhood) are no real, substantial entities, and calls for adopting a critical and self-reflecting stance towards the ways we use categories (2002, 2013). Brubaker suggests framing our analyses not in terms of groups as the unit of analysis, but as the object of analysis. He proposes viewing ethnicity, race, nation "in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful and disaggregated terms" rather than in terms of substantial groups (2002: 167). Communities and groups are seen as ‘events’, mutually interacting with and oriented towards other groups. Brubaker (2002) takes as basic analytical category not ‘the group’ as an entity but ‘groupness’ – a “contextually fluctuating conceptual variable” (2002: 167f.) – as an event, i.e. something that ‘happens’. Brubaker discusses the difference between pre-defined ‘categories of analysis’ and ‘categories of practice’. ‘Categories of practice’ are defined as “categories of everyday social experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors, as distinguished from the experience-distant categories used by social analysts” (Brubaker & Cooper 2000:4). Discussing the notion of diaspora, for example, Brubaker (2005) suggests that “[w]e should think of diaspora in the first instance as a category of practice, and only then ask whether, and how, it can fruitfully be used as a category of analysis” (2005: 12). Brubaker’s community as ‘event’ is different from CoP in that communities may be mobilised by individuals and groups in response to particular events. To take a crude example, the mobilisation of the notion of ‘Manchester’s Muslim community’ after the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017 could be seen as a community mobilised in the wake of the event, to emphasise Muslim populations’ various positive contributions to the city and distance themselves from the
terrorist attack. As Brubaker (2002, 2005) notes, group formations are often context- and goal-driven acts rather than states or processes, making them temporary and fluid.

2.3.3 Diaspora, transnationalism and community

The notion of ‘diaspora’ has been used to refer to ‘scattered communities’, i.e. populations that have settled far from their ancestral homeland, typically Greek settlements, the dispersion of Jews (Cohen 1997), or Armenian and African settlements. Diasporas were traditionally characterised by their experience of cultural trauma, a collective sense of identity, and their yearning for a lost homeland, real or imaginary (Werbner 2002: 120). The application of the term has been expanded considerably to include any group who are either forced to or voluntarily leave their place of origin. It is often used to refer loosely to ‘communities’ of migrants from the same ethnic or country-of-origin background (see Li Wei & Zhu Hua 2010) who may continue to share a religious, ethnic or national identity (see Woldemariam & Lanza 2015: 175). There has been increasing criticism of the concept of ‘diaspora’ in its traditional use, for its reliance on the notion of the nation-state, fixed associations between territory and identity, and its general tendency to categorise. Brubaker (2005) criticises that diaspora is often characterised as an entity, where ‘membership’ is understood as readily definable and quantifiable (2005: 10). Werbner (2002: 121) argues that diasporas must be understood as existing beyond the nation-state, as “detransnationalism imagined communities” which are, despite their dispersal, linked through a shared collective past and common destiny. With reference to the possibilities of modern communication technologies, Kozachenko (2013) emphasises that ‘diasporic communities’ are not necessarily ‘local’ ones. Accordingly, diasporas can be imagined as online or offline communities (see Laguerre 2010 on ‘digital diaspora’).

‘Transnationalism’ has been used to refer to global interconnectivity and focuses on processes and links rather than groups (Vertovec 2009; Faist 2000), while undermining the hegemony of national borders and ideologies (cf. Vertovec & Cohen 1999). It shifts attention to a multiplicity and complexity of overlapping identities and social relations. Contrary to ‘diaspora’, ‘transnationalism’ refers to recent (rather than inter-generational) flows. Finally, the term ‘transnationalism’ is not situated with the same historical narrative about trauma and survival as ‘diaspora’. ‘Transnationalism’ has been used for example to point to the transnational nature of families in a globalised world (King 2016).

The different ways of understanding ‘diaspora’ and the caution urged by Brubaker emphasise that any bounded notion of ‘diaspora’ or ‘diaspora communities’ is neither appropriate nor fruitful. In this thesis, I use the term ‘diaspora’ with reference to the globalised urban setting, where migrants from different parts of the globe have settled. I use it to refer to a context where people come
together whose countries of origins are overseas, irrespective of whether they do or do not aspire to a return. I understand diaspora as a site of social practice (cf. Brubaker 2005), shaped by a complexity of features and dynamics, with a focus on how language repertoires are made relevant and linked to notions of identity. Pointing to the significance of (offline and online) global networks, I emphasise the transnational character of the diaspora, rather than distinguishing between the two concepts. I see transnational connections (rather than necessarily firm rootedness in a homeland) as a central characteristic of diaspora settings, shaping practices, relations, and identities.

2.4 Bringing ‘language’ and ‘community’ together

Sociolinguistics has long concerned itself with questions of language and identity, with both theoretical and empirical work exploring their dynamic inter-relations (e.g. Rampton, 1995; Fishman 2001). Drawing on fieldwork in the Creole-speaking Caribbean and among West Indian populations in London, Le Page & Tabouret-Keller (1985) interpret code choice as “acts of identity”, i.e. speakers’ positive identification with ethnic and national identity. In cultural theory and sociology, Stuart Hall’s (1990) landmark work defines the role of language in the negotiation of identities as central, yet complex rather than straightforward (cf. Bucholtz & Hall 2005). There has been an increasing emphasis on the belief that the relationship between language and identity is neither stable nor easily predicted (see Rampton et al. 2019). Yet, the idea that language resources serve as an expression of and means to negotiate identities has been persistent. Language has been defined as important marker of group identity and membership (Coupland 2001; Schilling-Estes 1998). Studies in Bassiouney (2017) explore the ways in which the use of (Arabic) dialects may serve as intentional acts of identity performance: Accordingly, speakers may use their own (non-Standard) varieties with pride (Edwards 2017) or manipulate the language resources at their disposal to create their own local identities. De Fina (2017) explores dialect performances in “superdiverse communities”, arguing that the connection between linguistic resources and social categories is not straightforward.

While there is a widely shared understanding of language being a core value of identity, the links between language or language learning and community as well as the ways people speak about them require further attention (cf. Tseng 2020; Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004; Silverstein 2003). Identity is always a performance of both selfhood and otherness, with language users positioning themselves through creating distance and affiliation/alignment (Bucholtz & Hall 2005), or being positioned by others.

The below offers an overview of research on ‘language’ and ‘community’ across the settings explored in this thesis.
2.4.1 Family practices as community practices

The family is an important space for language, languaging, and language learning (Lanza 2007; Spolsky 2012). Pauwels (2005) discusses the importance of family efforts in heritage language maintenance, identifying the home setting as the main domain for heritage language use among immigrants. It is a setting where privacy and intimacy give speakers confidence, and multilingual repertoires become manifest as speakers draw on their complex linguistic resources. With different generations (and generations of migration) coming together, the family is a unique social domain to investigate language practices, maintenance of community languages, bottom-up language policies, and aspects of identity and belonging in the diaspora (see Li Wei 1994; De Fina 2012).

Recent research has touched on the relation between family language practices and notions of ‘community’. Zhu Hua & Li Wei (2016) suggest that experiences with multilingualism have an impact on how family members construct and present their own identities, and how they perceive social relations and social structures (2016: 655). Little (2017) explores how multilingual families in the UK experience heritage language development, both within the family, and “in relation to their extended communities” (2017: 1). The perceived need to maintain the heritage language may move between pragmatic (where the language is seen as necessary for daily life) to emotional (where the heritage language is linked to emotional wellbeing and perceived as socio-emotional convenience) (Little 2017: 10f.). Questions of how the family relates to the “extended community”, and who belongs to it, remain unanswered.

Lanza (2007) points out that, as an integral part of society, the family should not be separated from it; yet, it is useful to study multilingualism within the family as a phenomenon in itself and as distinct from societal multilingualism (2007: 46). Studying the micro-level of interaction of the family, Lanza (2007) defines the family as an “important sociolinguistic environment, specifically as a community of practice” (2007:45; cf. Lanza 2020; Johnsen 2020; Van Mensel 2020). As a CoP, the family is understood as a social unit that has its own norms for language use and beliefs about language (Lanza 2007: 47). Lanza (2007) suggests that understanding the family as CoP shifts attention to the observation that “even smaller groups can have their own ways of speaking, acting and believing” (2007: 47). There may be some shared consensus among family members how certain forms of language use are seen as appropriate, and others not. Corsaro (1997: 88) suggests conceptualising families as “local cultures”, or CoPs, where certain language attitudes, and perceptions are prominent. Drawing on surveys and interviews with parents and youths in Japanese families in Sydney, Oriyama (2016) understands families, similar to CoPs, as “social learning systems” whose members share values, norms, and knowledge about language and develop and maintain the heritage language together, while engaging in and negotiating
ideologies and identities. Canagarajah (2008: 170) conceptualises the family as a micro-level social institution in interaction with the macro-levels of society (cf. Curdt-Christiansen 2013). Thus, language practices and management efforts are shaped by the sociolinguistic ecology within and outside the family, including parents’ beliefs about language appropriateness of linguistic forms and language strategies (cf. Kheirkhah 2016).

The notion of ‘community’, particularly CoP, appears useful to explore and understand shared language practices and norms within families and how these relate to identity formations. However, it raises a number of questions: which family members (e.g. core or extended) form part of the CoP, and how regular or routine-based must shared practices among family members be? Do family members living in separate households, or ‘transnational families’, count as CoPs? How to define a shared ‘goal’ in families, a central feature of traditional CoPs? Heritage language maintenance may, for example, not necessarily be an aspiration shared among all family members. Finally, how do families as CoPs relate to the wider (diasporic) environment and other forms of community making? The present thesis aims to further develop the notion of family as CoP and shed light on such questions.

2.4.2 Supplementary schools as ‘community spaces’

Supplementary schools are independently run schools attended by pupils alongside their regular mainstream education, teaching content (e.g. languages) not typically taught as part of mainstream curricula. The schools are also known as complementary schools (see Creese & Martin 2006), a term that emphasises the positive, complementary nature of the schooling and points to its aim to compensate a perceived gap in the mainstream school curriculum. Other terms used worldwide include Saturday schools, ethnic schools, heritage language schools (Blackledge & Creese 2010; Creese et al. 2008) and community language schools, suggesting a rootedness in ‘communities’ of some kind (e.g. Robertson 2006; Wu 2006). All terms suggest unity and groupness based on shared ethnicity or ‘heritage’, separate from what is understood as the ‘mainstream’ or wider society. Supplementary schools have been described as ‘safe spaces’, where teachers and learners are encouraged to make use of their complex language repertoires

---

14 It is worth pointing briefly to the similarities between the family as CoP and Bakhtin’s (1986) ‘speech genres’, understood as shaped by and shaping the dialogical interactions of socially and culturally located actors. Accordingly, in each area of life and activity or social circle (e.g. a family) there are certain norms regarding language use. Speakers assimilate language from their unique experience and develop what is perceived as ‘typical forms of behaviour’ in their interaction with others (1986: 89).

15 While some schools focus on the attainment of pupils and offer mainstream curriculum support, others focus on the teaching of ‘heritage’ languages. This thesis explores practices in the latter type of schools.

16 The term supplementary school is preferred in this thesis, being the term commonly used in Manchester by the schools and in public discourse.
and to maintain their languages, contrasting with mainstream education institutions (Blackledge & Creese 2010).

With language understood as a crucial part of collective identities, cross-generational language maintenance is often seen as central to the maintenance of collective identities. Previous literature on supplementary schools has emphasised their roles in reinforcing associations between heritage language teaching and a “community identity” (Simon 2018; cf. Nordstrom 2020). Drawing on their research in Turkish supplementary schools in London, Lytra & Baraç (2008) show how language learning serves to negotiate identity positions and social affiliations in the UK diaspora. Describing language as the core of cultural identity, Issa & Williams (2009) suggest that language maintenance efforts are located within the larger aim of preserving a given ‘community’s’ identity. Blackledge & Creese (2010: 198) point out that, while the schools’ main activity may be language teaching, the promotion of an affiliation to a community’s ‘homeland’ is one of the motivating principles for the schools, contributing to defining group alignment within the diaspora context.

The link between supplementary schools and ‘community’ has been taken for granted rather than systematically explored or challenged, and how notions of ‘community’ relate to supplementary schools has across studies been understood in slightly different ways: Literature has generally described the role of supplementary schools as serving particular communities in maintaining culture and heritage (Archer et al. 2010; Creese et al. 2008). This suggests that the schools cater for pre-existing groups of people, identified on the basis of definable elements of ‘heritage’ and shared origin (cf. Minty et al. 2008). As Robertson (2006: 45) suggests, supplementary schools offer “classes that teach the language and culture of a minority community”, presupposing bounded ‘languages’ and ‘communities’. Particularly in early research on heritage language maintenance there is an assumption that supplementary schools are set up by ‘community members’ passing on their ‘heritage’ to their children (see Fishman 1985). ‘Language’ is understood as a crucial identifier and symbolic identity marker of ‘community’, where its maintenance reinforces community membership and boundaries (Mills 2005). Maylor et al. (2010) and Creese et al. (2008) suggest that supplementary schools maintain social relations, thus a “focal point in the construction of community” (Creese et al. 2008: 277). Supplementary schools are seen as socially, culturally and linguistically significant “both within their communities and in wider society”. Accordingly, communities are seen as separable from wider society, with supplementary schools serving as an institutional link between the home context, the ‘community’, and mainstream society (Creese et al. 2008: 271). Wu (2006) suggests that supplementary schools in England create a space for the development of a new, “third culture”, bringing together the different socio-histories of participants and allowing for a re-negotiation within the UK context (2006: 72).
Simon (2013, 2018) focuses on the social positioning of supplementary schools in wider society and what their positioning reveals about the “communities they serve” (2018: 208; cf. Nordstrom 2020: 302). Simon argues that the construction, negotiation and promotion of ‘community’ lie at the centre of supplementary schooling (2018: 25), describing “language” as “one of the most distinctive and readily available signifiers of community membership that members transport with them across geographical boundaries” (2018: 78; cf. Souza & Arthur 2020). Supplementary schools are perceived as a form of agency and self-determination for communities otherwise situated at the margins of society (Simon 2018: 3, 207). Simon suggests that heritage language schools contribute to “guarding community identity borders” and defining group characteristics, with language being a powerful emblem of community identity (2013: 196). However, Simon’s (2013, 2018) understanding of ‘community’ presupposes fixity and boundedness as well as homogeneity. Furthermore, I argue that the relationship between ‘language’ and ‘community’ is simplified in Simon’s account and cannot capture the complexities and diversities in today’s global settings.

Research on Arabic supplementary schools has similarly relied on the notion of ‘community’ to characterise school populations and aims. Bichani (2015) explores practices in two Arabic supplementary schools in London and Leeds and suggests that Arabic-speaking communities in the UK, described as communities that are “fairly closed” (2015: 10), can be “accessed” via supplementary schools. In fact, following Miller’s (2003) notion of such schools as ‘sites of representation’, Bichani (2015) argues that “the complementary school ‘stands in for’ or represents crucial aspects of the Arab community” (2015: 72). In a qualitative study on three Arabic supplementary schools across England, Szczep Reed et al. (2020a) define the schools as “stakeholders in Arab communities” (2020a: 1), with school staff, pupils and parents showing commitment to their communities. The authors speak of a ‘school community’, suggesting that the schools themselves form social groups that are distinct from wider society. Szczep Reed et al. (2020a; cf. 2020b) argue that language maintenance efforts may be seen as a way to identify and define ‘community’, as well as serving to position this ‘community’ within the multilingual setting (cf. Bichani 2015). Accordingly, Arabic schools support the values underpinning a diverse and inclusive society through language learning, equipping pupils for a multicultural setting (Szczep Reed et al. 2020a: 16). The authors report “a stated wish to assimilate to British society and its values” (2020a: 8).17 In contrast, Ben Nafa (2018) in her study on language practices among Libyans in Manchester reports that the city’s “Libyan community” runs Libyan

17 It is noteworthy that Szczep Reed et al.’s (2020a,b) participants were second and third generation (i.e. UK-born) “heritage speakers” but did not include recent arrivals, which may have influenced their findings.
supplementary schools to serve its members (2018: 7), thus understanding “the community” as separate from wider society.

The studies discussed above rely mainly on traditional notions of community defined on the basis of pre-selected characteristics, such as ‘language’, ethnicity, origin. Souza & Arthur (2020) shift attention to shared practice. In their study on Brazilian supplementary schools in the UK, the authors argue that CoPs develop from supplementary schools as they create a space for people with a similar passion and concern to interact regularly. Souza & Arthur (2020) suggest that it is useful for schools to make conscious efforts to develop CoPs, as this may have a positive impact on the professional development of teachers.

The notion of ‘community’ seems useful to explore the practices of supplementary schools and positionings in wider society; however, understandings of bounded and pre-definable school communities are not fruitful for a profound understanding of linguistic and community practices in the superdiverse diaspora setting.

2.4.3 Businesses and communities

Linguistic practices in markets and shops offer insights into the ways in which multilingual cities operate. The papers collected in Zhu Hua et al. (2017) explore local practices in businesses, focusing on social, spatial, and semiotic relations. Markets and small shops are understood as “very real spaces of everyday economic, intercultural, and linguistic exchange” (2017: 384). Blackledge et al. (2015) study interaction in a Birmingham market, a place where people with different biographies, trajectories and linguistic histories come together. Blackledge & Creese (2019) present new ways of thinking about and working with data in business settings and, more generally, global cities. Other studies on language in businesses settings have focused on the ways in which participants make use of linguistic resources (Pennycook & Otsuji 2014), or explored how institutions and businesses make efforts to adapt and respond to the city’s multilingual reality (Salverda 2002). Ehrkamp (2005) focuses on the spatiality of shared (language) practices and explores ‘communal places’ within cities that take on specific importance for particular populations. In her study on Turkish migrants in Germany, Ehrkamp (2005) finds that small businesses such as teahouses may become ‘communal places’, where people meet regularly and create places of belonging in the diaspora (2005: 345). Blokland (2017) argues that fluid encounters in the city, e.g. in the form of transactions, may be relevant to ‘doings’ and experiences of ‘community’. Transactions are defined as “social relations with instrumentally rational orientations” (2017: 50; cf. 2018). Sellers and buyers each perform clearly defined roles in the specific setting, yet may develop fluid relations beyond the mere transaction. While exploring how commercial settings may constitute community spaces, neither Ehrkamp (2005)
nor Blokland (2017) pay attention to the role of language in forging relations. Luo & Shenkar (2006) understand multinational corporations as “multilingual communities” in exploring translocal communication networks. Others have looked at multilingualism in international business management (Gaibrois & Nentwich 2020). So far, however, there has been little discussion on the potential of language practices in business settings to create, perform or invite ‘doings’ of community (but see studies on Linguistic Landscapes below).

2.4.4 Interpreting, translation and community

Relevant to language and community practices in superdiverse urban settings is the consideration of the role and nature of interpreting and translation (I&T) practices. These language services are vital in facilitating access to information and effective use of (public) services. Polezzi (2012: 348) points out that previous understandings of translation as “something that happens to an original (usually a written document which already exists as such in a specified language)” are no longer sufficient in the contexts of migration, where people and texts move across national, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Polezzi (2006) suggests that migration as well as translation shape representations as well as cultural, political and economic hierarchies.

The provision and use of I&T has been discussed in relation to questions of ‘integration’ (into the new setting) and ‘resilience’ (Cronin & Simon 2014; Tipton 2019). As Cronin (2006) points out, the very need for translation and act of mediation emphasises difference, in the same process that it is intended to bridge difference. As marker of difference, translation can be seen as a form of re-negotiation of power, establishing and negotiating directional relations between languages. Translation becomes a key to understanding the cultural life of cities when it is used to map out movements across language and among ‘communities’. Cronin (2006: 36) discusses the role of translation practices in reflecting and shaping prestige and hierarchies of languages, a question that may be expanded to the roles and status of language users in the diaspora. Cronin (2006: 45) discusses ‘agency’ as a crucial issue in the encounter between translation and migration and describes two strategies of immigrants’ responding to their new linguistic situation: Translation may be used by migrants as a “strategy of assimilation”, in an attempt to incorporate themselves into the culture of the host community through translation into the majority language; on the other hand, they can use translation as a form of accommodation, where translation is used as a means of maintaining their languages of origin as they try to negotiate spaces of resistance and survival of the language and culture of their origins (2006: 52). Instead of requiring translation, or being posited as requiring translation, migrants can become translators themselves and thus become

---

18 The term interpreting refers to the act of conveying meaning of the spoken word from one language to another, whereas translation refers to this practice in the written medium.
active subjects rather than objects of translation. In this sense the act of translation raises questions of identity (cf. Polezzi 2012). Cronin & Simon (2014) and Simon (2016) emphasise the interplay between language and cities as the setting in which interaction and negotiations of belonging take place. Translation is a reflection of differences in the city, and the urban space is a site of “translational forces”, where languages are both “in conversation and in tension” (Simon 2016: 1).

The ways in which I&T relates to hierarchisation of languages and power relations between actors show the relevance of exploring ‘community’ understandings and positionings in relation to I&T. ‘Community Interpreting’ is an established and taken-for-granted term to refer to a specific type of interpreting to facilitate access to services provided in the majority language, typically covering educational, medical, housing or legal areas. Polezzi (2012) juxtaposes migrants requiring language services with the “receiving community”, thus distinguishing between two groups where unequal language resources define group membership. Papers collected in Valero-Garcés & Martin (2008) discuss the role(s) of community interpreters and explore negotiations of traditionally assigned roles. The volume addresses how interpreting may serve to empower individuals by giving them a voice or redress power relations in society. Tipton (2016) offers reflections on intercultures and how agents construct and are oriented towards the ‘Other’, exploring relations between interpreters and social workers in interpreter-mediated interaction. Papers collected in Taibi (2017) explore how ‘Community Translation’ may serve to empower “disempowered” social groups through equitable access to public service information.

Mason (2009) discusses the constantly evolving nature of relations among participants in the interpreter-mediated encounter, as a result of joint negotiation. Mason (2009) advocates the notion of ‘positioning’ to move away from assumptions of fixed ‘roles’ to emphasise how participants position themselves (and others) within the interaction, rather than readily accepting pre-defined roles. In this sense, interpreters may express and negotiate power and status, “in-group solidarity” and distance towards interlocutors on the grounds of (shared) ethnicity, e.g. through establishing direct communicative contact with service users rather than between provider and user. Similarly, gaze or lexical choices are suggested to serve as markers of in-group solidarity. Mason (2009) briefly draws on the notion of CoP to show how interpreters may position themselves as belonging to a certain CoP or not, depending on whether through their discursive practices they acknowledge expected norms relevant in a given encounter (e.g. in the court or medical appointment). At the same time, Mason (2009) suggests that the observed regularity in interpreters’ behaviour in how positionings are negotiated “points to an interpreter community of practice, overlapping with the other communities of practice, of which they become part by their professional activity” (2009: 61).
The papers in Taibi (2016) focus on Arabic I&T, discussing the “social need” for such services as well as the specific complexities for Arabic due to its situation of diglossia. Faiq (2016) discusses the relevance of broader power relations between Arabic and Western cultures in translation. Hadziabdic & Hjelm (2014) use focus group interviews to explore Arabic-speaking migrants’ experiences of using interpreting services in healthcare in Sweden. Participants reported that differences in dialect between interpreter and patient had caused misunderstandings and resulted ultimately in inadequate treatment. Furthermore, participants expressed a preference for interpreters from the same country of origin for cultural reasons. Thus, “the qualities of a good interpreter” as perceived by the study’s participants cover a range of identity-related factors in addition to language ability, which points to the roles of interpreters as mediators beyond the provision of language services. Taibi & Maataoui (2016) explore ‘cultural taboos’ in Arabic/Spanish interpreter-mediated encounters. The authors draw on rather fixed notions of group membership (“exogroup interpreters” versus “endogroup interpreters”) to explore linguistic and cultural “asymmetries” and the likelihood to which “unshared cultural assumptions” may result in comprehension challenges.

While the I&T setting offers rich opportunities to explore the dynamics between ‘language’ and negotiations of ‘community’ and issues of positioning, there is a dearth of recent research on such questions, and insufficient attention has been paid to the complexities of these notions.

2.5 Norms, expectations and practices: Language policy and regimes

In the context of exploring understandings of ‘language’ and ‘community’, this thesis investigates forms of language policy (LP) across settings. Research on LP has traditionally focused on top-down, declared policies, and policy making was conceptualised as something that occurs mainly at the macro-level of the nation-state (e.g. Fishman 1974). Government officials or other authoritative bodies or persons were therefore considered the central actors in language planning and policy (LPP). More local, less formally defined issues related to LP on the other hand tended to be seen as secondary to the overall process of language planning, if considered at all (Liddicoat & Baldauf 2008; Spolsky 2012). Kelly-Holmes et al. (2009) point out that official LP and actual use of various linguistic resources are far apart, highlighting the need to explore patterns of local language use. Liddicoat & Baldauf (2008) note that, within local communities, individuals and small groups of individuals may have the potential and hold agency to exercise power and

---

19 Traditionally, a distinction is made between ‘language policy’ and ‘language planning’, whereby the former is typically used to refer to decisions or principles as part of language planning, and the latter refers to decision-making processes and implementation of policies (Haugen 1959; Deumert 2001). This distinction is however not used consistently (cf. Liddicoat 2020: 337), and it is not relevant to this study. Understanding policy and planning as inextricably linked, I use ‘language policy’ to incorporate both.
influence behaviours regarding language use (cf. Baldauf 2006). Liddicoat & Baldauf (2008) emphasise the need to study local contextual factors, which will affect how macro-level plans are accepted and function, and thus their outcomes. The dynamic interaction of macro-, meso-, and micro-level actors has recently been described by means of a continuum rather than separate levels (Davies & Ziegler 2015; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech 2014).

Spolsky (2004, 2009) argues that the notions of ‘language policy’ and ‘practice’ must not be seen as distinct and separate. Accordingly, LP consists of three components:

- **language beliefs**: expressed ideologies about language, i.e. values assigned to linguistic varieties and variations;
- **language management**: deliberate attempts to manipulate and modify language practices and beliefs;
- **language practices**: observable language behaviours; habitual choices of varieties.

LP is thus an interconnected process generated and negotiated through discourse, scripted policies and actual practices. Spolsky points out that while the levels are closely interrelated, LP observed at each of these levels may differ. Spolsky (2019) adds a distinction between advocates (i.e. policy actors without power) and managers to the management component, to include cases where individuals or groups lacking the authority of managers may still wish to change practices. Moreover, Spolsky (2019) adds the notion of self-management, drawing attention to individuals’ attempts to expand personal repertoires (i.e. learning language varieties) to enhance communication and employability. Spolsky argues that, to investigate LP at the level of language use, one must “look at what people do and not at what they think should be done or what someone else wants them to do” (Spolsky 2004: 218). Accordingly, practices constitute policy to the extent that they are “regular and predictable”, and that we can derive from them “a set of descriptive and explanatory rules” (Shohamy & Spolsky 2000: 29).

Shohamy & Spolsky (2000) draw on Labov’s (1972) notion of ‘speech community’ to argue that policies are derived from implicit and deducible norms or rules that “members of the community have of appropriate behaviour” (2000: 29). Accordingly, thus, LP operates ‘within’ communities (cf. Spolsky 2004: 40). A ‘community’ is understood as a group of language users characterised by their orientation to a common set of (explicit or implicit) rules about which forms of language are perceived as ‘correct’, ‘prestigious’ or ‘appropriate’. Spolsky (2007) argues that each domain of a community – such as school or home – “has its own policy, with some features controlled internally and others under the influence or control of external forces” (2007: 2). Levinson et al. (2009) use the notion of CoP to define the conditions under which policy is formed and appropriated (2009: 773). Accordingly, members share and develop through their routine
engagement practice routines, through which they negotiate meanings and norms. Likewise, Papageorgiou (2012) draws on the notion of CoP to argue that a community’s own locally developed norms emerge from shared practices, their own ‘practiced language policy’ (2012: 262).

The understanding that there is policy within language practices is particularly relevant to the present study, with its focus on actors’ perceptions and experiences of ‘language’. However, it has not been sufficiently explored how and when informal practice becomes policy or is interpreted as such. Questions arise also in relation to Spolsky’s theorisations of how LP relates to ‘community’. Understanding ‘communities’ as more or less fixed entities, where definitions of membership seem straightforward, suggests also a relatively fixed notion of LP. It presupposes ‘community’ as being pre-existing to language practices and policy, with members sharing the same language ideologies and norms. The idea appears to disregard Spolsky’s (2004, 2007) very argument about policy being dynamically constructed as inseparable from practice. While Levinson et al.’s (2009) reference to CoPs allows for more flexibility through its orientation towards practice, it is still based on notions of rather unambiguously definable and rather fixed ‘communities’, where frequency of interaction defines membership. Both theorisations do not account for actors’ own perceptions and experiences of ‘language’ and ‘community’.

2.5.1 Family language policy

In research on language policy and maintenance in diaspora settings, there has been an increasing focus on language policy in the family (Lanza 2007; King et al. 2008; Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Li Wei 2012; see Lomeu Gomes 2018) and how language socialisation interplays with language acquisition and development (Ochs & Schieffelin 1995, 2011; Duranti et al. 2012). Family language policy (FLP) has traditionally been defined as overt planning and explicitly declared policies regarding language use within the home and among family members (King & Fogle 2017: 315), thus in parallel with early research on LP more widely. There has since been a broadening of attention from focusing on FLP as planned language management, to exploring language practices among family members as implicit language policy (Curdt-Christiansen 2009: 352, 2013; Van Mensel 2018). King & Fogle (2017: 322f.) point out that FLP – like any LP – can be “implicit, covert, unarticulated, fluid and negotiated moment by moment”. Accordingly, the processes of defining FLP and language maintenance are not only “top-down” (e.g. explicit decisions, typically made by parents/caregivers, about language use) but also “bottom-up” practices (e.g. children’s resistance and negotiations of such decisions) and may be interactional, collaborative and co-constructed (Fogle & King 2013: 20f.). While there has been consistent use of quantitative written surveys to study FLP (De Houwer 2004, 2007; Van de Mol & De Valk 2018), researchers have increasingly applied in-depth, ethnographic approaches to
analyse interaction and explore how family members negotiate and experience practices and policies (Smith-Christmas 2016; Lanza & Li Wei 2016; King & Lanza 2017).

Fogle (2012), King & Lanza (2017) and Kheirkhah & Cekaite (2018) emphasise children’s agency in shaping family language ecologies through their practices, showing how children affect parental decisions about language learning and thus influence FLP over time (cf. Gafaranga 2010). Literature has commonly drawn on Ahearn’s (2001: 11) notion of agency, defined as an individual’s “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” and to exercise control over their action. Agency is thought to be negotiated context-specifically (Said & Zhu Hua 2019), where individuals may achieve agency despite power differences. Smith-Christmas (2020) explores how children enact agency in everyday interaction, exploiting their linguistic resources and achieving a form of empowerment in the family. Smith-Christmas (2020) suggests that child language brokering, a practice where children act as interpreters and translators for their families, may manipulate and revert power relations between caregivers and children (cf. Revis 2016; Tse 1995; Antonini 2015, 2016).

Lanza (2007) points to attitudes within the CoP of the family as significant factors shaping multilingual language acquisition (2007: 52). Attitudes are manifested in patterns of language use and choice, as well as more overtly in metalinguistic and metapragmatic discourse (e.g., explicit talk about how language should be used), which socialise children into the respective ideologies (2007: 61). As Lanza points out, “[i]deologies about language are of course not about language alone, rather they reflect issues of social and personal identity” (2007: 51). Wider socio-political and cultural factors and discourses influence family language practices and policy (King et al. 2008; Li Wei 2012; Lanza 2020; Liddicoat 2020). Rules established and negotiated within a family reflect ideological discourses regarding correctness, the separation of ‘languages’ and dialects, or attitudes towards code-mixing (Van Mensel 2018; Li Wei 2012; Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Shohamy 2006). As Spolsky (2009: 18) argues, the home language is influenced by the “sociolinguistic ecology” inside and outside the home (cf. Canagarajah 2007). This sociolinguistic ecology may include public discourse (Garrett 2011), the influence of mainstream schools, and significant persons such as grandparents (see Ruby 2012). Likewise, parents’/caregivers’ migration and language learning experiences may have an impact on FLP (Curdt-Christiansen 2009; King et al. 2008). Spolsky (2012) adds the neighbourhood as well as religion as important variables. Recently, there has been a growing interest in digitally mediated practices in multilingual families (see Lanza & Lexander 2019; Palviainen 2020), as well as a focus on transnational families (Zhu Hua & Li Wei 2016; Purkarthofer & Steien 2019; Smith-Christmas 2020).
Studies exploring FLP in Arabic-speaking families in diaspora settings have shown how parents’ commitment to maintaining Arabic are reflected in different language management measures, including strict rules regarding language choice, enrolling children in Arabic schools, and socialising with other Arabic-speaking families in the diaspora setting (Gomaa 2011; Othman 2011; Jamai 2008). Said & Zhu Hua (2019) explore FLP through close analysis of mealt ime conversations in one family of second and third generation Arabic-speaking migrants in London and report a rather flexible FLP. The authors show how both parents and children creatively draw on their multiple and developing language repertoires to, through their linguistic choices, assert agency in language use and socialisation to achieve their own interactional goals. Accordingly, the participant family’s children are fully aware of their parents’ language preferences and are capable of manipulating this knowledge, thus influencing FLP. Said & Zhu Hua (2019) conclude that language resources are used by family members as tools to position themselves and others to reinforce, forge and strengthen bonds. Said (2016) explores the impact of parents’ linguistic behaviour on children’s language and identity practices, taking an interactional sociolinguistic approach. The author discusses the “symbolisms of the family’s languages”, and how the different resources become meaningful during interaction, suggesting that the flexible use of Arabic and English serves to assist the children to negotiate their dynamic identities, to connect with their parents, and “as a symbolic tool through which they take up their agency in the processes of socialisation” (2016: 1). Elkhalik (2018) uses semi-structured interviews to explore FLP in recently arrived families from Syria in Leeds, asking how macro-level language attitudes affect language policies in the diaspora. The study finds that Arabic is seen as a “core value” in families, with its religious significance playing an important role in shaping the status of the language locally. Gomaa (2011) explores the maintenance of the Egyptian Arabic variety in families in Durham and finds that parents make efforts to encourage the use of Egyptian Arabic as an element of identity in the UK. Aziz’s (2017) doctoral research examines how intra-generational and intergenerational talk is accomplished through code-switching within Moroccan families in Birmingham, arguing that code-switching plays a central role in negotiating relationships within the family.

As De Fina (2012: 350) points out, there is a lack of research exploring the ways in which multilingual families negotiate the use of their linguistic resources, the values of different varieties of their ‘heritage languages’, and how such uses relate to aspects of identity. Palviainen (2020) calls for critical approaches that include child perspectives to capture the interactional nature of language policy, negotiated among all family members. Furthermore, there is a need to question the widely taken-for-granted ‘language’ categories in FLP research (Blommaert 2018).
2.5.2 Language policy in education settings

For education settings, Pennycook (2006) points out that power in shaping LP does not only rest with the state but is enacted by local practitioners through discursive practices that operate in relation to some authoritative criteria. Accordingly, bottom-up practices, e.g. classroom language use and discourses, are understood as the locus of governance (see Li Wei & Martin 2009).

A shift in focus from macro-level policies to micro-level practices has resulted in a re-thinking of agency, i.e. who has the power to influence change in language policy, how are norms negotiated and which conditions do they emerge in. Particular groups, such as teachers (Ricento & Hornberger 1996), may take central roles in the development of LP (Paulsrud 2020; Tarnanen & Palviainen 2018). Winter & Pauwels (2006) emphasise the importance of individual teachers’ local practices, which constitute central planning activities in the classroom (cf. Amir & Musk 2013).

Ricento & Hornberger’s (1996: 402) onion metaphor conceptualises agents, levels (national, institutional, interpersonal), and processes of LPP in terms of layers that together compose the LPP whole, the ‘onion’ (cf. Hornberger & Johnson 2007). The various layers – agents, levels, and LPP processes – “permeate and interact with each other in multiple and complex ways as they enact various types, approaches, and goals of LPP” (1996: 419). At the outer layer of the onion are macro-level policy objectives, articulated in legislation or high court rulings at the national level. These may then be operationalised in regulations and guidelines, which are interpreted and implemented in institutional settings. These are, in turn, composed of diverse, situated micro-level contexts (e.g. schools, businesses, government offices), where individuals from diverse backgrounds, with different experiences and communities, interact (1996: 409). Legislation or policy guidelines are (re-)interpreted and modified as they move from one layer to the next (1996: 410) and in different directions. In language education, classroom practitioners are seen as being at the heart of LP, and thus at the centre of the ‘onion’ (1996: 417).

Drawing on Spolsky (2004), Bonacina-Pugh (2012, 2017) explores policy found within language practices in multilingual classrooms. Bonacina-Pugh (2012) highlights the gap in literature on how to investigate such “practiced language policies”, suggesting ethnographic methods and conversation analysis as suitable approaches (Bonacina & Gafaranga 2010). Her work shows how practised policy consists of sets of shared interactional norms regulating speakers’ language use, oriented towards by speakers in order to interpret language choice as acceptable or not in particular situations (cf. Bonacina-Pugh 2017: 9). Thus, practised language policy is constructed at the very local level of interaction. Bonacina-Pugh (2017) uses the notion of ‘legitimate’ language use to refer to linguistic behaviour that is perceived as ‘appropriate’ locally and explores the practices and factors based on which classroom participants see language as acceptable, i.e. legitimate, or not. Shohamy & Spolsky (2000: 29), suggest that one way to discover a policy within
language use it to study the “nonobservance” of implicit rules. Accordingly, if participants react to a particular language choice or define uses of language as ‘incorrect’, this signals that the language act was perceived as deviant from (imagined) norms (Bonacina-Pugh 2012). As Bonacina emphasises, “acknowledging a language policy within language practices enables the analyst to see speakers as *agent* in the policy process; in other words, to see speakers as policy makers” (2011: 254).

2.5.3 Interactional regimes

Recently, the notion of ‘regime’ has been used to describe norms of language use as part of wider contexts (Purkarthofer & De Korne 2020; Blommaert et al. 2005a,b). The notion goes back to Kroskrity’s (2000) volume “Regimes of Language”, which collects essays that discuss language ideologies, identities, politics and institutional power as central elements defining a ‘language regime’. Kroskrity explores how dominant discourses about language are controlled and produced within a society, through restriction, authorisation or valorisation of linguistic practices. Irvine & Gal (2000) look at how ideologies frame ideas related to linguistic variation and how these are then mapped onto ‘typical’ speakers, events, and activities. Accordingly, ideologies may recognise (or misrecognise) linguistic difference, with linguistic forms understood as forms indexing social groups. The authors relate language ideologies and variation to social structure and collectivity, arguing that “what is needed is to shift attention to linguistic differentiation rather than community” (2000: 76). Irvine & Gal (2000: 36) point to the need to recognise that such differentiation is ideologically mediated, which applies also to researchers who map and describe boundaries of languages and peoples.

In his use of the German term for *language regime*, ‘Sprachregime’, Coulmas (2005) focuses on institutional LP and administered language. Coulmas (2005: 7) understands ‘Sprachregime’ as “a set of constraints” regarding language choice, consisting of habits, legal provisions (laws and regulations) and ideologies.

Blommaert et al. (2005a,b) understand the neighbourhood as a “unit of practice” (2005a: 205), where “language use and multilingualism are given social form by conditions of polycentricity and regimes of interactional practice”. Drawing on their fieldwork in a neighbourhood in Ghent, the authors suggest that across sites, different interactional regimes organise different patterns of language use and assessment. By interactional regime, the authors “understand minimally a set of behavioural expectations regarding physical conduct, including language” (2005a: 213). Thus, regimes include perceptions of what counts as an ‘acceptable’ set of language resources for its users, situated in time and place. Blommaert et al. (2005a) argue that interactional regimes may be elaborations of long-established ‘old’ regimes, which have been challenged by conditions of
ethnolinguistic diversity; other regimes surface locally (cf. Slembrouck 2020). Accordingly, regimes often originate exclusively in practice, removed from state-supported institutions with official LP. Blommaert et al. (2005a) emphasise the polycentric nature of the urban neighbourhood, with its different spaces, places and activities. “People inhabiting or using such spaces need to orient themselves towards very different sets of norms and expectations, often simultaneously” (2005a: 207). Interactional regimes operate at different scales across ‘centres’ in the neighbourhood or city. Scales are sets of norms and expectations that are layered on top of each other in social spaces, making meanings non-unified and stratified (Blommaert 2007, 2019; cf. Nguyen 2020). Accordingly, the interactional regime valid in a bakery operates at a different scale than the one valid in a school or a mosque and hence, it has different effects and consequences. Interactants may negotiate the value of their linguistic resources (i.e. legitimise or increase their value) by ‘jumping’ scales (Blommaert et al. 2005b). As Slembrouck (2020: 77) points out, an analysis of scaled dimensions can help “complete the picture about the local language regime”, broadening our understandings of how local and global factors shape ideological assumptions and practices.

Costa (2019: 2) defines ‘language regimes’ as “spatial and temporal set[s] of practices, either physical or symbolic, through which rules are established to determine an inside and an outside, and in which not anyone is allowed to participate or seen as legitimate”. Costa (2019) argues that regimes are different from ideologies in that they emphasise action and encompass practices themselves, as opposed to analysing ideologies in and for themselves (cf. Irvine 2019). Purkarthofer & De Korne (2020) suggest that initiatives teaching minority languages encourage practices that resist dominant language regimes, aiming to raise the social status of migrant populations while socialising learners into (often multilingual) communication practices (2020: 167). As the authors point out, “participants in a social space are also agents in the (re)production of language regimes” (2020: 168). Thus, in order to understand the language regime in a setting, and how new regimes may come to be, it is necessary to go beyond official policies and explore how language varieties are perceived and produced by actors within that setting.

The following sections discuss methodological implications of researchers’ increasing aims to capture rather than simplify complexity of sociolinguistic phenomena. The discussions below provide a starting point for the development of my own methodological framework (Chapter 3).

2.6 Methodological implications

A shift in focus from ‘languages’ and ‘communities’ to ‘resources’ and individual actors, an acknowledgment of the complexity of communication patterns, and a consideration of various macro- and micro-level scales has methodological implications (cf. Blommaert & Rampton 2011). There has been a shift from emphasising quantitative measures of language vitality (Barni & Extra
2008; Extra & Yağmur 2004; Duarte & Gogolin 2013) to ethnographic emphasis on practices (Blackledge & Creese 2010; Stevenson 2017) and long-term fieldwork (Van der Aa & Blommaert 2016). At the heart of ethnography is addressing situatedness and the surrounding linguistic ecology, exploring practices in space and time (Blommaert et al. 2005b; Pennycook & Otsuji 2015). Lamarre (2013) suggests that to study language in the city “we have to reduce and delimit what we are tackling, make it smaller, more manageable, so that it can be apprehended, analysed, theorized” (2013: 3). The move towards practice seeks to provide a perspective that acknowledges language as “intrinsically tied to context and to human activity” (Blommaert 2005: 233). The following sub-sections discuss various dimensions and ways of engaging with participants and language practices relevant to this study, starting with a discussion of the value of language biographies.

2.6.1 Biographical dimensions

Busch (2012b) shows how language biographies can help explore research participants’ societal and individual experiences with language over time. As Blommaert & Backus (2013) explain, “repertoires in a super-diverse world are records of mobility: of movement of people, language resources, social arenas, technologies of learning and learning environments” (2013: 28). Language biographical methods typically focus on individuals’ accounts of their language learning histories (Busch 2012; Lamarre 2013). Stevenson (2017) explores language biographies to investigate how encounters with languages in people’s everyday lives impact on the experience of migration, and how such experiences can help us understand the complexity of the city’s linguistic texture. His explorative study, based on engagement with inhabitants of an apartment block in Berlin, looks at how individuals reflect on their ‘lived experience of language’ (cf. Busch 2015), and how it has shaped their “transnational life worlds” (Stevenson 2017). Stevenson (2017) engages with participants in their everyday spaces, which is crucial also in participant observation approaches.

2.6.2 Observant participation and collaborative research

Drawing on Hymes (1972), Van der Aa & Blommaert (2016) emphasise the need to study complexity by interacting closely with the social actors we engage with. The required shift in role of the ethnographer is illustrated by the shift from ‘observer’ to ‘participant’. Participant observation has become a widely applied method of data collection in sociolinguistic research (Van der Aa & Blommaert 2016). Participant observation involves active engagement with informants in their practices or daily lives, where the researcher becomes part of the setting over longer periods of time. Moeran (2009) argues that a holistic approach to studying “a community” or organisation requires such long-term, intensive engagement with participants, allowing the
researcher to become closely involved in everyday routines of relevant actors. Moeran (2009) draws on Goffman’s (1990) distinction between ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’ behaviour, arguing that the fieldworker should attempt to move from front-stage impression management, “where people tell you what they do”, to a back-stage reality where you can observe their actual practices (cf. 2009: 143). Moeran (2009) calls for a move from participant observer to observant participant, to get access to information and knowledge that is otherwise unavailable to ‘outsiders’. Accordingly, this will enhance the quality of information accessible to the researcher. The shift from participant observation to observant participation is achieved through the researcher’s awareness of the difference between front-stage and back-stage behaviour, and the ability to move beyond the front stage. Moeran (2009) suggests that, by exploring interaction and practices during both front- and back-stage performances, as well as intensive involvement in formal and informal ad hoc interactions with participants, the researcher will have the opportunity to become aware of unanticipated details, see connections and the relevance of practices that may initially appear to be irrelevant. In addition, the fieldworker may no longer be regarded as ‘visiting foreign researcher’ if they can contribute to the work of the organisation. Schiller suggests making ethnographic approaches more collaborative to go beyond participant observation (2018: 9; cf. 2016). Her fieldwork as ‘research trainee’ in municipal organisations in three European cities prompted her to reflect on the directionality and character of fieldwork relations, and the conceptions of her own role. As Schiller (2018) shows, research placements offer insights into participants’ everyday routines and allow researchers to participate in those, which can help understand practices and attitudes through first-hand observations and experiences rather than a reliance on narratives and accounts of those routines.

2.6.3 Language learning as ethnographic method

Abercrombie (2017, 2020) proposes language learning as a method to study social relations, attitudes about and perceptions of language. In processes of formal and informal learning among Roma in Kosovo, Abercrombie participates in and observes language practices, through which she aims to better understand language ideologies. Typically, language is treated as a skill necessary for the research, which ethnographers are expected to have acquired prior to fieldwork. Abercrombie, in contrast, understands language learning as part of the ethnographic process (2017: 79) for its potential to offer invaluable insights into participants’ language practices and beliefs, webs of relations and perceptions of group membership, and how language affects social positioning. As Abercrombie points out, language teaching in both informal and formal settings often reflects what people consider a Standard or ‘correct’ variety. Abercrombie (2017: 74) reports that the way participants taught her to speak the Romani language was often different from how they spoke themselves, which revealed ideologies about language.
Being corrected on her use of Romani

opened up a range of avenues for [her] to understand the way people qualify and legitimise certain speech practices at the expense of others, and the way the normative metalinguistic discourse about speech practices diverges from the practices themselves. (2017: 126)

Abercrombie concludes that, rather than trying to learn what the ethnographer may perceive as ‘authentic’, a focus on the process of learning and people’s resistance to teaching ‘everyday’ variants or mixing resources offers invaluable insights. The following section focuses on the value of analysing written language use on signs to explore practices, ideologies and forms of identity construction.

2.6.4 Linguistic Landscapes: ‘language’ and ‘community’ in space

Linguistic landscapes (LL) – written language use on commercial signs and public signs, posters, spontaneously produced notices, and other forms of text displayed in public space (Landry & Bourhis 1997) – has been argued to visualise some of the effect of ‘super-diversity’ on linguistic repertoires and practices, as well as processes of identity formation and negotiation (Blommaert 2013c; Leeman & Modan 2009). Introducing the term semiotic landscapes, Jaworski & Thurlow (2010) emphasise that meaning making is multi-modal, and written language is only one among many semiotic resources that may be relevant (cf. Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006). Furthermore, there has been a focus on how LL serves functions beyond strictly communicative ones (Landry & Bourhis 1997; Cook 2013), offering rich insights into language ideologies and identities (Hult 2018; Blackwood & Tufi 2012).

Notions of ‘place’ and ‘space’ have been a central concern in LL research (Peck et al. 2018; Vandenbroucke 2015; Amos 2016). The geographical distribution and clustering of languages on signage has been argued to demarcate and negotiate ownership of space, turning ‘place’ in to socially meaningful ‘space’ (Jaworski & Thurlow 2010; Blackwood et al. 2016). The LL reflects how space is imagined, represented, and enacted by its inhabitants (Blommaert 2010: 63; Scollon & Scollon 2003), embodying the localised “symbolic construction of public space” (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). LL has been suggested to help create a sense of collective identity, positioning readers and their language resources in relation to signs in space (Blommaert 2013b). In this way, the LL serves as an arena for constructions and representations of identities (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006).

The notion of ‘community’ was used in early LL research without explicit theorising or questioning of the concept, taking for granted the traditional understanding of ‘community’ as based on ‘language boundaries’. Accordingly, publicly displayed language signs document the presence of
linguistically identifiable and rather homogeneous groups of people (cf. Landry & Bourhis 1997; Backhaus 2007; Barni 2008). Landry & Bourhis (1997: 45) for example consider LL “the most salient marker of perceived in-group versus out-group vitality”. Studies exploring LL in linguistically diverse settings have used ‘community’ to refer to immigrant groups and their language practices in LL for communication and identity negotiations, understanding signs as an emblematic expression of group belonging (Barni & Bagna 2010). With growing awareness of the complexities of language practices, more recent LL research has increasingly problematised traditional understandings of ‘community’. Analysing Bangkok’s LL, Huebner (2006) finds instances of code-mixing and shows how the fuzziness of language boundaries “calls into question the boundaries of a speech community” (2006: 50). Blommaert (2013b) and Blommaert & Maly (2014) aim to acknowledge the complex rather than straightforward relationships between language use and social groups. Blackwood et al. (2016) present studies that discuss the heterogeneity of identity constructions and negotiations in the LL. Blackwood (2018) investigates the written use of Guadeloupean Creole in the LL of the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe as expression of collective identity, pointing to the dynamically changing, negotiated and symbolic character of ‘community’.

Woldemariam & Lanza (2015) show how written language in the LL can serve to construct an “imagined community” and “imagined space” in the diaspora setting. Focusing on written language use on signs in the “Ethiopian transnational community” of Washington DC, Woldemariam & Lanza (2015: 172) explore how the LL serves as a “strategy among a diaspora community not only to maintain a transnational identity but also to construct a unique identity in the recipient society” (2015: 173). This imaginary community identity is described as being built on the myth of the old ‘homeland’, while including a unique African identity in a new homeland with other Africans as well as African Americans. The semiotic landscape is seen as a way to construct a symbolic link to the homeland, “in many cases involving the creation of an imagined community – one that perpetuates the image of Ethiopia at the time of the diaspora’s initial exodus” (2015: 186f.) A recent special issue on constructions of ‘community’ in the LL (Gaiser & Matras 2020a) collects papers that take various approaches and perspectives to exploring instances of performing community practices (cf. Reershemius 2020; Themistocleous 2020; Ziegler et al. 2020; Matras & Gaiser 2020).

The presence or absence of languages in the LL has the potential to reaffirm or negotiate relations of power between individuals and groups of actors, and researchers have emphasised the traditional links between LL and LPP (Van Mensel et al. 2016; Landry & Bourhis 1997; Backhaus 2007). Shohamy (2015) reviews previous LL research to explore the value of LL for the field of LP: LL may reflect locally constructed policies and their contestation, as well as having the potential to enhance policy awareness. Shohamy (2015, 2006) understands LL as a “mechanism”
for creating and negotiating de facto language policy (and thus de facto language use), alongside with declared policies, language tests, and ideology. Accordingly, “the presence (or absence) of language displays in the public space communicates a message, intentional or not, conscious or not, that affects, manipulates or imposes de facto language policy and practice” (2006: 110; cf. Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). In this way, LL is believed to indicate or may serve to negotiate who holds power in a given setting.

Methodologically, there has been an increasing focus on ethnographic approaches in LL research, using for example interviews or walking tours (see Blommaert 2013b; Garvin 2010) in addition to photos of language use and other semiotic means. However, most research has focused on LL as a practice in its own right rather than in inter-relation with other social practices. Furthermore, LL research typically focuses on LL in public space and has largely disregarded writing in private settings. I introduce the notion of ‘private’ LL and draw on Shohamy’s (2006, 2015) understanding of LL as a way of establishing or questioning LP, in the context of wider practices.

2.7 Conclusion

The above discussions have implications for my methodological and theoretical framework. Understanding constructions, performances and experiences of ‘Arabic communities’ in Manchester requires looking beyond ‘language boundaries’, across space, and beyond institutionally framed notions of interpersonal connections to acknowledge complex and fluid forms of interaction and encounter, participation and negotiation, and notions of commonality. It is important to pay attention not only to explicit and purposeful ways of creating ties and performing ‘community’, but also to fluid encounters. To acknowledge the importance of people’s routes as a form of creating belonging and identity (cf. Blokland 2017), there is a need to explore how individuals’ past migration routes may be relevant to their present and future understandings of ‘community’.

Social interaction and language use in the city must not be separated from the urban setting but understood as shaped by the dynamics and encounters the city facilitates. I draw on what has been referred to as urban sociolinguistics, according to which we do ethnography not simply in the city, but also of the city (Lamarre 2013: 3; Smakman & Heinrich 2017).

Assessments and hierarchisations of language resources shape everyday practices and can help understand processes of meaning-making and categorising (Collins & Slemrouck 2007). I see practised language policies as important indications of how language users understand and value ‘language’. As the notion of ‘regime’ brings together power relations, notions of legitimacy, and the various levels and scales at which policies are negotiated, I draw on this concept to
contextualise policies and practised policies, as well as their uptake. Following Blommaert et al. (2005a) I use the term interactional regime, emphasising the emergent nature of social processes, fluidity of language resources and multi-modal nature of communication. I draw on the concept of ‘scales’ to support my analysis and enrich the notion of linguistic hierarchies (Karatsareas 2020), showing how the hierarchical assessment of linguistic resources takes place not on one single, fixed hierarchy as resources are given value dynamically in interaction (see Silverstein 2003; Blommaert 2007).

In terms of data analysis, I embrace the shift away from bound, a priori categories to understand language practices as fluid and in inter-relation with structures and processes of the environment (Lamarre 2013: 3; Pennycook 2010: 128; Blommaert 2013b). Likewise, traditional understandings of ‘community’ based on enumerable language categories or the nation-state cannot capture the complex reality of social relations in superdiverse urban settings, as they emphasise homogeneity at the expense of diversity and difference (Bessant 2018; Rampton 2006). At the same time, however, categorisation and constructions of ‘difference’ are normal processes of human meaning-making (Blommaert et al. 2005b). This thesis therefore acknowledges that ‘languages’ and ‘communities’ as social constructs may very well be relevant to language users. As Blommaert points out, “[i]t is not because Languages ‘do not exist’ that the belief in their existence cannot have powerful effects” (2013c: 4). Similarly, the notion of ‘community’ for many remains an important signifier of collective social life (Bessant 2018: 2). Busch (2012) points out that discursive constructions of national, ethnic, and social affiliation shape the perception of language resources; thus, “To simply wish away categories is not sufficient” (2012: 17). Accordingly, participants may experience ‘languages’ and ‘communities’ as ideological categories significant to their own sense of self, relations to ‘others’ and belonging in the diverse setting. The experiences and meanings that language users attribute to their resources and social relations are crucial in addressing the research questions posed in this thesis.
3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methodological implications of superdiversity discussed in Chapter 2 are reflected in this study’s holistic, participatory approach. Rather than focus on a single field site and a priori defined number of research participants, the research follows participants’ connections, associations, and practices as individuals and groups to better understand notions of ‘language’ and ‘community’. The study combines different ethnographic methods and forms of engagement with multiple actors to collect different forms of data. This framework is intended to provide the insights needed to answer my research questions, shedding light on the use and management of language resources, the factors shaping perceived linguistic hierarchies, and relations between language and social relations. Interested in both actual practices and the ‘image’ of Arabic across usage domains, I study practices in relation to self-reports about participants’ understandings, assessments and experiences of ‘language’ and ‘community’. This chapter offers an account of and the rationale for the methodological framework developed.

First, I discuss the ideas behind the research design, which takes into consideration both practices and policies as well as accounts thereof. Second, I offer an overview of the methods used in each of the settings. I present the rationale of integrating different methods and approaches across sites in the city and explain how this serves to address the research questions of this thesis. Third, I introduce the data analysis methods used. Finally, I reflect on the limitations and shortcomings as well as strategies to overcome them.

3.2 Research philosophy

This thesis aims to recognise the complexity of language practices in the globalised city through complexity in methodology. The uniqueness of the methodological framework developed lies in the combination of research methods and data across sites: This thesis explores practices and reported practices of a plurality of actors and groups of actors; a plurality of complex linguistic repertoires rather than bounded ‘languages’; of sites that are interconnected through actors and practices; of modes of communication (written and spoken, online and offline); and of perspectives on heritage languages in Manchester (providers and users of language provisions, teachers and learners of Arabic). The plurality of methods across sites allows for a plurality of observation modes and ways of participation and engagement. Finally, the combination of settings and modes of observation and participation results in a plurality of data that aims to do justice to the complexities and fluidity of ‘language’ and ‘community’ practices in the diverse city.
3.3 Methodological framework

Figure 7 offers an overview of the main elements of my methodological framework. Fieldwork was conducted between January 2018 and March 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLURALITY OF SITES</th>
<th>FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>DATA COLLECTION METHODS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Family case study</td>
<td>o Observation</td>
<td>o Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Three supplementary schools</td>
<td>o Participation</td>
<td>o Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Four Businesses</td>
<td>o (Informal) interviews</td>
<td>o Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Public sector-based Interpreting &amp; Translation (I&amp;T) Service</td>
<td>o Focus group discussions</td>
<td>o Participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7. Overview of methodological framework

3.3.1 Sites

As Lamarre (2013) emphasises, language and social practices are not bound by neighbourhoods, as speakers move across the city and show dynamic and flexible uses of their language repertoires. Throughout the fieldwork I explored practices and engagement with actors across four sites: a family setting, supplementary schools, businesses, and a public-sector based (I&T) Service. Thus, the key actors for this study represent private individuals, actors engaging in so-called “community” initiatives, commercial settings, as well as actors involved in language provisions from the public sector perspective. These settings differ in the role that ‘language’ plays: The family case study explores practices among individuals who use and make efforts to maintain forms of Arabic, alongside English. As for Arabic Supplementary schools, language is the explicit agenda. Their work evolves explicitly around the formal learning of Arabic (i.e. in the classroom). Such bottom-up initiatives involve a variety of actors (e.g. head teacher, teachers, pupils, pupils’ parents), and their work is often shaped by a complex web of relations with other
community organisations, private and public actors. Supplementary schools are less private than the family setting, yet there is often close familiarity between actors. Membership in this setting is by choice. My investigation of businesses explores the role of Arabic in transactional communication and how it is used in customer contact, marketing, and interaction among staff. At the City Council-based I&T unit, the Arabic language becomes a service to bridge communication between Arabic speakers with limited proficiency and public service providers, thus a response to language needs. This selection of settings covers various perspectives on ‘language’ and ‘community’, and the values attributed to linguistic resources in users’ repertoires differ considerably across field sites. Each site creates a space in the city that encourages certain activity routines among actors, activates different repertoire components, and may bring to the fore particular ideologies and attitudes toward ‘language’ and ‘community’. My fieldwork allowed for systematic observations of practices across sites where participants live, work, do their shopping, meet to socialise. In addition, the framework integrates a blended online-offline approach (see Dong 2016; Georgalou 2019; Blommaert 2019) to recognise the intersection between these dimensions in today’s communication patterns.

As the different sites investigated in this research were shaped by dynamics unique to the respective setting and actor constellations, these methods and forms of engagement were combined in different ways across the settings. However, the four settings are not understood as separate ecologies, but as part of the wider urban setting where actors move across settings and social roles.

My in-depth research across the case study settings was complemented by fieldwork visits to other relevant initiatives and organisations, e.g. an Arabic Church in Manchester, as well as engagement with public sector contacts and a range of Arabic supplementary schools in Manchester. Such one-off visits cannot, of course, provide the comprehensive picture that was achieved through immersion in the case study settings, but they were useful for comparison across settings and helped avoid researcher bias.  

---

20 For reasons of space these cannot be discussed here.
3.3.2 Forms of engagement

In each setting, my immersion was shaped by various forms of engagement (or researcher perspectives), and for each of these I used a combination of methods to collect data. As researcher and placement student, I took detailed fieldnotes, conducted interviews and facilitated focus groups, collected documents, photographed Linguistic Landscapes (LL) signs and took screenshots of online practices. As language learner, I observed and participated in practices at the sites and established trust with participants. While the role of ‘student researcher’ is arguably the default role when engaging with participants as part of doctoral research, the perspectives of language learner and Multilingual Manchester (MLM) researcher are specific to this thesis and deserve some attention.

Language learner

Following Abercrombie (2017), I understand language learning as method to engage with participants and participate in their activities. Language learning practices in the family setting were informal and based on a language exchange, shaping a reciprocal relationship with participants around learning and teaching English and Arabic. In the supplementary school, a setting for formal language learning, my engagement with actors revolved specifically around language, among other learners of Arabic. In both settings, my routine and long-term engagement allowed me to move from participant observer to observing participant (Moeran 2009). In the business sites and I&T service, my learning of Arabic was not an explicit aim of the engagement but facilitated access to fieldwork sites and helped establish rapport.

Outside the four sites defined as research sites, I engaged in two further settings in the role as language learner: First, I took a ‘Beginners’ Arabic’ class during the first year of this research (2017/2018) at the University of Manchester’s Language Centre, focusing on Modern Standard Arabic. This offered me an opportunity to learn about other students’ motivations to study Arabic and their perceptions of the role of Arabic locally and translocally. Informal interviews with the teacher, who also teaches at a local supplementary school during the weekend, increased my understanding of attitudes towards the language and varieties, in terms of which varieties should or should not be taught in which settings, and why.

Second, in July/August 2018, I undertook intensive Arabic language training in Israel/Palestine focusing on spoken (non-Standard) Palestinian Arabic. I attended a formal 10-day intensive course in Jerusalem, where I had one-on-one classes and interacted with other learners. Following this, I spent 2 weeks with the case study supplementary school’s head teacher, who had invited me to join her and her family in her hometown in Palestine.
This offered various opportunities to learn more about the role of Arabic for her and her family across settings and gave me a better understanding of the translocal dynamics and networks.

The two latter language learning experiences offered important language training in written and spoken forms of Arabic, which in itself was a crucial prerequisite for my fieldwork. Additionally, prior to my doctoral research, I took the course “Introduction to Spoken Arabic” at the University of Manchester in 2016 and acquired some spoken and written Arabic through private contacts.

**Multilingual Manchester researcher**

The research for this thesis was embedded in my longstanding engagement with relevant public, voluntary sector and private actors as Research Assistant on the MLM research unit (The University of Manchester), which offered additional perspectives, breadth of knowledge and helped establish contacts prior to the doctoral fieldwork. At MLM I carried out large-scale data collection and research on LL, as well as working on language provisions in Manchester’s health care settings and language maintenance. From February 2017 I co-ordinated a support network for supplementary schools. In this capacity, I held regular meetings for supplementary school staff, in which we discussed any developments and challenges faced by schools. I co-organised teacher training for supplementary school teachers, among other events and activities, which offered me valuable insights into practices and needs. Between June 2019 and March 2021 I was involved in a survey of 25 supplementary schools in Manchester, based on interviews with staff and questionnaires with parents (see Matras et al. forthcoming). As part of this research, we conducted hour-long interviews with five Arabic supplementary schools in Manchester, three of which are the case study schools of this thesis. This MLM research thus offered an additional form of engagement with the schools and insights into their practices. Finally, through MLM, I had access to School Census data and data on I&T demand.

My various forms of engagement are not to be understood as mutually exclusive or clearly distinguishable. Rather, there was an interplay of roles of engagement within and across sites, across time and participants. See Section 3.6.4 for ethical considerations.

**3.3.3 Data collection methods**

I conducted informal conversational interviews (Copland & Creese 2015; O’Reilly 2012) with parents and adult children in the family setting; with teachers, head teachers, parents and pupils at supplementary schools; with business owners, staff and clients across commercial settings; with staff and interpreters and translators for Arabic at the I&T unit. These interviews took between 10 and 30 minutes, depending on my interlocutors’ availabilities. Some of these were held
impromptu (Gobo 2008, Agar 2008), while others had been scheduled. During these typically one-on-one conversations at the fieldwork site, I ensured that participants guided the conversation and discussed what they perceived as relevant (Agar 2008). I therefore did not use lists of written questions but instead followed the interlocutor’s narration, from which my questions emerged. Through such informal interviews, I intended to engage in mutual conversations and avoid hierarchical relationships between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ (cf. Copland & Creese 2015).

I conducted one focus group in the family setting and, as MLM researcher, a group interview with two teachers and the head teacher at the case study supplementary school. The latter was conducted as part of a wider engagement activity with the school within MLM’s support platform. These discussions served to elicit participants’ self-reports about practices and beliefs, encourage reflections about specific issues I had identified during the fieldwork, get clarification on anything I was unsure about, and to assess and check my observations and interpretations with participants (Copland & Creese 2015).

During observation and participation, I took extensive and systematic fieldnotes following each fieldwork visit to record and reflect on observations as well as theoretical issues (cf. Blommaert & Dong 2010), totalling to more than 250 pages across settings. As I often relied on memory to record my observations in writing, these reflections were done as soon as possible after the fieldwork encounter (cf. Copland & Creese 2015: 35), to ensure accuracy of notes taken and to be able to capture as many impressions as possible. I took fieldnotes whenever appropriate, without obstructing interactions with participants. I distinguished between observational notes, i.e. rough notes taken in the field, and fieldnotes, taken with more time after fieldwork visits. The more detailed, reflective and analytically engaged fieldnotes, which involved interpretation and reflections on my own positioning as well as descriptions of the settings, were typically based on observational notes. I used the software NVivo 12 (2018) to record and organise my notes.

3.3.4 Data as forms of practice

My data include notes detailing my observations of practices and notes on participants’ self-reports of practices, focusing on language choice and variation, meta-linguistic comments and discourses on language use and attitudes; transcriptions of interviews and focus groups; photos and screenshots of written practices (offline and online); documents (policy documents, teaching materials, lesson plans, curricula, promotion and information materials, etc.). I used a research diary to record and reflect on my own practices (research activities, thoughts and feelings throughout the research process, methodological decisions).
Informal interviews and group interviews

The participants’ reports on their own and others’ uses of language resources, as well as attitudes, were regarded as practices and understood within the larger genre of their respective elicitation method. As opposed to observations of actual practices, interviews and focus groups were more likely to provide insights into what participants wanted me to know or think about their practices. As Talmy and Richards (2011) note, interviews do not necessarily generate complete or accurate versions of interviewees’ perspectives but offer only a partial representation of reality or reconstruction of events and practices. Irrespective of whether participants’ self-reports reflected the truth or not, they offered insights into the ways they idealised or problematised particular forms of language use, as well as wider attitudes and ideologies. In interviews meaning is discursively co-constructed by interlocutors (Baynham 2011). Interviewees’ aims to satisfy the interviewer, which may be triggered by the interview situation as such, will influence their behaviour. While I attempted to keep unstructured interviews and focus groups as informal as possible, the above complexities were taken into account when interpreting interview data.

Linguistic Landscapes and practices beyond the signs

Exploring the presence of Arabic in the LL shed light on written language practices and helped explore relations between actors and the city, offering insights into the “spatiality of language” (Pennycook 2010). Across fieldwork sites, I photographed written language use in public spaces and, with permission from participants, ‘private’ LL inside the family home, supplementary schools and businesses. I recorded the written presence of Arabic on items that may be permanent and semi-permanent ‘stationary’ signs (e.g. shop signs, posters, handwritten notes), or ‘movable’ (e.g. vehicles, clothes) (Reh 2004), visible across the selected fieldwork sites and across the city. My analyses of signs were mainly qualitative (see 3.5). To get a quantitative overview of Manchester’s LL, I used LinguaSnapp (2016) to map the presence of written Arabic on signs and explore its patterns of use and functions across space (see Gaiser & Matras 2021 on using smartphones to document LL). At the time of writing, the corpus of nearly 2500 signs contained over 400 images of items featuring Arabic in Manchester (often combined with other languages). This corpus has been collected by colleagues and students at the University of Manchester, of whom I was one, since 2015. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the corpus were accompanied by ethnographic observations and informal interviews at the sites.

---

21 The LinguaSnapp corpus has been collected over time and does not necessarily reflect the current state of the dynamic LL.
Displays of written language use were explored in their wider meaning as forms of practice, i.e. not isolated but integrated into other types of practices and practice routines. Language use in the LL reflects, promotes and establishes practices, beyond the very ‘instance’ of language practice that is visually represented and materialised by the sign and its writing. I thus understand my explorations of public and private LL as part of a general account of (language) practices in the multilingual setting, where sign-writers and -readers are, similar to speakers, hearers and social media users, seen as actors whose creative uses of linguistic repertoires and complex interaction patterns may reflect or challenge notions of ‘community’ and ‘language’. Creating and reading, as well as reacting to, LL signs are seen as integrated parts of wider communication practices, as well as performance spaces to use language repertoires for communicative and/or symbolic negotiations.

*Online practices*

Blommaert & Maly (2019) point to the new social reality in which offline and online dimensions of action and identity form a unified system. The interplay of offline with online practices creates a need to combine both into a comprehensive analysis of interaction. In this thesis, written language use online was analysed as part of a general account of language practices in the globalised setting. I explored the online presence of those institutions and businesses that served as key participants, focusing on publicly accessible social media interaction and websites. The analysis of online practices was intended to offer insights into inter-relations between local and trans-local practices, and the potential transnational nature of ‘communities’. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, however, it was not feasible to capture a comprehensive profile of online practices for individual actors.

3.4 Overview: Methods across settings

Chapters 4-7 each draw on one or several ethnographically informed case studies. The map below (Figure 8) shows a map of Manchester, with numbers indicating the research sites.
3.4.1 Family case study

Chapter 4 is based on regular and longitudinal ethnographic engagement with a Syrian family, who came to Manchester as refugees. Contact with this family was made through the case study supplementary school: In early 2018 I was approached by the mother, who volunteered as teacher at the school and asked whether I might be interested in a language exchange. She suggested she could help me improve my Arabic while I might be able to support her and her husband with their English. Having identified this as an opportunity for observations of family practices and language learning, I asked whether the family might be interested in participating in this research while doing the proposed language exchange (see 3.6.4 for ethical considerations). My engagement with this family thus had, from the start, an explicit focus on ‘language’, initiated originally by participants themselves.

The parents Aaya and Nasri have four sons and one daughter, all born in Syria (see Figure 9).
My engagement included regular visits to the family home (see 1 and 2 in Figure 8) as language learner and teacher and informal interviews with family members during these visits, as well as regular interaction outside my visits via mobile phone. Fieldwork took place from March 2018 until October 2020. Between March 2018 and March 2019, I visited the family weekly for approximately two hours; from April 2019 my visits were fortnightly, lasting approximately three hours each. In December 2019, I carried out an hour-long focus group interview with the family. Due to COVID-19 social distancing rules, we drastically reduced face-to-face contact from March 2020 but kept in regular contact over the phone. My face-to-face engagement with the family amounted to approximately 240 hours in total.

Initially, research visits were centred explicitly around Arabic and English teaching and learning, as well as conversations about attitudes towards language varieties, the family’s general situation in Manchester, and any challenges they faced in relation to interaction with various actors in the Manchester setting. Over time, I developed a closer relationship with the family. I was invited to join for lunches and dinners, providing opportunities to observe family members’ language use at a time and place they would typically get together as a family also outside the research. During Ramadan, I was invited to break fast with the family and to join other celebrations. Furthermore, I engaged with the mother during activities that did not have an explicit focus on language learning, yet offered opportunities to speak about language beliefs and attitudes (e.g. cooking, baking).

While interviews have been used in Family Language Policy (FLP) research,24 this thesis pilots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Arrival in the UK</th>
<th>Age (at start of fieldwork, March 2018)</th>
<th>Participation in focus group discussion?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Aaya</td>
<td>2017 Mid 50ies</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Nasri</td>
<td>2015 Mid 50ies</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son 1</td>
<td>Tareq</td>
<td>2019 23</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son 2</td>
<td>Faiz</td>
<td>2017 18</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son 3</td>
<td>Yasser</td>
<td>2017 17</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son 4</td>
<td>Mohammad</td>
<td>2017 15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Farah</td>
<td>2017 10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Family members participant family

24 See for FLP research using interviews: Fogle (2013); Purkarthofer (2019); Kheirkhah (2016); Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia (2018).
the use of a family focus group involving parents and children from one family. At the time of writing, there are no widely published studies in the field that use such family focus groups.\textsuperscript{25} The focus group was carried out 15 months into the fieldwork, after I had established trust and identified issues of interest. It was intended to complement informal interviews about language, discuss and capture on audio-recording relevant ideas that had been voiced over time, and support my interpretation of observations (Copland & Creese 2015: 30). Furthermore, the semi-structured group discussion aimed to give participants a dedicated space to address any language-related issues they perceived as relevant as well as reflecting on their own language repertoires and practices. The focus group lasted approximately one hour, involving both parents and three sons (i.e. all family members who were available and at an age approved by University of Manchester Ethics Committee). The discussion was based on a topic guide I had prepared in advance, covering but not fixed to the following themes:

- Language biographies
- Language practices and language policies
- Language maintenance efforts, use of media
- Language attitudes
- Future aspirations

I gave participants the opportunity to ask questions during the interview and encouraged them to raise any issues they perceived as relevant. The focus group discussion was held mainly in English, but participants were invited to use any linguistic and non-linguistic resources they felt most comfortable with. The sons participating in the focus group, who are fluent in both Arabic and English, helped bridge any communication difficulties during the discussion, thus similar to any interaction we had outside the focus group. I transcribed the audio recording for thematic analysis (for transcript and transcription conventions see Appendix C).

Conceptualising the family as a Community of Practice (CoP) – a social unit that has its norms for speaking and believing – the focus group with family members was a useful method to allow for and encourage interactive discussions among relevant participants. This form of engagement with participants provided the focus on practice that the CoP approach highlights, relevant in understandings of FLP (Lanza 2020). I deemed it particularly important to include children in the discussion. This helped me explore their language ideologies and perceptions of their agency in FLP processes, acknowledging children’s roles in shaping FLP.

\textsuperscript{25} But see Nandi (2018) and O’Rourke & Nandi (2019) for a study using focus groups with parents/couples across families and Little (2017) for the use of “family interviews” to explore family language identities (but not specifically FLP).
To maintain an informal atmosphere, I did not voice- or video-record in the family home outside the focus group. I conducted several unstructured interviews with family members. Taking notes during my visits was not disruptive, since I was constantly taking notes in my capacity as Arabic learner (and was even invited and expected by participants to do so). On three occasions during my fieldwork, I reviewed my notes and observations together with Aaya and Nasri, to avoid any misunderstandings or over-/under-interpretation.

My data include photos of written language use displayed in the home, notes on the use of media (TV, radio, books, online sources), and other "soundscapes" in the home (see Pappenhagen et al. 2016 on soundscapes in the public space). Finally, my dataset includes text and voice messages I exchanged with the mother via a mobile phone messenger app throughout the fieldwork period. As in face-to-face meetings, language choice in the messenger chat was flexible, using both Arabic and English.

The decision to explore the ‘family’ as a research site as opposed to the ‘home’ is based on the fact that ‘home’ shifts focus to the geographical setting, a confined space within the city. ‘Family’, on the other hand, is not a physical site but an imagined site of what family is and where family members interact in a more or less private space. It has less of a spatial dimension to it and accounts for translocal connections among family members and thus various interpretations of who belongs to a ‘family’ (cf. Lanza & Lomeu Gomes 2020). Speaking about ‘family’ rather than ‘home’ as a setting allowed me to move out of the family space somewhat into ‘diasporic community spaces’ beyond the confines of the home.

3.4.2 Supplementary school case studies

Chapter 5 on language maintenance in supplementary schools is based on fieldwork with staff, pupils and parents across three Arabic supplementary schools in Manchester: Manchester Libyan Community School (see ③ in Figure 8), Damascene School (④), and the focus case study school Manchester Arabic School (⑤). This selection was intended to represent a variety of supplementary schools covering a range of aims and focus, lengths of time established in the city, populations and teaching locations. In addition, the schools’ readiness to welcome me as researcher and willingness to meet and talk about their school played a role in the selection. For the focus case study school, Manchester Arabic School (McrAS), contact with the school’s head teacher was established prior to my doctoral research in my capacity as research assistant at MLM, when she was head teacher at a different Arabic supplementary school. When launching McrAS in December 2017, she accepted me as PhD student and language learner for longitudinal
fieldwork. Manchester Libyan Community School (MLCS) was selected for the study after I had started the research, partly inspired by teachers and pupils at McrAS who perceived “the Libyan school” as relevant for my study on ‘communities’. Since this thesis is intended to acknowledge participants’ understandings of ‘language’ and ‘community’ and take into account what language users deemed important for me to learn about, I followed this suggestion. The Damascene School (DS) is, like McrAS, a newly established school, whose head teacher and staff I contacted at the start of my research.

Fieldwork at the Libyan and Damascene schools consisted of visits to the schools and informal hour-long interviews with the schools’ head teachers and staff (January 2019 at MLCS; November 2018 at DS). At the Libyan school, I had the opportunity to interview a former pupil in her early twenties (November 2018). Two semi-structured (audio-recorded) interviews with staff and head teachers at both schools (in 2019 with DS; in 2020 with MLCS) as part of a recent MLM survey supported my findings. My fieldwork in the focus case study school McrAS was longitudinal, based on immersion, participation and observation of routine practices as language learner. From January 2017 until June 2019, during a period of 15 months, I attended weekly Arabic lessons at the supplementary school (Saturdays, 10am – 3:30pm), totalling more than 290 hours of engagement.

**Focus case study: Manchester Arabic School**

My longitudinal involvement at McrAS put me in the position of an observing participant (Moeran 2009). My immersion and participation offered me opportunities to accompany and experience the process of setting up and running an Arabic supplementary school in Manchester and allowed insights into decision-making processes, teacher and pupil recruitment, organisation of learner groups, interaction outside the classroom, and of course the teaching itself. I had the opportunity to attend a variety of classes (Beginners’, GCSE and adult learner groups), and to carry out one-off observations in additional learner groups (“non-speakers” and pre-GCSE). In Beginners’ and adult classes, the level of Arabic taught was basic and the language of instruction was mostly English. My participation in the GCSE class offered complementary insights, i.e. exam-focused Arabic teaching where pupils’ proficiency levels allowed classroom interaction to be in Arabic.

---

26 I made the conscious decision to use the real names of the three participating supplementary schools in this thesis. The names form part of the schools’ positionings in Manchester and therefore play a role in the wider argument of this thesis. Furthermore, photos and screenshots of offline and online LL clearly identify the institutions; removing any school names and other identifiers from these data would have made them less meaningful in supporting my argument. This did not pose any major ethical issues, as my decision to use the schools’ names was coordinated and agreed upon with the relevant head teachers. Of course, any personal names throughout this thesis are pseudonyms (see 3.6.4 on ethical considerations).
Break times offered important opportunities to carry out short unstructured interviews with teachers and engage with parents. Furthermore, I had access to teaching materials and curricula. My engagement with McrAS further included participation in school events.

My research differs from recent studies on Arabic supplementary schools in the UK (Szczepek Reed et al. 2020a, b) in that interviews and focus groups were conducted as part of longitudinal and close engagement with actors in the supplementary school setting, rather than during one-off visits. Also, my study included recently arrived teachers and learners.

During language lessons in the classroom, I recorded my observations in the form of observational notes. Since it was normal for pupils to take notes during lessons, this did not necessarily mark me out as ‘different’ from other learners. Outside the classroom, I focused on interaction with participants since note-taking would have foregrounded my researcher role.

As the only adult learner in the Beginners’ and GCSE groups, my presence was rather marked for the most part of my fieldwork in these classes. For a period of approximately 2 months, a woman in her thirties joined the GCSE class as she was preparing to take the exam to enhance her career prospects, but for the most part of my participation, I was the only adult in the GCSE classroom (besides the teacher). The presence of more than one adult in a classroom at McrAS is not unusual per se, as most teachers have teaching assistants who sit with pupils rather than with the teacher at the front of the room. Yet, the fact that my role was that of an adult learner rather than (assistant) teacher will have undoubtedly shaped the ways in which I was perceived by pupils, in addition to my very role as (German-speaking) researcher learning Arabic.

My observations of spoken language use, meta-linguistic talk, teaching curricula and wider practices were complemented with an analysis of written language use (i.e. Linguistic Landscapes) in the teaching venue, as well as online practices (the school’s website as well as their facebook page).

3.4.3 Business case studies

To explore the use, relevance and roles of Arabic in business settings, I conducted four business case studies of outlets representing hospitality, computer & TV and grocery sectors, located in different neighbourhoods across South, West and Central Manchester (see Figure 8: ⑥ Sheba Café, ⑦ Laptop repair centre, ⑧ Frozen yoghurt outlet, ⑨ Halal Butcher’s). I included businesses located in neighbourhoods where Arabic is not necessarily among the most widely used languages among the population, to discover practices that have not been studied.
The research sites represent diverse residential areas (Hulme, Old Trafford, Eccles) in addition to the city centre; areas with a clustering of longer-established migrants (Old Trafford and Eccles), as well as more recent arrivals and university students (Hulme and City Centre). For three businesses, the use of Arabic in their LLs inspired more comprehensive fieldwork. In selecting the fourth business (a Yemeni-owned café), I followed the indication of a local elderly woman of Yemeni descent who had, in an informal conversation, described it as a “community hub”.

My engagement with participants included systematic observations of everyday practices across the sites and informal unstructured interviews with shop owners and staff over several weeks or months, totalling approximately 50 hours of engagement. Language use in the LL was explored alongside spoken and online practices. My perspective as language learner served as a point of entry to the sites; my initial approach to the businesses was thus language-focused. However, the sites themselves and the reasons for clients and staff to interact are not defined primarily around language, which distinguishes the business sites from the supplementary school setting.

While the overall methodology across field sites was consistent, the exact nature of my engagement differed slightly across the individual business case studies, as further specified where relevant in Chapter 6. I made use of research opportunities as they emerged during fieldwork, with opportunities offered in one setting potentially not being offered in the other. My engagement at businesses ranged from individual visits to more structured longitudinal engagement and a 3-hour observation. For coherence, systematicity and a degree of representativeness and comparability across sites, I ensured that I visited each of the sites at least three times and interacted with a range of participants in each setting, including staff and customers.

I took fieldnotes and reflected on my observations systematically after each of the visits. My observations focused on spoken language choice and written language use in the LL (outdoors, indoors, promotional materials), supplemented by explorations of the selected businesses’ online representations. For my informal interviews with staff and clients, I focused on attitudes about language choice, language maintenance and the perceived importance of Arabic in Manchester business settings, as well as self-reports about language practices.

3.4.4 Interpreting & Translation service

Chapter 7 is based on fieldwork at Manchester City Council’s in-house Interpreting and Translation (I&T) unit, one of the city’s main providers of language services and one of the largest public sector-based I&T Service in the UK. It offers interpreting services to facilitate interaction
between public service providers and the city’s residents with limited English proficiency. Additionally, it offers a walk-in service for translations available to the wider public.

Drawing on Schiller’s (2018) method of research traineeships, I carried out a six-months placement to facilitate observant participation at the I&T unit. The placement was set up through a longstanding collaboration between MLM and the I&T unit. It took place from November 2018 until April 2019, where I spent 6 hours weekly in the city-centre office (in Figure 8), totalling 120 hours.

I worked under the supervision of and together with I&T officers and manager, as well as a number of professional in-house interpreters and translators. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to meet and shadow the work of various freelance interpreters and translators for Arabic as well as other languages. As part of my observant participation, I conducted informal interviews with eight interpreters and translators for Arabic. The placement itself involved a range of explicit tasks such as monitoring and assessing data on I&T requests and exploring fluctuations in demand. In addition, I prepared questionnaires and interview guides for semi-structured interviews with interpreters, translators, and service users. Furthermore, I was responsible for entering data from freelancer application forms into a database and joined job interviews. Finally, I participated in several training sessions aimed to prepare new interpreters for their work at the Service. In addition to the days spent at the city-centre office, I had the opportunity to support two Language Assessments in South Manchester, oral exams for candidates working towards the ‘Community Interpreting’ qualification. I accompanied qualified external assessors who tested candidates on their ability to translate and interpret and participated in role plays forming part of the candidates’ assessment.

My fieldwork through the placement was complemented with my engagement with the service as MLM research assistant. In this capacity, I was invited to attend annual Consultation Meetings (2017, 2018, 2019) that inform staff members about the past year’s performance of the service, any changes in demand, or any other developments. Finally, as a German speaker I was asked to do some German-English translations. I accepted to do a small number of translations, becoming freelance staff at the service.

---

27 Due to the limited time frame of the placement and unforeseen delays, I was not able to carry out the planned interviews.
3.5 Data analysis

As with data collection, the process of data analysis started in Year One and continued up until Year Three of this research. Throughout the analysis, I aimed to describe and understand rather than narrow down or simplify complexity (Copland & Creese 2015; Blommaert & Rampton 2016), requiring continuous coding and re-coding of data and re-definition of themes.

The different datasets required different analysis methods while ensuring continuity and coherence. Figure 10 offers an overview of the types of data and methods of analysis used:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Method of Analysis</th>
<th>Data Storage and Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observational notes and field notes across settings, including notes on informal interviews</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke 2006)</td>
<td>NVivo 12 (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family focus group: audio-recording and transcript (see Appendix B for full transcript)</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke 2006)</td>
<td>NVivo 12 (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents (e.g. photos and PDFs of teaching materials; documents at I&amp;T Service)</td>
<td>Analyses of teaching focus and language choice or understandings of ‘language’</td>
<td>NVivo 12 (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online interaction</td>
<td>Analyses of language choice and content</td>
<td>NVivo 12 (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Offline) LL photos</td>
<td>Mainly qualitative analysis, with a focus on individual sign features; contextually as part of wider LL photos</td>
<td>LinguaSnapp (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research diary</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke 2006)</td>
<td>NVivo 12 (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLM qualitative data</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke 2006)</td>
<td>NVivo 12 (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Video-recorded group interview at McrAS with head teacher and two teachers. Cited in the text as: MLM interview (2018)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Audio-recorded group interview with DS head teacher and teacher. Cited as: MLM interview (2019)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Audio-recorded interviews at MCLS with head teacher and teachers. Cited as: MLM interview (2020a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Interview with McrAS head teacher. Cited as: MLM interview (2020b); conducted and video-recorded online due to Covid-19.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10. Data collected and methods of analysis

For most datasets I used Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke et al. 2015) for identifying, analysing and organising themes and patterns emerging from the data. This included my sets of fieldnotes on observations and interaction with participants across all settings, the
recording and transcript of the family focus group, research diary entries, as well as any data collected in my capacity as MLM researcher. Likewise, I applied Thematic Analysis when analysing any documents collected throughout the fieldwork. I applied a similar approach when exploring online presence and interaction of research participants, exploring how any themes and patterns identified would match with the analyses of other datasets.

Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke et al. 2015) was a suitable method to capture the complexities and richness of the data, for its flexibility and attention to detail. The method helped explore the different perspectives of research participants and generate unanticipated insights, as well as allowing for an inductive, data-driven analysis. The following steps, based on Braun & Clarke (2006), were carried out with individual datasets, and then with the wider corpus of different types of data:

1. Having familiarised myself with the data, I recorded any theoretical and reflective thoughts that emerged.
2. Using NVivo 12 (2018), I systematically worked through the data to generate initial codes. This helped organise data into meaningful groups. Throughout the coding process I related back to my research questions to identify the relevance of particular sections of the data to my overall research. I hierarchised initial codes, taking into account how individual points related to each other.
3. The third step focused on identifying broader themes and sub-themes, by reviewing coded data and identifying areas of similarity and overlap between codes. I ensured these themes emerged from the data rather than being imposed by my research questions. In identifying themes, I looked for routines and repeated practices forming patterns, which involved collapsing or clustering codes. I matched specific themes and sub-themes with relevant examples or excerpts from my fieldnotes or interview transcripts.
4. I reviewed, refined and analysed themes and codes in more detail in relation to the coded data and the entire dataset. I shifted attention to the wider corpus, comparing and contrasting across datasets. Some re-coding was part of this process. I checked whether my observations and analyses were appropriate to address my research questions and moved gradually to a more theoretically informed analysis.
5. In an ongoing process, I scrutinised my themes and codes, in light of newly collected data or recent fieldwork experiences and the literature. Throughout the entire process, I ensured that themes and codes formed a coherent pattern and were each linked to a set of examples from across fieldwork sites.
My analyses of Linguistic Landscapes (LL) were mainly qualitative, focusing on language choice and combination, message content and function, visual arrangement of languages and other multi-modal aspects in individual signs. Individual signs were analysed in their inter-relation with others in the neighbouring LL. I understood the LL of an entire business façade or school corridor as unit of analysis rather than the individual sign. These were, in turn, seen as part of the wider neighbourhood and city LL. The LinguaSnapp interactive map (LinguaSnapp 2021) as well as LinguaSnapp administration sites were used for quantitative analyses for contextualisation, using downloadable LinguaSnapp spreadsheets that list image metadata and analytical data. For ‘private’ LL in the family home or other indoors signs, e.g. in supplementary schools, I took digital photos rather than using the LinguaSnapp app for ethical reasons, as it felt inappropriate to upload photos of private or indoors spaces to the online platform. Since an analysis of ‘private’ signs did not require any mapping across geographic space, the fact that I did not use LinguaSnapp in these settings did not have any negative impact on my analyses.

Each dataset was interpreted in interaction with other types of data in the same setting. For example, my analyses of written language signs inside supplementary schools and online practices of relevant actors were related to observations of language practices and meta-linguistic comments in classrooms and during break times, and dynamic changes in the LL were related to wider events and dynamics in the setting. On a wider scale, findings from across settings were brought into relation with each other, to explore and account for the city setting as a factor shaping and re-shaping practices.

It is important to add a note on terminology: Even though notions such as ‘translanguaging’ are useful to emphasise and understand the reality of flexible uses of linguistic resources, in this thesis I acknowledge the categories as used and oriented to by my participants. While I refer to ‘languages’, I do not intend to suggest that I understand these as bounded entities in my analyses. Where relevant, I point to the fluidity of ‘languaging’ practices. Furthermore, I use the terms old speaker and new speaker to avoid the contested and ambiguous concepts of native speaker and non-native speaker (see O’Rourke & Pujolar 2003; O’Rourke et al. 2015; cf. Rampton 1990 for a critical discussion). Finally, it is worth pointing to the problematic nature of terms such as minority and majority language, mother tongue, heritage language and first or second language. I am aware of the complex and loaded meanings of these terms, as well as their diverse interpretations; I use these terms with caution and where participants made use of them; for reasons of space I refer the reader to Eisenchlas & Schalley (2020) for a critical discussion of these concepts.

---

Adopting an understanding of ‘language’ and ‘community’ as socially constructed rather than bounded entities raised the question of how to research understandings of these notions while avoiding *a priori* categorisation. A strict selection of participants and fieldwork sites before fieldwork would have suggested a drawing of boundaries between who is expected to be part of an Arabic community – therefore included in the research – and who is not – and thus excluded from this research. This, in effect, would have meant that I answer my research questions before doing the research. My aim to capture the complexities and dynamics of social practice required an emerging design of methodology, themes and analysis. Research sites and participants were not strictly pre-defined based on criteria selected prior to fieldwork. The methodology instead evolved during the research process, as my understanding of ‘language’ and ‘community’ practices increased, and emerging questions were followed up on. ‘Ad hoc’ fieldwork, as research opportunities arose, helped discover unexpected correlations and identify settings that emerged as relevant and would develop into fieldwork sites, as well as engaging with actors who became key informants. This process was aided by iterative analysis of data and continuous reflection on fieldnotes and positioning, rather than waiting with analysis until all data was collected. This naturally led me to connect my observations from across sites and encounters during the research, and what emerged from the data shaped my collection and further analysis. Iterative data analysis lessened the impact of subjectivity in data collection and helped avoid imposing the researcher’s perspective on the data (see Blommaert 2012). At the same time, however, there is a potential for bias in terms of the focus of my observations and questions I posed to participants, as reflections on previous observations may have resulted in me ‘searching’ for specific patterns or practices during subsequent fieldwork (see also Copland & Creese 2015: 46). Furthermore, I was conscious of the active role of the researcher in identifying and selecting patterns or themes, taking fieldnotes and reporting on findings (Huang 2016; Erickson 2004). As Rampton et al. (2002: 374) point out, “ethnography requires quite a detailed reflexive account of the researcher’s own activity”, including their position and experiences in data-collection and data-analysis. For example, my identity as international student, who, similar to most key informants, was not born in the UK, may have had an impact on how participants interacted with me and how I was positioned in relation to ‘communities’. My awareness of and continuous reflections on such dynamics and challenges were crucial and helped avoid related pitfalls.

### 3.6.1 Combining datasets

The combination of various types of data is, while having great potential, one of the challenges of this approach. For instance, spoken language in private settings is of course different from writing
in public space, which in turn differs from online practices (see Androutsopoulos 2015). Informal interaction with participant family members over lunch differed from the more formal focus group interview.

However, offline and online, more or less formal, and written and spoken uses of language are all practices language users typically engage in. The fact that these different practices are not easily comparable is the very reason for which I decided to explore them in an integrated manner. Throughout the research process, any differences between forms of data and modes of communication were taken into consideration.

3.6.2 Potential for generalisation and meaningfulness of findings

Typically, researchers are expected to test and produce generalisations (see Small 2009: 15). However, a qualitative focus on individual cases may serve to show only parts of the social reality researched. One of the drawbacks identified for case studies is the lack of generalisability (see e.g. Lanza 1997: 82; Duff 2012: 110). For example, it is difficult to make generalisations based on fieldwork in one family, or based on a combination of case studies in a small number of businesses. However, the multi-layered nature of this study, where fieldwork across various settings is combined to offer a comprehensive perspective on language and community practices, ensures greater robustness and reliability. Previous studies (e.g. Said 2016; Said & Zhu Hua 2017, 2019) have explored language practices in Arabic-English speaking families in the UK, which serve as a point of comparison for the family case study of this thesis. The central aim of this thesis is not to generalise, but to offer case studies that can “speak empirically to other cases” (Small 2009: 5) and thus make more far-reaching statements. The selection of examples and field sites is not intended to offer a representative profile of the different settings. Instead, I draw on my observations to identify examples that illustrate key patterns as part of wider (language and community) practices. In this way, this framework can capture the complex interconnections of sites, actors, and practices, each based on singularity of representation and thus embracing traditional ethnography.

3.6.3 Researching multilingually

My own multilingual repertoire facilitated communication and shaped relationships with participants, creating understanding and trust (see Mar-Molinero 2020). At the same time, the fact that I approached the field as language learner rather than proficient speaker of the language under study raises questions about the validity of observations in terms of any details that go beyond language choice, e.g. the specifics of dialect variation. Moreover, a lack of fluency in
Arabic may have limited the ways in which I was able to interact with participants (see Gibb & Danero Iglesias 2017). However, the focus of this thesis is not linguistic analysis of interaction or an interpretation of linguistic structures, but an exploration of expressed beliefs and attitudes, and how these relate to practices of language and community. My basic knowledge of Standard as well as colloquial forms of Arabic was sufficient to follow classroom conversation in the supplementary school, interaction in businesses and in the family.

Some participants’ limited English proficiencies may have prevented them from sharing their beliefs and experiences. While it is often recommended to use interpreters to overcome communication difficulties during research (see Gibb & Danero Iglesias 2017), this was not perceived as appropriate for this thesis. The use and presence of interpreters would have significantly changed my relationship with participants, as it would have inhibited the development of trust and changed the ways I communicated with participants and was immersed in the settings. Using an interpreter would have backgrounded my very role as language learner. Moreover, the use of interpreters during fieldwork would have made me dependent on this intermediary, with the risk that the interpreter’s perspective adds an additional subjectivity that may not match the interlocutors’ or my own perspective. In interaction with participants who had limited English, for example with parents in the family or staff in supplementary schools, third participants proficient in both English and Arabic often acted as spontaneous interpreters, resulting in several participants joining in and enriching the conversation. In this way, informal interviews and conversations themselves became sites of ‘languaging’ practice.

It is important not to downplay or disregard my own perspective as an actor learning language. Throughout the research process, I paid attention to how I made use of my own language repertoire and the potential impact this may have had.

3.6.4 Ethical considerations

Any ethical issues were carefully considered throughout the research process, to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants, to ensure confidentiality and privacy, and to ensure that participants were fully informed about the research.

I considered ethical issues at several stages during the research, from early research design (e.g. access to fieldwork sites, recruitment of participants) through data collection to data analysis and writing up. Before the start of data collection, this study was approved by the University of Manchester Ethics Committee (Ref: 2018-3841-653). Prior to commencing fieldwork in a given setting, I informed all participants in detail about the research, e.g. by means of participant information sheets (see Appendix B) and additional oral explanations. I discussed with
participants the different methods of data collection (participant observation, informal interviews, focus group discussions, Linguistic Landscapes, online ethnography), how they would be carried out, and what each method involved. I ensured that all individuals who agreed to participate gave informed consent, using University of Manchester consent forms that I had adapted for the purposes of this study. I informed all participants about the principles of confidentiality, the fact that participation was voluntary, their right to withdraw as well as their right to refuse to answer questions or allow me access to fieldwork sites at any point. Finally, I ensured that any questions about the research were answered to the participants’ satisfaction.

Since ‘the field’ was not strictly defined from the outset and new participants joined during ongoing fieldwork, the procedure of obtaining consent was an ongoing process. Furthermore, throughout the fieldwork, I showed participants examples of the collected data, quotes and conversations to ensure their understanding of the kinds of data I was collecting and to reconfirm their consent. At any stage, care was taken to protect participants’ anonymity.

My in-person fieldwork was completed before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, which meant that no Covid-19-specific measures had to be taken to ensure my participants’ and my own safety.

The following sub-sections outline the ethics procedures I implemented at each fieldwork site.

Family setting

As initial contact person, the mother Aaya was the gatekeeper to the family as research site. She was the first family member with whom I discussed the possibility of the family’s participation in this research, and following her initial agreement to take part I offered more information about the study to her husband and their sons. When they agreed to take part, I obtained consent from the family members in writing. The eldest son Tareq, who lived in Egypt when my fieldwork started, was informed about the study via video call during one of my visits to the family home and orally consented to taking part. Following his arrival to the UK in 2019, I obtained informed written consent from Tareq.

The youngest daughter Farah was only 10 years old when I started my fieldwork, which meant that she was not at an age appropriate to consent for her participation in the study. Before starting my fieldwork, I explained my research to her in age-appropriate terms and gave her opportunities to ask questions. I ensured she understood the choice she was being asked about in terms of participation in the study. After Farah confirmed verbally that she was happy to participate in the research, I sought parental consent from her mother: Aaya signed a consent form on behalf of her daughter to confirm that both were happy for Farah to participate in the study and for any statements by her to be used in anonymous form in this thesis. As was clearly defined in the
consent form, any conversations between myself and Farah were always held in the wider context of the family and I was never on my own with her. I did not carry out any formal interviews with Farah, nor did I record any conversations. Due to her young age, Farah did not join the recorded focus group discussion that I conducted with the family.

Throughout my fieldwork in the family setting, I did not take any photos of participants. Any photos of objects (i.e. language signs) I took in the family home were taken with participants’ consent.

**Supplementary schools**

Across the three supplementary schools, all staff members and parents whom I conducted informal interviews with consented to the use of information in this thesis. At the core case study school McrAS, where I participated on a long-term basis, I first informed the head teacher about this study and obtained her permission and written consent to conduct research in her school. In a second step, I informed all McrAS staff and parents whom I engaged with about this study. I obtained informed consent from teachers and parents whom I conducted informal interviews with, and from teachers whose lessons I observed. Throughout my fieldwork, I obtained consent for any additional activities I participated in and used for observations. This included for example my observations at teacher training sessions, for which I had obtained consent from the head teacher. Furthermore, I obtained consent from any ‘new’ participants, e.g. new teachers who joined the school during fieldwork, the woman who joined the GCSE class for two months, and parents/caregivers whom I met in the course of the fieldwork and conducted informal interviews with. For any group interviews I conducted in my capacity as Multilingual Manchester (MLM) researcher, consent was obtained through MLM. I ensured at all times that participants were aware of and felt comfortable with my presence as researcher.

Regarding consent from pupils, age-appropriate information about the research was provided to all pupils at the start of my fieldwork. Likewise, all parents/caregivers were informed about the research in writing, and parental consent was sought. No personal data was collected from parents, staff or children. I did not record any classroom conversations or conversations with/among pupils.

I applied for and received an Enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) certificate for my time at McrAS. In England and Wales, the Enhanced DBS certificate is needed for adults working directly with children. Since all teachers and any other adults carrying out activities at McrAS were DBS-checked, I decided to get this certificate myself, even though all my interactions with children were in the presence of other adults and, strictly speaking, a DBS certificate was not required.
I did not take any photos of participants. When photographing McrAS’s Linguistic Landscapes, I ensured that any individuals who may have been included in any photos were not recognisable in the relevant photos.

Across the three Arabic schools, I informed participants about my intention to observe practices on their public websites and social media pages and obtained consent from the head teachers. My online ethnographic fieldwork included only pages that were publicly accessible (i.e. pages that did not require signing in or becoming a member of a given group), and my analyses focused on institutional practices rather than individual users’ posts.

**Businesses**

Across business sites, I provided participant information sheets for all individuals I interacted with during fieldwork, and all participants consented to the use of information in my thesis, prior to the start of data collection. Any business owners, staff and clients who agreed to do informal interviews with me gave their written consent. I sought parental consent where any children joined fieldwork conversations (e.g. in Sheba Café). I did not collect any personal information and I did not do any recordings. Any photos of signs that I took across the businesses (outdoors and indoors) were taken with participants’ consent. I informed business owners about my intention to observe practices on their public websites and social media pages and obtained consent from business owners.

**Interpreting & Translation setting**

Before the start of my placement, a contract between the Interpreting & Translation (I&T) Service, MLM and myself was prepared and signed by all parties to define the details of the placement, to confirm that it formed part of the fieldwork for my PhD, and for consent. In addition, I provided participant information sheets for and sought consent from all key informants at the I&T Service, i.e. staff, interpreters and translators. My observations at assessments of candidates and shadowing of interpreters were part of the placement activities as defined in the contract and they were covered by the overall consent. I did not study language practices or beliefs of individuals but focused on institutional approaches of language categorisation and evaluation, for which I had obtained consent from I&T Service staff and the manager. Consent to access and examine I&T application forms was given by my main contacts for my placement at the I&T service, i.e. the I&T Service manager and an officer, as this formed part of the tasks I was asked to fulfil during my placement. My analyses of the application forms focused mainly on the institutional procedures in recording applicants’ language repertoires and understanding linguistic categories, as well as perceived planning needs. At all times, care was taken to protect the anonymity and privacy of
participants. I ensured that no identifiable information was used in the thesis or considered in my data analysis.

At times, my various forms of engaging with participants across sites raised question regarding researcher positionality and the boundaries between participant observation and informal engagement as a researcher, as opposed to socialising. With increasing immersion in some of the field sites (especially in the family and the case study supplementary school), the boundaries between research relationships and friendships had to be navigated carefully. I ensured that at all times it was clear to participants that my presence and participation was in my capacity as researcher and, thus, my role as language learner was to be understood in the context of this study. For further reflections on this, see Chapter 8.6.6.

3.6.5 Rationale for weighting of chapters

This thesis makes no claims for the ‘representativeness’ of the settings and actors studied, but to offer a qualitative perspective that reveals the complexities and dynamics of practices. I explore selected settings in detail, and practices in their natural context, in a way that larger sample sizes and more quantitative analyses would not have been able to provide. I recognise the imbalance between the main body chapters in terms of length and weighting, which is due to the complexity of methods, as well as how each of the sites serves to address my research questions. There are considerable differences between research sites in terms of the nature of researcher engagement (my own participation, my relation to the research participants, data collection methods), as well as the nature and dynamics of the sites themselves. Some sites are highly dynamic and complex, like supplementary schools, where a variety of actors and groups of actors are at play, with dynamic changes in participant constellation. Here, long-term immersion was necessary to be able to capture the described complexities. For other sites, like business settings, there are certain recurring elements that can be captured more quickly (i.e. the general nature of commercial practices), which is why I did not have to return in the same way as I did in other settings. With such differences between the sites and my engagement with participants, the amount of data I had access to differed considerably across settings. Despite the fact that Chapters 4-7 do not all follow the same template, I ensured consistency in themes and methods as much as possible. However, it is in fact precisely for the very diversity of research methods and forms of engagement that this methodology has a unique potential to capture the complexities of language and social practices in the diverse city.
4 Language in family spaces

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on language practices in the intimacy of the family and how they relate to dynamics beyond the home (see 3.6.4 and 8.6.6 for ethical considerations). I explore how attitudes towards varieties of Arabic and their maintenance are shaped by local and translocal factors, within and across generations, to offer a perspective on how the diaspora setting prompts actors to re-define and re-design beliefs and practices relating to language and community.

The following sections address questions of how 'language' and 'community' as well as ‘policy’ are practised, experienced, and performed among participants. While family members may not be aware of their roles as policymakers, parents as well as children assume agency in shaping the dynamics of language use as well as power relations in various explicit and implicit ways. As I develop the chapter, I move out of the strict family setting, beyond the confines of the home into diasporic ‘community’ spaces, to argue that community dimensions are relevant in shaping Family Language Policy (FLP).

While FLP has become a taken-for-granted notion to refer to rules, expectations and norms regarding language choice in the family, I ask whether ‘policy’ remains a fitting term. I draw on the notion of ‘interactional regime’ (Blommaert et al. 2005b) to allow for a more open and encompassing notion of ‘policy’, and to acknowledge the dynamics between policy and practice across settings and scales.

This chapter begins by offering some background information on the participating family, before discussing forms of practices and policies in the home. I then show how language practices and maintenance relate to family members’ positionings and social roles within the family, before I discuss how ‘community’ understandings and practices interact with language use. Finally, I reflect on how the combined method in the family setting has helped me address my research questions, before drawing conclusions and discussing the chapter’s significance for the thesis as a whole.

4.2 The case study family

The participant family are first-generation immigrants from Syria, who fled their home country in 2012 and spent several years in Turkey before coming to the UK. The parents are highly educated, having both completed Medical degrees and worked as doctors in Syria for more than
25 years. In 2015, the father Nasri applied for asylum in London and subsequently moved to Manchester, where he had contacts. In 2017, his wife Aaya, three sons and the daughter came to the UK. The eldest son Tareq studied Medicine in Egypt before he was granted the right to join his family in Manchester in 2019.

Upon arrival to the UK, Nasri spoke mainly Syrian Arabic, was literate in MSA, and had some basic knowledge of English. Aaya spoke Syrian Arabic, was literate in MSA, and had limited proficiency in French but not English. Both parents acquired basic conversational Turkish skills while living in Turkey. All children spoke Syrian Arabic when they arrived in the UK. The sons had acquired some Arabic literacy skills in Syria and at their Arabic-speaking school in Turkey, as well as some limited knowledge in English and basic Turkish. The daughter Farah had hardly received any schooling in Arabic and no English, due to her young age. Since their arrival to the UK, all family members have acquired English to a degree. The children now use English effortlessly, with Farah being the most fluent speaker. Aaya’s and Nasri’s proficiency is limited.

The participant family have relatives in Turkey and Central Europe, whom they have visited and are in daily contact with. The family thus maintain transnational links that encourage the use of Arabic in the home. Nasri and Aaya have Turkish friends in Manchester, who were one of their initial points of contact in the UK. On the occasions that they meet, Aaya and Nasri use their basic Turkish skills. This reflects the relevance of migration histories in shaping lives in the diaspora, where linguistic repertoires and practices constitute “records of mobility” (Blommaert & Backus 2013).

The family initially lived in a terraced house in Rusholme, before moving to a larger house in North Manchester. As the parents’ diploma and Physician licenses are not recognised in the UK, Nasri set up a small business importing and selling products, in collaboration with a contact based in Egypt. The younger children Farah and Mohammad go to school and college, and the older sons Yasser and Faaiz study at university.

4.3 ‘Arabic home’ in Manchester: Negotiating ‘needs’ and ‘proficiencies’

All family members agree that both Arabic and English are relevant in their diasporic lives. My observations suggest that participants share certain expectations and norms of language choice, where places and spaces in the home and across the diaspora are associated with different patterns of language use. As confirmed in the focus group, ‘Arabic’ is typically associated with family interaction in the home. In fact, participants understand their home in Manchester as “an Arabic home” (see Excerpt 1; see Full transcript Lines 98ff.).
EXCERPT 1 (Focus group)

LG        What are the roles of Arabic and English for you, in Manchester?

Tareq    Well, the first rule is, the family. This is the first one. ‘Cause when we are together we always speak in Arabic.

Yasser    Yeah. We have an Arabic home (...) even here in UK [laughs]

Responding to my (LG) question about the role that Arabic and English played for the family in Manchester, the eldest son suggested that ‘the family’ was a domain associated with Arabic. Tareq argued that ‘being together’ meant ‘speaking Arabic’. The home, “even here in the UK”, where the surrounding majority language is English, is associated with Arabic. Yasser’s use of the adverb “even” expresses the perception that the use of Arabic in the UK may seem unusual or surprising, yet for the family it is the default choice. Following the exchange in Excerpt 1, Nasri suggested that outside the home there was a routine of speaking English with others, occasionally also among family members. “So we use English outside. Everywhere. In shops, in schools, in barbers, outside. We use English” (Lines 380ff., Full transcript). This was confirmed by Mohammad at a later point of the focus group, while emphasising that he used Arabic with Arabic-speaking friends.

During one of my early visits to the family home, Aaya and Nasri reported that they had been advised by their ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers to take every opportunity to practise their English. Aaya described how she felt under pressure when one teacher asked repeatedly how many hours she had spoken English at home. Aaya emphasised to me that she did not like the idea of speaking English at home, “because home should be Arabic”. Aaya added that she did not study English to speak with her family (May 2018). Her comment shows how Aaya’s expectations as an English learner clashed with the ESOL teacher’s expectations as to when, where and with whom English should be used. For Aaya, interaction in the home should be in Arabic, and English was for contexts outside the family domain. For the participant family, ‘home’ and ‘outside home’ occupy different “language spheres” (Little 2017: 4), i.e. spheres of language use where certain code choices are perceived as appropriate, and others not. The distinction between language use in the home setting and in the wider city serves to create different “spheres of belonging and identity” (Little 2017: 8), with the heritage language being closely associated with the family and English with the wider diaspora.

29 The fact that Tareq speaks about a “rule” may be due to a potential misunderstanding, following my question about “roles”. This, however, does not make his statement less meaningful.
In Excerpt 2 Aaya expresses a perceived need to balance between two seemingly conflicting aims, i.e. the aim to improve English, and the desire to maintain Arabic as part of the family’s heritage (see Lines 15ff., Full transcript). Aaya’s comment followed my question about the family members’ language practices and preferences in the home.

**Excerpt 2 (Focus group)**

Aaya  When we start to learn English, it’s good to speak English, even at home. To improve your language. But when your English is improved, it’s good to speak also Arabic. Because Arabic is our culture. It remind us of our culture. Remind belong. Because we belong in Arab. So it’s good for us to speak Arabic. To belong our culture.

Aaya’s comment is a multi-layered and highly complex reflection on the values and preferences of her linguistic resources, which are dynamic and changing over time. Aaya described how in the early stages of learning English, it was important to use the new language in their repertoire. The addition “even at home” indicates that while Arabic would normally be seen as the default language for communication within the family, this personal and identity-related need is overridden by the instrumental goal to learn English. However, Aaya suggested that when a certain level of proficiency in English was achieved, it was “good” to shift attention back to the heritage language. Aaya described Arabic as an element of the family’s “culture”, which “reminds” them of their belonging. While English is seen as a tool needed for interaction in the UK, Arabic signifies identification with a group to which the family belong. The notion of ‘reminding’ of culture implies a time dimension, where Arabic is the language of their ancestral identity. In this sense, using Arabic in the ‘here and now’ of the diaspora is a way of preserving a sense of belonging which is why, in the long-term, Arabic takes priority over English.

Excerpt 2 addresses the task of balancing different forms of language ‘needs’: on the one hand, there is a communicative need to learn and improve English to be able to communicate with non-Arabic speakers; at the same time, there is an emotional and identity-related need where Arabic stands for the family’s culture and sense of self (cf. Little 2017: 10f.). Arabic links the family’s past with their present in the UK. Moreover, for the parents and the elder sons, language proficiency and ease of communication through fluency is another factor encouraging the use of Arabic. Such dynamics and opposing forces of perceived ‘needs’ to maintain Arabic while acquiring English are specific to the diaspora and shape the ways in which family members understand and evaluate their multi-layered language repertoires.
4.4 Negotiating interactional regimes

My observations confirm the family’s reported desire to create an “Arabic home” in Manchester: Arabic is the default language choice as both parents and children use Arabic. Also child-initiated interaction tends to be in Arabic. English is hardly used for communication; Turkish, also part of the shared repertoire, is not used, unless when Turkish-speaking friends visit.

Family members agreed during the focus group that there were no overt rules in the family about which language resources to use when. My observations confirm that there is no explicit ban on using English or English language media; yet, there is an implicit and widely accepted understanding among family members that the default language in the home is and should be Arabic, as reflected in the statements discussed above. However, the youngest family member Farah occasionally contests this default status of Arabic in the home, inserting English lexical items into larger Arabic constructions or addressing her parents or brothers in English. During the focus group both parents and their sons reported that, while for them it felt natural to use Arabic with each other, this was not the case for Farah (Lines 101ff., Full transcript). Participants suggested that they did not consider Farah’s use of English problematic as they accepted it as part of the reality of living in the UK; at the same time, however, they noted that they tried to encourage Farah to speak Arabic. My observations confirm that the implied ‘policy’ privileging Arabic is manifest in everyday practice, particularly when Farah uses English and thus deviates from the ‘default’ language choice: family members switch to Arabic when Farah addresses them in English, encourage Farah to repeat in Arabic or explicitly comment on her language choice. Such practices, which I observed mainly in interaction between Farah and her mother, Mohammad or Tareq, reflect perceptions of what is the desirable language choice in the home and serve to negotiate and re-establish an implicit norm through practice (see Amir & Musk 2013). Farah’s fluid uses of her repertoire resources on the other hand challenges the dominance of Arabic in the family.

Farah employs her complex and developing language repertoire creatively to assert agency (Cf. Said & Zhu Hua 2019). In the focus group her brother Mohammad pointed out that “when she [Farah] talks about a serious thing, when she’s getting serious. I think she tells us in Arabic” (Lines 191ff., Full transcript). Farah uses Arabic whenever she perceives a ‘need’ to do so (and indeed has the required proficiency), e.g. in situations in which she wants to be taken seriously by other family members. This, in turn, suggests that Arabic has an ‘official’ status in the household. Farah’s use of Arabic for topics that she deems important serves as a strategy to attract attention and take the floor, with the aim of achieving her social goals. Mohammad’s comment indicates an

30 See also Lanza’s (1992, 1997) continuum of parental discourse strategies.
awareness among family members of patterns of language choice. While Mohammad’s comment is merely an impressionistic assessment based on his own perspective, it offers insights into how family members perceive each other’s language practices as relevant, or at least how participants want me as researcher to understand them.

Tareq’s arrival from Egypt in 2019 encouraged a slight change in linguistic configurations towards an even stronger preference for Arabic in the home, as I observed and was reported by participants. While Tareq lived abroad, the family was in daily contact with him via video calls in Arabic. According to her mother, Farah tended not to participate actively in these conversations, as she was very young when she had last seen her brother and did not have a close relationship with Tareq. On occasions when she was encouraged to participate in the calls, Farah used both English and Arabic for meta-comments, e.g. to communicate that she did not understand what was being said (fieldnotes June 2018). The relationship between the siblings changed significantly after Tareq’s arrival in the UK, as he established a close connection with Farah. Tareq’s preference for Arabic – having lived in Arabic-speaking environments for all his life – and the respect Farah has developed for her eldest brother encouraged her to make greater efforts to speak Arabic in the Manchester home.

My observations reflect the complex and dynamic interplay of factors influencing a migrant family’s language practices. Modern communication technologies can strengthen relations with contacts abroad and shape everyday interaction patterns locally, thus vital for a full understanding of language practices and FLP. At the same time, the local presence of actors and inter-personal relations have an impact on language practices. Tareq’s presence in Manchester has reinforced the general dominance of Arabic and re-defined its role in the family.

4.4.1 (Playful) practices and policies

A more explicit while playful measure to establish Arabic as the dominant language in the family is a game suggested by Tareq to encourage Farah’s use of Arabic (see Excerpt 3; Lines 196ff., Full Transcript):
Excerpt 3 (Focus group)

Tareq One day I played with her [Farah] a game. So uhm if she didn't speak any word in English, for more than two hours, she will gain a present from me.

Aaya [laughs]

Tareq So, she couldn’t do that. So once I told her, never mind about the first one. Then, the second one she even speak English. The third one, the fourth one, she couldn’t.

Tareq set his sister a challenge to avoid using English for her to gain a reward. Tareq was surprised that Farah seemed unable to avoid using English for the two hours he had specified, even when he repeated the game. In his position of authority as eldest brother, Tareq used the game to playfully enforce the preferred language choice. A specific measure undertaken to influence Farah’s language practices, the game is a creative form of language management, and thus enacted FLP (Spolsky 2004). Tareq takes the roles of FLP “actor”, attempting to influence his sister’s linguistic practices and support his and the parents’ preferences in language use (cf. Kheirkhah 2016).

Tareq’s initiation of the game indicates that language choice and use are relevant topics of reflection and conversation in the family home. While participants suggest they did not set any rules about language choice, idealised notions of language use become manifest in practices such as this. The activity establishes implicit rules as to which language is the preferred choice in the household; however, Farah does not follow these rules, as she continues to make use of both her Arabic and English resources in a more fluid way. It is unclear whether she really attempted to avoid using English but did not manage to separate her resources strictly (see Matras 2020), or whether she consciously rejected a rule that would ban English. In either case, the language game illustrates how FLP is interactionally constructed in practice and negotiated by family members. It also shows the importance of sibling interaction shaping language practices and the wider interactional regime, as they contribute to the dynamics of negotiating FLP and thus become “language socialization agents” (Kheirkhah 2016).

The use of media is another way of establishing regimes through practice. In the family home, the TV in the living room is often switched on, broadcasting a range of Middle Eastern TV channels. Nasri reported to me during fieldwork that he wanted to stay informed about any developments related to the Syrian civil war. Furthermore, Nasri encourages his daughter to listen to traditional Arab music, and I observed him teach Farah about Egyptian and Syrian singers. Nasri explained that these musicians represented Arab cultural heritage, and his children should learn about them and see how “their” language was used in music. As Nasri pointed out to me, he lamented that
his daughter preferred English-language music.

During Ramadan, the family use an alarm clock that plays the call to prayer at the relevant times of day (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Call-to-prayer alarm clock (Buegle 2020)

Classical Arabic (CA) thus becomes part of the “linguistic soundscapes” (Shohamy 2015), adding to an Arabic sense of identity in the family. Aaya and Nasri have pointed out that hearing the Islamic call to prayer in their house made them feel as if they were back in Syria, re-invoking memories from the past (May 2019). Of course, religious rather than linguistic practice is the main motivation for using this device; likewise, watching Arabic TV channels may not be an intentional or conscious way of policing language; yet, such practices contribute to establishing a ‘home language’, reinforcing what is perceived as norm and what should be used in the family environment. Uses of media are forms of language management (Spolsky 2009), shaping local interactional regimes: Routine practices become forms of policy, as they have an impact on future patterns of language use in normalising them (Bonacina 2017). Additionally, such practices maintain transnational connections and create links with the past.

4.4.2 ‘Private’ Linguistic landscapes

Written language practices in the home contribute to shaping interactional regimes. As suggested for public spaces, Linguistic Landscapes (LL) may serve as a “mechanism of language policy” as
they reflect, cultivate and encourage language practice (Shohamy 2006). In the family’s home, a variety of permanent and temporary signs are visible, most of which are monolingual Arabic. In visually prominent places in their living room and entrance hall, the family display art that features Arabic calligraphy. These are the spaces that visitors would have access to and where family members spend most of their time socialising. The art does not serve any communicative function as such, but it serves symbolic functions in that the language displayed represents an alignment with cultural heritage and can thus be seen as a way of establishing and performing a sense of identity, addressed both at family members and potential visitors.

Furthermore, the family display Islamic Du’a, prayer texts for supplication. These handwritten notes in CA are attached to walls in the corridor, the kitchen, bathrooms and bedrooms. Both parents and sons have written and put up these texts over time, and the clustering and repetition of similar texts across the house creates a sense of space that establishes links with heritage and (religious) identity. As Aaya explained in the focus group, “you can’t say [Du’a] in English” (Line 219, Full Transcript), justifying the use of Arabic for these Qur’an quotes in their home. Aaya’s statement suggests an imagined distribution of roles of the linguistic resources in the family’s repertoire, for the religious significance of Arabic as the language of the Qur’an.

Farah’s bedroom door has a wooden sign carrying her name in Arabic script, which Aaya had brought from Turkey. This sign has decorative and identity-related rather than informational functions. With her bedroom being on the first floor, this space is unlikely to be frequented by visitors, and family members will not need the sign to remember whose bedroom the door gives access to. The permanent sign establishes a connection between space, Farah, and her Arab heritage through language, encouraged by the mother. As Curdt-Christiansen & Huang (2020: 177) suggest, using the heritage language may serve to maintain a cultural “loyalty” to the home country.

Moving towards the ‘communicative’ pole of the continuum between symbolic and communicative uses in the LL, written Arabic labels on food jars in the kitchen and corridor contribute to establishing Arabic as the default language in the family space (Figures 12, 13). The signs serve communicative functions in that they label the jars’ contents. At the same time, they reinforce the sense of identity established through surrounding LL-items and other practices in the house, as well as confirming Arabic as default language.

---

31 Cf. Matras & Gaiser (2020) on the clustering of Urdu in Manchester’s public LL.
Figure 12. Arabic labels on food jars in the kitchen
Some of the Arabic labels cover the jars’ original English labels. Beside the practicality of avoiding confusion in terms of label and content of a jar (in case Arabic and the original English label convey different meanings), the layering of Arabic and English signs expresses a negotiation of
the prominence and role of languages in space.\textsuperscript{32} It symbolises the relevance and status of visible texts, with Arabic overriding English. Despite Aaya being a very dedicated English learner, who takes up any opportunity to improve her English (see below), she chose to use Arabic over English for these labels. It is unsurprising that Aaya is more comfortable with Arabic in the domain of food: cooking is a cultural practice linking back to a past life in Syria. The use of Arabic here may simply be the reflection of a routine of using Arabic in this domain, rather than an effort to purposefully and explicitly establish an FLP that gives dominance to Arabic. However, it is precisely this routine of associating food with Arabic that reinforces the association of the language with the family’s heritage. The consistent practice of labelling food jars and other items in Arabic has the power to shape the local identity of place and define the kitchen as an ‘Arabic space’. The private LL is a reflection of the linguistic resources the family members draw on, reinforcing the status of Arabic and shaping perceived norms of language choice. Furthermore, the visual presence of Arabic in the Manchester home serves to symbolically bridge the present with the past, and thus the diaspora with the country of origin. When asked why she used Arabic on signs in the kitchen during the focus group, Aaya explained (Excerpt 4; Lines 231ff., \textit{Full Transcript}):

\textit{Excerpt 4 (Focus group)}

Aaya Yes, in Syria I did it in that way, it’s normal. I get used to write in Arabic. And it’s nice to have it in the kitchen here also. Reminds us of our house in Syria. Our home.

Mohammad Yes, it’s nice to see the language here.

The ‘private LL’ creates a diasporic “Arabic home” and establishes translocal links between their house in Syria and the “here” in Manchester, negotiating local interactional regimes.

The fridge displays a combination of temporary and more permanent texts, using both English and Arabic. These include handwritten notes written by family members, e.g. shopping lists typically using both Arabic and English, or letters from GPs or schools in English. Additional notes may be attached by any family member and may feature elements of English and/or Arabic. The dynamic combination of messages and types of texts, printed or handwritten, produced by various authors, creates a multi-layered negotiation of space, shaped by the factors in the “Arabic home” and the wider diaspora.

\textsuperscript{32} The practice of ‘layering’ signs has been explored in previous scholarship, typically related to power negotiations between (top-down and bottom-up) LL-actors; see Van Mensel et al. (2016); Blommaert (2013b); Pavlenko (2009); Backhaus (2007).
Another instance of written language use in the family home is a rewritable whiteboard, mounted to a wall in Mohammad’s bedroom (Figure 14).\textsuperscript{33}

Mohammad uses the whiteboard for his study plan in preparation of school exams ("Phy", "Bio", "exam questions"), as well as displaying Qur’an excerpts in Arabic and English. It thus brings together different sets of linguistic resources and illustrates how these are associated with particular domains. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Mohammad uses English for issues relating to his (UK) mainstream school education,\textsuperscript{34} and CA for Qur’an citations. The latter are given also in English. Mohammad explained that CA was difficult to understand, which is why he preferred adding English translations. An almost consistently systematic use of colours serves to distinguish between ‘languages’.

\textsuperscript{33} This photograph reflects the language practices as displayed at a specific point in time, rather than a permanent state.

\textsuperscript{34} Cf. Matras (2020: 36ff.) on insertions of institutional terminology.
The yellow box in Figure 14 shows a monolingual English message added by Farah ("Mohammad is the worst person"; "Farah best")\textsuperscript{35}, performing Farah’s preferred language choice. Farah’s addition is set in direct interaction with the remaining text on the whiteboard and contributes to negotiating FLP in the home space. It reflects the multi-layered character of both LL and interactional regimes, where various actors may add texts and, through their linguistic choices, reflect potentially polycentric orientations towards various norms, scales and linguistic hierarchies. The use of English for school-related terminology relates to the fact that Mohammad’s current education is undertaken in the UK, where English is the majority language and the language of schooling. Being the language of the Qur’an, CA is used for Qur’an excerpts, while English translations serve to facilitate access to the content communicated. Farah’s choice to use English for her message to Mohammad reflects her understanding that English is the language for interaction with peers, thus contesting wider family-internal norms. In this way, ‘private’ LL become an interactive space for language negotiations between family members, i.e. an “arena of contestation” (see Rubdy 2015 on public LL). The family members’ uses of the whiteboard reflect the fact that both ‘languages’, Arabic and English, co-exist in the family space, serving a variety of functions; at the same time, the LL serves to negotiate competing language hierarchies across actors. Farah draws on LL as a powerful mechanism for creating and manipulating de facto language policy and practices, as well as to protest, object and negotiate them (see Shohamy 2015). The very nature of the rewritable whiteboard highlights the dynamic nature of LL more generally, and through this the dynamic nature of FLP. LL is not static, as elements may be added and altered in message content, language choice, or removed; likewise, interactional regimes may be negotiated and re-negotiated by a wider range of actors and practices, as well as reactions to practices.

My explorations of the ‘private’ LL have shown how the functions of written language use in the LL are varied. Arabic calligraphy in artwork may serve mainly emblematic reasons in creating a link to Arab cultural heritage, but it may also have a communicative function for readers literate in Arabic. Du’a in CA are displayed mainly for religious reasons. The Arabic food labels in the kitchen have practical, communicative functions, as well as educational functions as they signal to household members the partly prescriptive status of Arabic; at the same time these signs serve emblematic, place-making functions in their clustering. The translingual whiteboard displays communicative as well as emblematic language use. The clustering and consistent display of Arabic on signs in the family home is not necessarily the result of a conscious effort to define space. Yet, the omnipresence of Arabic in its written form adds to perceived norms of language use and adds to a sense of Arab identity. In this way language signs in the family home are forms of practised FLP, reflecting usage patterns and associations with language resources, and at the

\textsuperscript{35} I have replaced participant names with pseudonyms to protect their identities.
same time establishing the status of Arabic and legitimising (and possibly encouraging) spoken uses of the language. As Spolsky (2009: 24) suggests, “controlling” the “language environment” can shape children’s language socialisation in that it establishes which language(s) should be used. I argue that negotiations of FLP become materialised in micro-level LL practices, as LL-items establish and contest the perceived appropriateness of language choice in space. The dominant presence of Arabic in the ‘private’ LL serves to express and at the same time reinforce this imagined distinction between “language spheres” (Little 2017). Imagining an ‘Arabic home’ in the diverse urban setting juxtaposes these two spheres. There is a sense of protecting the Arab-ness of the home while acknowledging that the majority language English is vital for interaction outside the home.

4.4.3 ‘Arabic’ maintenance as family language policy

Language teaching can be seen as a central component of practised FLP, shifting attention to the language resources perceived as desired and valued among family members (see King et al. 2008: 912). As Farah had received very limited schooling in Arabic before moving to the UK, Aaya and Nasri enrolled Farah for Arabic classes at Manchester Arabic School (McrAS) in early 2018, to support her acquisition of Arabic literacy and conversational skills. Between January and June 2018, Farah attended weekly classes at the supplementary school, while her mother taught Qur’an classes at the same school. After moving to North Manchester, Aaya decided to teach her daughter Arabic at home. Aaya and Farah follow a strict routine of studying Arabic for 15 minutes every day. The lessons focus on reading and writing children’s stories and the Qur’an, as well as speaking and listening.

The sociolinguistic complexity of ‘Arabic’ means that decisions have to be made regarding the variety/varieties to be taught. While the family uses Syrian Arabic for daily interaction in the home, the teaching focuses on proficiency in MSA, or CA for lesson focusing on reading Qur’an. When I observed one of the lessons in the home (27 March 2019), it became evident that Aaya corrected Farah’s spoken Arabic when using expressions or vocabulary that, outside the formal teaching, would be accepted and used by Aaya herself.36 During the lesson, Aaya made an effort to avoid Syrian Arabic dialect elements, adapting her own language practices in order to promote desired linguistic competencies in her daughter. However, Aaya’s self-corrections indicated that the avoidance of forms perceived as non-Standard deviates from how she normally interacts with her family.

36 I have observed such corrections mainly at the lexical level, e.g. where the Syrian ēh or mbala were used instead of na’am to mean ‘yes’, or mnh/mnhā instead of the formal bikheir for ‘fine’ in ‘I am fine’.
When I addressed my observations, Aaya confirmed that they spoke “only Syrian Arabic” normally, while teaching “ha[d] to be fuṣḥā”. Aaya did not perceive this discrepancy as problematic. This practice replicates the teaching of MSA in educational settings in the Arab world, yet disregards the fact that, in the diaspora setting, regular exposure to colloquial forms of Arabic is not guaranteed. For Aaya, the fact that fuṣḥā is not used for spontaneous conversation did not contradict the aim to teach Farah MSA forms. Aaya suggested that “the Arabic that we speak is not the real Arabic”, comparing it to the English used in Manchester and arguing that “it’s not right”. Aaya argued that it was good for Farah to speak “correct Arabic”, suggesting she should use fuṣḥā rather than the Syrian variety to enhance her job opportunities (27 March 2019), and that speaking Standard Arabic was important for all her children if they wanted to go to university or find work in the Arab world (25 April 2019).

Regardless of the variety taught, the fact that the family sets a dedicated time to focus on Arabic daily is, in itself, a form of FLP, confirming the privileged status of the ‘Arabic’ language in the family. Defining the learning target as MSA creates a hierarchy among varieties of Arabic, where the Standard variety is perceived as ‘correct’ and more valuable than the form of Arabic used for daily communication. This draws on language ideologies shared translocally, making them relevant in the diaspora. In fact, the prestige of MSA is applied even to the spoken mode of communication, where colloquial varieties are the default across the Arab world.

**4.4.4 Acquisition of English as family language policy**

While the parents make efforts to create and maintain an “Arabic home”, at the same time they acknowledge the role of English as the language of interaction in public settings in the UK, for its economic significance and for establishing contacts in the diaspora. They have made active efforts to study and improve their English since finishing their ESOL course, using online sources and books to revise grammar rules. Aaya has taken creative approaches to improving her conversational skills, e.g. joining weekly Tea & Coffee afternoons at a local church and attending a cooking course. In addition to taking up opportunities offered in the wider setting, Aaya has asked her daughter for support with English: Farah and her mother spend one hour on Saturdays and Sundays to focus on English (see below).

The fact that both parents make active efforts to improve their English shows how the surrounding language ecology plays a role in how actors evaluate and maintain their language resources. This, in turn, adds to the dynamics of practised FLP. It establishes both Arabic and English as valuable resources that have a place in the home. While Arabic is perceived as the language to be used for communication between family members, English is valued for its direct relevance in the diaspora setting, and therefore a resource that may legitimately (or indeed must) be acquired.
The aim to improve English becomes part of the complex FLP, negotiating the roles of various sets of resources in the family and wider diaspora. The maintenance of Arabic does not rule out English, and vice versa. For Farah, this serves to legitimise the use of English in the family home.

4.5 Language as power: Changing hierarchies and re-assessing skills

Below, I show how unequal proficiencies across Arabic and English shape and are employed to negotiate power relations and dynamics within the family and beyond.

4.5.1 Negotiating Arabic and English ‘proficiencies’

Throughout my fieldwork I observed how family members corrected each other’s language use in interaction. Salient deviations from fushā, e.g. certain vernacular lexical items or grammatical constructions, were at times perceived as “mistakes” and addressed by Aaya and Tareq. Such practices indicate a general awareness of linguistic practices among family members and show how certain language forms are perceived as correct, and therefore preferred over others. My observations were confirmed during the focus group discussion, with Tareq suggesting that he corrected “every error” he identified among family members (Lines 443 ff., Full transcript).

The exchange in Excerpt 5 indicates the dynamics between linguistic resources and negotiations of social relations, initiated by my question whether participants corrected each other’s language practices (Lines 452ff., Full transcript).

**Excerpt 5 (Focus group)**

Aaya I correct many words for Mohammad. In Arabic. But Mohammad was upset if I correct him [laughs]. I don't know why. He said 'always you correct me. Why?'

Mohammad But then I correct your English.

Aaya [laughs] Yes, always. And Farah always corrects me. Always Farah laughs at me. ‘Don’t speak that, don’t speak this word like that’.

Mohammad I sometimes correct teachers at college, in Arabic. We were learning about Islam. Some people don't know how to say Arabic words, so sometimes I correct them. (...) Normally I’m the guy who can't speak English.

Confirming my observations, Aaya reported that she routinely corrected Mohammad’s Arabic, which her son did not like. Mohammad interjected that he, in turn, corrected her English, to which
Aaya added that also the youngest daughter Farah highlighted ‘incorrect’ uses of English. Aaya’s statement that her own children’s Arabic needed correcting suggests that they have acquired a form of Arabic that she does not perceive as ‘correct’ or appropriate, at least in the local setting. Moreover, the excerpt suggests that participants do not enjoy being corrected. It positions the children as being insufficiently competent in the heritage language, while positioning the mother as ‘expert’. Mohammad challenges Aaya’s authority by asking why she corrected him, as well as by correcting her English.

Mohammad added that, in addition to correcting his mother’s English, he had corrected his English teacher’s pronunciation of Arabic when discussing Islam at college. The value of his linguistic proficiencies is assessed differently across contexts, actors, and topics of conversation. He does not typically showcase his Arabic skills in his UK mainstream school, where the wider interactional regime defines English as the required skill. Mohammad has noted during fieldwork that he did not like to shift attention to his Arabic skills, as he felt this would point to the fact that he was “not an English native speaker”. In the situation he described, however, Mohammad’s proficiency in the heritage language receives value. His position shifts from someone with limited English to someone whose language expertise allows him to correct a teacher’s pronunciation – in Arabic. At the same time, his mother corrects his Arabic, while admiring him for his English. This reflects a constant reassessment of language resources, which relates to positionings in the family setting and beyond. The described dynamics indicate how power relations between parents, children and potentially other actors may be negotiated based on perceived ‘correctness’ and relevance of language resources. Depending on language choice or the topic of conversation, sets of resources may be assessed as ‘correct’ and ‘appropriate’, or ‘incorrect’ and ‘inappropriate’. There is an understanding that Mohammad’s and Farah’s use of Arabic occasionally require correcting by the parents or older brother; at the same time Mohammad’s and Farah’s English proficiencies put them in a position to correct their family members’ use of English. Correcting others’ linguistic behaviour, participants claim competence and knowledge, thus re-negotiating authority positions (cf. Johnsen 2020).

As mentioned above, Farah helps Aaya improve her English during dedicated lessons, initiated by the mother. While Aaya is the teacher during Arabic lessons, teacher and learner roles are reversed in their English lessons: The daughter assumes the authority of the teacher and is in the position to set rules (Excerpt 6; Lines 422ff, Full transcript).
Excerpt 6 (Focus group)

Aaya [laughs] Farah is very strict teacher. And give me punishment. You know the punishment [...] she gives me? Because I don't write my homework, then my punishment to take her to Primark to buy many of clothes, about 60 pounds.

Nasri and lipstick

Aaya And when she says I will start my lesson, she wears lipstick, rouge, and she wears a red blouse the match to lipstick. And high uhm

LG High heels?

Aaya Yes, high heels, and she wear my bag on her shoulder. I said why you do that? She said ‘Like my teacher!’. And she is very strict. ‘Don't use your mobile, don’t drink, don’t use uh gum’. Strict, very strict.

Farah negotiates her position in the family by assuming the role of a strict teacher during their English lesson, as she disciplines her mother when Aaya does not fulfil the tasks expected from her. Based on her advanced proficiency in English, a resource recognised in the wider UK language regime, Farah re-negotiates the relationship between herself and her mother and appropriates a position of authority. Farah embraces the adult teacher role, wearing a blouse, makeup and using her mother’s handbag. During the English lesson, Farah assumes a (temporary) position of power. She recognises that her proficiency in the majority language during this time takes on unique values in the home. Farah negotiates agency and power based on her multi-layered linguistic repertoire, materialised in negotiations of the roles of language resources as well as identities in the family. Farah’s English proficiency makes this language part of the family language repertoire rather than remote and unapproachable. Farah herself is guided by her teacher as role model, both in terms of positioning in interaction with her mother, as well as regarding the English language.

4.5.2 English for recognition in the diaspora

Beyond the family setting, family-external dynamics – e.g. wider beliefs about language, perceived expectations, and the diverse urban setting as such – shape family members’ understandings of their own language resources and have an impact on language practices and policies. Unequal language skills across the majority and the heritage language across speakers have an impact on perceived power relations.

Aaya and Nasri have emphasised that English proficiency was essential for recognition in the UK
setting, both in private and professional contexts. Accordingly, English is seen as a key to local society and essential if they did not want to be isolated. As Aaya suggested in an informal interview “without English you can’t do anything here” (May 2018), with ‘here’ referring to Manchester. Accordingly, English is important to establish social relations and for accessing public services. The couple are aware of their entitlement to (free) interpreting and translation services to facilitate interaction with public service providers, which they made use of during their first months in the UK. However, Aaya and Nasri then made conscious choices not to involve professional interpreters for medical appointments, even though they would likely have benefitted from language support. This decision was based on prior negative experience at their local GP practice, where their limited English skills had impacted on how their extra-linguistic proficiencies had been valued – or rather devalued – by staff. Accordingly, Aaya and Nasri felt their own medical knowledge and experience as doctors had not been taken seriously by other medical professionals when interpreters were used. Thus, professional skills separate from language had been downgraded due to limited English proficiency. Aaya and Nasri felt disempowered and disadvantaged, perceiving a dependence on interpreting services as highlighting a “lack” of proficiency. The decision to go without such services was perceived as facilitating and demonstrating their autonomy and self-determination.

For a court hearing in May 2019, related to an application for family reunion, Aaya and Nasri aimed to make best use of their language resources. Prior to the hearing, both suggested that it was best to book an interpreter for the day, emphasising it was important for the judge to clearly understand their statements. Yet, Aaya and Nasri were determined to make their statement in English, arguing that Arabic was “not a good way” to represent themselves at a UK court. Both said they aimed to prove their English skills, hoping this may encourage the judge to take them seriously. Following the court hearing, Aaya and Nasri reported with pride and contentment that they had hardly needed any support from the interpreter (June 2019). Aaya pointed out that the interpreter spoke an Arabic variety they were not used to. Furthermore, Aaya and Nasri suggested they preferred expressing their thoughts directly to the judges, without mediation. They argued that speaking English helped impress the judge, showing they were dedicated and hardworking people who had invested time and effort to study English and learn about life in the UK. As Nasri reported, the judge was impressed by their English and included a remark about their English proficiency in a report. Such remarks replicate discourses about English proficiency as a positive sign of ‘integration’ or willingness to ‘integrate’ into British society, with lower levels of English, by implication, perceived as problematic (see Slembrouck 2020). My participants’ awareness of such discourses and pressures influenced their decision-making regarding the use of language support. Even though their limited English may have impeded Aaya and Nasri from expressing their thoughts and emotions in their full complexity, they chose to speak English, recognising the values their English skills have locally.
4.5.3 ‘Arabic’ as a resource in the diaspora

At the same time that participants emphasised the importance of English proficiency in the UK setting, the focus group shows that Arabic is also perceived as relevant beyond the family context. Nasri points out that ‘Arabic’ (here referring to the colloquial variety) was a crucial resource particularly during his first months in the UK, as most of his initial social and business contacts were Arabic speakers.

In an informal conversation with Mohammad and Yasser in June 2018, the participants suggested that they did not perceive the role of Arabic in the UK as important, as English rather than Arabic was the language people were required to speak and understand. English was regarded as a resource reflecting orientation towards the majority society, thus the language perceived as important for their future. However, 1.5 years later during the focus group, Yasser described his experience of being offered a temporary job by his university lecturer, due to his proficiency in both Arabic and English. The lecturer had asked him whether he could teach English to international students from Qatar, who had just arrived in Manchester. The lecturer thus recognised his Arabic knowledge as a skill in the engagement with Arabic speakers whose English was limited. Yasser’s Arabic proficiency grants him privileges that monolingual English speakers do not have. Similarly, Mohammad described his multilingual language repertoire as an asset both in the UK setting and the Arab world, following a comment from his tutor at college (Excerpt 7; Lines 313ff., Full transcript).

Excerpt 7 (Focus group)

Mohammad: My tutor, she actually told me that I got advantage over my English colleagues, because since I got this multiling— you know, like, English and Arabic, that would help me lot if I wanna go and apply in a company, here in Manchester.

Mohammad’s reference to his tutor emphasises the wider recognition of Arabic beyond the family setting, as the diverse Manchester setting gives value to language skills. English is not the only language guaranteeing ‘integration’ into British society. Both Yasser and Mohammad had re-assessed their linguistic resources, as their ‘heritage’ language had received recognition from UK authority figures.

Farah initially perceived the relevance of Arabic as confined largely to the home setting. This changed when a recently arrived girl from Iraq joined her school. Farah was asked by teachers to serve as casual interpreter to facilitate interaction between teachers and the girl, who did not speak much English. As teachers, authority figures in the UK setting, recognised her Arabic proficiency
as useful, Farah started developing a sense of pride, perceiving it as a skill that could be applied outside the home. Again, Arabic resources are assessed as valuable in combination with English proficiency. The diverse diaspora shapes perceived values of language resources and their recognition as skills, which becomes clear also from the following statement (Excerpt 8; Lines 532ff., Full transcript):

**Excerpt 8 (Focus group)**

Aaya Any language is like power. If you have, for example, five language, it’s powerful. It can help you translator. Interpreter. It can help you contact with many people. Because here in the UK many many culture, Multiculture in the UK, in Manchester. Arab, French, Italian, Pakistan. Yes. So, language, any language is power. So people should not lost any language he can learn.

As Aaya pointed out, in the diverse context, “any language is like power”, as language skills are valuable for finding work as well as developing social networks. Aaya recognises the value of ‘heritage’ languages and emphasises the importance of maintaining them. Her comment points to the relevance of the local regime in assessing language repertoires, as contextual factors determine the value of language resources (see Blommaert et al 2005a). Manchester is perceived as a setting where multilingualism, and in this case Arabic proficiency, grants power to language users.

**4.6 Community connections**

As Lanza (2007) suggests, families may be seen as Communities of Practice (CoPs) who share sets of practices and beliefs about language, developed and re-confirmed in daily interaction. The discussions above have shown how the participant family negotiates shared perceptions of ‘appropriateness’, or at least a shared understanding of what is accepted as ‘appropriate’ language behaviour in the family. The following focuses on how ‘communities’ are experienced and imagined beyond the home, and how actors and practices outside the home may shape language attitudes and practices.

**4.6.1 Neighbourhood communities: Shared practice in shared space**

During the fieldwork, the term community was not used much by participants; instead, family members made frequent reference to the “neighbourhood” when referring to their social contacts.
The participant family’s first residence in South Manchester – a terraced house with an alleyway at the back of the house, which was shared with neighbours – created ideal conditions for establishing a network of social contacts. The terraced houses had become home to several Arabic-speaking families who all shared the experiences of relatively recent migration to the UK. There were families from Libya, Palestine, Yemen, as well as Somalia who had arrived in the city since 2010 and lived next door or opposite to each other. The narrow streets of the ethnically diverse urban neighbourhood meant that the families crossed each other’s paths frequently. Figure 15 shows rows of terraced houses in South Manchester, comparable to the participant family’s first home in Manchester. Figure 16 shows a South Manchester communal alleyway.

Figure 15. South Manchester terraced houses (Scott & Smithers 2016)
The neighbouring families started to share food during Ramadan, attended the same ESOL courses, and met at the school playground when picking up their children. Shared religious practices and association with the ‘Arabic language’ – spoken varieties and CA – helped strengthen bonds. As Aaya pointed out, the families used Arabic for interaction, and she encouraged her children to spend time with the neighbours’ children for opportunities to practise Arabic (June 2018). Such neighbourhood contacts had an impact on language practices in their own family home, which I experienced during my visits. When neighbourhood children came over to play, Arabic became, also for Farah, the taken-for-granted language in the house.

Back in their countries of origin they may have not felt to have many similarities, neither in terms of social class, level of education, or otherwise; in the narrow, lively streets of the terraced houses in the Manchester diaspora, the families quickly established links with each other. As Aaya suggested (fieldnotes August 2018), it felt like “all families together here in the neighbour[hood] are like big family”, connected due to their shared experience of migration, shared alignment with the Arabic language and the aim to acquire English, and shared living space. In an informal interview, Nasri emphasised the importance of support and ‘being together’ in the local neighbourhood. However, the links slowly faded when the participant family moved to North Manchester. The family had formed what Blokland (2017) refers to as ‘durable engagements’, facilitated by daily urban experiences in shared space, as well as shared religious and linguistic
practices. My research suggests that such forms of 'doing' community may (temporarily) shape family language practices.

4.6.2 Communities as shared practice across space

While participants did not use the term community much throughout fieldwork, Aaya did use it during the focus group. Her reference to ‘community’ followed my question whether she wanted to continue teaching Arabic at a local supplementary school (Excerpt 9; see Lines 551ff., Full transcript).

Excerpt 9 (Focus group)

Aaya I try to contact with one man from the community, if you need some help in teach Arabic, I can do that, yes. (..) It’s important for find new friends. When you use your, a language you can meet many friends, relationships, friendship, many communication.

LG Okay (..) You just said you contacted a man from the community. What do you mean by that? So (..) do you think there is something like an Arabic community in Manchester?

Tareq Yes, of course, of course. We as, for example, Syrian doctors, we meet maybe every one week, at least, and we stand in a café and we have a discussion all of that in Arabic. And this is only Syrian. Maybe one of Arabic doctor will join us. And we speak in- in Arabic.

Aaya’s initial mention of the term “community” suggests a taken-for-granted understanding of ‘community’ being based on shared language. Without prompting, Aaya explained how teaching Arabic and sharing a language with others helped getting to know people. Sharing a language is thus believed to create connections among language users.

Following my explicit question whether participants thought there was “an Arabic community in Manchester”, Tareq reported that he met weekly with other Arabic-speaking (mainly Syrian) doctors informally to discuss their experiences as medical professionals in the diaspora. Tareq’s use of the expression of course to introduce his statement suggests that it was obvious or unsurprising that there was an “Arabic community in Manchester”. His understanding of ‘community’ is based on several factors shared among members who meet regularly, use Arabic for their discussions, are mostly from Syria or otherwise Arab origin and share a professional practice. As “Syrian doctors”, these individuals may share interests and needs in the diaspora as well as educational backgrounds. Thus, ‘community’ membership is understood as based on
shared practice and regular face-to-face contact, as well as a common language. New contacts may join, but there is a more or less established group of people and a set list of characteristics defining who may join. The notion of Community of Practice (CoP) is useful to describe such experiences of ‘community’ in the diaspora, where frequent interaction establishes and strengthens bonds between members with a shared endeavour.

4.6.3 Imagined communities through shared practice

Other understandings of ‘community’ rely less on regular shared practice, as the continuation of the above exchange suggests (Excerpt 10; see Lines 565ff., Full transcript):

**Excerpt 10 (Focus group)**

Yasser

Yeah, and there is Syrian community organisation also. So there is Syrians, they, like in Ramadan, these occasions, they, like everyone go to the office and share the food, you know, meet others, getting to know new people, through others, you know, who knows who. So this is a way also of getting to know others.

Aaya

Yes, strangers. Yes. And also. In 'eid. In first and second 'eid. 'eid al-adha and 'eid-al-futr. We go to Arabic community to share some event and we buy some things good, yes, yes, it’s good.

LG
	nice

Aaya

Yes. They do culture, Arabic culture? What’s the meaning? Help me? [to Yasser, laughs]

Yasser

What do you want to say?

Aaya

[laughs]

Tareq

Traditions, Arabic actions, activities.

Yasser’s statement reflects a notion of community that is institutionalised in the form of an organisation where people get together at events. Yasser refers to a Manchester-based charity supporting specifically Arabic-speaking refugees and asylum seekers. Aaya and Nasri have engaged with the organisation in the past, joining events or even taking a more active role, e.g. by giving talks on medical topics (in December 2019). Here, ‘community’ is based on engagement in a local institution, materialised in shared participation in events organised by that institution and
shared linguistic and religious practices. Members do not necessarily meet face-to-face or are acquainted to each other; yet there is a sense of connection between those who associate themselves with the charity. Yasser pointed out that members “meet others, getting to know new people, through others”, followed by Aaya’s comment “Yes, strangers. Yes”. This understanding of community resonates with Anderson’s (2006) notion of the nation as an ‘imagined community’, imagined by people who understand themselves as members yet do not know all fellow members. In Manchester, a shared identification with an imagined community links people with shared interests. Members feel connected through events and (religious) celebrations, where active participation is a way of performing and sharing their sense of Arab-ness, but not a precondition for membership. Rather, there is a sense of belonging to a wider, diverse city community locally, while simultaneously marking a connection to countries of origin and acknowledgment of the relevance of their heritage. People joining events at the community organisation share an identification with that group, but they do not necessarily know each other; in fact, they may be “strangers”. Such a “community of strangers”37 finds bonds through the organisation, which gives a sense of shared identity and connectedness among people who do not know each other from outside these events. ‘Community’ is defined on the basis of an institutional frame, which is pre-existing but dynamic in a sense that new people can become members, and strangers can become a ‘community’. Members may meet regularly, occasionally, just once, or never. Certain factors or characteristics are common to most members, such a shared country of origin, the experience of being refugee or asylum seeker in the UK, as well as shared language; these are however no requirements.

4.6.4 Shared origin and imagined communities

Later in the focus group discussion, Nasri introduced another understanding of imagined communities, based on a shared origin and migration experiences (Excerpt 11; see Lines 598ff., Full transcript).

37 See Parigi et al. (2013) for a related use of the term.
Excerpt 11 (Focus group)

Nasri The Syrian community is new in the UK. [...] In comparison with other communities, Arabic communities. Because uh for example Palestine community has a long time here in the UK. Also Yemen, here in Manchester. Also Iraq. Iraqi community. All of them was in the past. But the Syrian community is new. So, we now, we try to contact with each other. And to share a lot of events with the Syrian community and others, here in Manchester.

Here, “Arabic communities” is used an umbrella for various “sub-communities” based on country of origin. Nasri’s statement shifts attention to time of arrival or length/residence in the UK and associated needs or resilience. The comment suggests that there is mutual support between such sub-communities, with more recently arrived groups making contact with longer-established ones. Again, membership does not presuppose (regular) face-to-face contact; rather, it is based on imagined bonds through shared origin and needs. Nasri’s observation suggests an understanding of longer-established groups as communities of the past, while recently arrived migrants, like Syrians, formed “new”, distinct communities. What they share is the diaspora setting “here in Manchester”, where contacts can be made within and across such ‘sub-community’ boundaries. Such notions of communities on the basis of shared origin resemble traditional understandings of ‘diaspora’, where a collective sense of identity is rooted in the ‘homeland’ (Werbner 2002). In this connection, a further factor in understandings of community that was discussed in the focus group is the sharing and preserving of traditions. Aaya suggested that communities “do culture, Arabic culture” when getting together and celebrating their heritage through traditional events and activities (Line 577ff., Full transcript).

Moreover, Aaya noted the relevance of mutual support among sub-groups, recalling: “When I came to the UK. I don’t know any rule about the UK. I can go to the Arabic community and ask about the rule here. And ask how, what can I do. So this kind of support” (Lines 615ff., Full transcript). The notion of ‘going to the Arabic community’ here may relate to both approaching individuals, as a network of people for mutual support, as well as a physical space or location. Yet, Aaya’s comment points to communities where individuals do not necessarily meet regularly. ‘Community’ is imagined beyond shared practice, based on experiences of shared membership.

Finally, participants pointed out that certain Arabic expressions and traditions were understood beyond the borders of the Arab world (Line 682, Full transcript). Aaya and Tareq suggested that Arabic “connects” individuals and groups across national borders and language boundaries. The diverse diaspora context, in this case Manchester, provides a setting for such encounters to take
place, with MSA, CA and colloquial varieties inter-connecting speakers and learners. However, shared language is not the only factor that serves to inter-connect people, as it interacts with other practices and forms of identification. As Nasri suggested during an informal interview, most Syrian Muslim Arabs will feel closer to Egyptian Muslim Arabs than to Syrian Christian Arabs. ‘Communities’ are multi-layered and overlapping, and associations with language interplays with factors such as origin and faith; yet, this research suggests that language plays a powerful role in ‘doings’ and imaginings of ‘community’.

4.7 Researcher reflections

My long-term engagement and regular presence in the home helped build trust with participants and gave me invaluable opportunities to observe practices and participate in them, in the home and outside the home. This offered insights into the multiple layers affecting family language practices and policies, and perceptions about the usefulness of linguistic resources.

My identity as a female researcher affected the ways in which I was able to engage with and bond with my participants. My initial engagement with the family was invited by the mother, who also acted as my main teacher during our informal Arabic lessons. Her husband routinely joined the lessons, but I interacted mainly with Aaya. It was also the mother who I perceived as assuming most responsibility for any questions related to FLP, childcare and the maintenance of Arabic as a family or ‘home’ language, as well as questions relating to her and her husband’s acquisition of English. My gender allowed me to establish a close relationship with Aaya as gatekeeper to the family. Aaya’s strong relationship with her daughter Farah meant that Farah often joined our conversations or activities, as she tended to be near her mother. Furthermore, Aaya introduced me to several other Arabic-speaking women in the neighbourhood when she invited me to meet her friends. Arguably, my gender as a woman facilitated access to such additional opportunities for interaction with other women. As a Western, non-Muslim woman, I felt that I was able to establish a good relationship also with Nasri and the adult sons. If I had conducted this research as a Muslim woman, these circumstances may have been different, as in Islam, interactions between adult men and women (who are not married, or blood-related) often tend to be limited. Nasri and the four sons joined any conversations whenever they were at home during my visits. However, Aaya was my main contact for arranging research visits and my main interlocutor during such visits. The focus group discussion on the other hand was joined by three of the sons, the father and the mother, which meant that adult male viewpoints figured prominently in the discussion.
My own positioning as language learner offered opportunities to learn about language attitudes, language hierarchies and ideologies: Aaya taught me MSA expressions and vocabulary to discuss everyday topics (e.g. cooking, hobbies), which would for any old speaker of Arabic seem rather unnatural. I had insights into participants’ beliefs about which language forms I, as learner, should or should not use. This became particularly clear when, after my Palestinian Arabic course in 2018, family members ‘corrected’ certain expressions I had learned. Aaya’s and Nasri’s self-corrections and meta-linguistic comments in my presence offered valuable insights into their own perceptions of their language repertoires, and how in reality the ‘boundaries’ between MSA and colloquial forms are not as clear-cut as often imagined. There were instances in which participants disagreed over which language forms or lexical items counted as Standard and were thus the ‘correct’ forms to use. For example, during a lesson that focused on declension of nouns and verb conjugation, Aaya and Nasri disagreed over dual forms, and whether they were commonly used for spontaneous spoken conversation in informal contexts (April 2018). The result of their discussion was that, regardless of whether they themselves used it in everyday speech or not, they advised me to use the grammatically ‘correct’ dual forms.

Furthermore, I observed that the ways I was corrected when using colloquial language forms differed from participants’ assessment of Farah’s use of non-Standard features: While outside Farah’s dedicated Arabic lessons, Farah’s use of non-Standard forms was generally accepted, my use of colloquial Arabic was perceived as inappropriate at any point. When I pointed to this discrepancy, Aaya advised me to learn the ‘pure’ Arabic, adding “it is good for you”; for Farah, instead, it was her ‘culture’, and she had always heard it at home (January 2019). Thus, colloquial Arabic was perceived as inappropriate for me, as a ‘non-heritage’ learner. Aaya did not teach me the way they spoke themselves. Instead, I was taught what participants perceived as the ‘correct’ variety of Arabic, even though I had emphasised that my aim was to learn a colloquial form of Arabic used for everyday (spoken) interaction.

The family focus group proved to be an effective method to explore language practices and policies in the home. It allowed me to explore whether any opinions expressed in the recorded discussion were in any way at odds with the observed practices, offering insights into ideologies and attitudes that my observations as language learner did not reveal. Furthermore, the focus group encouraged discussions across age groups and generations. While all family members were born in Syria, due to their different ages of arrival they had had different experiences with learning English and acquiring Arabic, and different contact with English and Arabic in their
everyday lives in the UK. The focus group gave voice to the participants and revealed beliefs and ideologies more clearly than informal conversations.\textsuperscript{38}

In contrast to my informal observations and conversations, the focus group foregrounded my role as researcher. The organisation of the physical co-presence of the family members – in a quiet place, with participants seated and uninterrupted – and the fact that the discussion was audio-recorded highlighted the more formal nature of the interaction. Yet, the fact that family members were interviewed as a group rather than individually, and in the home rather than an unfamiliar setting, made them feel more at ease as it replicated the way I would typically interact with them. The discussion yielded rich data not only about participants’ language practices and reported practices, but also in terms of interactional dynamics among participants. Parents and children discussed what was perceived as ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ language use, which in itself constituted negotiations of FLP. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of the focus group discussion revealed different notions and experiences of ‘community’. In line with the overall aim of ethnography, the family focus group allowed making sense of shared, co-constructed knowledge. Moreover, it offered insights into how participants positioned themselves within the family. It reflected the dynamics of how family members at times relied on and supported each other in helping translate from Arabic to English, and vice versa (see e.g. Excerpt 10, “Help me”). The focus group created an environment for natural discussion, enabling insights into practices and attitudes that would otherwise not be visible via observations or one-on-one interviews as used in previous research on FLP.

While the focus group was intended to create an informal atmosphere, it was still a form of interview. This genre has certain implications, i.e. a potentially perceived need on the part of the interviewee to satisfy questions put to them. Thus, participants may have felt a need to please or accommodate to myself as researcher, and to answer questions or discuss topics in a way that would satisfy me. Likewise, while helping to mitigate the Observer’s Paradox (Labov 1972), the long-term immersion also presented challenges to myself: my perception as researcher changed throughout the fieldwork, as practices became familiar, and expectations about participants’ behaviour and attitudes were formed. During the focus group, there were instances where I perceived participants’ answers to my questions as ‘unsatisfactory’ as I had anticipated participants to address specific experiences or practices that stood out to me but may have in fact been less relevant to participants. Longitudinal immersion can thus create certain expectations or biases that I needed to make myself aware of. The combination of methods helped verify my interpretations and findings through triangulation, offering a comprehensive view on practices and

\textsuperscript{38} The extent to which participants were ‘given voice’ during the focus group was of course constrained, as I had pre-selected certain topics and cautiously guided the discussion.
beliefs from various perspectives. This allowed me to compare patterns of language use and opinions expressed throughout the fieldwork (when participants were perhaps less conscious about the research) with opinions expressed during the focus group interview, during which there was likely to be greater awareness of my presence as researcher rather than language learner or friend.

The ways in which participants oriented to my own uses of Arabic showed how unexpected it was for them that a German woman in the UK, who was fluent in English, would make efforts to study Arabic. Particularly the adult sons asked with amazement why I was studying Arabic and whether it was "worth the effort". The parents showed themselves impressed particularly with my writing and reading skills, which they perceived as "better" than their younger children's literacy skills in Arabic and therefore particularly laudable. What seemed most surprising to participants however was that I had an expressed interest in learning non-Standard forms of Arabic. Particularly Aaya did not seem happy with this and emphasised several times during fieldwork that the Standard variety was the only useful variety for me as language learner. In terms of language choice during fieldwork, participants showed a preference for using English with me outside our dedicated Arabic lessons, and as a language of instruction during these lessons. When I did initiate a conversation in Arabic, the parents and sons showed themselves impressed and engaged in short dialogues in Arabic. However, particularly at the start of fieldwork, there seemed to be uncertainty on their part as to how much Arabic I would understand, so participants tended to switch to English. During the course of fieldwork, Aaya's use of Arabic in interaction with me increased, as she aimed to support my acquisition of Arabic as much as possible. This was reflected also in her increasing use of Arabic in text messages and voice notes via mobile phone. The youngest daughter Farah on the other hand seemed rather uncomfortable with me using Arabic in conversations with her. For example, when on one occasion I asked her in Arabic about how her school day was, she replied in English. Following her brother Mohammad's request to respond to me in Arabic ("b'il 'Aarabiya"), she did say a few words in Arabic about how her school day was, but she seemed insecure and rather uncomfortable (25 April 2018). Farah explained that she spoke English with all her friends who are not Arabic speakers, pointing out that I was not Arab and therefore it was easier to use English with me. She thus pointed to the fact that I was a 'non-heritage' speaker of Arabic, which seemed relevant to her in terms of language choice.

I realised that my experiences of 'researcher as language learner', balancing different roles that became more or less salient throughout the research, was relevant not only to myself, but also to participants. This became obvious when during the focus group, I gave participants an opportunity to ask questions about the research. I thus prompted a reversal of the roles of 'researcher' and 'researched', which Aaya embraced by asking me to reflect on my own experience as language learner and its role in my research: "You learn Arabic. Tell me about your experience of learning,
and about the Arabic language in your study”. She added that as my teacher she knew I was a “good” and “hard-working” student. I was taken aback, since Aaya had shifted the focus of the discussion towards me rather than the research object or logistical questions, as I had expected. She asked about my own experience of language learning as part of the research, i.e. one of the most intricate aspects of my fieldwork in the family. Aaya’s comment highlighted that participants had been aware of my complex roles. Aaya pointed to our teacher-learner relationship, in which it was her role (rather than mine) to ask questions and carry out assessment. In such discussions, participants’ reflections and questions served to re-position me in the research and emphasised the dynamic relationships between individuals’ roles in fieldwork. Aaya, as my teacher and participant, had developed some emotional attachment to the project and was interested in the role that language learning had played in it. This challenges the often taken-for-granted dichotomy between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ (see Giampapa 2016) and shows the participants’ reflexivity, which remains underexplored (but see Schiller 2018). Where research participants do get opportunities to ask questions, this is often separate from the actual research and plays a subordinate role. I argue that granting such meta-discussions a more central position in research can offer interesting insights into participants’ behaviours, enrich data analysis, and help assess the validity of researchers’ interpretations of data. My presence in the family home may have had a greater impact on the participants’ practices than I had expected, which needed to be taken into consideration when interpreting the participants’ behaviour and statements throughout the course of the fieldwork.

Some of the practices that I observed or that were reported, e.g. ‘correcting’ each other’s language practices, may have been triggered by my presence as language learner and researcher. Yet, regardless of whether my presence altered participants’ behaviours, and irrespective of whether all details of reported practices happened exactly the way they were presented to me, participants’ self-reflections offered rich insights into how ‘languages’ and proficiencies are perceived.

4.8 Conclusion

Focusing on practices in one family with its unique linguistic ecology and social dynamics, this chapter has explored notions of ‘language’ and ‘community’ in relation to language use, maintenance and attitudes. I have shown the dynamic and complex assessments of family members’ linguistic resources – Standard and non-Standard forms of Arabic as well as English – with language ‘proficiencies’ being understood and recognised differently across actors and situations.
Differing proficiency levels in Arabic or English across family members play a role in negotiating family dynamics and power relations within the family. By making certain sets of language skills relevant in a given moment – e.g. Farah’s proficiency in English during English lessons, Aaya’s Arabic proficiency during the Arabic lessons, or outside the time dedicated explicitly to language – a re-positioning of family members and re-shaping of family dynamics and roles take place. My findings corroborate Said & Zhu Hua (2017), showing how children mobilise their developing linguistic repertoires to assert agency in the family home (cf. Curdt-Christiansen & Huang 2020). Agency is afforded to children in negotiations of language use in the home through the macro-level status of the majority language. Thus, FLP is shaped by dynamics across scale-levels (see Blommaert 2018), where the value of resources is determined by a complex interplay of factors locally and translocally.

I therefore argue that FLP is best understood as emerging and operating within wider interactional regimes. While the notion of ‘policy’ helps shed light on principles that guide decisions and overt rules intended to manage language behaviours, such policies must be seen in their interplay with spoken and written language practices, inter-personal relations of power, changing dynamics of how language hierarchies are negotiated, wider dimensions of language practices and policies in the urban setting, as well as norms and discourses at higher-level scales. Such dynamics condition how language resources are used and maintained, and how their appropriateness is interpreted by family members, in the home and beyond. As Spolsky (2009: 53) points out, the “family […] while certainly ‘micro,’ turned out to be quite complex as a sociolinguistic ecology”.

FLP is never strictly about practices and policies in the home only or established among family members, i.e. within the ‘boundaries’ of a family, as wider practices and beliefs shape the dynamic construction of expectations around language use in the home. External links, and thereby the dimension of ‘community’, are to be considered as part of the interplay of factors shaping FLP. This includes wider beliefs and ideologies about language as well as macro-level policies (Van Mensel 2018). Family members’ strategic language choice to negotiate recognition and power relations in interaction with actors outside the home may confirm or contest the perceived status of language resources in the home. The dynamics around practices and policies in the family are therefore closely related to interaction with actors in wider city spaces and therefore potentially shape FLP.

The urban city space shapes the creation of bonds between actors who may share experiences and language resources. Terraced houses, accommodating families of different backgrounds in small space, encourage interaction and the development of social relations, thus creating a sense of ‘community’ among families. This relevance of local ties in the urban neighbourhood foregrounds the spatial dimensions of ‘community’. My research adds to Stevenson’s (2017)
explorations of language biographies among migrants in an apartment block, illustrating how cohabiting diverse urban space can shape ‘lived experiences of language’, and that interconnecting stories across houses may enrich the perspective.

I have shown how family members connect with others in the neighbourhood and the city, and how the Arabic language and heritage play a role in fostering such community relations. At the same time, the family as such may be seen as forming a community. The notion of CoP helps describe how family members produce and engage in shared activities and ideology (see Lanza 2007, 2020). It enriches our understanding of FLP, shifting attention to the relevance of joint practices in creating routines, expectations and values. Family members develop shared understandings of which language practices are appropriate or inappropriate, and when and where, which in turn may be renegotiated in interaction and interpreted differently across actors. Parents’ and children’s positionings and negotiations of power relations play a role in constructing the family as CoP (cf. Johnsen 2020): Children exert agency in claiming competence and authority, orienting to and developing different linguistic norms.

The multilingual diaspora context and ideological factors at higher-level scales play a significant role in shaping family-internal dynamics. I therefore argue that even if the family as a social construct is understood as a CoP, its practices and policies are always in a reciprocal relationship with practices surrounding it, and with norms established within wider or overlapping CoPs (e.g. the neighbourhood, the city, or transnationally) that shape expectations and practices locally. In this regard, notions of ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 2006) help understand how wider factors and social relations across space shape FLP, where regular interaction may not be given. A sense of nostalgia and connection with the family’s ‘roots’ (Blokland 2017) in Syria, which was evident in the participants’ discourse throughout the fieldwork, played a role in their imaginings of communities that transcend space and go beyond everyday practices. The promotion of Arabic in the Manchester family home (e.g. through its visual presence) expresses a yearning for a lost, communal past and commemoration of life in the ‘homeland’, and a way to inter-link with others sharing this experience.

Written language displayed in the home shapes and reinforces interactional regimes. The ‘private’ LL is an unstructured way of engaging in language maintenance, as well as opening up opportunities for negotiating norms. The different types of signs establish a (visual) prominence of Arabic, lending it an official character and legitimising the use of Arabic as desired practice. Establishing the status of the language in the family home, the written use of Arabic is a form of negotiating the identity of place through alignment with heritage. As Blommaert (2010) suggests, space becomes “semiotized space” through written language use. I argue that the ‘private’ LL reveals how languages in the diasporic home are associated with and serve to invoke wider

131
regimes. The display of written Arabic in the private space contributes to feelings of belonging in the diaspora, where language choice creates a link back to the past by making language part of heritage visually prominent in the 'here and now.' The 'private' LL thus connects different temporal dimensions by carrying memories from the past into the present, making them relevant for the family in the UK. At the same time, the presence of English reflects a commitment to a present and future in the diaspora. I show how interaction with the ‘private’ LL and layering of LL texts reflect actors’ (i.e. parents’ and children’s) engagement with practised, visualised FLP, thus constituting active negotiations of interactional regimes. Materiality and durability of LL items are meaningful. Participants’ acts of adding to and changing LL in the home is a way of interacting with space, and an expression of constant negotiations and re-negotiations of language hierarchies locally. I argue that LL in the private space is different from publicly displayed LL: Public LL may construct and perform an identity to others in an openly accessible space in order to attract the attention of passers-by and encourage target audiences to engage, e.g. for marketing through commodification of linguistic resources (e.g. Lou 2010; Banda & Mokwena 2019). Writing displayed in the family home is visible to a selected audience (i.e. family members and visitors), where the language skills of people frequenting the space are known or can be assumed. ‘Private’ LL reflects the everyday needs and practices of people inhabiting it, conveys messages to other family members, or serves as construction, affirmation and re-negotiation of a sense of (shared family) identity.

My choice of the family is not necessarily a universally typical case of a migrant family: Both generations are professionals, with the parent generation having undertaken Higher Education qualifications in the country of origin and the children pursuing or planning to pursue Higher Education in the UK. The family are recent arrivals who fled their home country, with a very strong sense of historical identity, potentially differing from that of labour migrants emigrating voluntarily. Inevitably, this profile conditions the family members’ attitudes to maintain their heritage language, their efforts to learn English, and the opportunities they have to do so. Notwithstanding, my observations and engagement with this family offered an opportunity to better understand the complexity of factors shaping FLP, in a similar way to the dissertation’s overall aspiration to offer a model for describing a ‘community language’ in the diaspora.

This chapter has begun to shed light on the central questions raised in this thesis on understandings of 'language' and 'community'. The insights on how language practices, policies and hierarchies are dynamically negotiated within wider interactional regimes inform the subsequent discussions of my data. The following chapter explores language and ‘community’ practices in supplementary schools.
5 Language in educational spaces

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores settings where the maintenance of Arabic is the explicit purpose of actors coming together. I discuss differences across three case study schools in their orientations towards their homelands and the Manchester setting, and how these relate to the perceived roles of English and varieties of Arabic. For the focus case study school, I relate expressed attitudes about ‘languages’ to my observations of language use in the classroom (see 3.6.4 and 8.6.6 for ethical considerations). I show how norms and linguistic hierarchies are established and negotiated in practice and discuss teachers’ and pupils’ reflections on shifting ‘language boundaries’, shedding light on wider ideologies. My findings reinforce the relevance of the diaspora setting in shaping understandings of ‘language’ and how these relate to notions of ‘community’.

The chapter begins by presenting two brief case studies of Arabic supplementary schools, exploring the general setup of the schools, their curricula and language policies (LP). These accounts provide a point of comparison for the focus case study school, introduced subsequently. I draw on longitudinal fieldwork and immersion to discuss the complex language practices and policies I observed. In a third step, I bring together my findings from across schools to explore the dynamic constructions and experiences of ‘community’. I then reflect on my methodological approach and discuss advantages and disadvantages of my complex participation and engagement, before drawing conclusions.

5.2 Returning ‘home’: Manchester Libyan Community School

This section introduces a supplementary school that defines itself and is typically defined by others as “Libyan” school, based on its name and the population it has traditionally served. Manchester Libyan Community School is one of two well-established “Libyan” supplementary schools in Manchester, and according to staff the biggest Libyan School in the UK. The school was established over a decade ago and currently has more than 60 teachers and 400 students (between 4 and 18 years). Teaching takes place on Saturdays and Sundays in a mainstream school building in North Manchester. The school serves the local area, characterised by a significant presence of Arabic speakers (School Census 2019/2020; Census 2011), as well as drawing pupils from across the North of England and West Midlands.
The school welcomes children from all backgrounds, despite its affiliations with the Libyan Embassy in London. Originally, the school provided education mainly to children of Libyan parents who had come to the UK for Higher Education and would return to Libya after finishing their degrees. The school’s aim was to provide an opportunity for children to continue the schooling they may have begun in Libya and to acquire Libyan school qualifications, enabling children to continue school and university education on their return to Libya. The founding of the school is thus based on a clear orientation to the ‘homeland’.

The school teaches the full Libyan mainstream school curriculum in Arabic. Explicit teaching of MSA grammar and spelling takes place in a dedicated Arabic language class. The textbooks are from Libya, provided by the Embassy, and are the basis for exams taken at the school. These comply with the exams taken in Libya in terms of content, structure and even timing. Initially, the school did not charge any fees. As the head teacher pointed out in an informal interview, free access to Libyan education was defined by the Embassy as the children’s right as Libyan citizens. However, the school has since introduced fees to cover expenses, as the Embassy is no longer able to provide funding. Other expenses are financed through donations from pupils’ parents or local businesses.

The school’s website (MLCS 2019) and facebook page (MLCS facebook 2021; see Figure 17) are predominantly in Arabic, with only the school’s contact details given in English, for orientation in the UK setting. It is worth noting that the English school name contains the word ‘community’, while the Arabic name does not (‘The Libyan School – Manchester’). The English title points to the roles of the school beyond the mere teaching, establishing links among actors and creating a sense of ‘community’ in the diaspora.

Any information or interaction with users is in Arabic. The virtual absence of English ‘excludes’ readers who cannot read and understand Arabic. This reflects the school’s target (and expected) audience and gives an indication of the writers’ (i.e. school staffs’) preferred language choice. It creates a sense of Arabic being the default language among members and shapes the school’s identity.
The bilingual school logo features the school name in both languages as well as an accompanying text in Arabic, which can be translated as ‘with morals we rise, and with knowledge we build the nation’. In the ‘About’ section of the school’s facebook page, a monolingual Arabic statement introduces the school: ‘#the Libyan School Manchester aspires to building a generation that is ethical and strives for the rebirth of the #motherland’. Both statements refer to the desire to rebuild Libya as a home, reflecting the aim to return to the ‘homeland’. It emphasises the school’s aim to teach good (Libyan) morals and values, which indicates the school’s wider role in the socialisation and upbringing of Libyan children in the UK setting before their return to Libya. The consistent use of the colours of the Libyan flag underlines a sense of identity that is anchored in the origin country rather than the diaspora.

As reported during interviews, there is no school-wide LP. However, given the background of most teachers, the medium of instruction in the classroom tends to be Libyan Arabic. The head
teacher reported in the interview that both teachers and pupils were encouraged to use their regional varieties, and there was no expectation that teachers or pupils spoke MSA. The interviewees emphasised that *fuṣḥā* was “too difficult” for the children to speak. When asked about the role of English, the head teacher pointed out that he preferred pupils speak colloquial Arabic over the use of English. This was confirmed by the former pupil I interviewed, who recalled that her teacher informally advocated a monolingual Arabic (“no English”) policy in the classroom. In this way, the school replicates educational settings in Libya or elsewhere in the Arab world in terms of classroom interaction, where non-Standard varieties are used for communication and MSA is the variety used for writing and as target language in Arabic language classes. However, in the diaspora, where pupils from a variety of backgrounds come together, the pupils’ use of non-Standard elements can pose challenges. As one interviewee pointed out in an MLM interview (2020a), not all dialect elements are intelligible, in which case teachers will “translate in Arabic”. ‘Arabic’ here refers to an MSA equivalent of the lexical item in question, accepted as ‘language’ in juxtaposition with ‘dialects’ (see below). Furthermore, teachers reported that in the past some parents had complained about their children learning non-Standard forms that are associated with a different country or region than their own place of origin. This suggests that regional varieties serve as identity markers associated with the ‘homeland’, perceived as relevant also, or especially, in the diaspora.

The prolonged war in Libya has led to a change in migration patterns, as people are forced to build their future in the UK. This is reflected in recent changes in the Libyan school’s composition. While the majority of pupils and teachers are still of Libyan background, most pupils are now UK-born, and families are no longer planning to return to Libya. Yet, there is a perceived need to maintain the ‘heritage’ language and links to the ‘homeland’. The life trajectories of the former pupil I interviewed illustrate such complexities: Born in Libya, she moved to Manchester with her family when she was eight for her parents’ university degrees. The family then moved back to Libya for some years but, due to ongoing conflict, they decided to return to and stay in Manchester. Her trajectory reflects the complex migration patterns and dynamics shaping language practices and forms of identification.

Many pupils are now second or third generation migrants from Libya who speak mainly English in their everyday lives. In addition, there are pupils from other Arabic-speaking as well as non-Arabic-speaking backgrounds, e.g. from Algeria, Kuwait, Sudan, Eritrea, and Pakistan. A number of pupils come from Amazigh (Berber) families, whose parents speak Tamazight but for whom Arabic serves as a ‘Second’ language. The change in school population widens the language repertoire of the school, while posing challenges to teachers aiming to deliver the (Libyan) curriculum in Arabic. Most students, in contrast to the majority of teachers, speak English fluently while their Arabic may be very limited. The school acknowledges and adapts to the reality of the
diverse diaspora and changing migration patterns: It has recently started to offer “non-speakers” classes for UK-born students and students from non-Arabic-speaking families. Yet, head teacher and teachers highlight the school’s roots and associations with Libya.

5.3 Creating ‘home’: The Damascene School

The Damascene school was established recently as a response to increasing numbers of new arrivals, mainly from Syria. It was originally set up as an informal study group in April 2017 by parents who perceived a need to ensure their children acquired and continued to use Arabic in the UK setting. The school’s aim is thus not to prepare for a return to the ‘homeland’, but for language maintenance in the diaspora.

During the first months, parents and children met weekly at a mosque in South Manchester. With the financial support from a locally based Syrian businessman, the school expanded, and teaching started to be offered in a more structured format. Since August 2018 the school has rented classrooms in a mainstream school building in Media City, a re-developed area of Salford that has no significant presence of Arabic speakers. The businessman ceased to support the initiative in late 2018 and teachers and parents have had to cover expenses since. These developments reflect the vulnerabilities and dependencies of such bottom-up initiatives, built on local support networks. One interviewee pointed out that it was important for the school to continue teaching in a dedicated teaching venue rather than shift back to informal teaching in community spaces. The school’s efforts to continue teaching in a mainstream school building, located in a trendy suburb, indicate the perceived relevance of the very facilities, i.e. a recognised school building, to justify and valorise ‘heritage’ language teaching.

The school offers Arabic classes to children between 5 and 15 years on Sundays. By early 2019, the school had grown to more than 80 pupils, divided into several year groups. According to the head teacher, more than 25% of pupils are children from refugee families who arrived in the UK after 2013, but the school population now encompasses also pupils from longer established families. The school’s website (DS 2021) is monolingual English and offers background and logistical information as well as contact details. Their facebook page uses mainly Arabic, to inform parents about recent and upcoming lessons and activities (DS facebook 2021).

The school’s name suggests a link with Syria, but head teacher and teachers emphasise that, even though all twelve teachers are Syrian, the school welcomes children and staff from all backgrounds. While most pupils are indeed Syrian, others have Jordanian, Algerian, Libyan, Saudi, Egyptian or Tunisian backgrounds. The case of a Syrian Kurdish pupil studying Arabic,
whose home language is Kurmanji Kurdish and who had not received any schooling in Arabic before coming to Manchester, reflects the complexities of country of origin and language repertoires: While her family originates from the same nation-state as the majority of pupils and teachers, and her parents support her acquisition of Arabic for its religious and wider significance, she does not use the language in her everyday life. In our informal interview, the head teacher described the school’s wider aims as helping families maintain their culture and offering any kind of support for recent arrivals establishing themselves in Manchester (November 2018).

The curriculum focuses on language teaching, in addition to teaching Qur’an, crafts, cultural values, sports and social activities. The school uses textbooks (International Curricula 2021) specifically designed for Arabic learners outside the Arab world: According to the head teacher, curricula from Arabic-speaking countries were “not appropriate” for use in the UK setting, as the stories, photos, ideas and ideologies as well as teaching methods did not match the diaspora setting in terms of identity and culture. In addition, as the head teacher emphasised, textbooks based on curricula in the Arab world did not match the level of most Arabic learners in the diaspora.

My interviewees pointed out that the school aimed to help families settle in Manchester and establish support networks, while pupils acquired and solidified their Arabic literacy and communication skills. Accordingly, socialising between parents, staff and pupils outside the classes was a central part of the school day. The head teacher reported that there was no written LP, but emphasised teachers’ focus on maintaining Arabic as a means of communication. The main aim was to avoid the use of English, and to use ‘Arabic’ as much as possible. According to my interviewees, pupils may use their regional varieties in the classroom.

The diverse city provides a setting where different varieties of Arabic come into contact, which teachers capitalise on: As teachers suggested, pupils’ use of dialect features in the classroom provided an opportunity for children to learn from each other, showcasing the diversity of Arabic dialect variation. The head teacher reported that, although there may be difficulties understanding other’s dialects, “the children will find their way” to understand each other (November 2018). Practices and policies thus acknowledge the reality of teaching Arabic in the diaspora: The head teacher acknowledges the fact that pupils speak non-Standard varieties in their homes rather than fuṣḥā. She suggested the school’s aim was to make learners comfortable using ‘Arabic’ in Manchester, and a sole focus on MSA was not a realistic goal if parents wanted children to use Arabic for communications later on. Yet, the defined target language is MSA, believed to “unite” the different regional Arabic dialects. The head teacher suggested that they taught a form of “neutral fuṣḥā”, described as a “middle form” of Arabic that did not carry obvious
dialect features and should be widely intelligible to pupils from across backgrounds (see Gaiser & Matras 2020b: 67). Such notions of intermediary varieties are imagined in response to the diversity of Arabic varieties in the diaspora and the fact that speakers are not typically comfortable using MSA for spontaneous interaction. In the supplementary school, the “neutral” form of Arabic is what teachers are happy to accept as a variety close to the Standard, which captures a focus on facilitating interaction rather than structural language boundaries. The interviewees’ descriptions of a “middle form” of Arabic illustrate how actors understand their own linguistic repertoires and categorise resources. This corroborates a recent argument in the literature, whereby *fusha* and colloquial varieties are described as constituting opposite ends on a continuum of one language rather than alternatives (Al-Batal 2017).

Teachers set school-internal exams to assess pupils’ progress. The head teacher emphasised that school staff did not aim at “making the children experts in Arabic”, and qualifications were not a priority. However, during informal telephone conversations in late 2020, the head teacher indicated that she had received requests from parents to incorporate UK qualifications. As supplementary schools rely on the support and loyalty from parents, staff are very conscious of parents’ expectations. I observed a general trend among Manchester’s Arabic schools to start offering UK exam preparation, creating additional pressure.

My observations show that, while this school aims to focus on the maintenance of Arabic as an element of pupils’ ‘heritage’, expectations developed locally and the diversity of the setting shape teaching and learning practices, as well as perceived ‘appropriateness’ of varieties and understandings of language ‘boundaries’.

The following sections draw on my longitudinal immersion in the focus case study school, which I attended weekly over 15 months as language learner and researcher.

5.4 The city as diverse home: Manchester Arabic School

Manchester Arabic School (McrAS) was set up in late 2017 and grew from 25 pupils and six teachers in early 2018 to more than 300 pupils and 35-40 staff in 2020. This tenfold increase reflects the growing demand for Arabic teaching in the city, with an increasing presence of Arabic speakers in Manchester. Teaching takes place on Saturdays from 10am to 3:30pm in the premises of a mainstream school in a South Manchester middle-class neighbourhood, which does not have a significantly large Arabic-speaking population (School Census 2019/2020; Census 2011). The school attracts pupils from across Greater Manchester and even Liverpool.
The pupils, ranging from 4 to 16 years of age, are divided into groups on the basis of a combination of age and their levels of Arabic. So-called “non-speakers” classes are aimed at children from ‘non-heritage’ or mixed language backgrounds with very limited Arabic skills. For pupils with higher levels of proficiency, McrAS offers GCSE and Advanced Levels (A-levels) preparation. The supplementary school does not function as exam centre but solely prepares students for these UK qualifications, administered by a local state school. From January to June 2019, McrAS offered Arabic classes for adult learners, responding to requests received. The eight adult learners attending these classes included second generation migrants whose parents came to the UK from Iraq, Egypt and Libya, as well as individuals with one Arabic-speaking parent. The adults’ motivation to learn or improve their Arabic was to be able to communicate in Arabic with family members and in business settings, as well as to acquire literacy skills for reading Qur’an.

All staff are first generation immigrants from across the Arab world. Some have been in the UK for decades while others are more recent arrivals with limited English proficiency. The head teacher is a trained ‘English as Additional Language’-teacher at a mainstream school, as well as examiner for Arabic GCSEs. The great majority of teachers at McrAS do not have professional teaching qualifications, as in most supplementary schools (cf. Harrison et al. forthcoming).

The pupils at McrAS are a heterogeneous group of learners, with diverse motivations, learning goals and varying levels of proficiency in Arabic varieties and other languages. Some are fluent speakers of a colloquial variety of Arabic, having arrived in the UK only recently. Others have basic or passive knowledge of their home varieties. Yet others can read (and write) CA but do not use colloquial Arabic for communicative purposes; this group includes pupils who had previously attended madrasas or otherwise studied Arabic for religious purposes.

The great majority of pupils have Arab-speaking backgrounds. There is a number of recently arrived children from Syria and Libya. However, 70-80% of pupils are UK-born (MLM interview 2020b), with diverse backgrounds including Algeria, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, etc. There are children who describe themselves or are referred to by others as “half-Arabs”, having one Arab parent. In addition, the school attracts pupils from a range of (Muslim and non-Muslim) non-Arabic-speaking backgrounds, including Somali, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Malay. Pupils’ complex migration trajectories have enriched their linguistic repertoires: several pupils speak Italian having lived in Italy before coming to the UK; two Russia-born sisters of Algerian background have passive knowledge of Russian; some children have lived in several Arabic-speaking countries before migrating to the UK, where they were exposed to a range of Arabic dialects.
5.4.1 School aims and linguistic hierarchies

As the head teacher emphasised, the school’s main aim is to develop in the students an appreciation for ‘Arab culture’ and a sense of pride and identity through language. The curriculum aims to enhance the children’s reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in Arabic, as well as teaching about history and culture. McrAS’s facebook page describes the school’s goals as shown in the bilingual statement below (Figure 18).

Figure 18. McrAS facebook ‘About’ (McrAS facebook 2021)

Accordingly, Arabic serves as a vehicle for cultural identity, based on the belief that promoting the ‘Arabic language’ will help their children embrace their heritage in the diaspora. The statement suggests that the school’s orientation towards emphasising “our identity in UK” coincides with their aim to maintain Arabic as heritage. It is noteworthy that the English translation leaves out the first phrase ‘the best Arabic school in Manchester’, a form of self-assessment accessible to Arabic-reading audiences only.

The reasons for parents to enrol their children in the school vary widely. In informal interviews, parents emphasised that Arabic literacy skills improved the children’s educational and employment opportunities in the UK, as well as opening doors to job markets in Arab countries. Many parents remove their children from the school after passing GCSEs, which reflects the perceived relevance of such qualifications. Some Arab parents perceived it as a “duty” to teach their children Arabic, fearing to be judged by family and friends in their countries of origin or the UK. Supplementary school staff perceived teaching at McrAS as an opportunity to gain teaching experience in the UK, enhancing their CVs. The benefits of learning Arabic are not obvious to all pupils. In informal conversations, most children emphasised that it was their parents’ decision for them to attend the Arabic school. Many believed that English was more relevant in the UK setting, having little opportunity to speak Arabic outside supplementary schools. Other children recognised the benefits of speaking Arabic in facilitating communication with their family members who cannot speak English, in Manchester and abroad.
McrAS has a strong focus on pupil performance. Pupils are assessed throughout the school year to measure progress, with school-internal exams and certificates. McrAS’s website presents the school as a professional education institution that “celebrate[s] culture and heritage” while preparing pupils to take UK qualifications. Accordingly, “The courses we provide not only enhance the Arabic language, but also help them to gain a competitive academic edge” (McrAS 2021a).

Besides focused language teaching, which takes up the largest part of the school day, children learn about Qur’an and Islam. Here, learning Arabic takes place through religion rather than being a thematic unit in itself. The celebration of Arab traditions and values plays a central role in school routines, through activities aimed to encourage children to use and improve their Arabic for their personal development and cultural formation. Traditional dishes, music and dance are celebrated on special occasions, often accompanied by language-focused activities during the school day that link tradition to relevant vocabulary and expressions. McrAS offers a range of extra-curricular activities, such as weekly visits to the local mosque or bilingual Arabic-English Karate lessons.39 Such events and activities do not focus explicitly on the Arabic language but offer opportunities for exposure to Arabic (i.e. CA and colloquial spoken Arabic) in the diaspora setting. In this way, Arabic is taught not simply as a language ‘skill’, but in its interrelation with other forms of cultural heritage and as part of the Manchester setting.

Some factors shaping the school’s curriculum are external to the direct teaching context: the use of the mainstream school premises is tied to constraints regarding teaching content. As McrAS’s head teacher as well as a staff member at the relevant subletting agency explained, the host mainstream school imposes certain restrictions concerning the teaching of religion, which are formally defined in the sublease agreement. The restrictions concerning the teaching of religion was put in place arguably due to increasing concerns around radicalisation following the Manchester Arena Bombing in 2017. This seems to presuppose a strict and clear-cut separation between any elements of linguistic and religious heritage, which may however not always be possible. Furthermore, a ban on teaching mainstream curriculum subjects, again imposed by the host school, suggests that the teaching of ‘heritage’ can and should be separate from subjects defined as UK core curriculum content, separating the two and presupposing that supplementary schools’ aims do not include supporting children with mainstream education.

McrAS does not have a written LP that would explicitly prescribe language choice in the classroom. None of the school’s information materials (online or offline) define which variety of

39 For videos of such Karate lessons, see https://fb.watch/1Tux-nl4Xb/; https://fb.watch/1TuEUl35OZ/; last accessed 28 January 2021.
Arabic is the target language, or which language or languages (and varieties) are to be used for instruction. In practice, however, staff regularly emphasise in the classroom, in interaction with parents and in conversations with me that they aimed to avoid the use of English at McrAS. Furthermore, my informal interviews with staff, recorded MLM interviews, and classroom observations reflect a widely shared understanding that MSA is the target language at McrAS, even for casual interaction, and that non-Standard varieties of Arabic are to be avoided. Examining curricula across year groups handed out to teachers at the start of the school year, I found that dialect variation was not mentioned. The decision to privilege the teaching of MSA is based on various factors, including staff members’ language attitudes and parents’ expectations. As one parent explained in an informal interview, “If you speak dialect, that means you don’t speak Arabic well”. The participant suggested that using dialect created a “bad environment” for the children. In relation to her own children, one of the teachers suggested to me: “If I could go back in time I’d speak proper to my children”. MSA is perceived as a resource that is thought to guarantee success while connecting to heritage. Some teachers have suggested that colloquial forms must not ‘contaminate’ the Standard in any way. For instance, the teacher of the GCSE-level class at McrAS repeatedly expressed her concerns about “incorrect” ways of using Arabic and the use of colloquial forms on social media. Many parents explained that they could not speak “proper” or “pure” Arabic themselves but wanted to ensure their children learned MSA. There is thus a shift in responsibility regarding the transmission of what is perceived as ‘correct’ Arabic from parents to supplementary schools (cf. Francis et al. 2009).

This privileging of MSA replicates practices in educational institutions in the Arab world, where the Standard is taught at schools while knowledge of the vernacular is taken for granted. MSA is the only form of Arabic that has widespread institutional legitimacy. Furthermore, staff and parents emphasised routinely that fuṣḥā was more widely intelligible than the regional varieties. The perceived universality of fuṣḥā, the variety that is closest to CA used in the Qur’an, means it is not biased towards any country or region and therefore gains additional value in the diverse diaspora setting. Regulations and guidelines for UK-based qualifications reinforce the focus on Standard forms. Specifications for GCSE Arabic define Standard spoken and written Arabic as the target language (GCSE 2016; cf. Snowden et al. 2016: 6), in line with general requirements for GCSE in other languages (GCSE 2015). McrAS’s head teacher, herself Arabic GCSE-examiner, confirmed that while the use of non-Standard forms alone did not result in failing the exam, pupils achieved lower grades if dialect features were used.

This hierarchisation of Arabic varieties and privileging of MSA takes place despite a general awareness among teachers and parents that MSA is not the natural way of using Arabic for spontaneous interaction. Some teachers claimed that they spoke fuṣḥā in the classroom, which is at odds with my observations. In an MLM interview (2018), staff recognised that using MSA
for spoken interaction was not always a realistic goal, yet they “try [their] best to speak the fuṣḥā”. One teacher reported that most children had difficulties understanding fuṣḥā when they first came to the school, but that they would get used to it. The GCSE teacher, of Libyan background, explained she spoke “as much Standard as possible”. Accordingly, “it’s not the fuṣḥā, but it’s not very Libyan”. Similar to my findings at the Damascene School, such statements are expressions of speaker’s characterisations of their own linguistic repertoires. They reflect an understanding of a continuum between Standard and non-Standard varieties, with a ‘middle’ variety where the use of salient dialect features (or at least features that are perceived as obviously non-Standard) is avoided. Accordingly, speakers attempt to incorporate what is associated with MSA vocabulary and grammar in their ways of speaking.

5.4.2 Institutional practices and interactional regimes

While McrAS does not have an overarching policy that would prescribe language use in the classroom or beyond, various practices and routines combine to create interactional regimes that highlight and reinforce the emphasis on ‘Arabic’ over English, and the privileging of MSA over non-Standard forms.

Linguistic Landscapes: Negotiating interactional regimes

Linguistic Landscapes (LL) serve to establish the dominance and legitimacy of Arabic in the supplementary school, as well as defining ownership of and belonging to space. On entering the mainstream school building rented by McrAS on a Saturday, visitors are welcomed by multi-layered, multilingual and multi-authored LL. A combination of monolingual Arabic and bilingual Arabic-English signs, leaflets and posters are attached to walls or displayed on tables to communicate information to parents and pupils (Figure 19).

![Figure 19. School main entrance on a Saturday](image-url)
McrAS’s signs are surrounded by and partly cover the signage of the host mainstream school, which dominate the LL across the building and are permanent. The Arabic school’s signs, on the other hand, are to be removed at the end of the teaching day, underlining the majority language regime of the wider language ecology. Their visually prominent signs and banners reflect a repurposing of space, temporarily marking out those wings of the building claimed by McrAS during the weekend.

Different types of LL-items serve to inform visitors about the Arabic school and help organise space. As the school building is shared among several organisations on Saturdays, the LL is vital in marking their presence and temporary ownership of parts of the space. This temporary LL is slightly different each week, as new posters and information notes replace others. Yet, despite its inherently dynamic character, the LL mounted by supplementary school staff every Saturday morning has a number of stable elements, such as school banners and signposts, as well as the recurring use of the school’s colours and logo.40

McrAS’s banners are mainly English and thus ‘audience-inclusive’ (Gaiser & Matras 2016b), with only the school’s name given in Arabic script (see Figure 19). A rather ‘official’ element of the LL, the professionally printed banners recognise and acknowledge English as the default language used for written communication in the mainstream school building, while legitimising the presence of Arabic for the purpose of the supplementary school.

Laminated ‘wayfinding’ signs across the corridor guide parents, pupils, teachers and visitors to the building wing in which teaching takes place (Figure 20).

40 The colour green used in the logo is traditionally associated with Islam and Arab culture.
The arrow and logo serve as a visual gesture, indicating the direction to the classrooms; the school’s name in Arabic script provides additional information to readers of Arabic. Also for non-Arabic readers, the script will be recognisable, not least since it appears alongside the school logo and colours. In this sense, the Arabic script serves emblematic functions. However, the signs are not required for wayfinding as such: actors frequenting McrAS, e.g. teachers, pupils or parents, know their way to the classrooms; one-time visitors are typically accompanied by the head teacher or other staff members and are unlikely to require direction signs for orientation. Instead, the signs featuring Arabic writing serve to mark space and signal temporary ownership of this demarcated space, as well as symbolically constructing (non-permanent) identity of space (see Ben-Rafael et al. 2008). In this way, the LL establishes a sense of legitimacy to use Arabic in this space, thus contributing to a perceived ‘appropriateness’ of language use.

The direction signs are often attached to more permanent mainstream school signs, covering these until the end of the supplementary school day. The signposts’ material composition indicates their temporary purpose; similarly, the layering of signs indicates their non-permanent
relevance and validity, as well as a temporary shift in power between language resources and users. Symbolically, monolingual Arabic signs placed on top of the English LL of the mainstream school building challenge the otherwise marginalised role of ‘heritage languages’ in the UK education setting and serve to – at least temporarily – assert their relevance.

Laminated signs attached to classroom doors inform visitors about the year groups taught in the respective rooms (Figure 21). On McrAS’s signs, English year group terms are displayed alongside their Arabic equivalent, using the terms conventionally used in the Arab education system (‘sixth grade’, Year six) rather than direct translations. As administration staff confirmed during an informal interview, the bilingual signs facilitate access to information for parents and teachers who may be literate in only one of the languages.

Figure 21. Door signs (‘sixth grade’; ‘fifth grade’)
The positioning and materiality of signs (for ‘materiality’ see Cook 2015; Stroud & Mpendukana 2009; Blommaert 2013b) reflect the dynamics of place-making through LL in ‘borrowed’ space.41 The permanent metal signs indicate room numbers and the subject normally taught in a classroom. The laminated A4 sheets added on Saturdays inform readers about the Arabic teaching taking place during the time the sign is visible. Materiality, permanence and positioning on the door combine to create a hierarchical ordering between these types of signs, between their authors and languages. The mainstream school’s signs have a wider validity and more ‘official’ character than McrAS’s temporary signs. The bilingual nature of the Arabic school’s signs reflects that they target a selected readership, i.e. readers literate in or otherwise associating themselves with Arabic. Visually, Arabic takes the more prominent position on the sign (at the top). The monolingual English signs instead do not select specific audiences and thus have a wider reach; yet, the information they offer becomes irrelevant during the time in which the space is used by McrAS. The supplementary school’s signs negotiate the perceived roles and functions of the two languages in time and space, contesting the superiority of English. They thus re-define (use of) space temporarily and establish interactional regimes, re-ordering language hierarchies and attributing a local function to the Arabic language.

Notices and leaflets are used to convey information to parents or visitors. Figure 22 shows a bilingual note directed at parents. The main message is given in English and Arabic, acknowledging both languages as relevant locally. However, the attention-grabbing heading ‘notice’ (إشعار) framing the message is given in Arabic only, thus asserting its temporary dominance. Languages are in this way distributed over different speech/writing acts (see Matras & Gaiser 2020; Matras et al. 2018), where the Arabic heading frames the genre and lends legitimacy to its official status in space and time.

---

41 See Kenner & Ruby (2012) and Martin et al. (2006) for the term borrowed spaces in the context of supplementary schools.
The note in Figure 23 – directed at parents who had not yet paid tuition fees and asking them to do so – was handed out to parents on entering the building and was available in Arabic only. It illustrates school staff’s expectations that most parents are literate in Arabic and defines Arabic as the official means of communication between the school and parents. Such forms of written communication contribute to shaping the school’s linguistic identity, differentiating it from other UK-based educational institutions. The consistent visual prominence of Arabic on different types of signs across the school and leaflets, potentially carried to the pupils’ homes, serves to establish the status of Arabic outside the language classroom.

Signs directed towards readers who are not directly affiliated with McrAS use English to reach wider audiences. For example, as McrAS shares the building’s cafeteria with other initiatives, banners and signs serve to delineate McrAS’s dedicated part of the cafeteria. While some organise space and signal ownership implicitly through their placement, e.g. an advertisement...
banner, other signs explicitly demarcate space, signalling to readers who belongs and who does not belong (Figure 24).

Figure 24. "Manchester Arabic School Only" sign

Such signs contribute to creating and negotiating spatial and symbolic boundaries between groups using the larger space and emphasise the relevance of a sign’s emplacement in the LL (Scollon & Scollon 2003), determining its meaning in situ (Blommaert 2013b).

In addition to the use of Arabic for communicative purposes, posters created by pupils are often added to classroom and corridor walls for the teaching day (Figure 25).
They showcase the work done during the lessons and are an additional way of marking presence. In visualising and celebrating the children’s language practices, the signs enhance pride about pupils’ work and confidence in their language skills and heritage as well as granting learners a sense of co-ownership of Arabic. In addition, such signs serve to reinforce Arabic as the default language also outside the language classroom, creating an impression that it is dominant in relation to other languages people use (see Shohamy 2015).

During holidays, the Arabic language serves to connect to religious heritage, used e.g. for Arabic Ramadan greetings. On special occasions, traditional decoration and flags of Arab countries become part of the school’s semiotic landscape (Jaworski & Thurlow 2010) and contribute to creating what teachers refer to as an “Arab atmosphere” (Figure 26).
The various signs co-constituting the supplementary school’s LL reflect the interplay of actors and language resources. Different signs may target different audiences, each with a distinct language choice to match the intended readers’ expected preferences and proficiencies. In their combination, they offer insights into the complexities of language choice and intended functions. The combination of McrAS’s professional signs (e.g. banners), laminated posters, computer-printed A4 sheets of paper, flyers and smaller handwritten notes across the borrowed space creates an interplay of signs that symbolically acknowledges the school’s temporary ownership of space and the status of Arabic in the borrowed space. The logo, re-appearing on different types of signs, is part of the school’s official branding. The fact that it includes the school’s name in Arabic further reinforces the official status of the language locally. The repeated written presence of Arabic legitimises the oral use of Arabic in a space otherwise dominated by English. The supplementary school’s additions to the LL divides up the larger space into smaller spaces in which identities are being performed, ownership and entitlement articulated, and where particular rules operate and expectations prevail (cf. Blommaert 2013b).

Written language practices online serve to reinforce the supplementary school’s interactional regime, not only in terms of language choice but also regarding language variation. McrAS uses their facebook page to showcase classroom activities and interact with parents. General information about upcoming events is given in both Arabic and English, but parents’ interaction with such posts through comments is typically in Arabic. In addition to showcasing activities and

42 See Lanza & Woldemariam (2014) on branding in the LL and its role in identity creation.
events held at the school, the head teacher uses the page to reinforce the privileging of Standard Arabic. A monolingual Arabic post from January 2018 defines the school’s aim to ‘preserve our Arabic language and not to confuse it with ʿāmmiyya’ (McrAS facebook 2018a). The head teacher emphasises her aim to raise awareness of the (supposedly bad) habit of using words as ‘Arabic’ when they are theoretically not considered MSA, highlighting the perceived need to differentiate between MSA and what is considered ‘slang’. Three users engaging with this post expressed their agreement with this view, confirming the importance of highlighting such “problems”.

A post from 18 May 2020 features a text as part of a “Project to reduce violations of Arabic language”, praising ‘correct’ spellings and highlighting common misspellings (McrAS facebook 2020). Such posts are forms of LP, where the head teacher as recognised authority expresses a perceived need to preserve a ‘pure’ and supposedly ‘correct’ form of Arabic. The facebook page, used as a direct communication channel with parents, reinforces the privileging of MSA in the classroom.

Curriculum: Reinforcing interactional regimes

At yearly school-internal teacher training sessions offered by the head teacher, she emphasises the overarching aim to use ‘Arabic’ in the classroom and during break times, with ‘Arabic’ referring to MSA. The selected textbooks focus on teaching MSA and disregard the existence of regional varieties for spoken interaction, with some even actively advising teachers against the use of colloquial forms in the classroom. Most year groups follow the Jordanian curriculum, with some occasional use of materials designed specifically for children learning Arabic outside the Arab world. Jordanian textbooks are perceived as meeting the children’s needs and perceived as “neutral” linguistically and regarding content (MLM interview 2018).

Designed for children growing up in Jordan, these textbooks are monolingual Arabic, which differs from the resources designed for children learning Arabic abroad (see Figures 27, 28).
Figure 27. “Iqra’ Arabic Reader 1”, Beginners’ level (Abdallah 2007a: 51)

Figure 28. “Iqra’ Arabic Reader 3”, Advanced level (Abdallah 2007b: 3)
Materials for learners outside the Arab world treat Arabic as a ‘foreign language’: Instructions are in English, and new vocabulary and grammatical structures are typically introduced based on English as the source language or a metalanguage. The use of English as language of instruction recognises and replicates heritage learners’ linguistic environment in the diaspora, and through that legitimises the use of English in the classroom. The green arrow at the top right (Figure 27) indicates the right-to-left direction for reading and writing Arabic. Aspects of both Anglophone and Arab ‘cultures’ are included in photos and content. The Arab world is not taken as a default setting for storylines, and there is no fixed affiliation with one particular Arab or Western country. In this way, the textbooks acknowledge aspects of complex cultures and identity, and the possibility of multiple belonging (Heller & Duchêne 2012).

While both sets of teaching materials – Jordanian textbooks and those designed for learners outside the Arab world – enforce the prioritisation of MSA, they attach distinct roles to the relevance of English in the Arabic language classroom. They thus serve as forms of LP, defining the target variety and shaping learning practices in the classroom.

Exercises and teaching methods in the GCSE class are strongly oriented towards preparing pupils for exams and ensuring they pass with high marks. The GCSE curriculum covers formal, academic vocabulary, rather than words that may be useful and relevant for everyday conversations or on holidays abroad. Teachers typically advise pupils to focus on memorising pre-selected numerals, colour words, weekdays, etc., that pupils find easy to remember and can use in their writings without making mistakes. The topics and exercises are oriented towards GCSE requirements, with tasks such as “Write a formal letter to the local Municipality to complain about public transport”. These are unlikely to be situations which young learners growing up in the UK might find themselves in.

### 5.4.3 Classroom practices shaping interactional regimes

While McrAS does not have any written LP, classroom interaction serves to establish and negotiate norms of linguistic behaviour.

**Establishing norms**

I observed how teachers, often at the beginning of a new school year, point out that they did not accept any English in the classroom but expected pupils to speak Arabic. This may be partly shaped by language teaching pedagogy, whereby the use of the ‘target language’ is to be kept to a maximum in the language classroom (cf. Nordstrom 2020). However, the reasons teachers
explain or indeed justify their requests to use Arabic reflect more complex dynamics behind the ‘Arabic-only’-rules in the classroom, specific to ‘heritage’ language teaching in the diaspora. Several teachers pointed out (in Arabic) that ‘this is an Arabic school’ or ‘we are not in English school, we are in Arabic school’, which points to the context that McrAS creates. Supplementary school space is imagined as distinct from other education settings in terms of language use, creating an interactional regime where the default language is Arabic rather than English. Thus, linguistic hierarchies valid in Manchester mainstream school settings are reversed at the Arabic school.

In the GCSE class, I observed how the teacher routinely attempted to reinforce Arabic as the ‘default’ language, using Arabic for framing lessons: At the start of every lesson, she greeted pupils and asked which day and date it was in Arabic, which she then wrote on the board using the Hindu-Arabic numeral system traditionally used in the Arab world. This routine defines ‘Arabic’ (as opposed to English) as ‘appropriate’ language of interaction. While pupils’ answers were often in English, the teacher insisted on getting pupils to respond in Arabic. With Arabic being accepted as the only ‘correct’ response to her question, the teacher attempted to establish an idealised monolingual Arabic classroom. In GCSE lessons throughout my fieldwork, any text written on the board was in Arabic, even though the relevant topic may have been discussed or explained in English. The monolingual Arabic (practised) policy for writing on the board reinforces language hierarchies in the classroom, reinforcing Arabic as target language.

During my fieldwork, a Year 8 teacher held regular competitions to encourage learners to speak MSA, or at least any form of Arabic, during lessons as well as break times (see MLM interview 2018). Similar to the language game played among siblings in the family (Chapter 4), such activities constitute playful negotiations of LP. Other teachers communicated their policies more implicitly, e.g. by asking learners to repeat any English contributions in Arabic. While implicit, such practices are forms of ‘language management’ (Spolsky 2009), defining a ‘default medium’ in the classroom and regulating pupils’ behaviour.

**Negotiating hierarchies: ‘Arabic’ versus English**

At the same time, however, attempts to maintain a monolingual Arabic classroom are undermined by the understanding that English is often needed to clarify instructions and grammar. School staff expressed an awareness that most pupils were more comfortable using English than Arabic, and English was an important resource to keep learners motivated.
In informal interviews with the GCSE teacher, she repeatedly referred to English as being the children’s “mother tongue”. The teacher’s use of this term with reference to English reveals the complex reality of the learning environment in the diasporic classroom. While parents and teachers aim to pass on what is imagined as the ‘heritage’ language to future generations, there is an understanding that English rather than Arabic is the ‘mother tongue’ of children growing up in the UK, independently from the language(s) their parents will have spoken growing up. There is an acceptance that most children will feel more comfortable using English for everyday conversation at school and with their peers. In an MLM interview (2018), in response to my question whether it was challenging for pupils to speak Arabic, a teacher explained that “English is much easier for them. It is the language they use every day”. The interviewee added that most pupils understood Arabic yet replied in English. My observations confirm such reports: In practice, English was not strictly prohibited during lessons. Particularly in higher age groups such as the GCSE class, pupils tended to use English to reply to the teacher’s questions posed in Arabic, despite explicit rules and routines (see above). Likewise, for break-time interaction, pupils showed a clear preference for using English among peers.

Teachers seemed to accept that translations into English were the easiest way to ensure pupils’ understanding of work instructions or even each other’s contributions. In contrast to their self-defined or reported aim to encourage a monolingual Arabic classroom, there was a tendency for teachers to use English for meta-discourse and pedagogical structuring of lessons: teachers used English when introducing new grammar topics, to ensure pupils’ understanding of new vocabulary, or when asking pupils to pay attention. Likewise, information on exams or other organisational matters tended to be in English. Thus, in the supplementary school classroom, the majority language English is used as a facilitating tool for ‘heritage’ language maintenance (Matras et al. forthcoming).

My observations offered insights into how the use of English was often licensed in practice, as pupils used their agentive power in negotiating language choice and thus practised policies. Pupils used various strategies to justify the use of English, including translation requests, word searches, or highlighting a lack of understanding. Such requests reflect the pupils’ awareness of the ‘idealised’ Arabic-only policy, and at the same time suggests classroom participants’ acknowledgment that monolingual policies are difficult to implement. On one occasion after the GCSE-teacher had instructed pupils to write an essay, pupils asked (in English) for permission to write their essays in English. Following a process of negotiation, the teacher allowed students to use English for essay outlines, while the essay itself had to be written in Arabic (March 2018).

43 For translanguaging in supplementary schools see Yan Chu (2019), Creese & Blackledge (2015).
Thus, the teacher adapted her didactic methods to the pupils’ abilities and preferences, while re-establishing Arabic as the normatively prescribed target language.

 Likewise, teachers used medium negotiation strategies (Bonacina & Gafaranga 2010) to justify their language choice. For example, when the head teacher visited the GCSE class in December 2018 to explain the registration process for GCSE candidates, she greeted the pupils and explained the reason for her visit in Arabic. This was followed by a disclaimer, in English, that she was going to explain organisational matters in English to ensure pupils’ understanding. This justification of her switch to English served to license the deviance from Arabic, a perceived breach of the implied Arabic-only rule. Such explicit licensing of the use of English in fact reinforces the status of Arabic as default classroom language. Following her explanations in English, the head teacher re-established Arabic as the medium of interaction.

 Similar to power negotiations observed in the family setting (Chapter 4), my fieldwork at McrAS offered insights into how an imbalance of language proficiencies across classroom actors can lead to negotiations of power between teachers and pupils, resulting in dynamic re-positionings of actors’ local status and linguistic resources. Pupils routinely challenged teachers’ English skills, thereby subverting conventional teacher-student power relations. They ridiculed teachers’ pronunciation or grammar or explicitly corrected their uses of English. In the GCSE class, the teacher’s reaction often mirrored this practice, highlighting the pupils’ limited Arabic literacy skills or vocabulary. While such attempts to manage classroom interaction are pedagogically questionable, they offer insights into how linguistic resources serve to negotiate social relations between language users. Pupils emphasised the role of English as the dominant (majority) language, perceived as a more powerful resource in the UK and their everyday lives locally. They capitalised on their own proficiencies to contest the teacher’s authority as ‘language expert’, as well as challenging the relevance of Arabic in Manchester. Teachers, on the other hand, defined the setting as ‘Arabic’ school, where the use of and proficiency in Arabic rather than English was prioritised and assessed.

Re-negotiating hierarchies: ‘Proper’ Arabic versus ‘slang’

In addition to re-defining hierarchies between ‘Arabic’ and English, the supplementary school classroom provides a setting for negotiations between Arabic ‘language’ versus dialects. In informal interviews as well as classroom discourse, teachers typically referred to regional varieties using labels such as ‘slang’, ‘accent’, ‘street language’, in this way marking boundaries between sets of linguistic resources that are accepted or desired as target language, versus those that are not accepted as such (see Karatsareas 2020).
In the language classroom, teachers’ assessments of language practices expressively and explicitly create boundaries as well as hierarchies between ‘language’ and ‘dialect’. During a lesson in the adult class (taught by the head teacher), the teacher presented the full paradigm of MSA personal pronouns, arguing that most Arabic speakers did not use these “correctly” (September 2018). Aware that, in reality, some forms (e.g. 3rd P Fem Pl pronoun hunnā, or dual forms antumā and humā) are not used in spontaneous spoken conversation, one participant asked whether we needed such forms for interaction with “native speakers”. While recognising that “not many people use” these forms, the teacher argued that it was important for us as learners to use them, as they indicated “a high level of Arabic” and showed that we “speak the language well”, rather than “slang”. The teacher’s statement reinforces the hierarchisation of Arabic varieties, juxtaposing the ‘high level’ MSA with ‘slang’. The use of non-Standard forms is interpreted as reflecting limited education, while the use of the personal pronouns introduced by the teacher is perceived as indicating high proficiency in Arabic.

Several weeks later, when referring to the rarely used 2nd P Pl pronoun antunnā, the head teacher suggested that this was “just for grammar”. She suggested she “had to teach it” but noted that Arabic speakers did not actually use the form much, “unless you’re an Arabic freak”. The head teacher’s statement illustrates the paradox of teaching a Standard language that is “just for grammar” but not used in natural interaction. Her rather derogative addition that using such pronouns identified speakers as “freak[s]” further illustrates that, in natural spontaneous conversation, the pronouns are not used.

During another lesson in the adult class, the teacher added the MSA word haqiba (‘bag’) to the vocabulary list (October 2018). I commented that, during our stay with the head teacher’s family in Palestine, people used shanta to refer to ‘bag’. The head teacher responded that she had used the word haqiba “probably three times in [her] life”, adding “we normally say shanta”. She went on to explain that shanta was “a useful word”, as it could be used to refer to different types of bags including luggage at the airport. The head teacher suggested that haqiba, on the other hand, was “more formal Arabic” and therefore “better”. This statement is another reflection of the ideological hierarchisation of resources, where non-Standard forms are perceived as less correct and less worthy than Standard forms of Arabic. The head teacher acknowledges that the non-Standard shanta is useful and versatile. Yet, the word’s perceived lower level of “formality” (i.e. shanta being perceived as a non-Standard form) serves as justification for the preference for teaching haqiba to learners of Arabic. This is despite the fact that the adult learners’ main motivation to attend Arabic lessons was to improve their communication skills for informal interaction. In the head teacher’s suggestion that haqiba was “better for you”, you is generic, referring to learners of Arabic more widely. It stands in contrast with the pronoun we in the head
teacher’s preceding explanation (“we normally say shanta”), when she referred to old speakers of Palestinian Arabic or possibly other colloquial varieties.

On a different occasion, the teacher asked the group of adult learners to name nouns starting in /b/ (ب). My answer betinjān (‘aubergine’), or rather my pronunciation of it, triggered the head teacher to explain that bādhinjān was the “proper word”. The way I pronounced it, betinjan, was “between you and me, in Nablus”. The head teacher explained that, while in Palestine she taught me the informal variant that is locally used, the “real one” was bādhinjān. She went on to suggest that this applied to other words she taught me during our stay with her family, e.g. bandooora (‘tomato’), which “should be” tomātim. The head teacher emphasised that “here you shouldn’t speak like that” (February 2019). Her reaction shows how different judgment criteria of what counts as ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ apply across settings, even for the same speaker. Her justification is anchored in wider ideologies of how learners ‘should’ speak, depending on geographical location and language ecologies. She distinguishes between the ‘here’, i.e. the diaspora, and ‘there’, i.e. Nablus where Palestinian Arabic is spoken for everyday communication. In fact, the head teacher pointed out on a different occasion that “teaching āmmiyya would be better” if we were living in the Arab world. The fact that she taught me the colloquial Palestinian pronunciation of the words referring to ‘aubergine’ and ‘tomato’ was thus legitimised by setting and context. In her country of origin, it would have felt unnatural for her to teach me Standard Arabic words in conversations about food or other aspects of heritage. In the diaspora, the hierarchisation of language resources even for spoken communication gets re-adjusted. The pronunciation and variants perceived as Standard and thus “proper” Arabic are preferred to colloquial forms, used in the reality of spoken conversations in the teacher’s home country. Again, there is a juxtaposition between ‘we’, referring to old speakers in Nablus, and ‘you’, i.e. language learners in the diaspora. Accordingly, norms and conventions applying to old speakers do not apply to learners, challenging the general understanding of “native speakers” as the role model for language learners. The head teacher’s comment that her teaching of non-Standard forms should stay “between you and me” indicates that this cannot be reconciled with her focus on MSA as supplementary school head teacher in the UK.

Across lessons and teachers I observed that, to the extent that teachers were aware of their own uses of non-Standard features, they corrected their own uses of āmmiyya (captured also in the recording of MLM interview 2018). Such self-corrections during lessons indicate that while fushā may be the target variety, it is not the variety speakers are comfortable using in oral communication. Self-corrections are forms of practised LP. They help identify perceived norms, while at the same time reflecting routine language practices and language users’ awareness of how these differ from norms.
Contesting boundaries

In the GCSE-level class, where pupils were encouraged and expected to speak as much ‘Arabic’ as possible, teachers routinely corrected pupils’ uses of colloquial forms, asked pupils to “speak Arabic” and to avoid using non-Standard features. However, teachers’ assessment of dialectal forms as “incorrect” and separate from what was being defined as the target language did not remain uncontested. The below is an excerpt from my fieldnotes. It records the reactions following a student’s use of a colloquial Arabic expression to ask about a worksheet (Excerpt 12).

**Excerpt 12 (Classroom interaction)**

Pupil  
*Shu hadha?*  
[‘what’s this’]

Teacher  
*Fii-l lugha al-‘Arabiyya, min fadlak!*  
[‘in the Arabic language, please’]

Pupil  
This is *al-lugha al-‘Aarabiyya!*  
[‘the Arabic language’]

The pupil contested the teacher’s assessment of his question as not being ‘Arabic’, arguing that what he said was indeed the Arabic language. The pupil’s switch into English frames his statement, followed by a switch back to repeat the teacher’s words. This sets his comment apart from the preceding classroom interaction to make a meta-linguistic statement about his earlier contribution and reinforce his statement. The pupil’s understanding of ‘what is Arabic’ versus ‘what is not Arabic’ is based on the larger-scale distinction between ‘English’ and ‘Arabic’, whereas the teacher points to differences between Arabic varieties. In the pupil’s understanding of sets of language resources in his own repertoire, Arabic is perceived as ‘one language’ that is juxtaposed with English, rather than further distinguishing between home varieties of Arabic and the MSA variety taught at McrAS.

The exchange illustrates how language boundaries and the composition and nature of language repertoires depend on the vantage point and can be negotiated in interaction. This is salient particularly in the supplementary school classroom, where actors’ different backgrounds and migration histories result in complex linguistic repertoires and different understandings of what is ‘correct’ or what counts as ‘Arabic’ or ‘English, and what not.

As teachers interactively construct boundaries between ‘Arabic’ and its dialects, *fuṣṭā* is often juxtaposed with non-Standard varieties defined on the basis of nation states. Excerpt 13 below is an extract from my fieldnotes from the same GCSE class: When the teacher prompted pupils...
(in English) to ask about the time in Arabic, a student of Libyan background volunteered an answer, using the regional-colloquial interrogative giddāš ‘how much’ rather than the MSA equivalent kam (cf. Gaiser & Matras 2020b: 67):

**Excerpt 13 (Classroom interaction)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil</th>
<th>giddāš es-sā’ā? [‘what’s the time?’]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>That’s not Arabic, ya ḥabībi [‘my dear’]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil</td>
<td>It is! What else should it be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>It’s Libyan!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interrogative giddāš was perceived by the teacher as a ‘non-Standard’ form and therefore “not Arabic”. More specifically, she defined the expression used by the pupil as ‘Libyan’. The pupil challenged the teacher’s assessment of his answer, which he perceived as ‘Arabic’ and therefore satisfying the teacher’s task. The pupil based his answer on the forms of language he was exposed to in the home and which, in contexts outside the Arabic school, can legitimately be referred to as ‘Arabic’. The teacher’s assessment, on the other hand, defined his form of language as different from ‘Arabic’. Rather than imagining ‘Arabic’ as one language with different varieties, the teacher enforces an understanding of MSA as the ‘language’ to be learned, in contrast to regional varieties imagined as separate from the Arabic ‘language’.

The teacher’s reaction may be explained by the fact that she is herself of Libyan background and thus familiar with the variety. However, such labelling of colloquial varieties on the basis of nation-states (e.g. ‘Iraqi’, ‘Sudanese’) is a practice I observed across classrooms and teachers. Notably, when teachers juxtapose what is perceived as ‘pure Arabic’ with regional varieties, they use labels such as ‘Libyan’ or ‘Palestinian’, rather than “Libyan Arabic” or “Palestinian Arabic”. The latter two labels would recognise the respective non-Standard form as a variety of Arabic, due to the fact that in English the head of compound nouns (in this case Arabic) typically determines the semantic category of that compound. The use of labels such as ‘Libyan’ or ‘Palestinian’ on their own reinforce the idea of these varieties being distinct from ‘Arabic’.

---

44 English was the language mostly used in this practice of labelling. In Arabic, naming dialects by country is not uncommon when people of different backgrounds interact, but speakers typically distinguish only between fuṣḥā and non-Standard varieties collectively as ʿāmmiyya.
Pupils have shown a similar awareness of regional varieties. The following excerpt (Excerpt 14) reproduces a breaktime conversation I had with three girls from the pre-GCSE class about Arabic vocabulary for animals, following one girl’s request for the translation for ‘fish’.

**Excerpt 14 (Breaktime conversation)**

Pupil 1    How do you say ‘fish’ in Arabic?

LG     It’s *samak*, isn’t it?  

Pupil 2     No it’s *simač*!

Pupil 3    *simač* is Iraqi!

Pupil 2     Oh. I thought it’s Arabic (..) I wonder what am I then?

Drawing on her own language repertoire, enriched by language practices she had been exposed to in the family home, Pupil 2 noted that my suggestion *samak* for ‘fish’ did not match the ‘Arabic’ word she was familiar with. Pupil 3, her cousin, joined the conversation and explained that the word suggested by Pupil 2 was “Iraqi” rather than ‘Arabic’. Pupil 2’s final statement expressed her confusion and raised wider questions of identity. She perceived the classification of a word as ‘Iraqi’, which she had previously perceived as ‘Arabic’, as challenging her identity as Arab. Labels such as “Iraqi” are used to identify linguistic categories, while at the same time reflecting and negotiating social categories. Practices of creating and re-producing linguistic boundaries and hierarchies indicate underlying ideologies and beliefs, potentially triggering reflections on identity. In this way, teachers’ meta-linguistic comments about the distinctions between the ‘Arabic language’ and nation-based varieties, and the pupils’ embracing of such understandings, not only express but also reinforce imagined language and group boundaries. Pupils replicate language ideologies and hierarchical evaluations of repertoire resources, including a separation between Standard and non-Standard varieties of Arabic.

I observed how, adopting the juxtaposition of ‘Arabic’ and regional varieties, pupils challenge the fact that the language skills acquired in the home are not given any space at the Arabic school. In reaction to the teacher’s request to write an essay in Arabic, a pupil argued: “I can’t write *fuṣḥā*, cause we don’t speak Arabic. I’m fluent in Algerian, but I can’t write in *fuṣḥā*!” (October 2018). The statement shows the pupil’s frustration with the fact that the skills acquired from family members, i.e. fluency in “Algerian”, are not being acknowledged in the supplementary school setting. Literacy in *fuṣḥā*, or “Arabic”, is perceived as entirely separate from the Algerian Arabic variety used for communication in the home. The pupil explained that “we don’t speak Arabic”,
which may be interpreted as referring to her family and friends, or as a generalisation to refer to new speakers more widely. Her frustration further relates to the fact that she felt she was unable to meet teachers’ expectations, questioning the overall usefulness of the exercise. Such negotiations illustrate a certain paradox where the aim is to teach and ‘maintain’ a language as ‘heritage’, yet the varieties actually spoken in the learners’ homes are not accepted in the supplementary school. The pupil’s statement reflects complex relative rankings of linguistic resources. At the lower scale of the pupil’s family (i.e. the local, personal, situated scale), Algerian Arabic is valued more highly and thus perceived as more ‘appropriate’ than fuṣḥā, given the fact that Algerian Arabic serves as means of communication (and identification). In the classroom, the timeless, translocal and collective prestige values associated with MSA make fuṣḥā the preferred resource. The hierarchisation of these sets of resources is of course different when considering wider UK society, where English as societal majority language will be perceived as the most valued ‘language’ (cf. Karatsareas 2020).

Teachers’ and pupils’ corrections and labelling practices serve to delineate and highlight boundaries between sets of resources that are imagined as separate, categorising them as different languages. Such comments reproduce and reinforce the school’s aims to encourage the MSA variety and discourage the use of dialect forms.

*Contesting universality*

As mentioned above, fuṣḥā is perceived not only as the ‘correct’ but also a ‘universal’ variety that is widely intelligible and not biased towards any Arab country and culture (see Suleiman 2011). Throughout my fieldwork I observed how UK-born learners contested this understanding of MSA as ‘universal’. In a conversation with two pupils preparing for their oral GCSE exams, they emphasised their discontent with the requirement to use MSA for spoken conversation. The pupils questioned the usefulness of an oral exam assessing proficiency in a variety that is not typically used for speaking (except for scripted interaction). Furthermore, the pupils (both from Iraqi backgrounds) challenged the perception of Standard Arabic as a variety that everyone understands and can associate with (see Excerpt 15):

*Excerpt 15 (Breaktime conversation)*

Pupil They say it’s universal. It’s kinda universal, because it’s not a specific dialect. But then, it’s not, cause actually it’s not easy to understand if you’re not used to it.
The pupils perceived MSA as unnatural, different from the varieties of Arabic they were exposed to in their homes. The girls saw themselves as co-owners of the Arabic language and questioned why a variety privileged in the supplementary school and the wider UK education setting was not easily accessible to them. The Standard variety, in the pupils' understanding, could therefore not be truly universal (cf. Gaiser & Matras 2020b).

Wider questions of ‘authenticity’ of MSA challenge the central priority of teaching ḥā, while regional varieties are not defined as learning objective. In an informal interview with a teacher at McrAS, during which she justified why the target language should be MSA, I asked which variety of Arabic she spoke outside the classroom (February 2018). The teacher replied with no hesitation that she did not use ḥā but “Palestinian, my Arabic. If not, people think I can’t speak it, or I’m a foreigner”. She suggested she was proud of her variety, as in the UK setting it created a link to her homeland. The teacher’s comment indicates her perceived sense of ownership of ‘her’ Arabic, the variety that is naturally acquired and used for everyday communication in her place of origin. ḥā, on the other hand, is associated with the practice of teaching and learning Arabic. It seems that outside scripted conversation and education contexts, the Standard variety is associated with Foreign or Second Language speakers. The teacher suggested that she wanted to be recognised as a “native speaker” of Arabic, rather than someone who had grown up outside the Arab world. In this context, her regional non-Standard variety is highly valued as it identifies her as an authentic Arabic speaker rather than language learner. The perception of proficiency is based on natural fluency rather than ‘correctness’. Here, non-Standard is not downgraded as ‘slang’; instead, in the diaspora, colloquial Arabic serves as regional identity marker that is to be protected, expressing a sense of pride of one’s origin.

5.5 Supplementary schools and ‘community’

This section draws on fieldwork across the three Arabic schools to explore their positionings in Manchester. Language and identity-related practices reflect different understandings of and raise various questions around ‘community’. I do not intend to suggest that each school shows one orientation that differs from that of other schools, and that such orientations are mutually exclusive; instead, I argue that there are different discourses around positioning in the diaspora that actors may draw on and manifest at different points in time.

5.5.1 Safe ‘community’ spaces: Protecting identity

There is an inward orientation across supplementary schools, towards an imagined ‘community’ composed of members sharing cultural, linguistic and religious practices. Certain aims pursued by the schools suggest an orientation towards those who perceive themselves as belonging to
and strengthening a sense of in-group in the diaspora through shared practices, collective identity and confidence in heritage. Across all three schools, teachers and parents emphasised how the schools created an important environment for children and parents to socialise and to get to know other families who associate themselves with the Arabic language and heritage.

At the Libyan school, one interviewee suggested: “we want the atmosphere of the school to be as like a community, culture, and the language” (MLM interview 2020a). The teacher’s comment reflects the school’s aim to create a sense of collective identity based on shared heritage and language. The school’s name and curriculum, as well as descriptions and the Libyan flags on social media express and reinforce notions of identity that are based on orientations towards the homeland. This orientation inter-links ‘members’ in the diaspora. The former pupil I interviewed described the Libyan school as a “very Libyan space in the middle of Manchester”, due to people’s backgrounds, curriculum, language use and events. This comment differentiates the supplementary school from the wider UK diaspora setting.

The school draws pupils from across the North of England, and parents typically spend their day at the school while waiting for their children. In this way, the school plays a role in establishing and maintaining social networks among Libyans in the region. The school creates a form of Community of Practice (CoP), where shared practices and a common endeavour create bonds between actors. At the same time that it is practised, ‘community’ is *imagined*: while active and physical ‘doings’ of community are very much limited to the weekend – thus differing from neighbourhood ‘communities’ where everyday practices are shared (see Chapter 4) – the common orientation toward the homeland creates links that inter-connect individuals in the diaspora. This indicates the complex roles of space and time for ‘community’ formations, where actors may come together for a shared purpose but do not necessarily co-habit or frequent shared public spaces. The Libyan school builds an imagined diasporic identity based on the nation-state of the home country, as well as shared practices in the diaspora. It creates a ‘community’ where Libyan qualifications are perceived as valuable, in a context of families aiming to move back to their country of origin. The school serves a ‘community’ defined mainly by geographical origin (rather than shared space in the diaspora), and language seems to have a subordinate function in defining community affiliation.

Likewise, the Damascene School expresses an aim to maintain language as part of heritage, identity and culture. The school’s goal, as stated on the website, is

that our children have good companionship and that they maintain their identity and their Arabic language […] To create a society parallel to the society in which we live and at the same time adhere to our culture, language, religion and good morals. (DS 2021)
This reflects a focus on supporting the development of interpersonal contacts ("good companionship") around maintaining identity and language. The aim to “create a society parallel to the society in which we live” may be interpreted in different ways – a society parallel to Syria, or parallel to Manchester’s wider society. Either way, the school makes efforts to create a network among actors with common interests and shared linguistic as well as religious practices. In an interview with the head teacher and one of the teachers, following my question whether pupils tended to continue studying with them for several years, the head teacher suggested (Excerpt 16).

**Excerpt 16 (MLM interview 2019)**

Head teacher we feel like family now, because the relationship, […] we know the parents and sometimes we meet in different occasions […] so, it’s not like a school traditional.

Accordingly, shared practices and bonds between actors create a sense of familiarity and, arguably, ‘community’. The head teacher juxtaposes ‘traditional’ UK education settings with the Arabic school, where emphasis is placed on inter-personal relations.

The head teacher at McrAS suggested in an MLM interview (2018) that the school aimed “to maintain the identity of the children, as Arabs. To know about their culture, to know about the customs of their countries”. The interviewee suggested that the school created an “Arab atmosphere” that the children were otherwise not able to experience. The head teacher argued that “in a way, it does compensate for not being in your home country”. Her point about the school’s compensatory role for children not growing up in “the home country” suggests that the school is believed to offer certain practices and values that, if not arranged for specifically, the diaspora and mainstream education cannot offer. Accordingly, McrAS creates a setting that allows teachers and pupils to bring traditions and values from their lives in the past to the ‘here and now’, i.e. connecting with their “roots” (see Blokland 2017). Again, this sets the collective of teachers, pupils and parents apart from wider UK society, where such links do not necessarily exist or are not maintained.

In an MLM interview (2020b), the head teacher described McrAS as “a hub for the community to come together, to meet, to socialise and to have that sense of belonging to a group.” McrAS’ website (McrAS 2021b) defines the school as “a big family” and “more than just a school, [where] our students teachers and support staff are all part of a community that is waiting for you to join the School” (Figure 29).
This statement reflects an understanding of a flexible community based on shared practice, happy to welcome new members as they join the school.

Parents and teachers pointed out that the school created a space where parents could, in a carefree manner, let their children make friends with others who shared religious beliefs and language backgrounds. Accordingly, the school is understood as a ‘safe space’, encouraging learners to use their language resources and offering opportunities to negotiate their complex identities (Creese 2009; Creese et al. 2006), protected from influences from the wider UK. Creating ‘safe spaces’ through supplementary schooling may be regarded as a form of boundary-making between ‘community’ spaces and the wider diaspora. In the classroom, teachers frequently refer to their aim to preserve Arab or Islamic values. The teaching of such values is typically accompanied by a distinction from Western culture, and from UK mainstream education. At McrAS, the GCSE teacher reminded pupils while disciplining them: “It’s not like the English school. Here, we show respect for older people and the teacher!” (October 2018).

As Simon (2018) suggests, the teaching of the ‘community language’ and efforts to maintain heritage create and reinforce a sense of collective or community identity. The homeland becomes a “community reference point for the formulation of an ‘authentic’ identity beyond its borders” (Simon 2018: 198). I argue that orientations towards countries of origin become a “community reference point” for communities that may be imagined, reinforced and materialised through practice. In an aim to preserve aspects of ethnic identity and morals, perceived Western values are juxtaposed with imagined ‘community values’, built on a reference to the homeland.

Juxtapositions between the Arabic school and ‘wider society’ across schools indicates that there is a dialogic element to community building, where an emphasis on the difference to mainstream society suggests boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The role of supplementary schools in
promoting heritage and protecting certain sets of values in the diaspora is, in this sense, inward-looking, where the supplementary school aims to reinforce a shared identity and create a space for the families it serves. Practices of and around language learning and teaching create practice communities under the umbrella of the supplementary school.

5.5.2 ‘Community’ anchoring in the city

At the same time, my research suggests that the schools show an outward orientation towards the diaspora setting, where supplementary schools aim to ‘integrate’ and fit into UK society rather than separate themselves from it.

Supplementary schools and ‘integration’

At the Libyan school, a recent change of name from ‘North Manchester Libyan School’ to ‘Manchester Libyan Community School’ (in 2019/2020) may at first glance be interpreted as reflecting the relevance of the collective (‘community’) identity, developed through common practices and aims as well as an imagined bond to the homeland. However, at the same time that the school aims to create a space for Libyans within the wider city, the use of the word ‘community’ in its name might in fact be outward-looking, adopting a term that is used in the local institutional public discourse in order to assert status and recognition. This is in line with fact that, as noted above, the term ‘community’ is used only in the English name.

During informal interviews with the head teacher and a teacher, my interlocutors emphasised the importance of adapting to a recent shift in migration patterns, re-orientating from a return to Libya to a future in the UK. The head teacher pointed out that, even though Libyan qualifications enhanced applications to UK-based HE education or jobs, Arabic GCSE and A-levels qualifications were becoming more relevant among Libyans in Manchester. At the time of fieldwork, the school made plans to set up partnerships with UK mainstream schools, to be able to offer pupils an opportunity to take UK qualifications in addition to Libyan exams. Furthermore, school staff have since made efforts to create a bilingual Arabic-English website (MLCS 2021), in addition to the original Arabic-language website mentioned above (MLCS 2019). These recent developments suggest a change in understandings of ‘community’, shifting from a transnational Libyan community that forges tight links between the diaspora setting and the homeland, to a local community that retains its links to heritage yet orients towards a future in the UK.

Observations at The Damascene School suggest that their aim is to maintain Arabic while helping children integrate into UK society. The school occasionally invites trained teachers to
offer Maths lessons, held in English, as well as offering English support for pupils and parents. This reflects the school’s efforts to support recently arrived families settle in.

The head teacher at McrAS explained during an MLM interview (Excerpt 17):

Excerpt 17 (MLM interview 2018)

Head teacher We’re here to make them aware of their culture, of their identity, and to be proud of it. At the same time, they have the choice to integrate in this country, you know, of which Arabic is not the first language. So that we’re living and speaking Arabic language, and living the Arabic culture, and try at the same time to balance that with the surroundings. So it’s a great chance to be bilingual, and bicultural, and so far it’s working brilliantly.

The statement indicates an aim to reconcile the maintenance of ‘heritage’ with an imagined future in the UK. This involves “integration” into and a sense of belonging to the diaspora society through Arabic. Accordingly, while ‘living the language and culture’, McrAS aims to balance heritage with children’s life in the UK. Learning Arabic at the supplementary school is seen as a way to strengthen the children’s connections with their heritage as well as enhancing their confidence in the diaspora and anchoring in the UK. The head teacher points to her school’s positive role to encourage children to become “bilingual” and “bicultural”, with the latter being achieved through language learning and learning about heritage.

McrAS’s facebook page features a number of videos (in Arabic) that emphasise how the school is anchored in and connected with the UK setting. A video from spring 2018, pinned to the top of the facebook page, describes the objectives of the school and emphasises the aim to develop and strengthen the pupils’ complex identities (McrAS video 2021). The video is accompanied by a bilingual description (see Figure 30). While the school’s general aims are explained in both Arabic and English, the English text omits a statement included in Arabic: ‘We preserve our identity and culture as part of school activities that include creativity and entertainment. Our language preserves our identity’. This fragmentary translation (Reh 2004) suggests that parents unable to read Arabic may not be expected to understand Arabic as part of their identity and heritage, keeping the English text more neutral.
The monolingual Arabic video addresses the challenge of growing up in a UK setting while aiming to maintain the family’s linguistic and cultural heritage. It emphasises the school’s anchoring in the UK and the relevance of Arabic locally. The video suggests that the school helps children understand their place in a global city, facilitates engaging with this multilingual environment, and at the same time cherishes Arab values and identities through maintaining the Arabic language. Thus, rather than suggesting an inward-looking orientation where the school provides a service that is useful for a strictly Arabic-speaking population, McrAS promises to help children negotiate their heritage in the diverse diaspora and make it relevant in the UK. The banner in Figure 31 conveys a similar message. This banner is typically displayed at the entrance to the school, space that is also used by visitors and people participating in other activities offered in the building on Saturdays.
In addition to the bilingual logo, the banner outlines the school’s aims, opening times and contact details in English. Accordingly, the school aims to “teach the Arabic Language, to establish the identity of our children and to integrate in the local community”: Arabic is seen as part of heritage identity, serving to “integrate in the local community” (i.e. essentially non-Arab society). With the reference to ‘integration’, the Arabic school adopts a concept that belongs strictly to the public institutional discourse of the majority society. The use of the term may be seen as a reflection of an ‘outwards’ orientation, i.e. the aim to serve the wider Manchester population, i.e. ‘local community’. The school’s orientation towards “the society we live in today” is reconciled with the
aim to teach about and maintain a sense of pride of (as the banner suggests) the children’s origin and heritage.\footnote{The potential meanings of origin and heritage are of course highly complex and may differ widely across generations (of migration) and individuals. See Chapter 8; cf. Little (2017).}

Teaching and learning Arabic is described as a way of investing in the children’s future in the UK. The banner advertises high quality teaching and a “well-constructed syllabus”, emphasising the professional orientation of the school. Likewise, information on the head teacher’s educational background and qualifications adds to the credibility, sense of trustworthiness and professionalism the banner is intended to evoke. The information that the school prepares pupils for UK qualifications depicts Arabic skills as a form of empowerment in the UK. Learning Arabic is understood as a way to integrate into the “society we live in today”, expressing a future-oriented perspective anchored in the UK. This goes beyond teaching Arabic as cultural heritage and element from the past, and beyond the use of Arabic within Arabic-speaking populations. Describing Arabic as a form of investment for a successful future locally, the banner legitimises teaching Arabic in the UK setting through replicating wider discourses about the benefits of language learning. This message goes along with the school’s desire to create a positive image of the supplementary school as a professional and ambitious educational institution. The use of the banner as such, in combination with the message it conveys, reflect a valorisation of an institutional environment for community language education. Thus, the supplementary school does not aim to be seen as a ‘community’ that sets itself apart from ‘the rest’ of society, but as an integral part of society that adds value.

\textit{Embracing the city’s diversity}

Another theme identified at McrAS is the aim to embrace Manchester’s diversity. In our recent MLM interview (2020b), following my question about the teachers’ countries of origin, the head teacher described the school as anchored in a “multi-Arab community” rather than being affiliated with a specific nationality. In an interview shortly after launching the school, the head teacher described her aim of “building bridges” across nationalities through the Arabic language (MLM interview 2018).

Figure 32 shows an image displayed as a banner at school events as well as featuring on McrAS’s social media pages. The banner shows how the school’s orientation towards pupils’ countries of origin is balanced with its orientation towards the diverse UK setting. It features 29 different country flags representing countries across the Arab world (including Libya, Lebanon, Palestine, Algeria), Muslim countries where Arabic is not the majority language (e.g. Turkey,
Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia), as well as the UK flag placed at the top of the banner.

Figure 32. McrAS image: multi-flags banner

There has not been a single pupil from an ‘English’ background since the launch of the school; instead, the UK flag illustrates the embeddedness in the UK setting, and the school’s orientation towards it. Similarly, the other flags reach out to diverse populations that were, at the time of fieldwork and design of the image, not necessarily part of the supplementary school’s pupil and teacher population. The school aims to address the diversity of the city as part of the school community.

The school community suggested by the banner questions traditional notions of ‘community’ based on a single language or a single nation-state background. It reflects an *imagined community* (Anderson 2006) that goes beyond such traditional boundaries, with the imagined school community embracing Muslim Arabs and non-Arabs (who associate themselves with the global label of ‘Arabic’) and the diaspora setting itself.
All flags emanate from the school’s logo in the centre. While acknowledging individual countries of origin, this suggests an orientation towards the diverse UK setting, united in McrAS. As the head teacher stated in an informal conversation, the banner is intended to represent a welcoming gesture to anyone in the city (June 2019). The combination of flags embraces the diversity of the diaspora setting rather than simply addressing the school’s clientele or audience of addressees to establish a closed supplementary school community. Scale analysis helps understand the complex and scalar processes the image may trigger: the flags in their combination index a high-level scale of the global, pan-Arab and Muslim world in the diaspora. At the low-level scale, personal origin and family ties may be made relevant when pupils and teachers or parents consider individual flags. At the mid-level scale of the UK or Manchester diversity, all flags may be perceived as side-by-side and in their togetherness, intended to welcome a heterogeneous UK society.

Diversity occupies a central place in McrAS’s understanding of community composition. The school’s explicit emphasis on reaching out to populations across country-of-origin backgrounds differs from the Libyan and Syrian schools, which – although welcoming a diverse student body – capitalise on a national identity linked to the ‘homeland’. At McrAS, the multi-flags banner welcomes the diverse city, pointing to the heterogeneity of the school population and potential clientele within the local urban setting. The presence of the flags of Muslim countries where Arabic is not the majority language (see above) suggests an understanding of the ‘community’ uniting Muslims in Manchester, held together by a shared appreciation of ‘the Arabic language’.

The celebration of unity in diversity is emphasised also through practices at the school. At school-internal events, an emphasis on sharing and learning about traditional dishes and dresses from across Arab countries promote diversity within the practice community, while highlighting the Arabic language as a common link. In the classroom, when new pupils joined the group, I observed across groups how one of the first questions from teachers was where new pupils were from. This was typically followed by an activity where all pupils told the new student about their (parents’) countries of origin. Such practices serve as an indication of the new pupil’s Arabic variety, as well as drawing attention to the diversity of pupils’ backgrounds in the classroom.

**Contributing to the UK**

Teachers and parents across schools generally agree that there is a lack of acknowledgment of the positive role of supplementary schools. Arabic school staff have pointed to negative media reporting about Muslims and the role of community organisations, particularly following the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017. Contacts from various Arabic schools suggested they
had a certain responsibility as “representatives” of Arabic-speaking populations in Manchester to contribute to a positive public discourse about Muslims. These findings are in line with Szczepk Reed et al.’s (2020a: 10) discussion of Arabic supplementary schools’ “willingness to conform”, suggesting that their commitment “seemed part of what they deemed to be their wider community role”.

McrAS’s head teacher has defined the school’s role as actively contributing to the potential of Manchester’s and the UK’s diversity. The school’s facebook page includes posts that link to the British Council, a UK-based organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Figure 33 shows one of the posts, which links to a British Council video on the benefits of language learning. The bilingual text added by the head teacher celebrates Manchester’s multilingualism and describes the city as “capital of Multilingualism” (citing the MLM research unit as a source). The post emphasises the head teacher’s pride in her school’s contributions to this diversity.

![Figure 33. McrAS facebook post British Council (McrAS facebook 2018b)](image)

Figure 34 shows another post from October 2018, in which the head teacher refers to a British Council report (Tinsley & Board 2017) to emphasise the value of Arabic as one of the “five priority languages for the UK’s future prosperity, security and influence in the world”. The monolingual Arabic text added by the head teacher emphasises the ‘importance of the Arabic language’.
In other posts, the supplementary school’s head teacher links to discussions on the relevance of languages in times of Brexit, and the value of Arabic for a global orientation of the city’s economy. With such statements the head teacher emphasises the contributions of Arabic supplementary schools to society, legitimised by the British Council’s or other UK-based actors’ recognition of the potential of Arabic. In a wider sense, the school counters public discourses highlighting the need for English proficiency among heritage speakers and disregarding the values of ‘heritage’ languages. McrAS offers Manchester residents an opportunity to capitalise on their languages and turn them into a resource that is beneficial for the city and the UK. Supplementary schools are seen as a symbol of progress, achievement and way of gaining prestige across populations. Arabic is thus defined as having relevance across language-based ‘communities’ and wider UK society, not just within Arabic-speaking populations. ‘Community’ in this sense is imagined beyond weekly practices among those involved in supplementary schooling. Instead, McrAS contributes to and inter-links with the diversity of the local setting.

5.5.3 Transnational communities: Diversifying identities

Other schools emphasise their orientation towards internationalisation, i.e. an imagining and practising of translocal communities. The Libyan school’s traditional orientation towards the homeland has been addressed above. While shared practices in the Manchester setting may develop a sense of CoP in the diaspora, the school’s orientation towards Libya in terms of activities, teaching contents and materials creates transnational communities.

For the Syrian school, the head teacher saw the shift to online teaching during the coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity to invite pupils from abroad to their virtual classrooms. By autumn 2020, the school population had grown to include pupils living all over the UK, Europe, and even...
Canada. Most participants are from Middle Eastern backgrounds and had learned about the school’s teaching through online and personal networks. The online teaching brings together pupils from across diaspora settings and orients towards transnational communities, based on a shared interest in the Arabic language as a form of heritage. As of November 2020, only 50% of pupils were based in Manchester or other English-speaking environments. The only common language shared among all pupils is Arabic, reinforcing the relevance of Arabic for interaction. The Arabic language thus serves as a common resource, facilitating imaginings of ‘community’ beyond geographical space. Arabic helps establish and connect with diasporic communities that reach across nation-states rather than within the nation-state (Anderson 2006), both in terms of countries of origin (i.e. imagined homelands) and diasporic countries of residence. As Appadurai (2000) suggests, new technological means have caused the creation of ‘diasporic public spheres’, which enable diaspora communities to imagine themselves online.

5.6 Researcher reflections

Across the three schools, my engagement was versatile and dynamic, and reflections on my positionality were crucial throughout the research process. My engagement at the Libyan and Damascene Schools foregrounded my role as researcher, as I interacted with participants mainly through informal interviews during ‘fieldwork visits’. Such one-off visits positioned me as outsider to the site; at the same time, the fact that participants were aware of my efforts to learn Arabic helped develop trust and legitimised asking questions around language variation and ‘correctness’.

At McRAS, participatory immersion offered opportunities to experience the everyday dynamics and processes. I gained unique insights into the running of the school, routine practices and practised policies, classroom dynamics and school events. Informal break time conversations with teachers, pupils and parents offered valuable opportunities to address aspects about perceived ‘correctness’ of language, ideologies, home language practices, and aspirations. I gradually became part of the setting and member of the group of actors that I was studying. As learner, I participated actively in classroom interactions, asked questions in relation to the taught content and aimed to complete the language tasks set by the teacher. This created opportunities to immerse myself in the research setting and not only observe details in depth, but also experience and participate in practices.

My engagement and positioning at McRAS was highly complex, at times conflicting and challenging. Throughout my research, teachers and the head teacher treated and referred to me as a “friend”, as “a part of the school”, as “pupil”, and/or saw me as one of the teachers. I found
myself in constant negotiations between being a language learner versus researcher. During lessons I was given homework and participated in the classroom like other pupils, while during lunch breaks I was invited to join teachers at their table. Furthermore, I attended the yearly teacher training. I was asked by teachers to give feedback on pedagogy and pupil behaviour, whereby I was positioned as educator, researcher and language expert. On a few occasions in the GCSE group, when the teacher had to leave the classroom unexpectedly, she asked me to teach some German and discipline the (other) pupils while she was away. This gave relevance to my German skills in the Arabic classroom and re-defined my role. As adult in the classroom I was potentially expected to encourage good practice.

As non-Muslim, ‘non-heritage’ learner, I was typically expected by pupils and teachers to answer questions in English rather than in Arabic. Teachers occasionally asked whether I needed any extra support, emphasising that they would be happy to translate for me if I needed help. Classroom participants were often surprised or impressed when I did speak Arabic, and teachers took the opportunity to remind pupils that “even the German” knew how to speak Arabic, suggesting that they should be better at it. Such reactions raised questions of legitimacy and entitlement regarding Arabic proficiency, while helping me build a picture of Arabic language ‘community’ attributes and their relations to ‘heritage’. The fact that teachers and pupils expected my capacity to acquire Arabic to be lower than that of other learners (from across Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic-speaking Muslim backgrounds) positioned me as ‘different’ from other learners. In this way, participants’ orientations to my own use of Arabic can be related to notions of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ among participants in the study. While the fact that I am not from an English background created certain parallels with my participants (most of whom we’re also born abroad), my German and non-Muslim background at the same time marked a difference between myself and the participants. Teachers’ and pupils’ surprise at my use of Arabic as a ‘non-heritage’ learner (or new speaker) raised questions of ‘appropriateness’ and ‘legitimacy’, reflecting that the use of linguistic resources may be interpreted as expressions and negotiations of belonging. As a German woman, I was re-negotiating perceived social boundaries that were imagined on the basis of linguistic and religious heritage.

In a conversation with the head teacher about the multi-flags banner (Figure 32), she apologised for not having added the German flag, saying she “should have done” so. On another occasion, the head teacher asked me to represent McrAS at an event on Hatecrime Awareness, introducing the school to the audience and illustrating the importance of language learning, as she was not available herself. I was thus seen as part of the school and trusted to represent the

---

46 Differences in age between myself and other learners will have played a role in the GCSE class in terms of how I was positioned, but less so in the adult class.
school adequately. At school ceremonies, teachers dressed me up in traditional (Palestinian) garments, and at an annual city-wide event of all supplementary schools I was asked to give a speech in Arabic as representative of McrAS. This request that I (rather than other learners) represent the school adds to the wider narrative about McrAS embracing the diverse Manchester setting. Such practices were intended to position me as ‘insider’; I did, however, not necessarily perceive myself as inside member of the supplementary school ‘community’, at least not unequivocally.

My experiences raise questions regarding the extent to which I, as regular participant in the school’s practices, had become part of the ‘school community’. Learning Arabic at McrAS, thus developing shared practices and interests, had an impact on my own emerging sense of belonging to ‘communities’ in the diverse city and helped understand the ways in which both defining as well as experiencing ‘community’ are anything but straightforward. This emphasises the flexible ‘boundaries’ and the inherently dynamic and dialogic nature of notions of communities, as well as their relation to language (learning) and what one perceives or recognises as ‘heritage’. Shared practice and a common endeavour alone – as in CoP approaches – do not necessarily provide a simple answer to such questions, as perspectives and experiences may differ across individuals.

As a female researcher and language learner, I was able to establish close relationships with the female head teachers at McrAS as well as at the Syrian school. Also, most teachers across schools were women, which facilitated the ways in which I was able to engage with key actors in the schools. At McrAS, the fact that I was invited to join the teachers’ table in the cafeteria was arguably related to my age, but also to my gender. It was a space where female teachers gathered during lunch breaks and where they shared food with each other. Neither the male teacher at McrAS nor the head teacher’s husband ever joined us at the table. Outside school, I was invited to a “ladies’ lunch” with my head teacher, my GCSE teacher and two female learners from the adult class. The male learners from the adult class were not invited to join. In this way, my gender allowed me access to certain social spaces that I may not have been able to join as a male researcher and language learner. Almost all parents I interacted with were female, with the exception of one father who was keen to have conversations with me about family language policy and his children’s proficiencies in Arabic and other languages, after his (also European) wife had introduced me to him.

In the wider school setting, gender seemed to shape power relations between participants. The head teacher is a woman, but her husband is the manager of the school and the one representing the school formally. While the great majority of teachers were female, the school’s only male teacher was well-respected by pupils and teachers. Such site-internal dynamics affected the ways
in which I as a female adult navigated my way through fieldwork sites and was able to build relations with participants.

On several occasions, I noticed how my identity as a Western, non-Muslim woman seemed relevant. For example, some male participants at McrAS (e.g. the head teacher’s husband, the male teacher and one father of pupils) greeted me with handshakes, even though the act of handshaking between women and men (who are not married or blood-related) is uncommon in Muslim cultures. This suggested to me that, as a non-Muslim woman, I played an atypical, different role to that of Muslim women. This in turn raised additional questions in terms of my ‘belonging’ to the practice community of supplementary school learners, teachers and parents. In many respects I took an outsider role that did not necessarily mean distance in interaction with others, yet a marked sense of being ‘different’ due to my Western and non-Muslim identity.

In my engagement across supplementary schools, my various roles posed some challenges in terms of avoiding bias and maintaining an impartial position. The news that I was pupil at one school spread quickly. During meetings with representatives from across schools, which I held in my capacity as MLM researcher, I noticed how staff at some Arabic schools emphasised their close relationship with me. This led to expressions of jealousy from other Arabic schools and attempts to recruit me as learner. When organising teacher training sessions, at times I felt I needed to please and do favours to the schools where I conducted fieldwork and interviews, e.g. in terms of setting dates according to their availabilities. While I wanted to confirm the close relationship with my case study schools, and show my gratitude, I needed to ensure I maintained a neutral position as MLM researcher and offer equal support to all schools.

5.7 Conclusion

The above exploration of practices in supplementary schools complements my research in the family setting, offering insights into practices and decision-making processes around language maintenance at a higher level in the city: Supplementary schools are established in the diaspora environment by and for local populations.

Heritage language learning is shaped by various local and translocal ideologies, motivations, and understandings of ‘language’ and ‘community’. The three schools studied differ regarding teaching ideologies, curriculum content and aims. The Libyan School and the Damascene School allow or encourage the use of spoken conversational Arabic, yet emphasising MSA as target language for writing and scripted interaction. McrAS aims to promote Arab heritage in the city while embracing the diversity of the Manchester setting. However, the varieties used in
pupils’ homes and by family members abroad are not recognised as ‘heritage’, with a clear privileging of MSA even for spoken communication. There is a constant (re-)negotiation of LP and language boundaries, with pupils contesting teachers’ delineations between varieties. Classroom practices confirm or challenge (declared or practised) policies, negotiating the ‘legitimacy’ or ‘appropriateness’ (Bonacina-Pugh 2017) of language resources and creating alternative patterns. The acceptance of English for scaffolding becomes part of the practised LP negotiated in the classroom.

The notion of scales provides a useful lens to relate local classroom practices and the hierarchical re-organisation of resources to macro-processes (Blommaert 2019; cf. Nguyen 2020). The Arabic supplementary school, while established in the diaspora, creates institutionally defined expectations and ideologies regarding the target language, set by education settings in the Arab world. The teaching of MSA is closely linked to the enactment of the institutional identity and authority of the ‘teacher’ (see Papageorgiou 2012: 117). Their reminders to use fuṣḥā instead of colloquial forms of Arabic evoke the global language regime of standardisation, as well as GCSE and A-level requirements at the national level. In this sense, the teachers’ marking of language boundaries between non-Standard and Standard forms, and the assessment as ‘correct’ versus ‘incorrect’, orient to higher-level scales. The choice of textbook has an influence on the interactional regime of the classroom, as a form of language management that focuses on the use of MSA, disregards colloquial varieties and may suggest English as language of instruction. Similarly, McrAS’s (offline and online) LL contributes to creating expectations regarding language use and variation, as well as contesting norms valid in UK educational settings more widely.

Purkarthofer & De Korne (2020) suggest that “[m]inority language education initiatives often aim to resist dominant language regimes”, socialising learners into “alternative” regimes (2020: 167). This is the case for Arabic supplementary schools in Manchester, resisting UK macro-level language regimes and re-arranging conventional hierarchies between ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ languages. At the same time, encouraging pupils to take UK-based qualifications for Arabic re-negotiates such hierarchies, aligning with locally established ways of recognising language resources while flagging the relevance of ‘Arabic’ as a form of empowerment.

However, pupils are not passive ‘receivers’ of policy. Ideologies relating to Standard and non-Standard Arabic varieties are being re-interpreted, appropriated and contested, as actors respond to macro-scale language ideologies and (practised) supplementary school policies in different and complex ways. “Scale jumps” (Blommaert 2007) trigger shifts in value and validity: When pupils challenge teachers’ assessment of non-Standard Arabic, thus questioning implied (higher-level) linguistic hierarchies that privilege MSA and separations between varieties, they
foreground local interactional regimes as they draw on everyday language practices in the family home. When pupils contest the requested ban of English in the classroom, and point to the fact that they are physically sat in a UK mainstream school building, they invoke national language regimes. Pupils’ argument that the dominant language in education settings in the UK is typically English questions the institutionally defined language regime established by the Arabic supplementary school. Thus, pupils challenge the status of a given variety (i.e. Standard Arabic) and even a given language as a whole (‘Arabic’ as opposed to ‘English’) in the local setting and breach the order defined by their supplementary schools.

The notion of CoP helps illustrate how schools – and classrooms – develop their ways of talking and negotiating norms and expectations through shared practices. Engagement with others around a shared endeavour contributes to negotiating future practices and what is perceived as ‘appropriate’ language behaviour. In this sense, CoP helps make sense of the potential impact of practised policies and their relevance and roles in shaping interactional regimes locally. It also offers a starting point to put practice communities into relation with each other, as language users in the classroom or the supplementary school act not simply in response to local expectations and norms, but influenced by factors defined and negotiated by (overlapping) practice communities and ideologies at wider city, national and global levels.

However, I argue that shared practices and a shared endeavour alone do not fully capture the various understands of ‘community’ that have been made relevant during my fieldwork. The Libyan school evokes the notion of the ‘diaspora’ community, emphasising orientations to the homeland while increasingly developing an orientation towards the UK setting. The Damascene School links to ideas of transnationalism, where practices establish and maintain bonds across multiple borders rather than between the diaspora and a country-of-origin. In addition to establishing an international identity, the Damascene school shows an orientation towards the ‘here and now’ in Manchester, helping recent arrivals settle in the diasporic setting. McrAS claims UK-ness and embraces the diversity of the city setting. Images such as the multi-flags banner contribute to constructions of diverse learner identities and thus perform and reinforce imagined communities, based on shared (linguistic and religious) practice.

The ‘shared language’, whose use and maintenance may be seen as engendering a sense of belonging (Simon 2018: 40), is not the variety that teachers, parents and their pupils share as an everyday means of communication. Instead, the taught language symbolically connects actors across the boundaries of ‘language communities’, on the basis of shared religious values. MSA can be seen as an “artificial” ideological element that links learners of different national background origins under the umbrella of a “language” that is in reality not used for everyday spoken communication. The UK flag indicates the relevance of and anchoring in the diverse UK
environment, which allows for the formation of such a heterogeneous ‘community’. The transnational supplementary school ‘community’ is held together by their orientation towards the UK setting and their perception of shared space.

Practices of establishing and aligning oneself with Arabic supplementary schools may be seen as boundary-making practices that construct ‘community membership’, actively and explicitly negotiating belonging and identity through alignment with language. Self-selected actors who choose to participate in such practices – as head teacher, teachers, pupils, or parents – congregate around parts of their heritage. Involvement in an Arabic supplementary school may thus be seen as a collective assertion of identity through language maintenance efforts, thus having a demarcating effect.

However, the taken-for-granted understanding of supplementary schools as communities in previous literature presupposes a notion of ‘community’ as pre-defined and bounded, based on actors’ ethnicity, origin and language background (see e.g. Simon 2018). The present research suggests, however, that schools and ‘school communities’ operate within the context of the wider globalised urban setting and often embrace the city’s diversity. While supplementary schools may be anchored within what is perceived and experienced or performed as a ‘community’, they do not operate strictly within that ‘community’. I argue that the establishment of supplementary schools and related practices, on the one hand, and the negotiation of community identities and boundaries, on the other, are reciprocal processes. Supplementary schools are not simply institutions within a ‘community’, but they play a central role in establishing and maintaining ‘community relations’ and thus play a role in negotiating ‘communities’. In this sense, the schools play a role in facilitating an ‘anchoring’ in the diaspora context, providing support for recent arrivals and forming connections with others who have been long-established in the diaspora.

The present chapter has shed further light on the questions that guide this research. I have offered insights into the complex ways in which language users draw on and maintain their multi-layered repertoires and explored the dynamic hierarchisation of repertoire resources and negotiations of policies and practices as part of wider regimes. I have shown how LL contributes to shaping interactional regimes in the supplementary school’s (borrowed) spaces, reinforcing the need to attend to LL as a crucial part of wider language practices and policies. Finally, I have offered reflections on the ways in which narratives about ‘Arabic’, understandings of language boundaries and dynamic evaluations of resources affect the constitution, experiences and imaginings of ‘communities’. The following chapter shifts attention to Manchester business settings, building on the findings from the preceding chapters.
6 Language in business: Transaction and interaction

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a set of business case studies to explore language and community practices in the wider city space (see 3.6.4 and 8.6.6 for ethical considerations). Drawing on Blokland’s (2017) notion of ‘transactional’ encounters, I show how community experiences do not necessarily depend on joint continuous activity and a shared endeavour. The performance of, alignment with and appropriation of language relates to ‘doings’ and experiences of ‘community’ in the diverse diaspora, as language creates and reinforces bonds between actors who share needs, practices and past experiences. Yet, ‘communities’ may be practised and imagined across what is commonly perceived as language ‘boundaries’.

The discussion starts with a business that creates links to the ‘homeland’. The second business offers insights into pan-Arab orientations. The final two case studies reveal how the diversity of the diaspora is central to experiences of ‘language’ and ‘community’.47

6.2 Language and durable engagement

My explorations of Arabic in Manchester businesses begin with a study of a Yemeni-owned café and restaurant in Eccles, west of Manchester city centre. Throughout my four research visits, the café was always busy with people socialising at tables and the counter, Arabic being the dominant language for interaction among staff and clients. The café’s outdoors signage and temporary texts on a folding board are monolingual English (Figure 35), matching surrounding Linguistic Landscapes (LL). There is no explicit indication of the owner’s Yemeni background, except for the café’s name Sheba Café: For readers familiar with Islamic and Yemenite history, “Sheba” may serve to index a diasporic Yemeni identity.48

47 The case studies in 6.4 and 6.5 haven been published in shortened and modified form in Gaiser & Matras (2020b).

48 Sheba (or Saba) was a kingdom in Southern Arabia, the region of modern-day Yemen, between the 8th century BCE and 275 CE (Mark 2018).
Indoor wall decoration depicts a traditional Yemeni marketplace, proudly showcased on the café’s Facebook page (Figure 36). As confirmed by staff, the decoration was hand-painted by a local Yemeni artist. This creates links between local diasporic space and the ‘homeland’, while adding an exotic character and sense of authenticity for non-Yemeni visitors.

The café’s menu is monolingual English (Figure 37). While some of the menu items contain isolated romanised Arabic words (e.g. “lamb masslouq”, with *masslouq* meaning ‘boiled’), Arabic script is not used at all. Names of dishes are accompanied by an English description and supported by photos. The descriptions highlight the Yemeni origin of the dishes or spices, reinforcing a sense of identity and authenticity. The menu addresses a clientele literate in English and presupposes only limited familiarity with Yemeni cuisine.
During an informal group interview with the café’s owner, two staff and two clients with their teenage children (May 2019), all participants self-identified as “Yemeni”. Interviewees reported that staff and most clients used Arabic or a “mix” of Arabic and English for interaction and food orders, confirming my observations. According to the owner, most clients were themselves of Yemeni or other Arab background. Only a small proportion of customers were from English, Eastern European or South Asian backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the neighbourhood. As the business owner suggested, their monolingual English signs welcomed the “mixed neighbourhood”. In response to my question why Arabic did not feature on any of their signs, a client suggested “we don’t need a menu in Arabic”. Emphasising the collective we, i.e. clients of Yemeni background, the interviewee defines an in-group of people who knew which kind of food was offered. This points to a perceived juxtaposition between a diverse ‘outsider’-clientele on the one hand, best addressed in English, and local Yemenis on the other, most of whom are familiar with the menu. My interviewees routinely used the pronoun we to refer to Yemenis living in the area, indicating a sense of collective identity that indexes familiarity, shared customs and bonds. Unprompted, my interviewees pointed me to five other Yemeni-owned businesses in the neighbourhood, where Arabic was used for spoken interaction but not on signage. One participant suggested that these businesses all “supported” each other and catered to the needs of the local Yemeni population. As Simon (2000: 106) argues, “[w]hen several shops belonging to the same ethnic group are located side by side, they constitute a continuous ‘area’ through the repetition of these ‘community markers’”. I argue that the absence of Arabic in the LL is not to be understood as an indication of Arabic being of lesser importance to clients or staff; instead, it indicates
expected familiarity among ‘in-group’ members and close interaction between clients and staff. Arabic signs are not needed to attract attention or convey information to other local Yemenis, or to perform a shared identity towards passers-by. In fact, English in the LL addresses a diverse clientele including readers of Yemeni backgrounds, most of whom are proficient in English given their long-standing local presence.

My interviewees proudly mentioned the large local Yemeni population, representing different waves and generations of migration. From my participants, two had grown up in the Yemen and came to the UK as adults, with the remaining interviewees born locally as second-or third-generation migrants whose families arrived in the 1950s. More recently, Yemeni refugees fleeing from the ongoing civil war have arrived in Manchester. One interviewee emphasised the importance of ensuring that “everyone in the community” spoke Arabic alongside English, “also the younger ones”. By ‘Arabic’, participants referred to colloquial Arabic for informal interaction, i.e. mainly the Yemeni variety. MSA was not perceived as bearing wider relevance beyond writing. In fact, for speaking, Yemeni Arabic varieties (interviewees proudly pointed to significant variation within ‘Yemeni Arabic’) were referred to as a marker of identity and connection with their origin country, with interviewees expressing ownership of their dialect (“our dialect shows who we are”).

Staff at Sheba Café pointed me to the local “Yemeni Community Association” (YCA), which organises events and hosts an Arabic supplementary school (YCA 2020). Three of my interviewees reported that they had attended YCA’s Arabic School. Such efforts in maintaining Arabic among younger generations, and the fact that interviewees pointed to their importance without my prompts, indicate the perceived role of Arabic within what was described to me as ‘the community’. Participants’ awareness of local Yemeni-owned businesses and the YCA, and the fact that they chose to point me to such sites as relevant to my research, shows how local networks drawing on mutual identification with a shared homeland play a role in community formations in the diaspora. Furthermore, my research illustrates how social contacts among supplementary school pupils and parents may extend beyond the school, confirming their relevance at a wider scale not just in terms of language maintenance.

Sheba Café creates a space for routine encounters among Yemenis. Families who have lived in the UK for decades or even generations offer support to more recent arrivals. Their relationships and interactions go beyond a predominantly instrumental-rational orientation (Blokland 2017), as among the factors motivating their interaction is the strengthening of social ties as such. Yet, such ties are different to traditional Communities of Practice (CoPs), which assume a joint endeavour

49 I conducted a follow-up interview with staff at YCA, which for reasons of space cannot be discussed here.
Instead, everyday practices in space form experiences of ‘community’, coalescing around shared cultural and language backgrounds rather than a specific goal. Their migration ‘routes’ are of relevance, resulting in a shared UK diaspora experience. At the same time, actors emphasise and reinforce through their everyday practices an ongoing shared affiliation with the Yemen, i.e. their ‘roots’ (Blokland 2018). Locally anchored solidarity and mutual support in the ‘here and now’, materialised in encounters in Yemeni businesses and institutionalised in the form of the local YCA, are reinforced by imagined connections to a shared past in the homeland. Arabic is perceived as a community resource relevant for the present and future, and linked to wider practices. The maintenance of community (language) resources create and strengthen social capital for community empowerment (see Blokland 2018; Blokland & Nast 2014), which are however not necessarily performed towards ‘out-groups’.

Sheba café has since been closed, which reflects the vulnerability of such meeting places; yet, with several other Yemeni-owned businesses in the area, my participants now meet elsewhere. There is no fixed inter-linkage between space and ‘community’ practices, but space can temporarily create an anchor point for ‘doings’ of community.

6.3 Language and fluid encounters

This section presents a case study of a small outlet offering computer and mobile phone repairs as well as TV Satellite installations. The business is run by a Libyan, Omar, who came to the UK for his doctoral studies in 2013. It is an example of a business where the Arabic language—both for its communicative function and symbolically—serves to create and reinforce inter-personal ties across national backgrounds and among strangers. The discussion is based on seven research visits, informal interviews and a three-hour observation of business interaction.

The stall-like business is located in a retail park in Hulme, South Manchester, a neighbourhood characterised by immigrants of Caribbean and African origin, as well as a significant presence of Arabic speakers (cf. Census 2011, School Census of 2019/2020). The signs mounted to the stall are monolingual English, offering general information about services and products available as well as contact information (Figure 38).
The sign that attracted my attention as researcher and language learner was a folding board featuring Arabic, prominently placed within the otherwise English LL. The shop owner, who had designed the two-sided display board himself, normally places the sign in front of his business during opening times. While one side is monolingual English (Figure 39), the second side displays product and service information in Arabic (Figure 40).
The information on the two signs is complementary (Reh 2004): the English side advertises tablets and laptops, while the Arabic text informs readers about satellite receivers for access to Arabic Satellite TV.\(^\text{50}\) A closer look at the Arabic sign reveals that the Arabic writing was added to the originally monolingual English folding board: the phrase “FULLY WORKING” at the bottom of the sign is a remnant from the original English sign, still fully visible on the other side. The Arabic poster was added in a way that “FULLY WORKING” could be interpreted as referring to the reception of Arabic channels in the Manchester setting. The layering of LL-items results in a flexible and fluid combination of repertoire resources across time in space, licensed by the diaspora setting.

Across the two sides, complementary writing may indicate a readership expected to be bilingual, with access to both languages used and/or singling out specific audiences for selected information (Reh 2004). The Arabic sign reaches out to audiences literate in Arabic, among the target clientele for Arabic satellite TV. Most passers-by potentially interested in Arabic-language TV will be able to read or at least recognise the Arabic writing. As for the English side of the display board, the business owner suggested that readers interested in the advertised products and services were mostly English speakers, potentially from diverse backgrounds and including Arabic speakers. My participant suggested that the use of English attracted more people, while “Arabic [was] good” for particular services only. This indicates the audience-specific nature of language use in LL (Gaiser & Matras 2016b) and the conscious processes behind language choice, whereby resources are combined systematically to convey different pieces of information to target audiences.

Omar placed great importance on the sign’s role in establishing business and social relations with passers-by, both for its communicative and emblematic functions. Accordingly, his motivation to use an Arabic sign was based on the assumption that the display of Arabic would serve to attract the attention of Arabic readers, some of whom may not be literate in English. The stall owner suggested that the display of Arabic signalled to Arabic readers that he could help them, as they spoke “the same language”. Omar went on to explain that other clients may read English but prefer to read and speak Arabic on seeing the sign, adding “because it’s our language” (25 January 2018). Others might not read but recognise the script. Omar’s account points to the potential of Arabic writing for establishing symbolic links with passers-by and a sense of co-ownership of the language. While clients may well speak and read English, the shared Arabic

\(^{50}\) Translation: ‘We have receivers for Arabic channels; Internet two-year subscription; Aljazeera Sports channel; SKY Sports channels; Showtime movie channels; Nile Sat channels with movie packages and others’.  

191
resources in stall owner’s and clients’ language repertoires, or simply a shared identification with Arabic, create bonds between them.

The advertising text addresses a pan-Arab audience rather than flagging national media. This may be due to commercial interests, aiming to attract a broad clientele; at the same time, it reflects wider practices whereby Arabic speakers in the diaspora typically watch pan-Arab TV rather than country-of-origin specific channels, as Omar reported. There may be preferences for region-specific news, but the general practices of watching Arabic language channels are not restricted to specific audiences based on national boundaries.\textsuperscript{51}

The display board reflects language practices, as well as pointing to wider practice of watching Arabic Satellite TV in the diaspora. The latter, in turn, creates and maintains transnational links to the Arab world. As Anderson (2006) suggests, media consumption reshapes symbolic boundaries, with broadcasting allowing diaspora populations to be constantly and synchronically involved in the events of their homeland. I argue that both imagined and practice-based dimensions of ‘community’ are relevant here: individuals and participants may share the practice of watching Arab TV channels in the diaspora, while at the same time belonging to an imagined community of Arabic speakers that spans across transnational space. Through language choice, the LL-sign visualises and reinforces such connections in the local diaspora.

As Omar pointed out, satellite receivers could theoretically establish connections with any (non-Arabic and non-English) international channel, which is not mentioned in his signs. The use of Arabic serves to specifically address Arabic-speaking audiences, while excluding others as it limits access to those with a shared language background. Omar emphasised that Arabic was his language, which he wanted to use and showcase to others. It thus serves to signal his own affiliation with the language, “linking” with clients who equally identify with Arabic emotionally and creating a sense of trust. In addition, the sign is indexical in that it points to the languages that may be used for communication with the business owner. As Omar suggested and my observations confirmed, clients often addressed Omar in Arabic, even on their first approach to the stall. The display of Arabic serves to license the choice of Arabic for interaction, even if it is only a greeting to open a business conversation. The LL-sign thus acts as a statement of micro-level language policy (LP) and negotiates local interactional regimes. This indicates the emblematic potential of language in LL: It is not simply the presence of written Arabic in itself, but

\textsuperscript{51} This confirms practices observed in the family (Chapter 4).
the practices that are invited and encouraged through written language choice that establish links between actors.52

According to Omar’s own’ reports, and confirmed by my observations, much of the client interaction is in Arabic or combines elements of Arabic and English. ‘Arabic’ here refers to the various regional varieties. Omar argued that, although there may be differences between the dialects, there will always be a way to understand each other.53 While for client interaction in Arabic, Omar described the use of colloquial varieties as the natural and obvious practice, he encouraged me as language learner to learn MSA, the “proper Arabic”.

The physical setup of the business encourages interaction with customers or passers-by, as there are no doors separating off the business space (Figure 41).

Figure 41. Laptop & Mobile Repair Centre as open space for interaction

52 One might argue that, while the written presence of Arabic (or any language) may encourage some passers-by to interact, it may at the same time discourage others from approaching the stall. For reasons of space this cannot be discussed here.

53 Omar’s reports of meaning negotiations confirmed Othman’s (2011) findings that Arabic speakers in Manchester use strategies for effective pan-dialectal interaction.
Omar’s stall creates an ideal space for the type of fluid encounters and engagements described by Blokland (2017). Clients approach the stall for short business transactions, some wait for repairs to be done or simply have conversations with the owner and other clients. As Blokland (2018) suggests, “relations to strangers evoke practices of community, too” (2018: 40). Omar reported that most of his customers – irrespective of whether they lived in the neighbourhood or elsewhere across Manchester – come not only once but will return for different services. The stall owner and his clients develop a sphere of public familiarity (Blokland 2017) as they encounter each other repeatedly. For former clients or passers-by, Omar may become a “public stranger” (Blokland 2018: 37) through fluid encounters or more durable engagements.

My observations give weight to Blokland’s (2017) criticism of community as measured on the basis of intensity of social relations. While the business owner may not spend much time with his clients, not know their names or develop bonds on the basis of explicitly shared sets of beliefs and values, they may create bonds based on shared interests and linguistic resources. The stall becomes a space where people meet and interact on a one-off or repeated basis, but often without creating personal connections. Relations with his customers are not necessarily personal, as clients may be “replaced” by others over time. Omar’s connectedness to actors and space is not as such about longstanding social relations, but subjective understandings of the relevance of fluid ties, facilitated by shared language. Imagined community relations and experiences become materialised in practice.

6.4 Diverse ‘communities’

This section explores language and community practices at the city-centre branch of a small franchise business selling frozen yoghurts and similar products. The store is located near Manchester's university campuses and several student halls of residence, with a large presence of international students. My engagement includes three fieldwork visits and informal conversations with two staff members and clients. Additionally, I sent a follow-up email to business owners to enquire about language choice on signs across branches and decision-making processes behind language choice (April 2020).

The main sign on the shop's façade is monolingual English and offers information on outlet name and service specification, while a display board outside the city-centre branch features English, Chinese and Arabic. Product information is offered in all three languages, alongside photos
depicting the products; the business logo and subtitles are monolingual English (Figure 42). Any information on indoor signage is monolingual English.

![Figure 42. Frurt trilingual sign: English, Chinese, Arabic](image)

From observations and informal interviews with staff I learned that the outlet is frequented by young adult males of Arab background, mostly from Bahrain and Kuwait. Clients use the venue to socialise with each other and staff, who are also Arab. The default language in the outlet is Arabic, alongside English. Chinese students passing by the store on their way to or from university also frequent the store, but do not appear to spend much time there for interaction.

---

54 Some of the translations are approximations (e.g. both Arabic and Chinese translations for the English *matcha latte* mean ‘green tea’). Others are transliterations (e.g. the Arabic for *milk shake*).
The display board thus reflects the customer base: the majority language English addresses the ‘diverse city community’, while Arabic and Chinese single out the main audiences. As interviewees explained, the trilingual sign was created specifically for the local branch, which is frequented by diverse audiences. It was designed by the owner’s sister who added ‘her own language’ Arabic and, with the help of a Chinese friend, Chinese. From an email exchange with the business owners, I learned that this was the only multilingual sign across branches. On Frurt’s social media sites, branding, product information and interaction with customers are in English only, suggesting that customers are (expected to be) literate in English.

At the city-centre branch, Arabic and Chinese serve primarily emblematic rather than communicative purposes, intended to target the two largest clientele groups in an effort to make both feel welcome. Arguably, Chinese translations are not required to ensure Chinese readers’ access to the sign’s content, as the target clientele – mostly university students – are likely to know English. Yet, the use of Chinese characters targets Chinese students and creates a sense of solidarity. The East Asian origin of some of the products advertised (e.g. Bubble Tea, Matcha Latte) further explain the use of Chinese, with sign-writers capitalising on associations between language and the products by creating a sense of authenticity and originality. In this sense, Chinese characters are oriented towards diverse audiences as a brand that is recognised widely. Similarly, for Arabic, staff pointed out that its presence on the sign prompted Arabs to associate their products with those available in the Arab world, reassuring clients of the products’ quality. One of the clients I interviewed, of Kuwaiti background, suggested that when people saw Arabic on the sign, they knew the milkshake was “like at home”.

The multilingual sign’s emplacement (Scollon & Scollon 2003) is crucial for interpreting language choice on the sign, considering its absence from other stores located in less multilingual areas far from the city centre. The sign embraces the principal client groups, reflecting the local relevance of the languages while relating back to countries of origin of products and/or readers. Staff reported that they were often addressed in Arabic even by new customers, prompted by its presence on the sign and adding that “from our looks they [customers] can tell” that the staff were speakers of Arabic, but not Chinese. The sign points towards past and present actors (clients frequenting the store and sign-writers) and their language practices; at the same time, it encourages future practice, suggesting language choice for interaction with staff (Blommaert 2013b). LL thus establishes a link between the business and Arab clients, indicating the availability of products in the diaspora that clients know from the Arab world, thus interconnecting spaces. The visual and audible prominence of Arabic in this business space reflects and further invites a practice community of Arab clients and staff. The choice of Chinese on the other hand serves a strict marketing function, targeting a customer base known to frequent the area. In addition, the widely recognisable Chinese characters, used alongside English, add a sense of
authenticity to the products advertised, thus reaching out to diverse audiences. The trilingual sign, combining languages that are perceived as locally relevant, embraces the diversity of the city space and thus transcends traditional ‘community boundaries’. While the visual presence of Arabic is a reflection of the business owners’ and staff’s linguistic and cultural heritage, the use of Chinese is an example of how languages in the globalised urban setting are appropriated by non-speakers to create a business identity that appreciates local diversity.

Displayed outdoors, the trilingual sign is visible to the wider public, which indicates the intention to invite and express solidarity towards passers-by. Being a temporarily fixed rather than permanent sign, it allows for adjustment of language choice. The sign’s emplacement and materiality indicate the non-fixity of ‘community’. This highlights the relevance of ephemeral, everyday encounters for inter-relations between actors and the more volatile ties between individuals shaping community experiences.

6.5 Languages and the neighbourhood

In the businesses above, Arabic may serve both emblematic and communicative functions. The final case study focuses on a business where the communicative functions of Arabic are limited, yet the language plays a crucial role in creating experiences of ‘community’. I draw on the example of a butcher’s shop in the Trafford area, southwest of Manchester city centre. The neighbourhood has a large South Asian population, a large presence of Polish speakers, and a smaller population of Arabic speakers (Census of 2011; School Census 2019/2020). The nature of the butcher’s shop – with limited space for socialising – is inherently different from a café, with greater focus on the transactional nature of purchasing products rather than socialising. Yet, we see traces of experiencing and ‘doing’ community, going beyond pure transactions in the business space. Here, understandings of community relate to imagined neighbourhood bonds based on shared experiences of diversity and shared alignment with ‘Arabic’ in the diaspora through shared religious affiliation.

The main outdoors sign (Figure 43) displays the shop’s name Trafford Halal Meat. The product specification halal is repeated prominently in Arabic script, alongside its transliteration into Roman alphabet.
Temporary home-printed and handwritten posters and an electronic board displaying a scrolling text offer further product information in English and *halal* in Arabic script.

Indoors, a monolingual Arabic, multimodal poster displayed prominently next to the entrance features religious messages – a blessing that is typically said when slaughtering – alongside with photos of meat and animals (Figure 44). The poster creates a link between the products sold, Muslim principles, and the target clientele.
Of course, the display of this poster or the use of the word *halal* outdoors do not presuppose that addressees are fluent speakers and readers of Arabic. Yet, the text will, at least to an extent, be recognisable and readable by Muslim populations in the diverse neighbourhood. This creates a sense of group identity that audiences identifying with these principles can associate with. In fact, depending on a reader’s language repertoire, the isolated word *halal* on the outdoors sign may be perceived as Urdu, Persian or Sorani Kurdish, as these languages use the Arabic loanword in the same script. Sign-writers capitalise on the ambiguity of *halal* in Arabic script, when combined with the majority language English, to embrace the diverse neighbourhood. The poster and the outdoors sign thus address a diverse ‘Muslim practice community’, rather than an ‘Arabic community’. As with the sign advertising Arabic Satellite TV at Omar’s stall, this poster is an example of how LL offers insights into extra-linguistic practices beyond the sign, inter-related with language practices and self-identification.

The emphasis on shared practices across the boundaries of traditional ‘language communities’ is captured also in the butcher’s business card (Figures 45, 46).
The card shows how choices within a multilingual repertoire both indicate and constitute different communicative acts and illocutions (cf. Gaiser & Matras 2020b). It combines English, Arabic and Urdu on one side, and English and Urdu on the other. On both sides, the Urdu text says ‘fresh halal meat’. Full product information is given in English and Arabic only, with English being displayed in a visually prominent position and colours. The Arabic text offers the same product specification also given in English and supplements this by adding ‘the most delicious meat’. Target clients are expected to read and understand English, but not necessarily Urdu or Arabic. Urdu is used for branding and could be seen as ornamental, attracting the attention of a local Pakistani clientele. Urdu also serves for valorisation of the butcher’s products, repeated in English
Informal interviews with staff members revealed that the owner and the majority of staff and clients are not Arabs or fluent Arabic speakers; yet, Arabic has a symbolic significance in the neighbourhood. One member of staff, UK-born of Pakistani descent, uses Urdu and Panjabi alongside English, with limited literacy skills in Arabic. He reported he occasionally used Panjabi in client interaction but suggested that most South Asians living in the neighbourhood spoke and read English. This confirms the assumption above that the use of Urdu on the business card is mainly emblematic. Another staff member was of Iraqi Kurdish background, who reported to occasionally use non-Standard Arabic but mostly Sorani Kurdish with customers, in addition to English. A third staff member I interviewed was Kurdish from northwestern Iran, using Persian and English with customers. My interviewees emphasised that their clientele was diverse, and staff used their full collective language repertoires – Arabic, Sorani Kurdish, Panjabi, Persian, and English – to communicate with clients.

As reported by one interviewee, business owners had purposefully hired staff from different linguistic backgrounds. Such “diversifying recruitment strategies” (Szczepek Reed et al. 2018: 60) build on the language resources offered by the urban space to meet the needs of a linguistically diverse clientele, embracing the neighbourhood’s complex linguistic composition and contributing to a sense of heterogeneous rather than homogeneous ‘community’. Regarding language choice in interaction, there were no instructions from managers on which languages to use (or avoid using) in customer interaction, as long as they adapted to clients’ language preferences; if clients did not volunteer languages other than English, the default language was to be English. This is a form of LP that recognises English as the majority language, while encouraging staff to capitalise on their language skills and connect with clients.

When asked why Arabic was used in the butcher’s written communications, with Persian or Kurdish being absent, staff explained: “Arabic speaks to everyone in the area. It belongs to all, you know, so we use it”. This comment indicates the symbolic value Arabic assumes in the diverse neighbourhood, serving as a link between different Muslim populations. This suggests that ownership and appropriation of Arabic by non-speakers is considered acceptable and negotiated locally, thus challenging traditional understandings of ‘using’ and ‘knowing’ a language. ‘Arabic’ here refers mainly to the CA and MSA (fuṣḥā) varieties. Colloquial forms of spoken Arabic have limited relevance in the butcher’s shop. In my engagement as language learner, staff members emphasised the prestige values and ‘correctness’ associated with fuṣḥā.
In its wider notion, ‘Arabic’ is part of the neighbourhood repertoire and thus a resource available for everyone to use, rather than restricted only to speakers who are proficient in the language (see Blommaert 2010 on ‘truncated repertoires’). Such language and social practices in shared space in turn challenge traditional notions of ‘community’, understood as bounded and fixed. Instead, the display of Arabic reflects practice routines and repertoire management that are dynamically shaped by and shape wider interaction practices in the local space. Actors make use of available resources to establish links with a diverse audience. Language is used to appeal or “speak to everyone in the area”, also to those who are not necessarily able to use it for communication. Shared interests, practices and needs (i.e. complying with Islamic dietary laws) create a bond between actors that is mediated through the emblematic values of the Arabic language, challenging traditional notions of ‘community’ and ‘language proficiency’.

This case study points to the relevance of the notion of ‘spatial repertoires’, rather than thinking of individual ‘languages’ as separate from their users and space (Pennycook & Otsuji 2015). Spatial repertoires are formed through local actors’ life trajectories and linked to the particular places and sets of activities in which the resources are deployed. As Canagarajah (2018: 37) points out, spatial repertoires are “assembled in situ, and in collaboration with others, in the manner of distributed practice”. Spatial repertoires are thus not necessarily part of existing proficiencies but mobilised in shared space.

Community may be experienced as part of the shared neighbourhood space that connects local clients and the business, based on wider beliefs and shared religious and linguistic practice. The written CA and MSA varieties inter-connect actors in an imagined neighbourhood ‘community’ for their symbolic rather than strictly communicative functions. The display of Arabic serves as a form of alignment with the diaspora. The appropriation by non-speakers reflects how ‘Arabic’ is a part of a wider diverse neighbourhood community. Such communities are practised and at the same time imagined: members do not necessarily know each other or meet face-to-face and regularly; yet, their shared practices create a collective identity that is materialised in the display of Arabic, which serves as mediator of shared religious values. The word halal in Arabic script, surrounded by English text, is associated with multiple languages and thus transcends what is typically perceived as ‘language boundaries’; similarly, the readerships addressed constitute populations that transcend what is understood as ‘communities’.

6.6 Researcher reflections

My fieldwork in businesses benefitted greatly from my perspective as language learner, serving as an entry point for interaction across case studies. The Arabic sign at the PC stall was the reason for which I approached the stall, and my attempts to translate the sign opened up
conversations with the stall owner and resulted in his offers to support my learning of Arabic. My interest in the language as a learner encouraged participants to discuss their understandings and assessments of their own repertoires, as compared to mine. Referring to their ‘lack’ of proficiency, for instance, one participant suggested that “Even your [i.e. the researcher’s] Arabic is better than mine”. This may reveal perceptions of correctness in connection with MSA, or it may simply be a formulaic way of commenting on a ‘foreigner’s’ proficiency. Either way, such comments reflect perceptions as to who is typically expected to be able to speak Arabic, and who not (i.e., myself as a non-heritage, non-Muslim individual of German background). Such discussions resulted in rich negotiations of positioning on the basis of language resources, shedding further light on the issues addressed in this research. While my participants attempted to teach me what they perceived as the ‘correct’ language forms, they did not express a perceived need or desire to change their own ways of speaking. This differed from the behaviour of supplementary school teachers or Aaya’s attempts to speak MSA while teaching Arabic to her daughter.

My role as researcher gave my engagement credibility and helped justify when asking for permission to take photos of LLs. My focus on LL proved crucial for the very identification of potential fieldwork sites. The display of the word ‘halal’ at the butcher’s shop in Trafford, for example, prompted me to further explore the rich dynamics in the shop. At the same time, my research revealed that the presence of a given language in the LL is not always a reliable indicator; instead, the absence of a language (e.g. as in the case of the Yemeni café) may be potentially meaningful and help uncover the complex processes of experiencing and performing ‘community’ among close-knit networks where the display of Arabic is not needed for identifying a shared background.

My gender played a role during fieldwork in business settings. While most key participants in family and supplementary school settings were female (see 4.7; 5.6), the great majority of my interlocutors across businesses were male, as most business owners and staff were men. I spoke to both female and male clients throughout my fieldwork but, again, male viewpoints seemed to prevail. My gender affected the relationships I was able to establish with participants, as well as the extent to which I was able to ‘immerse myself’ in the settings. As compared to other settings, I found it more difficult to establish research relations with participants at business sites. Of course, my more long-term immersion in other sites will have naturally facilitated the building of rapport in those settings. Yet, my identity as a female researcher and language learner certainly shaped the ways in which I was able to interact with my mostly male participants across businesses: There was some sense of distance to be kept, which I perceived as less prominent in interaction with female participants.
Recordings at research sites may have provided deeper insights into language practices, and semi-structured interviews would have made my findings across sites more comparable. However, my aim was to present a qualitative and local analysis of language practices and beliefs in the selected business settings. I argue that the benefits of ethnographic observation and informal interviews outweigh any drawbacks. The combination of fieldnotes taken during and following repeated research visits, photographic material and reflections on interaction during my engagement as language learner provide a rich dataset. Analyses of online practices and email contact with owners offered additional insights, while less intrusive.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored language practices across business settings, discussing how ‘community’ is practised in the urban neighborhood. Arabic (in interaction with other linguistic resources) serves functions beyond communication of information, such as audience-selection in marketing and identity-constructions. With their principal focus on business transactions, commercial settings differ from the settings explored in previous chapters, where language maintenance was foregrounded. For businesses, one does not expect clear forms of ‘membership’. At the same time, there are certain parallels: both businesses and supplementary schools make provisions and offer services and products to populations, based on their understanding of local ‘community’ needs. Both may become hubs for interaction: the sites offer a social space for actors to come together and engage in joint practices, allowing for a form of durable engagement between individuals; others may simply have a conversation at one single occasion, yet feel connected through a shared alignment with (language) practices, products or services. Both take into consideration expected language preferences and interests of their target audiences to encourage and maintain engagement, an observation made also in the family setting. While businesses do not focus on explicit measures to maintain language, the display of Arabic in the LL and actors’ uses of Arabic for business interaction makes it a permanent (while inherently dynamic) part of the city space.

Across business case studies, Arabic is recognised as a valuable resource: (Standard) Arabic appears on facades and display boards to attract attention and address target audiences, facilitate access to information, and create a sense of authenticity in relation to products and services offered. Colloquial varieties are used for oral communication between staff and clients, and individuals meeting with others to spend time and ‘do community’. Arabic – the global label that incorporates MSA, CA and colloquial varieties – serves as an identity marker and an invitation to ‘others’, used by Arabic speakers and appropriated by non-speakers. The display of ‘other’ languages like Chinese helps create and maintain bonds and build trust. Alignment with language does, in this sense, not necessarily presuppose a high level of proficiency. Inequitable access to
language resources is used not to delineate groups, but to connect individuals, even where proficiency levels differ sharply. In other words, it is not necessarily proficiency but self-identification with a language that is crucial for furthering our understanding of the complex intersections between language and identity. My observations thus shed light on a new concept of language use, namely alignment with, rather than appropriation/adoptions of or performance in language.

A comprehensive understanding of communities requires broadening the focus to include both long-term and ephemeral experiences of belonging and everyday practices of ‘doing’ community in public space. Even though actors do not gather explicitly around language maintenance, a shared alignment with the language may help establish ties with others in the diaspora. Instrumentally rational practices or business transactions, which focus on the pre-defined goal of exchanging commodities or services, can be relevant to understandings of community (cf. Blokland’s 2018: 38). The nature of encounter and engagement reaches from durable and recurring (e.g. at Sheba Café) to fluid and potentially one-off encounters (e.g. at the butchers). The repetitiveness of fluid encounters creates a more defined sense of connectedness. Here, the non-fixity of ‘community’ becomes temporarily fixed through space, encouraged by the urban diaspora setting.

As Blokland pointed out at a conference in 2019, understandings of ‘community’ are related to types of public practices: “You cannot do community in the private space of your kitchen or bedroom”.

CITIES provide an ideal space for developing loose ties with others who become public familiars but are not necessarily part of close social networks, based on repeated encounters in a shared space. As shown above, physical place shapes ‘doings’ of community as shared practices coincide with shared place. LL offers an opportunity to publically perform unity and sameness by embracing neighbourhood diversity or singling out certain groups through audience-exclusive language choice. Trafford’s butchers for instance draws on wider alignment with Arabic through shared religious beliefs, but across language and country-of-origin boundaries. Frurt identifies Chinese as an important resource locally, a way to address frequent passers-by. For these businesses, city space and awareness of the local area’s language and cultural repertoires are relevant for marketing and creating relations. Multilingual signage and business cards express a sense of ‘conviviality’, as people cohabit superdiverse neighbourhoods and engage with difference (Wessendorf 2016). Also the Yemeni-owned Sheba Café draws on knowledge of the local area, but in a different way: Monolingual English marketing (and an absence of Arabic in the LL) is due to close interaction with space and a much more intimate, close-knit network between

---

55 Talja Blokland at the conference “Rethinking Language and Community”, University of Manchester, 16 May 2019.
actors and across outlets. The high degree of familiarity with ‘community-owned’ businesses, local networks and products makes the display of Arabic for collective identity-creation redundant; yet, local businesses are inter-linked at an imagined level to form a local community that maintains symbolic links to a shared origin. English serves as a language to equally address all actors in the diverse neighbourhood. In this way, community may be anchored in a sense of belonging and practices locally, while at the same time intersecting with imagined links to a shared ‘homeland’, oriented towards a national rather than pan-Arab identity. This echoes my previous discussion on supplementary schools creating links to countries of origin in establishing their identities in the diaspora.

My insights add a new dimension to Blokland’s (2017) model, emphasising the role of language in performing communities publicly. This is relevant particularly in the diverse setting, with language serving as tool for communication, indicator of sameness and difference and as marker of alignment with heritage. Language in the LL can invite fluid encounters, which may encourage more durable engagement through regular interaction. I have shown how LL can create links between customers and owners, through communicative and emblematic uses of language. In the bigger picture, language use in the LL has the power to create and maintain ‘community’, reinforcing alignment to a collective sense of identity while embracing the diversity of the local environment.

The display of language is a form of negotiating belonging to place. The combination of Arabic and Chinese on Frurt’s sign simultaneously points to the similarities (shared interest in offered products) and differences (backgrounds, made tangible through distinct language repertoires) of the audiences addressed. Reaching out to Chinese readers may be merely a business model, but it reflects flexibility in terms of identity in the multilingual city. The use of Chinese here derives from first-hand local experience, and thus from precisely the public familiarity and the complexities of language repertoires of the urban setting.

Language use in the LL can contribute to dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, i.e. to processes of boundary-drawing. Thus, the relation between notions of ‘community’ and language use in LL is characterised by reciprocal dynamics. On the one hand, the presence of Arabic can serve to indicate and negotiate some kind of belonging to an ‘imagined’ (local) community, expressing solidarity with other readers and speakers of Arabic, or possibly wider Muslim populations. At the same time, language use in the LL may encourage readers to engage, triggering encounters and transactions and potentially resulting in shared experiences and narratives. Blokland (2017) describes the urban space as a stage for performances of community. The LL may be seen as creating a space for visual aspects of such performances of community (see Gaiser & Matras 2020b).
Businesses become “communal places” and create “local attachments” (Ehrkamp 2005: 361) as they become an anchor point in the wider urban setting to meet and interact. Throughout my fieldwork across the city, I identified a number of places where Arabic speakers gather regularly to establish and maintain social ties, including a coffee shop near university campus known to serve as meeting place for Libyans, an Algerian ice-cream shop where North Africans meet, or a Middle Eastern take-away in Trafford frequented by individuals from across the Arab world. Here, long-established migrants offer support to recent arrivals, and recent arrivals reinforce the relevance of maintaining Arabic locally. Felder & Pignolo (2018) suggest: “[frequenting] the same business and developing a sense of familiarity with both the setting and the staff can provide users with a feeling of belonging” (Felder & Pignolo 2018: 99). Such a sense of belonging in the diaspora creates local attachments and is a form of experiencing and ‘doing’ community. While fluid interpersonal relations are not tied to the specific location of businesses, shared space does become relevant for fluid encounters and more durable engagement. ‘Communal places’ thus reinforce expressions of identity, which are however not limited to national boundaries or fixed to local space but may embrace translocal dimensions.

This chapter has complemented my findings from previous chapters to help answer my research questions. I have shed light on further dimensions of community and how language plays a role in the creation, performance and experience of these. The following chapter shifts attention to public service interpreting and translation, where Arabic is used as a service helping overcome ‘language barriers’.
7 Language as a service

7.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on fieldwork during a six-months placement at Manchester City Council’s Interpreting and Translation (I&T) unit (see 3.6.4 and 8.6.6 for ethical considerations). I discuss different narratives about and ways of categorising ‘Arabic’ to offer insights into how participants evaluate their language repertoires. The complex language ideologies I explored in family, supplementary school and business settings resurface in the context of language provisions and help understand interpreters’ assessments of their ‘proficiencies’. This chapter discusses the role of the diaspora in interpreters’ and translators’ (re-)negotiations of linguistic hierarchies, in relation to the translation unit’s expectations and perceived expectations of ‘language skills’. Moreover, I show how notions of ‘community’ are negotiated or enacted in interpreter-mediated communication, and how interpreters’ perceived language competences play a role in their positionings.

It is important at this point to offer some background information on qualifications and requirements for interpreters and translators in the UK context: Spoken interpreting is an unregulated profession in the UK. There are no overarching qualification requirements that need to be fulfilled to be able to work as ‘interpreter’ or for someone to call themselves an ‘interpreter’ in the UK (see Hlavac 2013: 54f.). The National Register of Public Service Interpreters is often seen as some guarantee of quality by some service providers since, in order to be accepted onto the register, individuals have to prove certain qualifications and numbers of hours of service (see NRPSI 2020). However, many service providers rely on their own lists or interpreter banks, with various degrees of quality assurance checks and qualification standards. Some I&T service providers apply their own language testing scheme for admission to a list. The highest level of qualifications for public service I&T is currently the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) Level 6, offered by the Chartered Institute of Linguistics (CIOL 2021). The qualification is exam-based, involving oral assessments to cover simultaneous, consecutive and sight translation to and from English, as well as a written exam to cover written translation to and from English. While there are courses available to prepare candidates for these exams, completing a course of training and preparation is not compulsory. There are lower-level qualifications in Community Interpreting (Levels 1-3), but the level of skill developed here is much inferior to the DPSI qualification and so interpreters will be less well prepared to undertake complex assignments. There are Master’s courses in I&T Studies, but some are more theoretical than others and the courses may not include any practical training. The lack of overarching training or qualification requirements for interpreters and translators in the UK creates challenges in terms
of quality assurance of language provisions (cf. Gaiser & Matras 2016a). An individual may
describe themselves as a ‘qualified interpreter/translator’ in all legitimacy, but there is likely to be
a substantial difference in the level of reliability and risk if the person has taken Community
Interpreting Level 1 as opposed to a DPSI.\footnote{I would like to acknowledge Dr Rebecca Tipton’s valuable insights
on the issue of qualification requirements for interpreters and translators in the UK (personal conversation, July 2021).}

In the following sections, I begin by offering some background information on the I&T unit and the
logistics behind the provision, before I explore the complex language repertoires of my
participants. Completed freelancer profile forms offer insights into complex understandings of
‘language’. This is followed by a discussion of some of the challenges behind providing Arabic
I&T. I then explore how I&T practices may play a role in practising and understanding
communities. Finally, I offer reflections on methodology before drawing conclusions.

I use the terms \textit{client} and \textit{service user} interchangeably to refer to individuals with limited English
proficiency using I&T services to facilitate access to public services. The term \textit{service provider}
refers to the party providing a service to the client (e.g. health professionals), communicating with
service users via interpreters/translators.

7.2 Logistics of service provision

Manchester City Council has emphasised their aims to recognise and respond to the city’s
linguistic diversity, ensuring that Council services are accessible to “a broad spectrum” of
residents (MCC 2019).\footnote{See Donakey (2007) for the city’s overall policy on language provisions; cf. Matras & Robertson (2015, 2017).} The I&T Service was established within Manchester City Council in 1992.

Today, it is one of the largest local authority and public sector-based I&T services in the UK
(Ramanuj 2016: 44). It serves a range of municipal departments as well as some Council partners;
in addition, translation services are accessible for members of the public. Moreover,
interpreters/translators can be booked for pupil language assessments in local mainstream
schools, and to assess newly trained interpreters/translators for the necessary qualifications.

The Service defines its main aim as enabling “effective communication between service providers
and non-English-speaking residents” to ensure “equal access to services and opportunities”
(Ramanuj 2016: 5). Drawing on Equality Acts, Ramanuj (2016) suggests that all residents have a
right to access information and a “right to be understood”, highlighting the service provider’s duty
to ensure mutual understanding (2016: 16.). As the I&T Service Manager pointed out in an
informal interview, the long-term aim of the Service is to reduce an individual’s dependency on language provisions rather than heritage language maintenance.

The I&T unit currently has a team of six in-house interpreters/translators, who have extensive experience of working with the Service. The team cover I&T for Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese, Bangla, and Urdu/Panjabi. Despite increasing demand (see Chapter 1), Arabic is not part of this core provision. The Service used to have six additional fixed-contract staff, offering I&T for Somali, Gujarati, French, Kurdish, and indeed Arabic, but the in-house team was reduced in 2010/2012 due to financial pressures. To remove Arabic from the core team was not a targeted decision, but the respective staff member left the Service voluntarily. For languages and demand that the in-house team cannot cover, the unit relies on freelance interpreters. The Service works with a pool of 150-200 interpreters/translators for over 77 languages, 14 of whom offer I&T for Arabic.

Arabic is among the most frequently requested languages for I&T in Manchester, alongside Urdu/Panjabi, Bengali, and Polish (see Gaiser & Matras 2016a). The council-based service receives 10-15 interpreting requests for Arabic every day, from an average of 60-70 requests across languages. Arabic is among the top languages requested for translation. In informal interviews with staff, there was an awareness of the importance to monitor population changes and predict potential fluctuations in language needs. It was pointed out that population changes were monitored by the “Planning department” at MCC, but I was unable to ascertain any structured collaboration between the I&T unit and the ‘planning department’ for more effective service planning.

7.3 Language repertoires and notions of ‘language’

During the placement, I gained insights into the complex language repertoires of interpreters, different notions of ‘language’ and expectations regarding which variety/varieties might be relevant for interpreting. The interpreters I interviewed were of different backgrounds from across the Arab world and beyond, including first- and second-generation migrants. Their self-reports about their language repertoires reflect the complexities of ‘language’ and ‘community’: In addition to proficiencies in a range of regional Arabic varieties and, as often emphasised, skills in MSA, most interviewees reported proficiencies in one or several additional language(s) for which they offered I&T services: Berber, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Somali, Sorani Kurdish, Kurmanji Kurdish, Farsi, Turkish, Amharic, Tigrinya, Tigo. This offers insights into the multi-layered language repertoires of individuals in the globalised city, with some having grown up in multilingual settings (e.g. speakers of Kurdish or Somali alongside Arabic), and others with
complex migration routes who acquired languages before coming to the UK (e.g. German, Italian, Spanish). The combination of Arabic and French is covered by individuals from countries where French used to be a colonial language, mainly North African countries or Lebanon. The fact that participants offer I&T services in these languages suggests a certain level of fluency, thus indicating the potential complexity of interaction dynamics in the diverse setting.

Hailing from across the Arab world, the pool of interpreters for Arabic cover various regional dialects; these proficiencies however are not capitalised on systematically. The selection of interpreter for a given request for ‘Arabic’ is typically not made on the basis of matching regional varieties or mutual intelligibility between client and interpreter. Only occasionally, interpreter requests include an indication of the client’s variety or place of origin, or the client’s preferences as to the variety spoken by the interpreter. Even if such information is provided, the I&T service is not necessarily able to match such requests to staff competences.

The I&T unit uses a unique electronic database, developed and maintained by a staff member, to record incoming interpreter requests and allocate staff. The database contains an entry for each in-house and free-lance staff, listing the languages they cover for translation and/or interpreting. It can be searched by interpreter/translators, to show up their language repertoires and qualifications. Alternatively, the database is searchable for ‘languages’. For some ‘languages’, the database distinguishes between varieties: For ‘Bengali’, staff members are prompted to specify the dialect required (e.g. Sylheti or others). Urdu and Panjabi are recorded as one language (‘Urdu/Panjabi’), based on the fact that people proficient in Urdu will normally use Panjabi for spontaneous spoken communication or switch between the two. For Arabic, the database uses only one category (‘Arabic’) and does not prompt users to specify which variety is required or preferred. There is an option for users to add comments on an interpreter’s preferred variety or information about country of origin, but this is not done systematically. Consequently, matching varieties between interpreter and client is difficult, which would be crucial to avoid situations of limited mutual intelligibility. Interpreters reported that, on the occasions that interpreter-requests did include information on the client’s geographical origin, crude categories such as ‘Middle Eastern Arabic’ and ‘North African Arabic’ may be used. This of course cannot capture the full complexities of variation but offers insights into wider understandings of ‘Arabic’.

However, the category ‘Urdu/Panjabi’ disregards the differences in practices and language repertoires between the variety of Panjabi spoken by Muslims, typically of Pakistani background, who use Urdu as a written and Standard form of language (using the Arabic script), and the variety of Panjabi spoken by Sikh populations, written in Gurmukhi script. Such differences are crucial for both interpreting and translation but cannot be discussed here.

This is the case also for other languages for which a specification of dialect would be crucial to ensure mutual understanding, e.g. ‘Kurdish’.
Six out of the eight interpreters I interviewed argued that they usually used the more universal MSA. This is questionable, given the fact that MSA is not typically used for spoken interaction. Users of interpreter services who may find themselves in a distressing situation (e.g. at medical appointments) are unlikely to feel comfortable using a variety of Arabic that is not typically used informally. Furthermore, individuals with limited literacy will find even passive understanding difficult.

At the same time that the relevance of language variation for Arabic I&T services seems underestimated, staff expressed their awareness of clients’ potentially multilingual repertoires and the fact that several ‘languages’ may be used during an interpreting encounter. If indicated as part of the request, staff match client repertoires with interpreters’ repertoires, subject to interpreter availability.

7.3.1 Freelancer profile forms

I had access to over 50 completed Freelancer profile forms (from 2016 to 2019), application forms submitted by candidates applying to become freelance interpreters at the I&T Service (see 3.6.4 for ethical considerations). The forms ask applicants to provide information on their “languages”, their “qualifications, experience and/or training relevant to language, interpreting and translation”, as well as a reference (Figure 47 shows an extract of the form).
In Section 2 of the form, the applicant is asked to list the ‘languages’ they are applying for, and to specify whether they can work as interpreter and/or translator. The section presupposes that language repertoires can be easily divided into different ‘languages’, for each of which an applicant will then be able to indicate whether they have ‘sufficient’ oral or literacy skills for interpreting or translation. Applicants are asked to summarise their relevant language resources in a seemingly simple and straightforward way, largely disregarding any complexities related to language variation and writing or speaking proficiencies. While in theory there is space for applicants to offer specific information on their proficiencies in individual dialects (or geographical origin), the form does not explicitly prompt applicants to do so. The form offers insights into the I&T unit’s understandings of ‘language’ and perceived planning needs, where ‘languages’ are understood as more or less bounded categories that can be described “accurately and clearly”.

The completed forms reflect interpreters’ understandings of their language repertoires, as well as the expectations believed to be held by the I&T unit. From the forms I had access to, nine included Arabic among the applicants’ languages. Half of these applicants reported to be able to cover interpreting and translation for several and up to six ‘languages’, with language combinations roughly matching the repertoires of existing I&T staff for Arabic discussed above. This is an
indication that, despite increasing complexity in language repertoires in globalised settings (Vertovec 2007), there are identifiable patterns of shared practices and repertoires. The fact that applicants indicated Berber/Amazigh as among their language proficiencies, a language that is generally perceived as less valuable and prestigious than Arabic (cf. Sayahi 2014), suggests an awareness of the considerable presence of speakers in the city, as well as a recognition that Berber is thus a useful resource in the diverse setting.

The completed profile forms also offer insights into how Arabic speakers assess the relevance of specifying familiarity with dialects when applying for a job as interpreter/translator. Most applicants indicated simply ‘Arabic’, with no information on their regional varieties. Arguably, what applicants wish to advertise is their proficiency in a form of Arabic that is close to the Standard, perceived as ‘correct’ and widely comprehensible. This is suggested by one of the applicants who reported that he had “studied correct Arabic language (to A-level equivalent)”. Applications’ descriptions of their language repertoires are not practice- and needs-based (to ensure effective communication), but oriented towards the institutionally defined MSA. The completed forms suggest an expectation among applicants that, in a job application for I&T, the prestigious Standard variety is perceived as relevant, and there is no need to specify spoken varieties. This is notable since, in practice, spoken varieties will be used for interpreting. At the same time, the downplaying of colloquial forms of Arabic is not surprising, as Standard Arabic has a wide institutional recognition and authority that colloquial varieties do not have. Applicants want the best opportunity to be allocated jobs, thus judging and describing their language repertoires based on imagined institutional requirements. Furthermore, it may be assumed that the way the form asks for information about applicants’ repertoires (i.e. asking to list “languages”) is understood by language users as information about indeed ‘language’ proficiencies, as opposed to dialects. Yet, it is noteworthy that perceptions of prestige seem to override possible practical issues such as limited mutual intelligibility and efficiency of interaction.

Only two of the nine applicants for Arabic addressed the issue of dialect. One applicant, who indicated “Arabic” as their “language” for I&T, offered some more detail in Section 3. The applicant, male in his early thirties, reported: “Arabic is my second language, born and raised in middle east – speak and understand all dialects – Arabic language degree”. Accordingly, the applicant perceived a need to emphasise that Arabic is his ‘second language’; he did not however offer any information on the language(s) considered his ‘first language(s)’. While the suggestion that the applicant could “speak and understand all dialects” is a daring statement, it acknowledges the relevance of dialect differences for interpreting. It also assumes, rightly or wrongly, that the institutional context affords recognition to proficiency in dialects as a skill, suggesting an apparent gap in expectations between the individual and the institution. At the same time, the applicant
shifts attention to MSA, emphasising his “Arabic language degree” as a proof of his comprehensive proficiency, and thus in line with wider expectations of perceived ‘correctness’ of and ‘professionalism’ associated with the Standard variety.

A second applicant listed “Arabic – Standard” in the first line and “Arabic – regional dialects” in the second line in Section 2, as if they were two separate languages. This suggests the perceived difference between two sets of resources, where *fuṣḥā* is juxtaposed with ‘āmmiyatna dialects as one separate ‘language’ or set of resources. The applicant did not specify which “regional dialects” she was familiar with. For “regional dialects”, the applicant ticked both interpreting and translation. This is rather surprising, as it is not common practice to write colloquial varieties of Arabic, at least for official documents; any informal online conversations or other spontaneously written notes, which may include regional dialect elements, are unlikely to require certified translations. That the applicant does not understand the difference between interpreting and translation seems unlikely, as it is indeed specific to the professional jargon. Rather, the form reflects the applicant’s aim to describe her language repertoire as ‘as complete as possible’. Indicating spoken and written proficiencies in both Standard and colloquial varieties, the applicant aims to suggest that she is equipped with the skills needed to meet any communication challenges involving ‘Arabic’ in the diverse diaspora. Again, the individual’s expectations that a consideration of dialect differences is crucial for effective communication, and therefore proficiency in dialects is a useful skill in a setting like Manchester, do not match institutional routines, which draw on named ‘languages’ as straightforward, bounded and unequivocal categories.

Notably, there was no single application form in my sample where applicants named proficiency in one or several specific varieties, reflecting a wider devaluation of spoken colloquial varieties in this context or a lack of routine in identifying them. This is striking, given the high level of awareness that many interpreters are likely to have of situations facing recent arrivals from across the Arab world. The self-perceptions and descriptions of language repertoires on these profile forms are, of course, not necessarily realistic indications of people’s language proficiencies. However, they offer insights into individuals’ understandings of their repertoires, or at least the resources perceived as relevant or expected in the context of an application as interpreter/translator in the Manchester setting. The profile forms prompt applicants to create and highlight boundaries within their complex repertoires, and to make decisions as to which of their resources are worthy to be mentioned and will be recognised.

Beliefs and ideologies underlying the decision-making processes of applicants when filling in the forms may be shaped by local requirements for interpreter qualifications. During an assessment for candidates aspiring for the qualification ‘Community Interpreting’, which I had an opportunity to join in December 2018, examiners (themselves qualified interpreters) reported that they did
“not mark down” candidates for the use of dialect features, but candidates got rewarded for demonstrating their proficiency in “formal” or “official Arabic”. At the same time, I have witnessed how the I&T Service Manager encouraged inexperienced interpreters to familiarise themselves with “jargon” and get used to hearing different dialects.

7.3.2 Challenges in practice

Differing perceptions of language boundaries, an expected preference for MSA, and a lack of valorisation of and confidence in using colloquial varieties result in a number of challenges. During informal interviews with interpreters for Arabic, most participants reported that they had experienced challenging situations where the client had had difficulties understanding the interpreter, or vice versa. Such difficulties in understanding were mostly due to variety-specific lexical items, semantics or pronunciation. For example, one interpreter of Palestinian background reported an encounter with a client speaking Egyptian Arabic, where the client used the word *darab* (ضرب), which in his variety meant ‘hitting’ someone, while in Palestinian Arabic its meaning was much less specific and could refer to any aggressive action towards someone else. My interviewee emphasised that such differences could result in misunderstandings and have serious implications. A second interpreter suggested during an interview that even though she was familiar with different dialects for her migration history, interpreting across varieties (i.e. with each participant in the interaction using their own variety) was challenging. The participant emphasised that only in Manchester she had realised how significant the differences between Arabic dialects could be. The global diaspora offers a degree of diversity of Arabic speakers and varieties that is not necessarily found in the Arab world, thus posing unique challenges.

Participants agreed that work experience and exposure to different varieties throughout the years had helped understand clients from various backgrounds. This suggests that during early years in the profession, interpreters may attempt to just ‘get along’. Furthermore, clients may not have had an opportunity to increase their familiarity with different varieties. Three interpreters reported that they had used “fuṣḥā” or “high Arabic” when their own variety differed considerably from the client’s. Some interpreters reported that they had interrupted interpreting assignments, requested to re-arrange the appointment and asked for another interpreter to replace them as dialect differences had impeded effective communication.
7.4 ‘Community’ and positioning

The guidance booklet provided by Manchester City Council’s I&T Service refers to the city population as one diverse ‘community’ (Ramanuj 2016: 5; 19). Throughout my placement, the notion of ‘community’ was used by administration staff as well as interpreters in relation to the provision of language services, although with a more specific meaning. In informal discourse and for planning purposes, staff often speak of “communities” as defined on the basis of bounded languages, as in their aim to provide a service for “the Arabic community” in Manchester. Such notions of ‘community’ encompass Arabic speakers resident in Manchester with the need for I&T services to access information in English. They do however not necessarily include people who are proficient in Arabic as well as English, as the focus is on speakers with perceived (and expressed) language needs.

Some of the profile forms I analysed offer indications of applicants’ imaginings of ‘communities’ in Manchester. One applicant, applying as Kurdish and Arabic interpreter, indicated as part of his qualification and experience that he had volunteered as interpreter for the “Manchester-Kurdish-Arabs community”. Another applicant, with the same language combination, included a reference that describes him as having “shown outstanding performance in the Kurdish & Arabic community in Manchester by engaging [in] interpreting […]”. Such statements reflect people’s understandings of ‘community’ as going beyond single languages. With many Kurdish speakers being fluent also in Arabic, boundaries between sets of resources in individuals’ language repertoires are fuzzy, and interaction crosses social groups understood as mapped onto languages. Furthermore, the notion of ‘community’ seems to be linked to ideas of mutual support, and supporting the local ‘community’ is seen as an experience that gives weight to the application. During informal interviews with interpreters, there was a general consensus that offering interpreting services was a way to help and “give back to the community”, implying that the interpreters themselves had in the past benefitted from support. Similarly, an Arabic interpreter of Iraqi background explained that providing interpreting services could be very satisfactory and fulfilling: “when you’re doing your job right you feel like you do something for the community” (December 2018). My fieldwork indicates the perceived everyday relevance of the notion of ‘community’; at the same time, it reflects diverse interpretations.

Anderson’s (2006) ‘imagined community’ is useful to illustrate how participants perceive themselves as members of a group where embodied presence and continuous joint interaction are no prerequisites for a sense of belonging and collective identity. Such imagined collectivities between individuals in the diaspora draw on shared linguistic (and cultural) backgrounds resulting in mutual support. The interpreting encounter in itself very much materialises the supportive
practices that create bonds among members of such imagined communities. Yet, as some of the completed application forms and informal interviews suggest, interpreters may portray themselves as (no longer) fully belonging to the part of the community that relies on support. Interpreters may be perceived or perceive themselves as taking an intermediate role between these imagined communities of 'heritage language' speakers on the one hand, and wider UK society on the other. Facilitating communication between individuals with limited English proficiency and the wider English-dominant society, interpreters may be seen as linking the two. Interpreters become spokespeople for their ‘communities’, using their multilingual proficiencies to make connections across imagined community ‘boundaries’ and “give back to the community”.

Even though interpreters are instructed to remain impartial (Ramanuj 2016), roles are not necessarily fixed but shaped during the interpreting encounter (cf. Tipton & Furmanek 2016; Taibi & Ozolins 2016). In my informal interviews, Arabic interpreters described how service providers tried to get interpreters on their side, asking for advice or their opinion regarding service users’ statements. As fluent speakers of English and representing Manchester City Council, interpreters suggested that they were often seen as supporting service providers rather than service users. At the same time, clients may see interpreters as their advocates, based on the shared linguistic, cultural/ethnic background. Ramanuj (2016) points to such challenges, advising interpreters not to take sides and “[t]ry not to form a strong empathy with the service user” (2016: 37). The interpreter-mediated interactions I shadowed throughout the fieldwork showed how positioning is complex and may depend on a variety of factors, such as the topic and goals of the interaction, or whether clients arrived together with the interpreter or were already waiting with service providers. I observed service providers ‘chatting’ with interpreters without interpreting this part of the conversation, which ‘excludes’ clients from the dyadic interaction. Likewise, there may be interaction between client and interpreter that does not get interpreted into English, thus ‘excluding’ service providers. Clients’ attempts to use English and communicate directly with the service provider (rather than via the interpreter) further re-define positionings.interpreters negotiate intermediary roles as they attempt to ‘bridge’ communication. It is precisely their multi-layered and flexible language repertoires including proficiency in English that positions interpreters ‘in-between’.

Furthermore, such acts of positioning through language choice may be seen as practices negotiating language policy (LP). During the interpreting encounter, there are arguably relatively fixed expectations (and shared norms) regarding patterns of language choice. The very nature of the interpreting encounter is inherently defined by two parties – service provider and user –

---

60 Cf. Chapter 4 for discussions on participants’ use of English in the court.
speaking different languages; the interpreter, who shares linguistic resources with both sides, acts as mediator between the two. This, in the prototypical situation, arguably pre-defines a (potentially taken-for-granted) LP whereby the service provider is expected to speak the majority language, and service user the heritage language. I argue that, negotiating their own English proficiencies, actors challenge and re-define this taken-for-granted LP (cf. Gaiser et al. forthcoming).

7.5 Researcher reflections

My fieldwork on public sector-based I&T provisions in Manchester builds mostly on my perspective as placement student, with language learning playing a subordinate role. My role as placement student allowed for a form of engagement that participants were familiar with (the Service takes several placement students yearly), and which was likely to be less intimidating than if my primary role of engagement had been that of university researcher. The placement allowed me to learn about everyday logistical processes and procedures and about the challenges of providing an effective service. I was not a passive observer of practices but was given my own tasks to complete, which allowed me to participate actively. The placement also offered vital opportunities to make contact with interpreters and translators for Arabic.

Much of the analysis presented above is based on participants’ self-reports during informal interviews and in the profile forms. The forms, completed as part of a job application rather than for research, constitute a rich dataset and an innovative way to explore participants’ beliefs about ‘language’ and participants’ assessments of their own language resources. They offer insights into people’s complex repertoires – or at least those sets of resources applicants decided to highlight in the application, which in itself sheds light on their perceptions of the values of their ‘languages’ and beliefs about which skills are required or expected as interpreter/translator.

Researcher positioning was not always straightforward. In my capacity as PhD student and MLM researcher, I was asked for feedback on the training sessions and language assessments I had participated in, to inform the planning of future training sessions. My engagement thus provided a unique opportunity to make contributions to the City Council’s I&T unit and inform future decision-making processes and planning within the Service. These reciprocal dynamics, where the placement offered me opportunities for observations and participation while allowing me to feed back into their work (cf. Schiller 2018) in itself shaped research dynamics and researcher positioning. As placement student and language learner, I was placed into a ‘learning’ role with procedures at the Service being new to me, thus sub-ordinate to everyone else. I did not have a fixed desk space in the office but used other staff members’ computers while they were absent,
having to move on their return. At the same time, my knowledge in Linguistics, University affiliation and experience as language learner meant that staff members and freelance interpreters and translators respected me as multilingual individual and language ‘expert’. My involvement in MLM helped establish credibility. I took my lunches together with other senior and junior staff and was invited to staff parties. This created trust, yet at times made it difficult to balance my roles during the placement, and the directionality and character of fieldwork relations (see Schiller 2018).

In terms of positionality, I perceived my gender as playing less of a central role in shaping my relationships with participants as compared to other fieldwork sites. I interacted with both female and male staff members at the I&T Service, and both female and male interpreters. Since practices in this setting were less focused on language maintenance – which is often perceived as the responsibility of women – and more on bridging communication gaps, I perceived my identity as an international student, who is herself a non-native speaker of English, as more relevant in how I was positioned in the field than the fact that I was a woman. Both women and men were equally respected as professionals in I&T, and both women and men are users of language services with expressed language needs. The gender dimension was less prominent in shaping my fieldwork relations, even though it may have affected the ways in which I was perceived by participants (i.e. as a female student researcher).

Regarding my own use of Arabic as an individual of German background, and how participants oriented to it, my interlocutors in the I&T context seemed much less surprised or impressed at my Arabic skills as compared to participants in other settings. For example, several I&T staff told me about other Arabic interpreters who were not Arabs but had lived in the Arab world, or who were married to Arabs and had therefore acquired Arabic. While participants were not necessarily surprised at my Arabic proficiency, the very fact that they told me about other Arabic speakers of non-Arab background (without me prompting them to do so) reflects wider associations between ethnic backgrounds and language proficiency, which in turn may have implications for understandings of ‘community’.

The rather structured nature of engagement in this setting as placement student contrasts with the more informal and in-depth immersion in other settings, which may have impaired comparability of findings across chapters. However, it is precisely this combination, testing and assessing of different methods that is among the central aims of this study, to be able to develop a comprehensive ethnographic approach that can do justice to the complexity of (language) practices in globalised urban diaspora settings.
7.6 Conclusion

Exploring provisions for Arabic at Manchester City Council’s I&T Service, this chapter has provided new perspectives on how linguistic hierarchies and notions of ‘community’ are defined and re-defined in the diaspora.

The values associated with different Arabic varieties manifested themselves in this setting in various forms. The ways in which I&T Service staff deal with and record interpreter requests for ‘Arabic’ prioritise the perceived need to provide an interpreter that answers to the global label of ‘Arabic’ over matching regional varieties to ensure effective communication. Wider language ideologies encountered in language maintenance settings (i.e. tensions between fushâ and colloquial varieties) resurface among providers of language services. Emphasis seems to be placed on the positive associations of MSA with education and success, and a general disregard of colloquial spoken varieties of Arabic. Likewise, most completed application forms in my corpus reflect a privileging of MSA rather than a focus on potential practical language needs. This captures the assumption of languages being relevant and legitimate as systems rather than as fluid resources for interaction. There is some awareness of language variation among staff, which is however not currently embedded into the procedures of booking interpreters or recording information from new freelance interpreters. Some of the statements expressed by interpreters during informal interviews and application forms suggest an awareness of the fact that dialect differences may impede mutual understanding between two ‘Arabic’ speakers at the micro-level of interaction. This is particularly relevant in the superdiverse diaspora where speakers from different parts of the world and with increasingly complex language repertoires meet. Somewhat paradoxically, the linguistic diversity found in the diaspora setting seems to reinforce the perceived prestige of MSA for its neutrality and supposed wide intelligibility, rather than encouraging individuals to capitalise on specialised skills. This marks a contrast to young learners’ discourse in supplementary schools in terms of ‘useability’ of language: while child learners promote dialect and contest the role of MSA, adult interpreters (like adult teachers) promote MSA.

My findings raise questions regarding policy enactment at the micro-level. I have revealed gaps between apparent expectations of the I&T service and those of interpreters/translators. Ideologies differ between the institution and the individual. The application forms I had access to reflect attempts to bridge the two: applicants predict and aim to meet the institution’s expectations and requirements, yet the institutional discourse may differ. Some applicants draw on the local relevance of dialect diversity in forming their expectations, while the I&T service and other applicants draw on higher-scale ideals and perceptions of language, with MSA being perceived as the universally applicable variety appropriate for the institutional context.
The globalised city creates needs as well as opportunities. Proficiency in heritage language(s) is, if there is a simultaneous 'lack' of proficiency in English, seen as a hindrance in terms of accessing services in the diaspora setting, thus creating a dependency on others. In this case, Arabic is seen as an issue to be overcome. An individual’s fluency in Arabic becomes valorised as ‘resource’ if the same individual is proficient also in the majority language. Thus, instead of requiring language services, or being posited as requiring such support, multilingual individuals capitalise on their multi-layered repertoires and become active subjects rather than objects of I&T (cf. Polezzi 2012). Command of both Arabic and English empowers individuals through opening up job opportunities. Proficiencies in MSA are perceived as giving further value to the repertoire. The ‘heritage’ language comes to be seen as a skill serving to contribute to the diverse city. While working as interpreter was described as a way of “giving back to the community”, the very need for the service among ‘community members’ creates jobs for longer-established residents. This is however not the case if English does not form part of an individual’s repertoire, in which case language is seen as a need rather than a resource.

This research raises new questions regarding the ways in which I&T, and the actors involved in I&T encounters, shape community ‘boundaries’ and relationships. The process of changing linguistic forms into another ‘language’ is a marker of difference (Cronin 2006). In the encounter, clients draw on shared language resources to position themselves vis-à-vis the interpreter, i.e. marking sameness. This, at the same time, highlights difference between client and service provider. The act of translating/interpreting from one ‘language’ to the other is a way of juxtaposing imagined language systems as well as their users. I argue however that such processes of positioning cannot be understood as a simply dyadic and fixed (a priori definable) juxtaposition. I argue that positioning is based on and results in a re-shuffling of hierarchical orderings of language resources in the repertoire, where the perceived value of language resources is being re-defined dynamically. Arabic is recognised as a skill that can be mobilised for a career, which depends on the continuing influx of new arrivals and a constant need ‘within the community’ for such services. Individuals working as interpreters find themselves as positioning “in-between” public service providers and ‘the community’.

In the bigger picture of this research, the placement provided an opportunity to experience the practicalities around providing and using language services for Arabic, as well as offering an additional perspective: It helped me put my thesis in the wider context of the multilingual city and allowed me to complement ‘bottom-up’ views in terms of categorisation with ‘top-down’ perspectives. Self-defined perceptions of individuals’ or group’s own community experiences, as well as perceptions of ‘proficiencies’ and skills, may differ from other-imposed (e.g. public authority) categorisations.
My research on Arabic in public service I&T has provided further insights into the complexities of language practices, as well as the dynamic positionings of actors and perceptions of ‘community’. Again, higher-level scales play a role in individuals’ and the institution’s assessments of language resources. I have demonstrated the relevance of key concepts presented in the study to this particularised setting and offered additional insights, helping me address my research questions.

In the following (and concluding) chapter, I bring my findings from across settings together and reflect on the wider significance of this study.
8 Discussion and conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This study set out to explore language practices and policies, actors’ understandings of their linguistic repertoires, and notions of ‘community’ among users of Arabic in Manchester, UK. I developed a methodological framework that involves engaging as language learner and researcher to study practices and policies, reported practices and beliefs about language.

In this concluding chapter, I draw on my findings to answer my research questions. I discuss the contributions this study offers, shifting debates on ‘community’ and ‘language’ in global settings into new directions: I argue for an understanding of language policy that emerges and operates within wider interactional regimes, taking into account actors’ dynamic understandings of their language resources as well as community practices and imaginings. Drawing on the notion of scales, I explore linguistic hierarchies in inter-relation with wider dynamics and thus contribute to previous understandings of ‘language’ and language policy (LP) in diverse diasporas. In terms of methodology, I make a case for the study of ‘private’ Linguistic Landscapes (LL) as forms of practised LP, the use of family focus groups, and a versatile engagement with research participants.

This chapter is structured as follows: After revisiting the research questions and summarising my overall findings, I draw together discussions from across settings to illustrate my argument. First, I explore understandings of ‘language’ and linguistic hierarchies across settings. Second, I offer reflections on LP as part of multi-layered ‘interactional regimes’. I show how my observations help understand notions of ‘community’ and discuss how previous approaches might be usefully adapted and complemented to capture the complexities of experiences, performances and conceptualisations of ‘community’ in the diaspora. Third, I revisit the methods of this study and reflect on their potential as well as limitations. Finally, I reflect on the contributions and wider significance of this study, as well as offering an outlook on future research.

---

61 My research questions are not addressed separately, as findings inter-relate and aspects that may serve to answer one question are often closely linked to other questions. I refer to specific questions where relevant.
8.2 Summary of findings

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do speakers of Arabic in Manchester draw on and maintain their multi-layered language repertoires?

2. Which factors shape Arabic language practices and perceived hierarchies of language resources in the urban diaspora, and what forms of implicit and explicit language 'policy' become apparent (scripted, practised, reported)?

3. How do language resources and perceived hierarchies shape inter-personal (power) relations, and how do language practices, policies and beliefs affect the constitution, experiences and imaginings of 'communities' in the diaspora?

4. What are the components and nature of a comprehensive approach to exploring 'language' and 'community' in the globalised urban diaspora?

From this research it is apparent that language policies do not operate within 'communities', as suggested previously (Labov 1972; Spolsky 2004). I argue that policies and 'community' must be understood in their wider dynamics, in interplay with language practices and negotiated hierarchies of linguistic resources. I draw on and advance the notion of 'interactional regimes', proposing to view regimes as a context in which to understand policies and conceptions of 'language' and 'community'. This shifts attention away from a (somewhat artificial) distinction between policy and practice and focuses on the interplay and overlap between the two, understood as a whole and interacting with other factors.

My argument is based on five closely inter-related points:

1) Understandings of 'language' (in our case 'Arabic'), perceptions of linguistic hierarchies and beliefs about which resources are perceived as 'proficiencies' are dynamic rather than fixed, as they are subject to negotiation and re-negotiation. I argue that local understandings of language affect language policies at the micro-level.

2) Language policies and practised policies are negotiated, interpreted and acted upon as part of wider interactional regimes, as actors orient to policies in relation to wider contexts, and based on what they understand 'language' to be.
3) **Interactional regimes** are subject to negotiation and interpretation, shaped by:

- Expectations and perceived ‘appropriateness’ of language use, based on (routine) practices in time and space;
- Rules (i.e. policies), both implicit as well as shared, i.e. made explicit through management strategies (at macro-, meso- and micro-levels);
- Explicit contestations of rules and norms in practice;
- Wider ideologies and prestige values associated with linguistic resources (e.g. for religious significance and/or standardisation).

4) Various (co-existing, overlapping, scalar) interactional regimes across time and space form part of and make up wider **ecologies**.

5) The dynamics of language hierarchies and policies play a role in understandings of ‘community’, as shared hierarchisation of language resources encourage shared routines and/or bonds between actors. Communities may be experienced based on practices and performances, as well as socially constructed through imagination.

A recurring theme across chapters is the issue of language ideologies (particularly *fuṣḥā*-dialect tensions) and how they are re-negotiated in the diaspora. They shape the ways language users assess the value of linguistic resources, influencing maintenance practices, positionings and ‘community’ alliances. In this sense, conceptions of ‘language’ help explore understandings of ‘community’.

Two opposing trends of community experiences and alliances can be identified in relation to language practices and ideologies in the diaspora: a greater valorisation of linguistic forms associated with speakers’ places of origin on the one hand, and an orientation towards ‘universalisation’ and the diverse diaspora through flagging their shared identification with MSA, on the other (see below). The relevance of ‘Arabic’ is understood in interplay with English, recognised as a significant resource as part of ‘community repertoires’ in the reality of the diaspora. Furthermore, I have shown how speakers of a range of ‘other’ languages in the global setting associate themselves with and appropriate Arabic, which further challenges the notion of an ‘Arabic community’ as defined on the basis of one ‘language’ (and one understanding of ‘Arabic’).

One aim of this study was to identify the components and nature of an approach that can capture the complexities of ‘language’ and ‘community’ in the globalised urban diaspora. I argue that I have developed not just a method, but an entire epistemology about the complexities of knowing and exploring what counts as ‘language’, who has the right to speak or use it, and how language
practices and beliefs link to ‘community’. I thus offer an approach that suggests how to study communities, rather than understanding ‘community’ as unit of analysis (cf. Brubaker 2005).

My findings have significance on several levels of generalisability and abstraction. My discussions begin by making points that are specific to the Arabic language and its users in Manchester, followed by a more widely applicable argument on linguistic hierarchies (8.3). While specific to Arabic, my reflections on policies as part of interactional regimes offer insights into the wider dynamics of language and community in the UK and beyond (8.4). Finally, I make broader points about language and community in urban diaspora settings (8.5.), yet adding some observations that are specific to the hierarchisation of Arabic varieties (8.5.2).

8.3 ‘Language’, linguistic hierarchies and positionings

Across settings, individuals expressed strong opinions about their repertoires and the relative value of their own and others’ linguistic resources. ‘Arabic’ is seen as an important resource for its communicative and emblematic values, not only in settings where actors get together explicitly around ‘language’.

This brings me back to the first two research questions raised in this study, asking how language users draw on their complex repertoires and what factors shape language practices and hierarchies. From my research, it is clear that patterns of language use and maintenance, understandings of boundaries between sets of resources and their assessment cannot be predicted a priori, as they are highly dynamic and context-specific. Practices and perceived hierarchies are dependent on an interplay of factors such as the situation, aims, the individual speaker and their social role in a given setting (e.g. teacher vs. pupil vs. individuals applying as interpreter). Language users negotiate their own ‘proficiencies’, or what is perceived as ‘proficiency’, in a given activity.

Our participant family is faced with the challenge of balancing various needs and interests regarding the maintenance of ‘Arabic’ and acquisition of English, both perceived as crucial for interaction and positioning in the diaspora. Such dynamics are complicated by the fact that adult family members have limited competence in the UK majority language, whereas most children have limited proficiency in the ‘heritage’ language. Arabic is seen as a cultural and economic resource. The prominence of written Arabic in the ‘private’ LL establishes and reinforces its status in the Manchester home. Colloquial Syrian Arabic is the desired and accepted means of communication for everyday interaction and is preferred over English. It is seen as an important marker of identity in pan-Arab encounters in the diaspora. Yet, during dedicated ‘Arabic’ lessons, language hierarchies are re-organised: the prestigious MSA and CA are perceived as the
appropriate varieties to be endorsed formally, even for speaking. At the same time, there is a perceived need to acquire and constantly improve family members’ English proficiencies, both for interaction with non-Arabic speakers and access to services as well as for recognition and enhanced job opportunities in a setting where English is the majority language, but useful also for a possible future back in the Arab world. Language resources are employed systematically to negotiate positioning, both within and beyond the family. Such beliefs replicate wider discourses about English being the ‘key to life in the UK’, and English proficiency an indication of willingness to ‘integrate’, while a lack of English is seen as a barrier. At the same time, however, Arabic proficiency is recognised as a skill, both to establish local (support) networks as well as enhancing job prospects. Arabic provides links between participants’ lives in the diaspora and their past in Syria, as well as playing an important role for their future. Language resources thus create interconnections across time and space.

**Arabic supplementary schools**, by definition, place their focus on teaching ‘Arabic’. Teachers need to support basic communication skills in addition to literacy, a condition specific to the diaspora setting. Yet, across schools, *fuṣḥā* is perceived as the single variety worthy of teaching, while different approaches are taken regarding the acceptance of non-Standard varieties for classroom interaction. At the same time, there is diversity in curricula and learning objectives, and how these link with schools’ wider positionings in the diaspora. Curricula at the Libyan school are a legacy of the period when the school’s principal aim was to prepare pupils for a potential return to their families’ origin country. The Damascene school orients more towards the UK setting: The teaching of Arabic meets the concerns of more recently arrived families in terms of maintaining the heritage language as a communicative resource and creates a support network that helps families settle in the UK. At McrAS, the focus on (Standard) Arabic as “one of the UK’s Languages of the Future” is a way of forming and linking with a wider, diverse diaspora ‘community’ anchored in the local setting. Marking criteria for UK qualifications reflect the privileging of the Standard variety. The alignment with MSA serves to legitimise the maintenance of ‘heritage’ languages locally, while reinforcing language ideologies held translocally. The different local and translocal factors and requirements affect what teachers and pupils perceive as their own and others’ language ‘proficiencies’. Pupils contest the expectations defined by supplementary schools and more widely, based on their own experiences and perceptions of the value of linguistic resources.

In **business settings**, business owners creatively draw on available resources, using their “own” as well as “other’s” languages to reach diverse readerships. Less focus is placed on *fuṣḥā* when it comes to spoken interaction, as the communicative function of colloquial varieties is valued for transactions where MSA would not be practical or feel natural. In fact, non-Standard regional varieties may serve to build trust; yet, ideologies privileging MSA persist. (Standard) Arabic in the LL serves for mutual identification, and Qur’an quotes (using CA) appeal to Arabic-speaking and
non-Arabic-speaking Muslims. Here, the global label of ‘Arabic’ is a meaningful resource to establish relations across language-based populations. Arabic is combined with English and potentially additional resources, with sign-writers ‘crossing boundaries’ to embrace the diversity of the local neighbourhood.

At Manchester City Council’s I&T unit an ideological privileging of MSA is salient, echoing a general disregard of colloquial Arabic varieties in embracing a routine defined by the institutional setting. This ignores the complexities at the practical level of the potential need to bridge across Arabic dialects, a necessity when the aim of the provision is to ensure effective communication. The prestige associated with ʿfuṣḥā is expected to boost applications, while removed from the reality of language use in the actual encounter. Proficiency in MSA, in combination with English, is perceived as a valuable resource and skill. This stands in contrast with the vulnerability of Arabic-speaking service users who ‘lack’ English, where the heritage language poses problems rather than bringing an advantage. In the diverse diaspora, heritage languages are seen as resources for some, and a hindrance for others. The provision and availability of I&T services points to the notion of language as ‘right’, where non-English speakers are entitled to provisions allowing access to public services in their ‘own’ languages; yet actors’ dependency on I&T points to what is perceived as a deficiency that creates communication gaps. The long-term aim of the Service is to reduce an individual’s need for I&T provisions rather than to maintain heritage languages.

While the above is specific to Arabic – with its particular linguistic conditions and attributes – and the Manchester setting, my findings allow us to draw conclusions that are relevant more widely. I highlight the relevance of scales and use the concept to enrich our understanding of linguistic hierarchies to help conceptualise language users’ assessment of resources, thus contributing to existing discussions (Karatsareas 2020). I argue that globally established and negotiated (higher-scale) hierarchies are not simply adapted or replicated in the diaspora. Attention must be shifted to how expectations and evaluations of resources are challenged and re-negotiated locally. Linguistic hierarchies are not static but constructed dynamically through discourses and practices, as actors challenge evaluations of repertoires or boundary-makings (and markings) between sets of resources. For example, the marking of language boundaries by means of labelling ‘language’ versus ‘dialect’ is a way of hierarchising language resources, and contesting such categorisations serves to negotiate hierarchies. The globalised urban diaspora adds ‘new’ practices to the repertoire, e.g. encounters among regional varieties and the use of Arabic to forge connections across national and linguistic backgrounds in a unique interaction space, as well as negotiations of the value of the ‘heritage language’ as opposed to the local majority language. The diaspora setting is the site of a local language ecology that prompts actors across contexts to re-define and
re-negotiate higher-level beliefs and practice routines relating to ‘language’, which in turn shapes the ways individuals (re-)evaluate their linguistic resources.

Dynamic negotiations of language hierarchies and boundaries play a role in actors’ positionings and social identification. Actors negotiate and re-negotiate how they understand their own ‘proficiencies’. Across settings, ‘heritage’ language may be understood as right, problem, or resource (cf. Hult & Hornberger 2016; Matras & Robertson 2017; Ruiz 1984). Perceptions of specific repertoire components as ‘deficient’ or ‘proficient’ are dynamic, as actors and practices constantly redefine the values associated with Standard vs. non-Standard varieties, and majority vs. ‘heritage’ languages. For l&T, ‘proficiency’ may be understood as MSA combined with English, even though this contrasts with the reality of language practices and needs. In business settings, colloquial varieties may be privileged for their potential as link to a shared ‘homeland’. Overall, and contrary to popular discourse (Creese 2009; Mills 2005), participants see their heritage language not as a barrier but as a rich resource which holds powerful potential.

8.4 Language policies as part of interactional regimes

I argue that the dynamic hierarchisation of language resources is crucial for our understanding of language policies as dynamically constructed, (re-)interpreted and (re-)negotiated. Exploring micro-level LP as practised (cf. Spolsky 2004), this study contributes to previous discussions by addressing, in addition to ‘what is policy?’, questions such as ‘who can do policy?’ and ‘what can policy do?’.

LP does not operate in isolation. Therefore, I argue, policies and practices must be explored as part of wider ecologies, i.e. in their inter-relation with other practices and policies, their uptake, as well as various factors that may come into play. This research suggests that the notion of ‘interactional regime’ can significantly enhance our understanding of LP, as it helps shift focus away from individual ‘policies’ to bring together the complexities of macro-and micro-level policies and practices, actors’ local positionings, sociolinguistic hierarchies and language ‘boundaries’. I understand interactional regimes as emerging from a combination of such factors and activities in time and space, subject to re-interpretation, negotiation and contestation. They encompass ideologies and beliefs as made relevant by actors and are shaped by language needs and preferences. In this sense, regimes create expectations regarding (language) behaviour, thus co-determining the value ascribed to resources. To illustrate how ‘interactional regimes’ is a useful notion to understand language policies and practice in context, I explore three dimensions: the interplay of language policies, practices and beliefs; the relevance of language users as policy actors; policies and practices in space and time.
8.4.1 Interplay of policies, practices and beliefs across scales

Regimes emerge within larger ecologies. The notion of ‘sociolinguistic scale’ (Blommaert 2007) helps inter-link and explore the dynamics of higher-level and lower-level scales that contribute to establishing local interactional regimes. Blommaert et al. (2005b) point to meaningful relations between one scale and another, which certain regimes invoke. Any local regime works against the backdrop of national LP and global ideologies (i.e. wider regimes), as local policies and practices are interpreted in consideration of wider evaluations of resources. At the same time, interactional regimes are shaped by practices and routines locally. My observations across settings have shown that different levels of scripting and practising policy are to be understood not as working separately, but as being in dialogue with each other and often inter-dependent. A declared or implicit policy and local practices will be interpreted and acted upon in relation to each other, as well as with higher-level policies and regulations. In the supplementary school, for example, spoken and written language practices contribute to establishing interactional regimes and will (subconsciously) be interpreted by actors in response to declared and implicit policies and practices at wider scales (e.g. the wider relevance of English as societal language). This includes the reproduction or contesting of ideologies in practice, which may in turn result in alternative practised policies. A practised language policy legitimising the use of English for pedagogical purposes in the supplementary school classroom may be recognised by participants as such only as it contradicts declared policies expecting classroom participants to use Arabic only.

Norms and rules imposed by interactional regimes are hierarchically ordered according to the scale on which they operate and have validity (Blommaert 2007). At the supplementary school, actors make higher-level policies and ideologies relevant locally, where these different norms and expectations interact and compete. Language users appropriate (standardised) resources that are higher up in the hierarchy to negotiate their positioning. At the same time, as pupils challenge the privileging of MSA, local language practices and beliefs override higher-level, declared policies. In the family, participants reported that there was a preference to use English at the GP or court to establish a more favourable position. This invokes and confirms higher-scale regimes (i.e. the national scale). Furthermore, it shows how actors use their resources strategically to use widely shared hierarchisations of resources to their advantage. On the other hand, the parents’ language management practices are influenced by their aim to prioritise Arabic to create an ‘Arabic home’ in the diaspora. These are attempts to socialise their children into “alternative language regimes” (Purkarthofer & De Korne 2020) in the home, while adapting to higher-level expectations. Similar “scale jumps” were observed in the I&T context, where completed application forms reflected an orientation towards higher-level ideologies through highlighting interpreters’ fushā skills in order to strengthen their application: despite the local relevance of non-
Standard varieties in the interactional encounter, MSA was flagged as a skill associated with educatedness and expertise.

I argue that there is no *a priori* hierarchy between macro- and micro-level policies, or between practised and declared policies. Different language regimes and their policies and practices intersect in complex and chaotic ways (cf. Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech 2020), and hierarchies are – to an extent – negotiated locally.

### 8.4.2 Language users as policy actors

The etymology of *regime* inherently points to the centrality of power relations (cf. Costa 2019). The notion thus prompts questions of legitimacy, i.e. who can participate in establishing interactional regimes, influence and contest them?

The relevance of language users contesting declared policies has been emphasised previously (Bonacina-Pugh 2017; Fogle 2013). This study shows how, while speakers negotiate policies in interaction, they may re-arrange regimes across scales and override conventional relations of authority (e.g. between parents and children, or teachers and pupils). The notion of ‘interactional regimes’ points to the fact that policies emerge and are implemented not as a matter of top-down actors prescribing (language) behaviour, but as local social processes where relevance and ‘appropriateness’ of resources are negotiated and, with that, social roles (re-)negotiated. I do not intend to imply that conventions around social norms or pre-defined institutional roles are made irrelevant in dynamic constructions of LP. However, at the local level, power relations may be challenged and even overthrown by an imbalance in access to linguistic resources across actors and by making certain sets of resources more or less relevant. In the family setting, for example, different sets of resources are foregrounded by mother and daughter at different times; proficiencies in English or ‘Arabic’ may grant power to actors and re-negotiate conventionalised statuses within the family and beyond. Ultimately, thus, local interactional regimes are negotiated by actors and their micro-level practices, which may in turn contest and re-define power relations locally.

I argue that there is a need to shift attention to individuals’ interpretations of policies and norms, a central dimension for understanding the workings of interactional regimes and implementation of policy (cf. Hornberger et al. 2018). Perceived language boundaries and what is accepted as ‘Arabic’ depend on the vantage point: For example, a supplementary school teacher’s request to

---

62 The term *regime* is derived from Latin regimen ‘rule, guidance, government, rudder’ and stems from the same root as the Latin *rex* ‘king’ (Costa 2019: 2).
speak ‘Arabic’ in the classroom may be interpreted by pupils based on the larger-scale distinction between ‘English’ and ‘Arabic’, where ‘Arabic’ includes any (non-Standard) language forms falling under the wider umbrella of ‘Arabic’. Teachers on the other hand may be guided by the scripted definition of ‘Standard Arabic’. While learners’ use of colloquial Arabic may be praised in the home setting – possibly preferred over ‘English’ by parents – these same forms of language may be ‘corrected’ by teachers in the supplementary school classroom where they are not accepted as the defined target language.

The interpretation of LP and understandings of language repertoires affect the negotiation of interactional regimes. I argue that to a certain extent, regimes are subjective in that they include actors’ perceptions and expectations of what counts as acceptable and ‘appropriate’ sets of language resources. The notion of ‘interactional regime’ acknowledges the relevance of language users in their roles as actors and interpreters of LP. Actors establish routines and act in relation to what they understand as relevant norms, not just individual policies, but as interplay of policies and expectations in space and time.

8.4.3 Policies and practices in space and time

The notion of ‘interactional regimes’ prompts us to relate language practices, policies and their interpretation to the notion of space. Space organises regimes, providing a context for making use of available language resources as well as assessing and interpreting their use (cf. Slembrouck 2020). Manchester as a multilingual setting gives value to individuals’ linguistic resources and defines communicative potential, as well as imposing certain requirements. This study has shown how different spaces across the urban diaspora environment allow for or invite different interactional regimes. For example, in neighbourhoods with a significant presence of Muslim populations, Arabic enjoyed a special status locally. In the family, the home was defined as an ‘Arabic space’, whereas English was dominant among family members outside the home. ‘Private’ and public LL contribute to shaping interactional regimes, as language choice may serve as a statement about norms and legitimacy of language. The act of contributing to LL is a way of recreating or contesting shared (practised) language policies and hierarchies in a given space, reflecting micro-level decision-making processes.

Space must be understood in its interrelation with time, both highly relevant for individual’s assessments of their own or others’ language resources. An individual’s perception of the relevance of colloquial varieties, taken for granted in the Arab world for their communicative value, may change with migration to the UK. In the diaspora, the prestigious MSA variety is idealised beyond literacy for its wider recognition as ‘skill’. In the participant family, the focus of attention
across activities (e.g. Arabic vs. English lessons) defines the relevant interactional regime. What is assessed as ‘good’ communicative behaviour during Arabic lessons is not necessarily preferred during English lessons. At McrAS, the temporary LL reflects the fact that actors borrow rather than own the space used for teaching Arabic. The non-permanent nature of the school’s LL, marking space temporarily, illustrates how interactional regimes may change over time, with a change in actors and practices. The practices taking place on Saturdays in the mainstream school building re-define local interactional regimes. Within this temporary regime, the norms valid during lessons, where MSA is preferred by teachers, may change during break times when children use their English and Arabic resources more freely.

Conceptualising language practices and policies as part of wider interactional regimes allows us to better understand the interplay of the various factors in shaping norms and expectations about language use. The notion offers a structured and systematic way of capturing a dynamic, potentially infinite, set of more or less defined ‘policies’, understood in their interaction with power relations between actors. It encompasses changing language hierarchies and offers a way to capture the complexities of how expectations and norms are developed in interaction. Finally, interactional regimes are inherently and necessarily chronotopic, as norms, expectations and hierarchies are negotiated and re-negotiated across space and time.63

I argue that exploring policies as part of interactional regimes makes the analysis of ‘practised policies’ more systematic and avoids blurring the boundaries between ‘policy’ and ‘practice’, a persistent and unresolved issue (Curdt-Christiansen & Lanza 2018; Lanza & Lomeu Gomes 2020). Within a regime, language choice becomes a ‘statement’ when challenging or disregarding accepted norms and expectations. The routine use of language that deviates from accepted regimes may be interpreted as practised policy. For example, the use of English in the mainstream school classroom is not practised LP, as it is the default choice (except possibly during a foreign language class). The use of English in the Arabic supplementary school classroom however may be interpreted as a statement positioning against rather than aligning with teachers’ norms and expectations, and its routine use and acceptance by others can turn it into practised policy. A teacher’s explicit language management measures may be oriented towards maintaining an Arabic language regime in the classroom, yet her own language practices (the unwitting use of dialect features, or English for pedagogical purposes) may be contradictory. The notion of regime offers a framework from which acts of language use can be interpreted, in wider relation to larger-scale factors and dynamics. Whether the linguistic choices that users make are interpreted as

63 The notion of ‘chronotope’ from literary theory (see Bakhtin 1981) refers to the belief that configurations of time and space are represented in language and discourse (cf. Silverstein 2005; Blommaert & De Fina 2017).
‘policy’ depends on a multitude of factors, and ultimately depends on an individual’s perspective and perception. Likewise, the uptake of declared policies depends on contextual factors at different scales and relative positions of power of actors. ‘Interactional regimes’ are different to ‘environment’ in that they are dynamically constructed and dependent on a range of inter-relations and expectations rather than simply provided, as well as involving power relations.

This study departs from existing research that understands language policies as operating within ‘communities’, where members share sets of norms regarding language use (see Labov 1972; Spolsky & Shohamy 2000), or where Communities of Practice (CoPs) negotiate their policies in practice (Papageorgiou 2012). I argue that ‘communities’ (or experiences of community) and LP are to be understood as much more complex and dynamic, continuously re-defined in their inter-relation. Accordingly, policies are developed not simply based on the expectations created by members of a CoP who are physically present or in regular mutual contact and negotiate their norms in interaction. Instead, the negotiation of interactional regimes relates to understandings of and alignment with ‘community’ as ongoing and complex social processes, locally and translocally. Imagined language hierarchies and norms about language use – declared and/or practised – shape and are shaped by imaginings of ‘community’. Language policies are reflections of ideologies and beliefs about language, which in turn reflect actors’ alignments with practised and imagined communities. If communities are understood as formed around shared norms and policies regarding language use (Spolsky 2007; Spolsky & Shohamy 2000), but these policies and their local relevance are negotiated and part of larger, dynamic regimes, then community alignment is dynamic and negotiable, and may change across interactional regimes. The following offers reflections on the notion of ‘community’ in the diaspora, thus shedding light on research question 3.

8.5 Understanding ‘community’ in the globalised urban diaspora

‘Community’ can mean different things to different people. Perhaps not surprisingly, thus, it is one of the most heavily contested concepts in the social sciences (Bessant 2018: 1; Rampton 2009). The question remains whether it is a useful term for exploring social and linguistic practices after all. Following recent research, I argue that notions such as ‘speech community’ that understand groups of speakers as pre-defined units with shared rules and norms are indeed not very fruitful. Yet, in public discourse, ‘community’ serves as point of alignment, often in inter-relation with ‘language’ as tangible marker of identification. While I do not suggest using ‘language community’ as unchallenged category detached from its context, I argue that as long as language users perceive the notion as relevant and useful to capture social practices and relations, it must not be disregarded in research. In other words, the notions of ‘community’ that actors put forward as
such constitute a valid and important object for research, and actors' understandings and experiences of ‘community’ can enrich analyses of wider aspects or behaviours.

The Community of Practice approach (Lave & Wenger 1991; Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999) usefully points to the centrality of (shared) practice for social identification, which I observed in supplementary school classrooms and family homes where regular face-to-face interaction is given and close bonds are developed. At the same time, ‘communities’ in the global setting may be formed on the basis of loose connections in fluid encounters, where regular interaction and mutual engagement are not prerequisites (cf. Blokland 2017). To understand ‘community’, and to appreciate actors’ experiences of ‘community’ in the global city, we must pay attention to various dimensions beyond regular shared practices, acknowledging the relevance of more fluid encounters and community imaginings. ‘Doing’ community is open-ended, evolving and heterogenous, where identification, shared alignment, performances and experiences are crucial.

While Blokland (2017) focuses on the types of social ties that shape understandings of community, this study highlights the role of language in establishing and maintaining such ties. I shift Blokland’s (2017) discussions into new directions, arguing that an understanding of communities as dynamically constructed through public practice and performances requires an acknowledgement of the role of language practice. I suggest that studying patterns of language use and exploring negotiations around ‘language’ and associated ideologies are essential for a profound understanding of social identification and alignment in the diaspora. Language use and meta-linguistic discourse can in many ways display ‘belonging’ in the diverse setting: language choice in the LL is a way of publicly performing community, as is the active involvement in initiatives teaching languages; likewise, dedicated language maintenance practices in private settings are forms of aligning with a sense of collective identity around language. Offering one’s services as interpreter can be seen as a negotiation of belonging through language, recognising links with linguistic heritage and turning it into a useful resource locally. People may not gather explicitly around language or language maintenance, yet language may play a role in creating bonds between actors in the diaspora.

Language choice and alignment with language can be seen as ways of creating, representing and showcasing membership or performing community allegiance – analysable from ‘without’ – and imagining community – negotiated from ‘within’. Anderson’s (2006) ‘imagined communities’ addresses the question of how ‘language’ is constructed as a frame that brings together strangers to adopt a shared sense of belonging. I argue that the notion of ‘imagined community’ is applicable

64 Of course, language is not the only dimension that shapes community practices and imaginings, interacting with other factors such as religion, profession, etc.
and fruitful outside nationalism studies and relevant at the very micro-level of local practices in the diaspora (cf. Woldemariam & Lanza 2015). I argue that ‘community’ may be imagined among individuals within and beyond otherwise established units (e.g. the family, the classroom or wider supplementary school, neighbourhood). As in Anderson (2006), individuals maintain a symbolic sense of interconnectedness on the basis of language and shared experience, where routine practices in the present and shared endeavour are not preconditions. Mutual identification in the diverse diaspora may be developed even where there is no physical encounter.

8.5.1 Communities as practice and imagination

Both ‘practice’ and ‘imagination’ are crucial for furthering our understanding of ‘community’, bringing together individuals’ and collective, lived and imagined experiences. They are not mutually exclusive but inter-twined: shared interaction and involvement in joint activities contribute to shaping imagined social formations; at the same time, individuals’ experiences thereof and imaginings encourage joint practices. At an everyday level, people may develop a sense of community based on shared routines and mutual support. The urban setting facilitates such community formations. ‘Communities’ materialise in shared practices, e.g. under the supplementary school umbrella or in LL, where language choice invites ‘community’ practices and signs function as “cohesive forces” among businesses and passers-by (Huebner 2006: 50). The use of Arabic on the façades of private homes or printed on T-shirts (Chapter 1) may similarly be seen as ways of performing ‘community’. In their clustering and continuity across the city, they perform an alignment with shared history and culture, creating networks of individuals engaging in joint practices. Urban settings constitute “public stages” for “public doings” of community (Blokland 2017), where identification with a certain language serves to single out particular groups of audiences and negotiate social ties. Here, community is produced locally and re-confirmed through practice. Communities can flag their own (emergent) existence through activities and events. In this sense, they are negotiated in practice.

I propose the term communities as practice rather than community of practice, to emphasise the ad hoc formation and re-formation of groups where different factors, forces and traditionally imagined membership categories may become relevant or lose relevance through and in practice (rather than a set of joint practices shared continuously by a fixed group of individuals, as in CoP). The urban setting constitutes a meaningful environment whose dynamics create, manage and shape relations between people and groups of people, as well as interactional patterns and language use. The length of time individuals have spent in the diaspora may contribute to defining groupness: ‘resilient’ or long-standing communities are thought to have different sets of needs and interests as well as language repertoires in comparison with more recently arrived, ‘emergent'
communities. Practices of mutual support are materialised in different forms, e.g. as supplementary schools (where well-established and recently arrived families get together and mutually enrich common practices); encounters between interpreters (with high levels of proficiency in English and Arabic) and Arabic-speaking individuals with limited English proficiency; owners of local neighbourhood businesses that use Arabic in spoken and/or written interaction and help recently-arrived individuals adjust to their new environment and, in turn, benefit from new clientele.

The diaspora setting offers possibilities that shape community practices in complex ways. The global city provides an ideal space for developing loose ties with others who may become, in the sense of Blokland (2017), ‘public familiars’, while not necessarily becoming part of close social networks based on repeated encounters in a shared place (cf. Gaiser & Matras 2020a). In these encounters, use and significance of ‘Arabic’ takes on a variety of forms. Diverse urban neighbourhoods, supplementary schools, or a café where groups of Syrian doctors or locals of Yemeni background meet, invite and contribute to shaping the very fabric that might be experienced as ‘communities’ within the larger space. It is practices in space, rather than space as such, that define the diverse and dynamic ‘doings’ of community.

At the same time that practices shape experiences of communion, ‘community’ may be imagined. In this sense, community is personal as well as collective, experienced by individuals in their imagined alignment with others. Communities may be imagined in local neighbourhoods, based on shared association with Arabic through religion. Local organisations institutionalise imagined communities: members may not actively engage or may have never met, yet there may be a perceived sense of imagined communion based on shared language and a shared past. Furthermore, communities may be imagined across time and space, where a sense of connectedness in the ‘here and now’ links back to a past in the ‘homeland’.

It is important to note that self-defined understandings and experiences of community may differ from other-imposed (e.g. public authority) categorisations. Community boundaries are enacted at the intersection of ‘internal’ practices and assumptions of self-identifying community members, and ‘external’ policies and categorisations of non-community members, especially those in positions of authority. Such dynamics and tensions have particular relevance in the Manchester setting, where diversity is openly celebrated by the City and public authorities recognise responsibilities for meeting the needs of a linguistically diverse population.

There is thus a dialogic dimension to ‘community’ (cf. Bessant 2018). As Brubaker (2002; 2005) points out, forming and defining ‘community’ involves boundary-making. However, such ‘boundaries’ are not pre-defined or fixed but emerge dynamically through dialogic interaction,
practised or imagined. An individual may imagine and subscribe to a wider pan-Arab or pan-Muslim community, while in practice socialising mostly with a close-knit network where individuals share a country-of-origin background. Imagined global or local communities, in their varied and flexible constellations, may locally perform in different or overlapping practice communities. Imagined and practised forms of community do not exclude each other, but both may be relevant to an individual.

8.5.2 Linguistic hierarchies and ‘communities’

This research reveals two opposing trends of community experiences and alliances in relation to language practices and ideologies in the diaspora: a greater valorisation of region-specific language forms on the one hand, and an orientation towards ‘universalisation’ in the diaspora on the other.

The diaspora setting encourages an increased appreciation of language forms associated with places of origin, and a tendency to flag country-of-origin varieties as forms of identity. Thus, the connection between language and nation, crucial to Anderson’s (2006) imagined communities, does hold firm within global diasporas. Language users hold on to symbolic and practised forms of identification with their ‘homeland’. The Libyan school, for example, creates a practice community around a specifically ‘Libyan’ identity in Manchester, thus facilitating imaginings of community that orient to the country of origin. At McrAS, while pupils are encouraged to refrain from using regional varieties, alignment with individual country-of-origin groups within the larger pan-Arab community is celebrated during cultural events and performances. In the classroom, the creation of language categories through juxtaposing varieties of Arabic is an act of boundary construction and emphasising a separateness of the respective linguistic as well as social categories. In the participant family or the Yemeni Café, speakers use their regional varieties to create a sense of belonging and difference. Thus, in the diverse diaspora, regional varieties of Arabic serve for social identification and as indexes for origin.

At the same time, (imagined and practised) communities may expressively and explicitly go beyond links with homeland identities. I have shown the relevance of pan-Arab or even pan-Muslim notions of community, encouraged through the diverse neighbourhood and intensified online, where relationships are established and strengthened between ‘language’ and transnational communities. The diverse urban setting (and the opportunities offered by modern communication technologies) produces a ‘universalising effect’, shifting towards an identification with the diaspora and allowing for a development of inclusive “civic identities” (see Matras & Robertson 2015) rather than country-of-origin orientations. Individuals flag and align with the
abstract notion of a ‘neutral’ Standard and CA to unite actors from across ‘language affiliations’ in the diverse city. Despite the fact that it is not used for spontaneous interaction anywhere in the (Arab) world, MSA has come to represent ‘heritage’ as a symbol of unity across Arab and non-Arab Muslim populations. Dialect diversity in the diaspora does therefore not constitute an obstacle for unity, as unity is achieved and reinforced through a strong Standard ideology. Actors resort to collective celebrations of the perceived universal character of fuṣḥā and its wider recognition as a ‘skill’ through UK qualifications, as a way of associating themselves with a diverse diasporic community anchored in the UK setting. Transnationalism, and within that pan-Arabism, is held together by ‘UK-ness’ in a perception of shared space. The expressed aim to make use of MSA resources as a way of integrating into the UK, and the aim of highlighting the role of Arabic as one of the future languages of the UK are ways of justifying ‘heritage’ language maintenance in the UK. The relevance of ‘Arabic’ is in interplay with English, which is not seen as disturbing ‘community cohesion’ but flagged as added value. While holding specifically for minority languages that have an international standing (and particularly Arabic, with its pan-Arab and pan-Islamic dimensions), this challenges conventional notions of the relationship between ‘integration’ and the majority language as crucial facilitator.

I argue that users’ shared identification with MSA creates ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 2006) across the boundaries of nation-states. Their affiliation with the global label of ‘Arabic’ and its macro-level associations with prestige, education and religion inter-links actors from across ethnic, language and country-of-origin backgrounds. In the diverse diaspora, ‘communities’ may be imagined as pan-Arab (or pan-Islamic), and transnational. Actors align themselves with MSA or CA as ‘proper’ Arabic, which provides some uniformity of practices and aspirations. One form of practice bringing about a “pan-Arab consciousness” (see Kraidy 2002) is the reception of Arabic language satellite TV. Nation-based broadcasting is not the focus or preference of viewers, even though regional varieties are used alongside MSA. Such imaginings of a transnational and pan-Arab community echo notions of umma, a term traditionally used to conceptualise a collective pan-Islamic ‘community’ (see Suleiman 2003: 64ff.). Accordingly, Arabic serves as a symbol of (ethnic) identity, where Arabs and Muslims more widely are understood as a nation. The concept may inspire locally imagined ‘Muslim practice communities’, such as the one observed around the butcher in Trafford. Thus, perhaps paradoxically, Anderson’s (2006) view of nation-states as imagined communities has relevance in the globalised diaspora. However, while language may serve as orientation for shared alignment, it does not build on or create boundaries. Here, shared (urban) space is relevant for understandings of communities, yet not limiting imaginings of community to that space.

---

65 Since the concept of ‘umma’ was not referred to as such by any participant throughout this research, the term is not used in this study.
These two trends – orientation towards countries of origin and universalisation – suggest tensions between an emphasis on boundary-maintenance and identity-preservation, on the one hand, and a focus on superdiversity and conviviality on the other (Wessendorf 2014; Norwicka & Vertovec 2014). I argue that the two trends are not mutually exclusive and fixed; rather, actors may associate themselves with either of these simultaneously or at different points in time. They help us better understand how the complexities of understanding ‘language’ link in dynamic ways to the complexities of ‘community’ in the diaspora.

There is no single way to imagine, experience, perform, negotiate, or contest community, and there is no single way to research it. Notions of ‘community’ may be reflected in practices and reported practices, in language choice, and in narratives as practised and discursive constructions of collectivity. As Anderson (2006) points out, “[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (2006: 6). Experiencing and ‘doing’ community depends on the vantage point, with there being no absolute point of formation. However, as this study has shown, language practices and alignment with language help us understand a vital dimension of imagined and practised communion in the diverse global setting. Through publicly visible or audible language use, or language maintenance efforts, actors negotiate their positionings in relation to ‘others’. However, what is understood as a ‘language’ is subject to negotiation. Understandings of ‘language’ are as complex and dynamic as understandings of ‘community’, yet each of the notions can serve to shed light on the other.
8.6 Inter-linking spheres: Reflections on methodology

The holistic and appreciative model I developed offers a comprehensive picture of language practices and reported practices, allowing me to answer my research questions and contribute to current discussions. My approach enabled me to relate socially constructed language ideologies, expressed in informal interviews and groups interviews, to analyses of situated interaction and routine practices. I engaged with individuals from different generations of migration, with recent arrivals and longer-established individuals, ‘first’ and ‘second language’ speakers, and others who align with ‘Arabic’ but may not use it for interaction.

My framework is based on five main pillars (Figure 48):

1. Plurality of settings
2. Plurality of types of data and data collection methods
3. Plurality of researcher roles and modes of engagement
4. Flexibility and versatility
5. Reflexivity

Figure 48. Five methodological pillars

8.6.1 Plurality of settings

My research and immersion across sites allowed me to engage with a range of actors who use, align themselves with or appropriate ‘Arabic’ for various reasons. Each setting was unique in its dynamics of actor constellations and motivations to participate in practices. My fieldwork allowed for systematic observations of practices across private and public spaces, where participants lived, worked, did their shopping, met to socialise, offline and online.

Fieldwork across settings was presented in separate chapters for practical purposes rather than to suggest that each site was to be studied in isolation. Each setting was understood as closely inter-linked with the others and the wider urban environment. In fact, I had the opportunity to engage with some actors across settings. I engaged with the participant family’s mother and daughter in the supplementary school setting, and with MCRAS’s head teacher in a family context in Manchester and Palestine, as well in interaction with the university. My cross-site fieldwork helped me better understand practices in each setting, as my insights across settings complemented, confirmed, or contested each other.
It may be argued that my findings on family practices, drawing mainly on fieldwork in one family, may be limited in validity due to the small sample size. However, I triangulated my findings with observations from other Arabic-speaking families throughout the fieldwork, e.g. in interaction with parents at supplementary schools. Furthermore, my intensive engagement with the participant family captured the depth and nuances of practices and attitudes, which larger-scale research would not have been able to reveal.

There is a certain unavoidable bias related to the very selection of fieldwork sites and participants, which must be taken into account. Moeran (2009) points out that "[e]ach choice necessarily invites, and simultaneously excludes, certain kinds of potential information" (2009: 141). My immersion opened the doors for rich observations and participation in the selected settings, while closing the doors to others. Having decided to study Arabic at one school may have affected how I was received in others, given a degree of competition between them.

8.6.2 Plurality of types of data and data collection methods

This research has drawn on different types of data and data collection methods to explore various forms of practice. Data were gathered using observant participation (as language learner or placement student), focus group and informal interviews, document analysis, and explorations of LL.

Informal interviews and focus groups offered opportunities for participants to address practices and beliefs they perceived as important, pointing me to their perspectives or the spaces and practices they wanted me to be aware of, which in turn reflected beliefs and ideologies. The true complexities and intricacies were highlighted by integrating interviews with my longitudinal observations. Furthermore, this study revealed the analytical potential of ‘private’ and public LL, explored as complex markers of identity and LP in their inter-relation with other practices. Discussing my interpretations with research participants helped validate my findings and offered additional insights.

The combination of data sources and data collection methods helped assure the validity and strengthen the reliability of my findings, avoiding potential biases that may arise from the use of a single dataset.\textsuperscript{66} Combining data collection methods offered insights into aspects that were accessible with certain methods but not with others.

\textsuperscript{66} See Matras & Robertson (2015) on data triangulation.
8.6.3 Plurality of researcher roles and modes of engagement

My research draws on close interaction and longitudinal engagement with participants, as well as flexible and casual encounters. Across settings and time, I took on a variety of roles ranging from doctoral student and researcher, language learner, placement student, colleague and friend. My immersion offered opportunities to attend events and gatherings outside planned fieldwork visits, allowing me to engage in additional roles (e.g. guest speaker at celebrations) and expand my perspective. This combination of roles offered multiple ways of experiencing the field as I interacted with participants from different perspectives, and offered insights into complex processes and practices.

My positioning as language learner offered opportunities to experience language teaching and use as practised and as communicated about. As observing participant, I was able to explore people's 'front-stage' and 'back-stage' behaviours (Moeran 2009): Interlocutors taught me what they deemed 'correct' language and highlighted any perceived incorrectness, rather than teaching me how they themselves used Arabic. Returning from intensive 'Spoken Palestinian Arabic' language immersion, supplementary school teachers showed rather negative reactions to my use of colloquial forms. My engagement as learner legitimised asking questions related to beliefs about language and variation, revealing ideologies and linguistic hierarchies.

The ethnographer's vantage point and involvement depend, at least in part, on the nature of relationships they form with actors (Okely 2020). Participants' and my own positionings were the point of departure for explorations of understandings of 'language' and 'community'. My different modes of engagement resulted in complex relations with my interlocutors, encouraging a shift away from the dichotomy between 'researcher' and 'researched' (Mullings 1999). My role as language learner reduced my authority as university researcher and empowered participants by turning them into 'language experts'. Asking participants to define their concepts, I inherently emphasised their authority (see Chen 2011). This challenged traditional power relations where the researcher is perceived as the 'knowledgeable' expert. Close interaction with key participants throughout the various stages of my fieldwork and data analysis allowed for joint meaning making, rather than imposing meaning on data from the position of the researcher.

My experience as MLM researcher allowed me to approach data collection and analysis with some prior knowledge and first-hand observations in the Manchester setting. As co-ordinator of MLM’s supplementary school support platform, my role was defined not strictly as researcher, but as someone who offers 'projects in return' for research opportunities (see Schiller 2018). I organised training sessions for teachers, enrichment sessions for learners, and made
arrangements to hold McrAS’s end-of-year ceremony on campus. This arguably shaped the ways in which I was perceived by research participants and welcomed into the respective settings.

Positionalities complemented each other; yet, my various roles and perspectives were not mutually exclusive and power positions highly dynamic. In order to accommodate the fact that fieldwork sites differed inherently from each other in terms of actors involved, social relations between actors and the role of ‘Arabic’, I adapted my engagement to the specifics of each setting. For example, while my role as language learner was relevant across the settings, it was more central in some (family, supplementary schools) than others (I&T). My position as researcher was highlighted more in some settings (businesses) than in others (family). At McrAS, my positioning as language learner was foregrounded both by participants and myself. I was treated like a pupil and realised how I had unconsciously adapted my behaviour to match this role. At the same time, some participants perceived me as expert on supplementary schools, rather than learner. Thus, while I positioned myself, I was also positioned by others. Furthermore, my perceptions of my role in a given fieldwork encounter might not have been understood the same way by others. My positionality was continually evaluated and contested, by myself and my participants.

8.6.4 Flexibility and versatility

Ethnography is inherently social, relational and improvisational. The fourth pillar of my approach is therefore flexibility regarding research participants, sites and opportunities. The increasing acknowledgement of the need to study rather than simplify ‘complexity’ of language and social practices (Blommaert & Rampton 2016) flags the importance of an approach that is responsive to the dynamics of social practice as well as interpretations, findings, or other developments throughout the research process. ‘The field’ is traditionally constructed as a separate entity, which researchers may ‘enter’ or ‘leave’ (Caputo 2000). I argue that for the study of language practices in today’s global societies, it is not suitable to define ‘the field’ ahead of the research process, in terms of geographical location, selection of participants, or a time period during which fieldwork is to be ‘completed’. As Amit (2000) points out, the researcher is a central agent in the construction of the ‘field’, a category singled out by the ethnographer rather than a pre-existing unit. These points relate to the very challenge of defining ‘community’ and the observation that ‘community’ is not a bounded entity that one may ‘enter’ and become member of, or observe or interact with from the ‘outside’ or ‘inside’ in any straightforward way. Rejecting an understanding of ‘community’ as pre-defined unit and instead regarding it as an area of investigation (Brubaker 2002; 2005) has methodological implications: The ‘research site’ cannot be pre-defined as a bounded geographic entity. Places initially perceived as trivial may come to be considered relevant ‘field sites’, or vice versa; similarly, individuals may, unexpectedly, become ‘participants’. My fieldwork included not
only actors that may be seen as “obvious” participants for this research, e.g. speakers of Arabic actively involved in language maintenance or provision, but also others who may initially not be regarded as key players of ‘Arabic communities’. The latter group offered important insights, revealing how non-Arabic speakers aligned themselves with the language. My flexibility helped me respond to and embrace the dynamics and versatility of understandings of ‘community’, open to constant (re-)interpretation. I followed up on references to locations or initiatives made by other ‘participants’, acknowledging what informants perceived as important.

Finally, flexibility was central in the constant reviewing of categories used during fieldnote taking. Reflections on categorisation added to my development of epistemology: during the coding process, NVivo (2018) required me to categorise and draw boundaries. At the start of my research I defined ‘policy’ and ‘practice’ as two separate codes but soon encountered difficulties separating the two. Revisiting and reflecting on my fieldnotes and analyses, I concluded that a clear-cut distinction between them was impossible. This shifted attention to the complex interdependencies of policy and practice and emphasised the relevance of practised policies, informing my theorisations. Such processes prompted me to reflect on categorisation more widely and offered an opportunity to re-think taken-for-granted categories.

8.6.5 Reflexivity

For my complex forms of engagement, variety of data and flexibility of the framework, researcher reflexivity was crucial for interpreting observations, making decisions regarding the specifics of my fieldwork and adapting methods where appropriate. For instance, my reflections on my positioning at McrAS resulted in abandoning the idea of conducting recorded one-on-one interviews, as I increasingly realised this would alter my positioning and relationship with participants. Such interviews would have foregrounded my engagement as researcher, which may have risked making my relationship with participants more distant and changed my subsequent participation in the setting. It was crucial that my reflections took place throughout my fieldwork rather than separately, allowing me to adjust my framework.

My reflections on my own positioning enriched and informed my understandings of ‘community’. For instance, staff at the butcher’s suggested that my (limited) Arabic proficiency made me part of the “neighbourhood community”, which foregrounded language skills and alignment rather than origin and ethnicity as factors relevant in local understandings of ‘community’.

My language learning afforded me a certain sensitivity that helped me better understand the various conceptualisations of ‘language’ and offered insights into pupils’ lived experiences. The
distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ speech practices, highlighted by teachers in the classroom, was reproduced in my own learning process. I myself felt concerned about mixing varieties, or the frustration that forms learnt as ‘Arabic’ in certain settings might not be accepted as such in the classroom. This helped me understand the apparent paradox between learning goals and assessment criteria defined by teachers on the one hand, and the reality of language use on the other, increasing my awareness of the various emotions and factors involved.

Engagement with participants changes who we are and what we do as researchers. I was not just objective observer but participant in the practices I studied. My own positionality had an impact on both research processes and outcome. Thus, continuous reflexivity was crucial to track and understand the dynamics and complexities in the field.

8.6.6 Ethical challenges

The plurality of roles, sites, and participants brings to the fore complex questions related to research ethics. Striking a balance between my roles was difficult. As they often merged, it is impossible to identify instances where research was pure research, or engagement as language learner was pure engagement. It was not always obvious how to best announce my engagement or whether, how often and at what points to ‘remind’ my participants of my role as researcher. I feared that highlighting my role as researcher may have an impact on participants’ language practices, reports on practices and the general ways participants engaged with me. At the same time, my role as university researcher provided me with credibility and respect. Certain activities, such as socialising in participants’ homes, created grey areas that required careful negotiation. It was not always clear whether what was shared with me was meant to be part of the research. The longer I engaged with participants the more difficult it was to distinguish between friendship and research relationship. Continuous reflections and self-awareness helped me ensure I did not instrumentalise social relationships.

The strategies I developed to overcome challenges regarding positionality include clear and repeated articulation of the research being undertaken. While it risked interrupting the flow of conversations, I realised how it reduced unnecessary worries if I clarified with participants whether what was being shared was to be kept in private or could be used as data, where appropriate. Making decisions on how to deal with such challenges helped manage difficult situations.

Towards the end of my research, I realised I needed some distance to participants and research sites to reduce bias while reflecting on my observations, to be able to see the bigger picture across sites, and to bring data collection to an end. This was difficult in terms of research integrity, as
participants were disappointed when I stopped Arabic lessons, ended the placement or visited less frequently.

There is some tension between the notion of ‘ethics’ to address a personal perspective on integrity, and its use in the institutional context to denote compliance with the University’s Ethics guidelines. Similar to how ‘the field’ and my positioning as researcher were not always clearly definable and needed to be reflected upon continuously, the fluidity of the research situation meant that ethical questions and decisions were not always straightforward. The institutional definition of ‘Ethics’ did not always cover the complex ethical challenges I encountered throughout my research. Furthermore, as Copland & Creese (2015) point out, it is crucial to consider potential intercultural differences as ethical concepts may be interpreted differently across cultures (and languages). It was crucial to supplement University guidelines with my own individual, careful and in-depth reflections in response to any challenges encountered throughout the research process.

I do not claim to offer a ‘ready-made’ formula or template for an ethnographic study exploring ‘language’ and/or ‘community’ in the city; on the contrary, this study and the dynamic process of developing it highlight the complexities of practices, actors and their social relations, unique to individuals at a given point in time and space. My research thus embraces the very idea of ethnography, capturing individual moments in a given situation that can offer insights into the multi-layeredness of human interaction and social relations, rather than attempting to generalise and extrapolate from this study definitions and explanations that claim to be widely applicable.

8.7 Implications and contributions

The present study contributes to theorising notions of ‘communities’ and ‘language’ and how to study them, thus deepening our understanding of urban multilingual realities. I have offered insights into various (sometimes contrasting) perspectives on these concepts, and one of my contributions is engaging with and exploring such tensions. While drawing on Arabic as a case study, this study is of wider significance and adds to several fields of academic enquiry, including Sociolinguistics and research on diversity, Language Policy and Family Language Policy, Linguistic Landscapes Studies, Interpreting & Translation Studies, and social scientific methodology across disciplines.

This study provides a reference work and methodological and theoretical guide for research on heritage language maintenance, diaspora languages, and language repertoires in multilingual urban settings. Allowing for various understandings of ‘language’ and language boundaries when studying social groups, I further discussions on fluid language practices (cf. García & Li Wei 2014;
Pennycook & Otsuji (2010) as I highlight the perceived relevance of the dynamic and practised demarcations among language users. My observations on meta-linguistic discourse and narratives about ‘language’ emphasise how actors construct language (and social) boundaries and re-define linguistic (and social) hierarchies in interaction, practices that are particularly meaningful in the diverse diaspora. Researchers’ theoretical and analytical understanding of linguistic repertoires may contrast with the ways users perceive and make use of their ‘languages’. I argue that language practices and beliefs about language can only be fully understood if both perspectives are taken into account.

Understanding declared and practised policies as emerging and operating within wider interactional regimes, I shift theorisations of language policy into new directions. This study proposes an approach that helps conceptualise policies and practices in a more holistic and systematic way, shedding light on their complex inter-relations. As I have shown, our understandings of the negotiation and contestation of policies can be enriched by a consideration of linguistic hierarchies and scales.

Furthermore, I broaden LP and FLP perspectives: To my knowledge, this is the first research to systematically explore LP in supplementary school settings, considering LL as a form of practised LP in this setting. I have shown how ‘private’ LL in the family home may serve as an important mechanism of FLP, offering a more comprehensive view on the dynamics of FLP. Additionally, I have shown the value of conducting family focus groups, encouraging family members to interact with each other and offering a method to explore children’s perspectives. Moreover, this research advances our understanding of how FLPs are constructed and negotiated, highlighting the relevance of factors beyond the home setting. This study further contributes to FLP in emphasising the relevance of past, present and future orientations of family members in their identity negotiations and assessments of language resources in the diaspora.

My contributions to I&T Studies include the relevance of linguistic hierarchies and ideologies in the context of language variation, and apparent gaps between the institution’s and language practitioners’ expectations regarding language use. These may pose challenges in the interpreting encounter and thus have practical implications. As my research emphasises, a lack of recognition of the complexities of linguistic variation may lead to a potential mismatch between the client’s and the interpreter’s dialects and compromise effectiveness of interpreter-mediated communication. Furthermore, there is no existing research in I&T Studies that explores the issues of positioning as presented in this study, which highlights originality as a contribution. Likewise, the notion of ‘community’ had not yet received systematic attention in I&T Studies. As I have shown, an awareness of understandings of ‘community’ may offer significant insights into
decision-making processes behind I&T provisions. At the same time, the I&T setting has the potential to further our understanding of ‘community’.

The development of my methodological framework forms a central part of my innovations, making wider contributions to methodology in Sociolinguistics and Social Sciences. Combining various modes of engagement and types of data across settings, I have shown the potential that ethnography can have as a comprehensive approach. I further developed the method of ‘ethnographer as language learner’ (Abercrombie 2020) as a way of drawing on multilingualism in research practice and shedding light on participants’ imaginings of language boundaries and hierarchies. My thesis contributes to current LL research in embedding explorations of LL and ‘private’ LL in a wider study on language and community practices, understanding LL as a lens to better understand practices and policies behind the signs. A further contribution of this thesis lies in my in-depth reflections on the emerging connections between choice of method and findings, having wider implications for the study of multilingualism and diversity more generally.

My research raises questions regarding our responsibility as researchers to offer advice to practitioners and make wider recommendations for policy and practice. While one of the expressed aims of supplementary schools may be to develop confidence in cultural heritage, and to encourage younger generations to use the ‘heritage language’, ideologies and requirements related to official qualifications may lead to the contrary. The teaching or at least acknowledgment of vernaculars is important to support new speakers’ communication skills, bridge cross-generational communication, and give younger generations confidence in using their ‘heritage’ languages in the diverse diaspora. For I&T, this research can offer recommendations regarding the role that language variation could play in staff training and recruitment, as well as strategic planning of services.

This study contributes to wider public debate in the UK regarding the role of heritage languages and English among recent arrivals and longer established migrants, challenging claims that English is the central resource supporting ‘integration’ into the local setting. I argue that maintaining heritage, and language as heritage, is anything but self-segregating. Arabic supplementary schools in Manchester emphasise the relevance of Arabic for the present-day UK context and a global future, positioning themselves as part of and developing social and cultural capital for a diverse society.

More research is needed to further explore the complexities of LP and the role of the ‘private’ LL. Another area for future study could be the wider relevance of fluid encounters for understandings of ‘community’ in the diaspora. Finally, future research could focus on online practices and virtual ‘doings’ of community – with increasing relevance in times of COVID-19 – exploring the relevance
of physical presence versus the role of modern communication platforms and transnational connections for experiences of 'community'. 
9 References


Coupland, N. (2010). Welsh linguistic landscapes “from above” and “from below”. In A. Jaworski & C. Thurlow (Eds.), Semiotic landscapes: Language, image, space (pp. 77–101). Continuum.


Fogle, L. W. (2013). Family language policy from the children’s point of view: Bilingualism in place and time. In M. Schwartz & A. Verschik (Eds.), Successful family language policy (pp. 177–200), Springer.


Garvin, R. T. (2010). Responses to the linguistic landscape in Memphis, Tennessee: An urban space in transition. In E. Shohamy, E. Ben-Rafael & M. Barna (Eds.), *Linguistic landscape in the City* (pp. 252–271). Multilingual Matters


https://www.facebook.com/ManchesterArabicSchoolChorlton/posts/377101022854789
; last accessed 28 January 2021.

https://www.facebook.com/ManchesterArabicSchoolChorlton/posts/335640407000851
; last accessed 28 January 2021.

McrAS facebook (2018c). Languages for the Future [facebook page].
https://www.facebook.com/ManchesterArabicSchoolChorlton/posts/341513306413561
; last accessed 28 January 2021.

McrAS facebook (2020). Project to reduce violations of Arabic language [facebook page].
https://www.facebook.com/ManchesterArabicSchoolChorlton/posts/663932714171617
; last accessed 23 March 2021.

https://www.facebook.com/ManchesterArabicSchoolChorlton;
last accessed 8 March 2021

https://fb.watch/3iM1KFrsC7/; last accessed 28 January 2021.


Youth Development Trust. (1967). *Young and coloured in Manchester.* A report written by members of the Youth Development Trust. Manchester, UK.


Appendix A

Initiatives teaching Arabic in Manchester

The list below offers an overview of the supplementary schools, madrasas and other initiatives teaching Arabic in Manchester that I was able to identify throughout this doctoral research (between September 2017 and March 2021). It is important to note however that this list may not be exhaustive, as some initiatives are run informally and are not widely known or advertised. The list does, however, give an indication of the considerable demand for Arabic teaching as well as the efforts devoted to the maintenance of ‘Arabic’ in the city. The colours indicate the part of Manchester where the teaching takes place (green: South Manchester; yellow: North Manchester; blue: West of Manchester). The colour codes highlight that the schools identified generally reflect the residential patterns suggested in datasets on language (Census of 2011; School Language Census), with Arabic speakers clustering in South and North Manchester. I was not able to identify any Arabic supplementary schools or other initiatives teaching Arabic in East Manchester, which may be partly due to a lack of contacts in that part of the city, and a general tendency for Arabic-speaking or Muslim populations in Manchester to cluster in the North; South and West of the city rather than the East.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Where in Manchester does the teaching take place?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Al-Amal Arabic School</td>
<td>Moss Side/Whalley Range (South Manchester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Al-Manar</td>
<td>Burnage (South Manchester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 As-Safa Arabic School</td>
<td>Whalley Range (South Manchester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Bolton Arabic School</td>
<td>Bolton (North Manchester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Bosnian Supplementary School*</td>
<td>Chorlton-cum-Hardy (South Manchester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Damascene Arabic School</td>
<td>Salford (West of Manchester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Hijra School</td>
<td>Whalley Range (South Manchester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Iqra Arabic School</td>
<td>Chorlton-on-Medlock (South Manchester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Iqra Salford Arabic School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Yemeni Community Association Greater Manchester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Iraqi School 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Iraqi School 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Khizra Mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>supplementary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Madina Mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>supplementary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Malaysian Community School of Manchester*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Manchester Arabic School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Manchester Islamic Centre – Didsbury Mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Manchester Quran Academy (Guidance Hub)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Manchester Libyan Community School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mishkaat Arabic School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Nebras Arabic School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Noor Arabic School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>North Manchester Jamia Mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Saudi School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Seraj Arabic School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>South Manchester Libyan School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Sudanese Supplementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>The Open School for Arabic and Islamic Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These schools teach (Classical) Arabic alongside other languages (e.g. Bosnian, Malay, or Urdu)
Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research project that studies the use of Arabic, language maintenance of Arabic and provisions for Arabic in Manchester, UK. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Who will conduct the research?

Leonie Elisa Gaiser (PhD student in Linguistics)  
School of Arts, Languages and Cultures,  
The University of Manchester  
Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL

What is the purpose of the research?

This research aims to broaden our understanding of the language practices, language maintenance efforts and language needs of Arabic speakers in Manchester. It also looks at language provisions for Arabic in Manchester, to see if they can meet linguistic needs.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are a speaker of Arabic or learning Arabic, and you are a Manchester resident.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

You would be asked to take part in an interview or focus group interview together with other participants. The researcher will ask about your language use patterns and preferences in language choice, any potential language difficulties you have had when accessing public services in Manchester, and any need for support with language-related issues. You will not be asked to speak about any sensitive topics, and the researcher will not collect any personal information.
information. The interview will take place in a public setting, such as the University campus or a public school building. Our conversation would be recorded, if you agree.

What happens to the data collected?

The interview recording will be transcribed, and your statements will be analysed together with others’ statements.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Data will be encrypted and stored on University equipment, where it is kept secure. Data will be destroyed after the end of the project. Your taking part in this study is absolutely confidential and anonymous. There is no risk of harm to self or others.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

You will not be paid for participating in this research.

What is the duration of the research?

The participation in this research will take no longer than 60 minutes.

Where will the research be conducted?

This research will be conducted in a public setting, such as The University of Manchester’s campus or a public school building in Manchester.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The outcomes of the research may be published.

Disability and Barring Service (DBS) Check (if applicable)

The researcher has done a satisfactory DBS check.

Who has reviewed the research project?

This project has been reviewed by the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee.
What if something goes wrong?

In case you want to contact the researcher: 
Leonie Elisa Gaiser 
e-mail: leonie.gaiser@manchester.ac.uk

What if I want to complain?

If there are any issues regarding this research you should contact the researcher in the first instance: 
Leonie Elisa Gaiser 
e-mail: leonie.gaiser@manchester.ac.uk

However, if you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the supervisor of the research project: 
Prof Yaron Matras 
e-mail: yaron.matras@manchester.ac.uk

If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research you can contact a Research Governance and Integrity Manager, Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning 0161 275 2674 or 275 8093

How can I contact you?

Leonie Elisa Gaiser 
e-mail: leonie.gaiser@manchester.ac.uk 
+44 (0)7842 733225

This Project Has Been Approved by the University of Manchester's Research Ethics Committee [Ref: 2018-3841-6531].
Appendix C

Transcription conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(..)</td>
<td>pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
<td>interrupted/ cut off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:</td>
<td>lengthened sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[laughs]</td>
<td>extra-linguistic or para-linguistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>indicates rising question intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘…..’</td>
<td>indicates reported speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word</td>
<td>emphasis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transcript family focus group

The focus group interview was carried out on 5 December 2019. The audio-recording was transcribed by the author of this thesis. All names in the transcript are pseudonyms.

Participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age (at start of fieldwork, March 2018)</th>
<th>Initials used in transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Aaya</td>
<td>Mid 50ies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Nasri</td>
<td>Mid 50ies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son 1</td>
<td>Tareq</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son 3</td>
<td>Yasser</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son 4</td>
<td>Mohammad</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer: Leonie Gaiser</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second eldest son, Faaiz, was not available when the interview was conducted. I did not invite the daughter, Farah, to join the focus group discussion, since she was under 16 years old at the time of the interview and her participation would not have been in line with my Ethics Clearance.
LG | Good alright: Thank you so much! So today is the fifth of December 2019, and as we discussed we'll just be having a conversation about your language uses and the languages you know, and what you think about your languages. (..)
M | Great, so just, let's start with a very general question. Can you tell me which languages you've learned over the course of your life, and which dialects?

LG | I have learned only English. And we've been taught, when I was in school in Syria, French, as a third language. Not a third language. You can either choose English or French. But, or in fact, we've learned French as well. So I chose English and learned French a little bit, just the basics, and but I don't really speak. Even, or I forgot everything now, 'cause I'm not using it any more. Uhm. Yes, that's it about me

Y | So actually. English is the only language that I've learned. Because like in Syria, I was like learning Arabic. And English as an additional language, so. It's the only one. And I came here, I just, I just was learning about English. I didn't pick up any other languages.

LG | Mhm

Y | any other languages, like English or French.

T | Yeah, I think. My, my, my answer would be. The first answer

LG | Mhm?

T | As I learned French, Arabic, and English. So what English. I didn't remember. Any of English, cause we're not using it. Uhm. But uhm. English now has. I have been here in UK for about four months. So I pre-start speaking with English

LG | English

T | Yes.

LG | Okay!

A | My first uhm language is Arabic. But when I was in Syria I learned French, and uhm but only principles language. I can speak fluently. And when I moved to Turkey I also learned Turkish language. Yes. And, like

M | Turkish, yes, me too.

A | günaydın [laughs] Yes uhm Turkish language, also principles. When I was in Turkey I can use Turkish with people and I, but when I moved to here the UK I forget unfortunately Turkish a lot

LG | So you actually learned Turkish there?
A: Yes, because now I didn't use. When you don't use language it's difficult to remember.

LG: Mhm

A: So uhm So now I use the English, Yes, and I improve day by day.

LG: Nice!

N: For me the same, I learned English when I was in Syria, but in school, but after I came to the UK in 2014, my English improved, and now I speak to some extent English, good.

LG: Of course, you do!

N: Yes, in addition to Arabic.

LG: Perfect! And what do you mean when you say Arabic? So, you said for instance your first language is Arabic. And some of you said you learned Arabic. Did you mean, also, you learned it at school? Or what do you mean when you say Arabic?

T: Well, it is our language

LG: Mhm. And is the language that you learned at home different from the one that you learned at school?

M: Yes, it's like English language. How you learn English language and literature. It's the same in Syria. Like, you learn, Arabic, and you got Sciences.

N: When we was in Syria, we are studying in High School, you have to choose one foreign language to learn it.

LG: To learn

N: You can choose French, English or nowadays Russia. Russiy. Russia. But for me, and most people in Syria, choose English.

LG: And what do you think here in the UK now. So you've started using English a lot more. Or you actually started using it.

T: Yes, of course

LG: So what does Arabic mean to you. So how do you think Arabic. And what are the roles of Arabic and English for you?

T: Well, the first rule is, the family. This is the first one. 'Cause when we are together we always speak in Arabic.

Y: Yeah. We have an Arabic home…even here in UK [laughs]
Nobody—If someone spoke to the other in English, it would be weird. How (..) I am speaking with my brother in English? Except for (..) Farah.

[laugh]

And you as, you are one of our family

Oh I thought except when I’m here that you all start speaking English

With you just little different

So with Farah it’s okay to speak English?

Yes. Yes. When we are speaking with her in English. Because she’s the one speaking in English.

Okay.

Only Farah use English at home. Because maybe she’s little, my daughter, eleven years.

Mhm

But all my son use Arabic. Because we’re used to speak fluently Arabic.

Mhm

And uhm to express easily in Arabic.

So you don't have a rule? It’s just, you, you, you prefer speaking Arabic anyway?

Yes. Outside home, we merely talk English. With only people who’s got English only. It’s a common. It’s a common language us. But with our Arabic friends we tend to, to speak, you know, in Arabic.

Oh!

Because it’s part of our culture. So.

Nice. So also at college, at university?

Yes. We come a cross Arab friends who speaks this language. It really depends who are you talking to. And, depending on that, you choose automatically the language you wanna speak.

Sometimes we need, even with some of our Arab friend. We need to speak in Arabic. Uhm in English, I’m sorry. With Arab friends we need to speak in
English. Because there is one person who is not understanding Arabic. So it's like. Not good behaviour to speak in front of a foreigner in your original language.

LG Mhm Okay.

A Yes, and when we start to learn English, it's good to speak English, even at home. To improve your language. But when your English is improved, it's good to speak also Arabic. Because Arabic is our culture. It remind us of our culture. Remind belong. Because we belong in Arab. So it's good for us to speak Arabic. To belong our culture, like that.

LG Of course. And sometimes, when Farah, for instance, when she speaks English, do you then sometimes. Do you sometimes try to speak with her in Arabic? Or encourage her to speak Arabic?

T Yes!

[All nodding]

A Yes, we encourage her to speak Arabic.

LG And how do you do that?

A Because some day we will go to our country, and because, the first language for her will be foreign, or strange. So it's difficult for her. Maybe we don't know what (...) happen in future. Because I know my friend. When she came to the UK. She only speaks English. She only spoke English. Everything. When she went to her home she can't understand any. Difficult. She can't. She can't understand anything. Because it's difficult. It's difficult.

LG Of course. Mhm. Yes. So then. So how do you then try and encourage Farah to speak Arabic?

A Because we use at home. So we just speak to her in Arabic. She will speak. We speak with each other.

Y And I think she can understand more than she speaks. Because when she speaks she tends to talk in English, rather than in Arabic. So we just keep speaking in Arabic. Cause we know she understands.

LG Mhm

M But when she talks about a serious thing, when she’s getting serious. I think she tells us in Arabic.

[All laugh]
One day I played with her a game. So uhm if she didn't speak any word in English, for more than two hours, she will gain a present from me.

[laughs]

So, she couldn't do that. So once, I told her, never mind about the first one. Then, the second one she even speak English. The third one, the fourth one, she couldn't.

That's funny. Uhm, okay. I've seen that some products in your kitchen have an Arabic sign.

Yeah.

Is that because you just. Or, what's the reason for that? Is it because some morals, something I want to remember, I can't write them in English.

Du'a

Ah, religious messages. Mhm, of course.

You can't say in English.

When you go out from the home, when you enter the bathroom, when you do something, some Du'a for.

Of course. And then you also have it on your products. The label sometimes. You say. You know, in the kitchen.

Aaah yes, [laughs]

Is it in Arabic because you. Because you're used to it?

Yes, in Syria I did it in that way, it's normal. I get used to write in Arabic. And it's nice to have it in the kitchen here also. Reminds us of our house in Syria. Our home.

Yes, it's nice to see our language here.

Yes, and she's got a lot of these (...) spices. So there is no way for her to memorise which one from which [laughs]

[laughs] without labelling it?

[laughs] yes.

Good. And, do you. So sometimes I see you watch TV in Arabic.
A: Yes.
N: Yes, unfortunately. I watch TV for Arabic programme. I hope to follow the English programme. But uhm unfortunately I can’t understand everything.
LG: Uhm
N: Because sometimes I need to know more and more about, especially about the news. Politics. News in the Middle East. So I have to watch in Arabic. But I, I would like to follow the English news, to improve my English.
LG: Mhm. Okay. And do you sometimes watch, or do you sometimes read books in Arabic or English? I mean you [addressing sons] would, you will have to read in English anyway for your studies, uhm, and I think, Aaya, I think once you mentioned to me that you wanted, well o
A: Yes, when I want to improve my English as well I read English book.
T: Well, apart from study, for me I prefer always to read in Arabic. In my, in my language. Uhm because I'm comfortable with it. I don't need Google to translate every word, or even one word in every page would be not good for me. So I always tend to read Arabic books. Apart from medicine, apart from studying.
A: Sometimes I read poem. Poem in Arabic, you can't, you don’t know how beautiful Arabic, if you express in Arabic. Like sing, like music. I don't find this in ANY language. Because I study Turkish, French, English, and many many language, but I didn't see, found
LG: find, mhm
A: the music, or rhythm, or the word, how to, uh, very strong. In Arabic, there is very strong word. You can express EVERYthing in Arabic. Because, you know, there is million, seven million of words in Arabic
LG: wow
A: Yes, yes, of course, seven or eight million words in Arabic, Yes. Arabic is very rich.
LG: So, in terms of Arabic. For you obviously it’s the language itself, and it also has some religious connection, doesn’t it, I mean, which makes it even richer maybe?
A: Yes
T: Of course
LG: Is this also one of the reasons why it's such an important language as well, isn't it?

T: Exactly. If you want, as we are Muslims here, if you want to read Qur'an. Uhm. The language of Qur'an is Arabic. So you can't read in Arabic, you can't read Qur'an. So it's very important, even to Farah, to learn how to read in Arabic, to can, to read Qur'an in Arabic.

LG: I see

T: Of course you can read Qur'an in English, of course. But, for us, if we know Arabic, and it's one of the most difficult language all over the world. So it's very important to learn for Farah, while she is young. Inshallah.

LG: Okay. And in your everyday lives, how important do you think are English and Arabic? For instance, for finding a job. What do you think?

T: Of course English.

M: But also Arabic. My tutor, she actually told me that I got advantage over my English colleagues, because since I got this multiling- you know, like, English and Arabic, that would help me lot if I wanna go and apply in a company, here in Manchester. (..) But also let's say in Middle East. Like Arabic countries for example Golf Arab countries. So here and there they would be interested more in those who got these multiple language rather than just one, so, one language. So this is one of the benefits that uhm I got. You know, over the ones who only have one language.

LG: And didn't you [to Y] also at some point teach Arabic? Here, to Qatari students, or something? Oh, no, English?

A: [laughs]

Y: Yes, there is a group of English students who came here to have an English course.

LG: Uhu.

Y: And their supervisor told me if I can do one-on-one sessions. It wasn't one-on-one, it was one and a group. But it's like a more friendly way, in a park, or a café. So we, yeah, we used to go to these public places and have a conversation, friendly conversation, asking what's they struggling with.

LG: Uhu, about English?

Y: About, about, English, yes. But my Arabic helped obviously to even get the job. That's nothing I expected (...) They really got benefits out of this. So have I. [laughs]
If Farah, my daughter, is normal, is healthy, she will tell you about her experience in Arabic. Because when she was in school, one year, and one Arabic student came to the school, nobody can understand this student, and Farah was like translator.

Interpreter for the understanding. Because any language is like power. If you have, for example, five language, it’s powerful. It can help you translator. Interpreter. It can help you contact with many people. Because here in the UK many many culture, Multiculture in the UK, in Manchester. Arab, French, Italian, Pakistan. Yes. So, language, any language is power. So people should not lost any language he can learn.

So, if, I think, if you want to know anything about any culture, first of all, you have to learn their language. So when you learn their language you can know more and more about this culture. So this benefit of learning another language.

That’s probably also why it’s important to pass on languages to the next generations? ‘Cause it has to do with culture as well?

Exactly. Especially Arabic. Because very difficult and rich of words. So in, when the person is, was little, it’s good for him to learn. Very easy.

Do you sometimes use Arabic in a supermarket, or something? Not with yourselves I mean. Do you sometimes go to shops where the owner or the staff also speak Arabic?

No.

No. I think uh the most of

English

supermarket using English. So we use English outside. Everywhere. In shops, in schools, in barbers, outside. We use English.

Hospitals. Everywhere. We use English.

Okay. And then of course with friends,

Some of them Arabic, some of them English. Depends on the friend

Exactly. Okay. Perfect. What do you do in terms of teaching and learning languages in the home? We were speaking for instance before that you want
to teach Arabic reading and writing to Farah. So what do you do, how do you do that?

A Me, I, for example. For my daughter, we read stories. Small stories. Then we write, Farah, write all this story. Yes, every day, for some time, so day by day, now she can write everything.

LG So how long do you take every day?

A Only uhm fifteen minute per day.

LG And on the weekends? You do some language learning as well? On the weekends?

A Yes, yes. On weekend. All, every day. Because fifteen minute only. Now. Every morning.

N I think the best way to learn English at home. Uhm. Using Youtube. Youtube programmes. There is a lot, a lot of programmes can teach you English. That is very beneficial for me to learn English.

LG And Farah is now also teaching you English, isn't she?


LG Oh wow that's a lot!

A Yes.

N How to do that. Can you tell her? How Farah teach you?

A [laughs] Farah is very strict teacher. And give me punishment. You know the punishment who. Uhm the punishment she gives me? Because I don't write my homework, then my punishment to take her to Primark to buy many of clothes, about 60 pounds.

N and lipstick

A And when she says I will start my lesson, she wears lipstick, rouge, and she wears a red blouse the match to lipstick. And high uhm

LG High heels?

A Yes, high heels, and she wear my bag on her shoulder. I said 'why you do that?' She said 'Like my teacher!'. And she is very strict. 'Don't use your mobile, don't drink, don't use uh gum'. Strict, very strict.
LG Wow, very strict. (...) And uh, outside of that, or in the classes with Farah, do you ever correct each others' Arabic or English. So if you hear someone says something that's not correct.

T Well uhm it depends on the person. If he will accept correcting him or not. But between us, I correct every error I see. In language, but also in every side of life. I correct everything. But maybe not if not for family. Because may, my friends they may not accept my correction.

LG But sometimes it happens here in the house? For instance if Farah says something in Arabic. It might not be correct Arabic.

T I mean definitely.

A Yes, Farah, and Mohammad also. I correct many words for Mohammad. In Arabic. But Mohammad was upset if I correct him [laughs]. I don't know why. He said 'always you correct me. Why?'

M And then I correct your English.

A [laughs] Yes, always. And Farah always corrects me. Always Farah laughs at me. 'Don't speak that, don't speak this word like that.'

M I sometimes correct teachers at college, in Arabic. We were learning about Islam. Some people don't know how to say Arabic words, so sometimes I correct them. Normally I'm the guy who can't speak English.

LG Oh okay. And, uhm, do you think sometimes you mix Arabic and English?

M Oh, a lot.

A Yes. My daughter. Farah, yes.

M No I mean like in college.

LG In college also?

M Yes I mean I have Arabic friends. And I've got English friends. Sometimes I just mix language together. So I don't know, like. Which language should. Sometimes I speak with the teacher in Arabic. If like my friend speaks to me I speak like fluent Arabic. Then I call the teacher like in Arabic. Which he says like 'what what?'

LG [laughs] Do you think that's a problem or not?

A For us also. Because we used to use some word. Like Mashallah. Like Inshallah. So when I speak to British people I say Inshallah. Because I, it's continuously.
Sometimes I say shukran. Thank you. Yes, sometimes.

So is it a problem?

No, no.

Good. Uhm And. We were speaking about this previously. So there are two different forms of Arabic. You know, the fusha, Standard form of Arabic. And then there’s the dialect, like Syrian Arabic.

Yes, yes.

What do you, how do you think, which one, or how do you see their roles, here in England. For instance, how, when you teach Farah, when you teach her Arabic. Which one do you teach her?

If we give uh some academic lesson, we teach in formal language. But if I say in daily life, I say in informal. I use informal. Yes.

And that’s the way (...) that makes sense, that’s fine?

Yes, exactly.

And what do you think I, as a language learner. What would you advise me as a learner? So that I can communicate? For example, I went to Palestine but wasn’t able to communicate with my Standard Arabic skills.

I think uh generally, the Arabic in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, generally the same. But, in North of Africa, such as Morocco, the Arabic there is very different. So, for me, for example. I can’t understand everything from Morocco, what they say. But generally in Middle East all of them speak the same. So I advise anyone to learn Arabic, to learn formal

Yes.

In addition to language of Middle East. Because it’s more famous, more famous, and it’s famous for all Arabic people in the world.

Yes. I advise you to learn formal. Every country can understand you and you can contact with them. It’s very easy for you. Don’t lose your time to speak informal. Yes.

Yeah but if you learn how to speak formal, you will not understand informal. This is the tricky thing.

Because it’s different. Completely different.

Yes. So uh as I told you, Arabic is the most language I think, the most difficult language, so it’s too difficult to learn. Uh. You need maybe one or two years,
depending on your powers and your hours of studying. So needs a lot of effort actually.

N You can watch TV, Arabic programmes, it has a mixed of formal and informal.

LG Okay, that’s uhm good advise (..) And I have a question for you Asmahan. Because I know you were teaching Arabic before, in the Arabic school. On a Saturday. What was your main motivation to do that, you think? (..) What were your reasons to teach Arabic in the Arabic school.

A Because, uh, it’s my first language, and it’s my culture. It belong my home. It remind me everything about my past.

LG And now you can’t, now there is no opportunity for you to teach any more?

A I try to contact with one man from the community, if you need some help in teach Arabic, I can do that, yes. [...] It’s important for find new friends. When you use your, a language you can meet many friends, relationships, friendship, many communication.

LG Okay (..) You just said you contacted a man from the community. What do you mean by that? So….do you think there is something like an Arabic community in Manchester?

T Yes, of course, of course. We as, for example, Syrian doctors, we meet maybe every one week, at least, and we stand in a café and we have a discussion all of that in Arabic. And this is only Syrian. Maybe one of Arabic doctor will join us. And we speak in- in Arabic.

Y Yeah, and there is Syrian community organisation also. So there is Syrians, they, like in Ramadan, these occasions, they, like everyone go to the office and share the food, you know, meet others, getting to know new people, through others, you know, who knows who. So this is a way also of getting to know others.

A Yes, strangers. Yes. And also. In ‘eid. In first and second ‘eid. ‘eid al-adha and ‘eid-al-futr. We go to Arabic community to share some event and we buy some things good, yes, yes, it's good.

LG Nice

A Yes. They do culture, Arabic culture? What’s the meaning? Help me? [to Yasser, laughs]

Y What do you want to say?

A [laughs]

T Traditions, Syrian actions, activities,
LG So do you think there is different. Because obviously, Arabic, the language is spoken in so many countries. So there are probably, maybe different communities? Different Arabic-speaking communities?

T Yes [hesitant]

LG Or is it one?

A We can understand all of them

T Yeah. We can understand. But there are some cultural differences.

N The Syrian community is new in the UK. They are new. In comparison with other communities, Arabic communities. Because uh for example Palestine community has a long time here in the UK. Also Yemen, here in Manchester. Also Iraq. Iraqi community. All of them was in the past. But the Syrian community is new. So, we now, we try to contact with each other. And to share a lot of events with the Syrian community and others, here in Manchester.

LG And do you think sometimes, because you were mentioning an interesting point. Some of them for instance Yemeni or Iraqi or Palestinians, they've been in the UK for longer. Do you think there is some kind of support also? For welcoming new communities?

A Yes.

N Yes, to some extent.

A Yes. Because when, for example, I came to the UK. I don't know any rule about the UK. I can go to the Arabic community, for example, and ask about the rule here. And ask how, what can I do. So this kind of support.

N Somali community. Sometimes. Somali community helped us a lot.

LG Oh, in Rusholme?

A Yes

N Yes, when we were in Moss Side. Somali community helped us a lot.

LG Nice. Didn't you also work, or teach Qur'an there?

A Yeah. Yes, last year.

N But now we moved.
What do you think is the role of supplementary schools, of these Arabic schools, here in the city? Because for instance, Farah, she used to go when you were living close to one, and now you’re teaching from home. Do you think that’s good?

It would be better to send to an Arabic school. To not forget their language. And the children also spend a good time with their language and culture. Because this school give not only language. Give culture also. So that the children don’t forget their culture.

To keep children a bond with their culture. Home, origin, home country.

Good, one final question from me. In terms of your future aspirations, what roles do you think Arabic and English will be playing? You might actually use Arabic more? Maybe see it as a job opportunity? Maybe use all your language skills?

One, actually if we travelled back to our home, then it will be a good experience to have English. Because you will be demanded to more hospitals, to more jobs. Because everyone will need you. Will need your language, in different kinds of aspects of life.

Because it opens new door, yes, for you. In future to get job, to get opportunity to work.

Especially English. Many migrants prefer to migrate to UK to learn English. More than another country, for example Netherland, or Sweden. They prefer to come to the UK because there English is spread more. And if anyone come back to his country in the future, English is very important.

Britain has a good reputation for whole the world. If you have some experience in the UK, it’s good for you. Big opportunity to work anywhere. And high salary. [laughs] We’ll be rich

Do you have any other question, or anything you would like to say?

You learn Arabic. Tell me about your experience of learning, and about the Arabic language in your study

Interesting. The link between any language and culture. Even though I am not fluent in Arabic, and I cant have a long conversation in Arabic, still the experience opened a world for me. In terms of obviously friendship, learning about a culture. Even little things about a language tell you about the culture.

Yes, for example many words of greetings. If you say Assalamu ‘aleikum And all the Arab countries know that.

Even Pakistan. Even Hind [India]. Even British people know that, I think.
Yes, all. Arabic connects everyone. Also from countries that are not Arab.

It connects. In Manchester I met someone who is from Bangladesh. But Bangladesh, the language is not Arabic. But he know how to speak Arabic. So we left English and we spoke with each other in Arabic. Yes, he's from Bangladesh and knows Arabic. So we spoke to each other in Arabic. Yes, there are a lot of people who are not Arabic in Manchester but who have connection through Arabic. I have one of my friends from Pakistan. And he know a wide vocabulary in Arabic. He knows, which you mentioned, Standard Arabic, formal Arabic.

He asked me the same question which you asked, ‘I know formal Arabic but I couldn't understand you guys. What should I do?’ [laughs]

And we have some delicious meals.

And I was your teacher in Arabic. You are a good student. You are a hard-working student.

Do you have any more questions?

Do you like Arabic?

Of course, so different from other languages, and so beautiful (..)

Yes, a lot of words.

[Silence; participants nod]

What is your feeling for instance when you see Arabic on signs. In the city?

Oooh it reminds of my home. Because.

Actually, in the market, we are looking for one word, halal.

[All laugh]

Yes, it's very common this word in here.

And would you say that sometimes maybe in the early years that you, when you first moved here, and maybe your English wasn't as great as it is now, that maybe sometimes if a shop has an Arabic sign, that you were maybe more confident going there? Because maybe you thought maybe they can speak Arabic as well?

Yeah, regarding speaking. But not regarding everything. I mean if there is two shops, one of them Arabic, one of them British, we may buy from British. Not
even from Arabic. It’s not related to that. Because we can understand, we can ask, with British shops, Arabic shops. Everywhere. Because it’s easy when it comes to buy stuff. Just money and point. Want this, want this.

LG  Do you think you as doctors can use Arabic with patients?
T    Well, you can’t use Arabic with someone who doesn’t understand Arabic. But With Arabic person you can talk in any language you want. This is what I know. Because I went to a dentist and when he knows that I am Syrian he speaks he spoke with me in Arabic. The whole session.

LG  Oh good.
T    That helps the patient. More than me.
N    You have to bring interpreters. But if you can speak Arabic with a patient who speaks Arabic, that is good, because you save money for the government. [laughs]
T    For the patients it is better. It is very important to know your disease in your language. You can understand better.
LG  Thank you so much! If you don’t have any more questions, that was it. Thank you!