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From text to context: Literacy practices of native speakers of Arabic in Arabic and English

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GRADUATE SCHOOL
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By Ghada Gherwash

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FROM TEXT TO CONTEXT: LITERACY PRACTICES OF NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ARABIC IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



Is approved by the final examining committee:

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12/1/2015

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Date

FROM TEXT TO CONTEXT: LITERACY PRACTICES OF NATIVE SPEAKERS OF
ARABIC IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Ghada Gherwash

In Partial Fulfillment of the

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of

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To my mother, one of the strongest women I know

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ABSTRACT

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Previous studies that looked at the written product of native speakers of Arabic in their second language (L2), English, have identified traces of Arabic rhetoric (L1), mainly Classical Arabic, in their writing (e.g., Atari, 1983; Kaplan, 1966; Ostler, 1987). These studies focused primarily on the L2-written texts, where the written product is used to make inferences about the rhetorical structures of the writers' L1. The results from these studies portrayed the native-Arab writer's text as highly influenced by Classical Arabic. This was evidenced by "foreign" rhetorical structures that Arab writers employ when producing texts in their L2 that are considered trademarks of Classical Arabic. This unitary picture of the native-Arabic writer remained intact in later studies (e. g., Abu Radwan, 2012; Connor 1996). However, none of these studies looked at the possible influence of the remarkable difference between written and spoken forms of Arabic on such rhetorical transfer. Nor did they look at the potential impact of cultural, historical, sociopolitical, and institutional factors on how literacy is acquired, practiced, and valued in the Arab world.

This project focuses on these two neglected factors that, I argue, are crucial to understanding Arab students' writing in English. These factors are investigated through

the New Literacy Studies theory that looks at literacy as multiple, varying across communities and historical contexts. In order to investigate *literacies* as part of the social fabric of the Arab culture, I conducted a series of semi-structured, life-story interviews with Arab-graduate students representing five-Arab countries: Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. The aim of these interviews was to gain insight about how the participants are socialized into reading and writing in their L1 and the impact such socialization might have on their literacy practices in their L2.

The participants' accounts regarding their own literacy practices in Arabic problematize the picture of the native-Arabic writers that has been held true for decades. Mainly that their writing is highly influenced by the rhetorical structures of Classical Arabic. The narratives elicited from the interviews show that due to lack of prolonged socialization into and practice in the written form of Arabic, none of the participants developed a sophisticated knowledge of the written form of Arabic that they considered transferrable into their L2. Therefore, if we look at a given text as the product of socialization into a given practice, by default lack of socialization impedes that process (Gee, 1990). In addition, the participant accounts show discrepancies in the type and quality of instruction they received in Arabic and English. Contrary to what would be expected, the participants received more explicit writing instruction in English than they did in Arabic. Even those who considered themselves as sophisticated readers in Arabic, described themselves as poor writers. Thus, it would be flawed to argue that all native Arabic speakers' writing is influenced by Classical Arabic, a form that the participants admitted they haven't mastered. It would be more logical to argue that their writing might

be influenced by their regional varieties that they have mastered and are more comfortable using to express their thoughts.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of Topic

Since the focus of this project is literacy practices and what literacy practices actually mean to individuals across languages and communities, a definition of literacy is deemed imperative. *Literacy* could be simply defined as the ability to read and write. However, this simplistic definition has proven to be problematic for first language (L1) literacy researchers, due to its inability to include, for example, the level of proficiency that a given person has to achieve in order to be considered literate. Thus, the vagueness in this definition has led researchers to question its validity (e.g., Dauzat & Dauzat, 1977; Heath, 1980). For example, Dauzat & Dauzat (1977) argue that the “language component of literacy should be broad enough to include levels of proficiency to use all aspects of language as a means of communicating ideas and influencing the environment” (p. 40). Another criticism of similar simplistic definitions of literacy was put forth by Scribner (1984), who argues that literacy is usually referred to as an individual trait, which ignores the social contexts that contribute to the availability of literacy to individuals— “individual literacy is relative to social literacy” (p.7-8). If we accept the fact that literacy and what it means to be literate is socially constructed rather than universally identified, then a universal definition of literacy would be more difficult to devise.

L1 literacy researchers seem to have accepted this complex nature of literacy as they began to see literacy more as “a social, cultural and political phenomenon that takes diverse forms in particular societies” (Wagner, Messick, & Spratt, 1986, p. 239). As such, they have come to the realization that a “definition [of literacy] must be shaped by changing types of literacy demanded by the changing world” and the different socio-cultural contexts within which literacy is situated (Duazat & Duazat, 1977, p. 40). For example, researchers, depending on the scope of their research, have defined literacy in relation to: a) illiteracy, b) the number of years of formal schooling, c) economic/personal/social values, and d) functional literacy, which refers to the ability to use literacy in a limited way to fulfill daily tasks.

But what does it really mean to say that literacy can only be defined on a case-by-case basis? Two examples that will help make the abstract discussion above about the relativity of literacy more concrete are: The Tuareg society and Quranic literacy in Morocco. The Tuareg society, a nomadic group that inhabits the Sahara desert, has a writing system that represents their Berber language, which many Tuaregs have access to. However, they rarely use it (Heath, 1980, p. 125). An important question to be raised here is whether we can consider the Tuaregs to be a literate society? If we define literacy as the ability to read and write, then, yes, they are literate, but what about their infrequent use of the written script? Another example that might complicate this discussion even more is the literacy situation in countries like Morocco, more specifically the idea of Quranic literacy that was presented by Wagner and his colleagues (1986). They presented the experiences of many Moroccan men and women who memorize and recite the Quran; they memorize the Quran for prayer and recitation, but “they may not actually be able to

read the Quran with comprehension” (p. 240). In this example, we can argue that the Moroccans’ encounter with literacy is even more problematic than the Tuareg example above, especially if we take into account the diglossic nature of Arabic, where the written and the spoken forms of the language differ drastically. In this case, an argument could be made that written Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, is a second language (L2) to all native speakers of Arabic. Thus, the introduction of L2 literacy, either as part of the diglossic nature of Arabic or as a completely different second language, complicates the situation even more; this shows that the difficulty with reaching consensus about a single definition of literacy extends beyond L1 literacy.

As the discussion above shows, literacy and the different practices associated with it, seem to be rooted in socially-identified norms and traditions across languages and communities. As such, this project provides the following definition of literacy. Literacy here is defined as an individual’s ability to read and write in a given language that is in line with the socio-cultural and academic expectations of a given community. Thus, providing a more comprehensive definition of literacy that goes beyond the individual’s ability to decode a written text to include cultural, historical, and institutional facets that give the literacy act its meaning (Kumagai & Lopez-Sanchez, 2015, p. 1). Literacy practices refer to any encounter with the written text. This interaction could range from reading a sign on the street to writing a novel. With such a wide range of literacy possible, some researchers have attempted to understand L2 literacy in relation to L1 literacy. Such studies have focused on literacy, mainly writing, in different languages and tried to identify similarities and differences between rhetorical structures across

languages. Such studies focused mainly on the written text itself. These types of studies comprise the field of contrastive rhetoric (CR).

Limitations in the Literature

A number of studies have used the contrastive rhetoric (CR) framework to look at the written products of native-Arabic speakers when writing in their second language (L2), English (e.g., Abu Radwan, 2012; Atari, 1983; Ostler, 1987). These studies were carried out to shed light on the rhetorical structures that Arab L2 writers might transfer from their L1. The results from these studies painted a picture of the native speaker of Arabic as being highly influenced by Classical Arabic. Such conclusions were evidenced by long sentences and rhetorical patterns that show coordination rather than subordination in the writers' texts (Harfmann, 2004; Kaplan, 1966; Ostler 1987). However, none of these studies looked explicitly at the effects of possible discrepancies between literacy and orality in Arabic. This difference is akin to working in radically different (at least temporally) varieties of the same language, which would be similar to writing a text in Middle English and presenting it to contemporary English readers. That is, the difference between the written and spoken forms of diglossic languages is more than mere register and stylistic shifts. Additionally, previous studies focused mainly on the written product and failed to consider overall L1 literacy practices as a possible contributing factor to the difficulties that L1 Arab writers may face when they write in their L2, English.

One way to investigate this phenomenon is to look at how native-Arabic speakers socialize into the different forms of Arabic. This socialization process with literacy could take place at home, school, or during daily interactions with peers. The aim of the current

study is to go beyond the text so as to include the social contexts where literacy practices take place. The term *literacy practices* takes literacy beyond the ability to read and write to include the “link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structure in which they are embedded and which they help shape” (Barton & Hamilton, 1999, p.7). It “entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power” (Street, 2003, p. 77). That is to say, literacy here goes beyond what is being practiced in school, to include any interaction with written text. In addition to investigating L1 literacy practices, this study will investigate the potential effect of literacy practices in the L1, Arabic, on the literacy practices of the L2, English.

Similar studies have investigated literacy practices in both first language literacy (e.g., Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Sohn, 2006) and biliteracy, literacy practices in Korean and English (e.g., Cho, 2010) and in Chinese and English (e.g., Bell, 1995). However, to my knowledge, the conceptual framework of literacy practices has never been applied to a diglossic language like Arabic to look at how literacy practices in general and the linguistic nature of Arabic might contribute to the negotiation of meaning during text-composition in the L2.

In an attempt to widen the scope of contrastive rhetoric (CR), a number of researchers have proposed the use of different investigative methods, such as ethnographies and case studies, to examine literacy practices of the learners' L1 (e.g., Ostler, 2002). Connor (2004), a long standing proponent of CR, presented new methodological tools that intercultural rhetoric (IR), the successor to contrastive rhetoric,

researchers could use to analyze texts that extend to include the “social practices” that surround the written text (Connor 2008, p.299). Connor (2011) also argues that “changing definitions of both written discourse analysis—from text-based to context sensitive—and of culture—from static to dynamic—contribute to changing the focus of intercultural rhetoric research, one that better reflects its dynamic nature” (p. 54). However, despite CR/IR’s effort to widen its scope, little has been done to explain the methodological alternative to the traditional text-based methods that CR/IR has been using. In order to capture the social contexts where literacies are encountered, a more comprehensive framework needs to be utilized. The framework used in this study should not be seen as an alternative to the text-based focus, but as a tool that might help us make sense of previous text-based findings. As such, this study will make use of the New Literacy Studies framework to include literacy practices in the writers’ L1 with the hope that such inclusion might help us better understand how native speakers of Arabic socialize into different forms of Arabic and the influence of their L1 literacy practices on that of their L2 .

Rationale and Aim of the Study

In this study, I aim to look at L1 literacy acquisition and use by multiliterate writers. This will be accomplished by conducting interviews to gain access to the participants’ personal stories. The reoccurring picture that previous research has presented of Arab writers needs to be problematized as it is not a true representation of every individual in the Arab world. Each learner is influenced in one way or another by the sociocultural context of their immediate community. In order to present snapshots of personal stories from different regions in the Arab world, I aim to give writers from

different regions a voice and present them as active agents who are part of the process of negotiating meaning. Just like Plato's allegory of the cave, previous studies, especially CR studies, have looked at what seems to be the shadow of the L2 writers' texts without considering L1 literacy practices. As such, they were able to point out incongruity in the written product in the learner's L2 but failed to account for the writer, her educational influences and social context in which all this was situated. Looking beyond the text will also help us take a closer look at what Arab L2 writers bring with them to the writing act. In addition to the challenges of writing in an L2 that native speakers of languages other than English face, I argue that the diglossic nature of Arabic adds an extra layer of difficulty not only in terms of transfer of skills from L1 to L2, but also in terms of socialization within L1 literacy practices. I further contextualize this examination by discussing how the complexities of literacy acquisition in Arabic might impact the efficacy of text production in the L2, English. More specifically, I will look at how the writers' literacy practices in their L1 might aid/hinder their literacy progress in the L2.

Significance of the Study

This project goes beyond examining text and, instead, explores literacy in context. In doing so, this project focuses on narratives of five Arab participants' past and present experiences with literacy: more specifically, their subjective understanding and interaction with literacies. This, however, does not imply that the current project ignores the text itself. By exploring different individuals' experiences, and how they process these experiences with literacy in general, this project provides contextual explanations that might help us better understand how literacy is practiced in these individuals' communities and the projection of that on the L2 text. It is a step towards building an

understanding of the context or the different instances where literacy takes place that might contribute, in one way or another, to the production of the text. Studies that focus on writers' literacy practices in their L1 and L2 are very scarce (Cho, 2010, p. 83). Most of the studies that have been done in the field of L2 writing have concerned themselves with the immediate context and practices of L2 writers in their L2 (e.g., Currie & Cray, 2004). To challenge the common perception in the literature that the written products of the majority of Arab writers is characterized by long sentences and unneeded coordination (Kaplan, 1966; Ostler, 1987), this project, through personal narratives, presents the diversity in backgrounds and literacy practices in different parts of the Arab world.

CHAPTER 2: THE CONTEXT OF LITERACY IN THE ARAB WORLD

Understanding the literacy practices of native Arabic speakers in Arabic and in English, requires a deep understanding of the linguistic nature of Arabic and the cultural, historical, and institutional contexts within which such practices exist. Previous comparative studies that looked at Arab students' writing in English have not paid much attention to L1 practices. Such studies focused exclusively on the L2 written product of the native speaker of Arabic without accounting for contextual factors, such as cultural perception of literacy and socio-economic status, as contributing factors in determining the degree of exposure to literacy in general and writing in particular. Studies that looked at the influence of L1 literacy practices on L2 literacy practices (e.g. Bialystok, 2002; Collier, 1999) have indicated positive relationships between L1 and L2 literacy practices. For example, Bell (1995) conducted an autobiographical study where she reported her literacy progress in Chinese, her L2, and how much her literacy in English, L1, complicated the acquisition of Chinese literacy. Such studies suggest that L1 literacy skills might influence the acquisition and use of L2 literacy skills. If this is the likely case, in order to understand the literacy skills of native speakers of Arabic in their L2, we need to look first at their literacy practices in their L1. In order to delineate such literacy practices, this chapter looks at the following: previous comparative studies of L1 Arabic and L2 English, sociolinguistic approaches to language use, literacy acquisition in

Arabic, and literacy in Arabic, and concludes with a discussion of literacy scholarship in the west.

Previous Comparative Studies of L1 Arabic and L2 English

A large number of studies (Abu Radwa, 2012; Kaplan, 1966; Kamel, 2000; Ostler, 1978; Sheikholeslami & Makhlouf, 2000) and theses and dissertations (Al-Amer, 2000; Alnofal, 2003; Al-Sameri, 1993; Atari, 1983; El Mortaji, 2001; Gamie, 2009; Ismail, 2010; Mahmoud, 1982; Kamel, 1989) have looked at the written products of native Arabic writers in English. The majority of these studies used the contrastive rhetoric framework as an investigative method. The main focus of contrastive rhetoric is to look at the L2 writers' written text, and based on the "foreignness" in the text, determine the rhetorical patterns that have been transferred from their L1 (e.g., Kaplan, 1966, Connor, 1996). Thus, the studies presented in this section were carried out to shed light on the rhetorical structures that native speakers of Arabic transfer from their L1.

These studies could be categorized into two groups: those that were done by western researchers and those that were done by non-western researchers¹. The majority of the studies that were done by native speakers of Arabic actually support the findings of the early studies that were done by western researchers (e.g., Kaplan, 1966; Ostler, 1987). The two groups of studies will be discussed below.

The first western researcher to discuss the writing of native speakers of Arabic in their L2 was Kaplan (1966). Kaplan (1966) analyzed a number of college-entry essays that were written by nonnative speakers of English, arguing that there is a "fallacy of

¹ Grouping these studies in this manner does not imply that the studies conducted by native speakers of Arabic drew completely different conclusions, it is to show some minor differences in the conclusions drawn regarding Arabic rhetoric itself.

some repute...that assumes that because a student can write an adequate essay in his [sic] native language, he [sic] can write an adequate essay in a second language” (p.3). Based on his inspection of these essays, Kaplan maintained that due to the different rhetorical structure that different languages employ, nonnative-English writers present their texts differently. One group of L2 texts that he had investigated were written by native speakers of Arabic. He portrayed the native Arabic writers’ written product as heavily influenced by their L1. For example, Kaplan stated that while English relies on subordination, Arabic relies more on parallel and paratactic constructions. As a result, native speakers of Arabic are more likely to use parallel constructions in English. Kaplan compared the parallel structure that native speakers of Arabic use when they write in English to the one used in the King James’ version of the Bible. Kaplan chose the King James version because it is translated from Hebrew, a Semitic language. To illustrate his point, Kaplan included some written samples of native speakers of Arabic. These samples showed a recurring use of coordination and lack of subordination. Kaplan concluded that the mastery of grammatical and syntactic structure of a given language does not automatically translate into proficiency in writing.

Another western researcher who drew similar conclusions was Ostler (1987). Ostler investigated how advanced Arab students organized their writing in English differently than did native English writers. She investigated what she called the “foreignness” in their writing even if their writing was error-free (p. 170). In investigating this topic, Ostler selected a corpus of 22 English essays that Saudi Arabian students wrote as part of a university placement test and compared them to 10 English paragraphs that were selected at random from different books that were found at the Los

Angeles public library. The results of the study showed that the major difference between the Arabic speakers' writing and the native-English speakers' was in the "length of their clauses" (p.184). Arabic speakers relied more on coordination, and their sentences were longer when compared to those of their English counterparts. Ostler attributed this to the coordination structure that she argued is a preferred structure in Classical Arabic prose. Ostler stated that such "foreignness" in the Arab students' writing is a result of using the rhetorical conventions of Classical Arabic, which are different from those of Modern English. These two early studies have paved the path to studies that focused on elaborating on these findings from the native-speaker's perspective.

The studies that were carried out by researchers who are native speakers of Arabic tried to explain and make sense of the findings that western researchers have reached. For example, Sa'adeddin (1989) argues that the over-use of parallelism and subordination in Arabic are not actually influenced by the Quran or Classical/Modern Standard Arabic; they are used to achieve a rhetorical function, especially in the genre of argumentation. A similar claim was made by Al-jubori (1984), who analyzed three newspaper articles in Arabic to look at the rhetorical functions of repetition and parallelism on three levels: morphological, sentential, and discoursal. He concluded that all three forms of repetition were used to "create a more rhythmic and more passionate effect" on the audience (p.109). These findings do not necessarily contradict Kaplan's (1966) and Ostler's (1987) studies; instead, they provide explanations for the rhetorical choices that native speakers of Arabic make when they write in English.

More recent studies focused more on linguistic proficiency and its effects on the L2 writing process. One such study is done by Al-Semari's (1993) who looked at the

revising strategies of eight graduate Saudi students in Arabic and in English. The students in this study were presented as advanced ESL students who were also, as native speakers of Arabic, proficient readers and writers in Arabic. The study concluded that the students' revision strategies in both languages were very similar. For example, the majority of the revisions occurred as the subjects were producing the text, and the revisions that were done after the text was produced were more extensions rather than deletions. Al-Semari also noted that formal revisions were done more in Arabic than in English. Another study that drew similar conclusions in terms of language proficiency was conducted by Abu Radwan (2012). Abu Radwan looked at the written products in English of two groups of native speakers of Arabic: intermediate and advanced groups. He used the produced texts and compared them to texts written by native speakers of English. The main focus of this study was to look at the use of coordination and repetition in the L2 written texts of native speakers of Arabic. The results of the study show that language proficiency played a pivotal role in the quality of the L2 texts. While the advanced students' writing was similar to that of the native-English writers, the intermediate writers' texts did not show any similarities to either the advanced L2 writers or to the native writers. The intermediate group's writing showed a high level of repetition and a frequent use of the coordinating conjunction "and".

Both studies above based their conclusions on the assumption that being a native speaker of Arabic is causally linked to being a good writer. While levels of language proficiency can be determined by standardized tests in English, such tools are not readily available to determine language proficiency of native speakers of Arabic in Arabic. Moreover, there is very little research that looked at the writing skills of native speakers

of Arabic in their L1 (Myhill, 2014). Thus, more needs to be known about Arab students' literacy practices in their L1 in order to present valuable comparative results. One step towards understanding Arab students' literacy practices in their L1 is to look at the linguistic nature of Arabic, namely diglossia. The comparative studies above attempted to explain the influence of L1, Arabic, on L2, English, without any focus on diglossia, as a sociolinguistic phenomenon to make sense of their findings. The following section will look at the sociolinguistic nature of diglossia.

Sociolinguistic Approaches to Language Use

Sociolinguistics is a field of study that focuses on, among other things, studying language within its sociocultural context. Hymes (1972) was among the first sociolinguists to point out the importance of studying and discussing language as a sociolinguistic act. He critiqued Chomsky's (1965) infamous "ideal speaker" model that presented the linguistic competence of the "native" speaker without any reference to different sociocultural contexts where such a linguistic competence can be utilized. Hymes (1972) argued for the "need to include sociocultural dimensions" when discussing linguistic competence (p.272). This proposition has led to what became to be known in the field of sociolinguistics as communicative competence. Gumperz (1981) defines communicative competence as: "the knowledge of linguistic and related communicative conventions that speakers must have to initiate and sustain conversational involvement" (p.41). The communicative act here involves more than just the interlocutors' linguistic knowledge. It includes crucial social and contextual cues that prompt speakers to tailor their speech to a given context. As such, a mere linguistic knowledge in any second language does not warrant successful interactions.

Since Hymes' idea of communicative competence focused on oral interaction, a restricted understanding of communicative competence would limit its application to spoken interactions. However, a more robust understanding would include literacy practices spanning a range of possible literacies across languages and communities. A literate person, I argue, has a wider range of communicative competence. Such a competence is crucial across the broader literacy contexts and more particularly to the idea of diglossia that characterizes the Arabic language. In the case of Arabic, familiarity with the social context is very important to effective written and oral communication. The following section will discuss diglossia in Arabic in greater details.

Diglossia. One contributing factor, I argue, that might influence the literacy practices of native Arabic speakers both in their L1 and L2 is the diglossic nature of Arabic. The discrepancy between the written and the spoken forms in Arabic might make native speakers of Arabic associate the function of the written form in English with that of the high form in Arabic. This kind of association might violate English discourse expectations. This section will introduce the concept of diglossia in Arabic.

The term diglossia was coined by Charles Ferguson in 1959 and is used to refer to a unique linguistic situation where a given language has two forms: a high form and a low form. In Ferguson's (1959) words diglossia is defined as:

a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature... which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation (p.16).

These two levels are used in different social settings to serve different purposes.

Diglossia here is seen as a “characterization of linguistic organization at the socio-cultural level” (Fishman, 1967, p. 34). In Arabic, for example, at least two forms of the language are identified: Classical Arabic (CA), which is known in a more modernized form as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)², and vernacular or spoken Arabic (Thompson & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983, p. 609). These two forms, CA/MSA and vernacular Arabic, are used in different social contexts to serve different sociolinguistic functions. Before discussing the sociolinguistic function of each form, it is important to draw a distinction between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Classical Arabic (CA) and state how these two forms of Arabic are different from the spoken varieties of the language.

The MSA/CA Distinction. MSA is both a written and an oral form of Arabic. It is the language of contemporary written discourse and is used among educated speakers to deliver speeches or engage in intellectual conversations. CA is mainly written. It is the language of the Quran and the *Hadiths* (sayings of the Prophet) as well as old literary works. Knowing CA provides language users with access to a wealth of literary culture that goes back as far as the pre-Islamic era, which might not be accessible to speakers who only know MSA (Bateson, 2003, p. 79).

MSA is considered as a slightly modernized version of CA especially in vocabulary and style. The modernization of Arabic was required with the advancement of technology and the increase in lexical borrowing between languages (Bateson, 2003, p. 90). When it comes to grammar, however, the two

² CA and MSA are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature to represent the high form. However, I will be referring to them as two separate but closely related forms.

forms of the language share the same grammatical system. This grammatical system has remained intact since the 8th Century. Despite the similarities between CA and MSA, these two forms of the language have different sociolinguistic functions that will be discussed below.

Vernacular Arabic. Vernacular or spoken varieties of Arabic are regional. These varieties are usually divided into four major dialect groups: a) Maghrebi dialects (Mauretania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, and Libya, b) Egyptian (Egypt and Sudan), c) Levantine (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine), and d) the Arabic of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait) (for a slightly different break down see Alish, 2000; Bassiouney, 2009). These are the varieties native speakers of Arabic learn first at home. They usually don't learn or are exposed to MSA/CA until they start formal schooling. As mentioned above, these varieties are different in grammar, lexis, and phonology from the written varieties CA and MSA, which are the same throughout the Arab world. However, these varieties share some features that make them mutually intelligible to a certain degree.

The Function of CA, MSA, and the spoken varieties. The function of each linguistic form varies according to its pre-identified sociocultural function. CA and MSA are used for “religious practices, formal occasions, and most literacy-- while the vernacular variety is the normal spoken language of daily use and of the home” (Saiegh-Haddad & Spolsky, 2014, p. 226). When discussing the different functions the two language forms serve within Arab societies, some researchers (e.g., Al-Toma, 1951) go as far as to argue that CA and MSA are “ill-suited” to be used to express the concrete

everyday needs of modern life. When speaking their varieties, Arabs either coin new words or borrow foreign words to express such concrete concepts (p.286). Conversely, a given spoken variety can't be used to express intellectually abstract ideas that MSA is best suited for (p. 287). This exclusivity of these linguistic forms and their functions represents the linguistic situation in Arabic.

In summary, vernacular or spoken Arabic is unlike CA and MSA in that it is used for everyday communication, is acquired with no formal instruction, and is almost never used for formal written interaction. However, CA and MSA are taught formally in Quranic and traditional schools in both their written and oral forms. CA is the language used in the Quran and the *Hadiths* (sayings of the Prophet) and pre-Islamic literary texts that are still widely read today. CA/MSA is the language of written discourse and is used among educated speakers to deliver speeches or engage in intellectual conversations. The following section will present the writing system of Arabic and how it is acquired.

Features of the writing system. Arabic is the official language of 22 countries and the native language of roughly 300 million native speakers (Saiegh-Haddad & Henkin-Roitfarb, 2014, p. 3). The Arabic script consists of a 28-letter alphabet, with certain letters having different configurations depending on their position in a given word. Unlike the Roman alphabet, the Arabic alphabet consists of only consonants and long vowels. Short vowels are presented with diacritic marks that are written either above or below the letters to aid with pronunciation. These diacritic marks are included only in texts from the Quran and some beginner language books. Newspaper articles and books, for example, don't normally include these marks as they are written for adult readers who are, or should be, familiar with the language in a way that they can utilize their

knowledge of Arabic to read the text. When reading an Arabic text, understanding seems to precede reading, in the sense that in order to read the words without the diacritic marks correctly, the reader should predict the pronunciation of a given word from the context (Al-Toma, 1961, p. 405). Thus, without a prior knowledge of the short vowel system and how much it influences meaning, a reader might not be able to read a sentence without first scanning it to determine the meaning of un-voweled words.

Arabic script is written only in cursive and from right to left, with letters having different shapes in initial, medial, and final positions of a given word. All letters in Arabic may be attached to the letters preceding them with the exception of six letters that can only be attached to what comes before them. The written variation of these letters exceeds six hundred forms (Al-Toma, 1961, p. 404).

Arabic follows what is known as the “root pattern system” (Bateson, 2003, p. 1). This system uses a root form of a given word to derive other words that have a similar general meaning. These roots consist of a three letter word like k-t-b (He wrote) that are used to derive different words that express other concepts that are related in meaning. For example, book is *kitab*, library is *maktaba*, letter is *maktoub*, writer is *kateb*, and so on. In Arabic dictionaries, words are listed under their trilateral root rather than the way they are presented in English dictionaries. A pre-knowledge of the Arabic root system is required in order to be able to look up words in Arabic dictionaries.

Literacy Acquisition in Arabic

With the exception of a handful of ethnographic studies that were conducted by Wagner and later Wagner and colleagues starting in the 1980s, we know very

little about literacy and the acquisition of literacy over an extended period of time in the Arab world (Haeri, 2009, p. 417). Recent studies seem to focus more on a specific aspect of language acquisition, for example, children's early acquisition of phonological and morphological aspects of Arabic (e.g., Saiegh-Haddad, 2011; Saiegh-Haddad, Hadieh, & Ravid, 2012) or early literacy among Arab children in specific areas in the Arab world (Korat, Saiegh-Haddad, Arafat, Koury, & Abu Elhija, 2013; Levin, Saiegh-Haddad, Hende, 2008). This recent research in the area of literacy acquisition is important, however it only provides snapshots of language acquisition at a certain stage in a child's life without much discussion about the role of literacy in these communities. In this section, I present how literacy is acquired in the Arab world by piecing together the limited research that has been done in this area.

Literacy and Quranic Schools. Most Arab children are normally introduced to literacy when they start formal schooling at the age of six. However, some parents choose to send their children to Quranic schools to provide children with basic reading and writing skills. In addition to developing basic reading and writing skills, children also memorize parts or all of the Quran. Daniel Wagner (1982) who has studied literacy in Morocco extensively identifies four stages that Quranic schools use to introduce children to literacy. First, children are taught the alphabet by chanting the alphabet along with the diacritics that go along with each letter. Another part of this stage is introducing the children to writing, where children are asked to trace over letters repeatedly until the letters are learned by heart. At this stage, the children are also introduced to *surahs* or short verses of the Quran. Second, children start to practice writing by copying words

from model texts. The second stage, according to Wagner & Lotfi (1980), might take up to one year. At this stage the learner is called *hannash* or “someone who memorizes what is written but cannot read for comprehension” (Wagner & Lotfi, 1980, p.247). In the third stage, children spend the morning with their teacher reading and reciting different verses from the Quran and the afternoon with their peers in study groups. In order to move up to the fourth step, the child must have mastered what they had been taught up to this point. In the fourth and final stage, the child is able to write from dictation. This early introduction to the written form of the language is believed to facilitate children’s success in the first and subsequent grade of formal schooling (for more on Quranic literacy see Wagner and Lotfi, 1980; Wagner, 1982, and Street, 1993).

Literacy in schools and the attitudes towards early exposure to literacy.

Young children’s journey with literacy in schools starts normally at the age of six. Students are exposed to different reading and writing tasks in Modern Standard Arabic, which is different from the varieties they speak at home, where the textbook language is removed from the language that the student is used to in every day communication (Haeri, 2009). In West European languages, for example, the difference between the written and the spoken form of the language is not vast in the sense that the orthographic presentation of the spoken sounds is what the speakers need to know to be considered literate. However, in the case of Arabic, generally literacy is minimized to the speaker’s reading abilities (Ibrahim, 1983). When discussing literacy in the Arab world, there is a tendency of lumping together the student’s reading and writing skills. These two skills are interconnected, in that there is the assumption that “anyone who can learn how to read can also learn to write” (Ibrahim, 1982, p. 508). Students are generally instructed to read,

but very rarely to write—with the assumption being that if they can read, by association alone, they can write. Even in scholarly articles that investigate writing, reading and writing are almost always discussed simultaneously.

Most Arab children do not get exposed to the written form of the language until they start school where they “are required to develop concurrently linguistic proficiency and literacy in the non-spoken and largely unfamiliar Standard language” (Saiegh-Haddad & Spolsky, 2014, p.232). Some researchers argue that by the time the child starts school, he/she has already mastered the spoken form of the language and their learning of the written form of the language is comparable to learning a second language (Ibrahim, 1982; Ayari, 1996). Very few parents actually read to their children. Parents think that because of the diglossic nature of Arabic, their children will not be able to understand the written form of the language at an early age. Instead, most parents practice oral-folk story telling (Doak, 1989, cited in Ayari, 2009, p. 249). Negative attitudes about literacy have also been observed by some researchers. For example, Haeri (2009) reports after looking at literacy in Egypt, that not only high school students, but also librarians expressed their dislike of reading. Arguing that “they find the language of books too difficult and it takes them too long to read just a few pages” (p. 423). As for writing, she reports that her interviewees used very little writing outside of school or employment settings. Even the writing that is required at the work place is very formulaic. This late exposure to the written form and attitude towards the written form of the language is seen as widening the gap between the written and the spoken varieties, and thus making the acquisition of literacy more challenging.

Attitudes towards the spoken varieties. Language policy in the Arab world has political, economic, and religious forces that are driving it, with no academic force (Ayari, 1996, p. 247). These ideologies have had a huge impact on people's perception of the spoken varieties. The spoken varieties of Arabic are usually looked down upon and viewed as the language of the illiterate. There have been some attempts that advocated for the use of spoken varieties as the medium of instruction (e.g., Al-Tama, 1961). However, such attempts have been disregarded (See reform section).

This attitude towards the spoken varieties of the language was the result of the view that the spoken forms of Arabic have been seen throughout history as the low form of the language and the product of illiteracy among some of its speakers. One reason behind the resistance to using spoken varieties of Arabic as a medium of instruction is that such a transition will deny future generations access to the rich literature that's written in Classical Arabic (Al-Jundi, 1987, cited in Ayari, 1996). This literature represents the highly glorified period of pre-Islamic literature production in the Arab world (Shouby, 1951, p. 289). Another important reason for this resistance is the symbolic value Arabic has among its speakers. Arabic is seen as "a symbol of ethnic unity...and it is essential for any kind of Pan-Arabism" (Bateson, 2003, 79). Religion is also a major factor. The Quran is viewed among Arabs as the word of God and should be preserved in its original language (Shouby, 1951, p. 288). Thus, any attempt at using regional varieties is seen as a threat to such a symbolic unity. For these reasons, among others, various attempts to use or standardize regional varieties have been condemned. Saiegh-Haddad and Spolsky (2014) argue that three main factors make the propositions to standardize regional varieties difficult to attain in the case of Arabic: 1) the lack of

material that is written in the spoken variety, 2) the societal resistance against the use of the spoken varieties to fulfill the functions of the written variety, and 3) the religious and political factors that look at Standard Arabic as a symbol of religious and pan-Arab unity (p.230). Such resistance to the simplification of the written form of Arabic is what seems to be keeping the diglossic situation in Arabic intact. The gap between the written and the spoken forms of Arabic has had a negative impact on the acquisition of literacy and literacy rates throughout the Arab world.

What is Literacy in Arabic?

As mentioned in chapter one, literacy is a difficult term to define, as its definition depends on understanding the socio-cultural contexts of the region/regions under investigation. Literacy and illiteracy reports in the Arab world seem to lack this very basic component—a simple definition of literacy. In addition, or maybe due to the lack of this basic component, there are discrepancies among the literacy/illiteracy reports in the Arab world. For example, Haeri (2009) argues that the discrepancy between the existing reports on literacy is “as much as 20 percent” (p.425). She goes on to critique the available reports’ lack of definition of what literacy is or, even when literacy is defined, it vaguely uses terms such as “adults fifteen years or older who can read and write” (p.425). These concerns about the accuracy of the literacy/illiteracy rates in the Arab world are echoed by Myhill (2014), who attempted to present the literacy situation in the Arab world by combining the existing reports on literacy about different Arab countries. Myhill (2014) looked at the most recent data, 2007-2008, by UNESCO that is available on only 16 out of the 22 countries in the Arab world. The list in which this data was

presented included the literacy rates in a total of 180 countries around the world. The 16 Arab countries that are included are: Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, UAE, Lebanon, Bahrain, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Oman, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Sudan (Northern Sudan), Yemen, and Morocco. 14 out of the 16 Arab countries that are included showed “literacy rates that are lower than the average for the 180 countries listed;” even the two countries that were above average, Kuwait and Qatar, “are barely above average” (Myhill, 2014, p. 198). Myhill (2014) takes his analysis a step further and compares the literacy rates in the 16 countries with their Gross Domestic Production (GDP). He concludes that the high GDP in almost all of these countries should be positively reflected in their literacy rates. As a result, he argues that, in the case of literacy rates in the Arab world, low literacy rates cannot be blamed on lack of resources or poverty. He asserts that the low literacy rates are the result of the linguistic nature of Arabic.

Other researchers have also argued that this discrepancy between the written and the spoken form are responsible for the high illiteracy rates in the Arab world (Alrabaa, 1986; Ayari, 1996; Hammoud, 2005). That’s to say, exposing the students to the written form of the language only in a specific context, school, doesn’t allow students to attain a high level of proficiency in that form. This can also be seen in the lack of demand for books. Del Castillo (2001) discussed the low demand for books in the Arab world in relation to the population size in the area. He states that “there are 275 million Arab speakers in 22 countries, but for Middle Eastern publishers, print runs of 5,000 are considered huge... a best seller in Egypt is a book that reaches just 10,000 copies sold, a tenth of what a best seller in the

United States might do. Only a few books make it into the stratosphere of 50,000 or more copies” (p. 55. Cited in Haeri, 2009, p. 424). The diglossic nature of Arabic, the limited exposure to the written form in and out of school, and the lack of interest in reading in general have concerned educators for years now. These concerns have led to some attempts to bridge the gap between the spoken and written forms of Arabic. The following section will discuss these attempts in more detail.

Illiteracy and Failed Attempts for Reform

The high illiteracy rates in the Arab world have been attributed to the diglossic nature of the language, especially the complexity of the writing system (Al-Toma, 1961; Ayari, 2009). The realization that the challenges of the writing system might be the reason behind the illiteracy rates in the Arab world have led many scholars to propose a reformation of the writing system. These proposals ranged from advocating for the Romanization of Arabic script to the minimization of the different forms that a given letter can have (for full list see Al-Toma, 1961).

The Romanization of the script was proposed so that the Arabic language would share the same letters that the majority of other languages use, which would provide unity between these languages. Even though the adoption of the Roman writing system might sound economical when it comes to writing, it was proven to be problematic when it comes to presenting phonemes that exist in Arabic but can't be presented by the Roman alphabet, for example /h/, /χ/, /ʕ/, /ʔ/, /q/, /s/. One objection behind such a proposition was that those presently literate would have to learn a new alphabet (Al-Toma, 1961, pp. 406-406). Another objection was that

such a change would deny future generations access to the rich literary heritage that most Arabs take pride in.

The proposal for the simplification of letter variation saw that, among other advantages, the approval of such a proposal would facilitate the initial process of learning the written script. The proposal was ultimately dismissed because it failed to include an explanation as to how the *hamza* (the glottal stop) would be simplified, as the *hamza* could appear on different letters depending on the diacritic mark on the preceding letter (Al-Toma, 1961, p. 412). The failure of these attempts at reform leaves the writing system as it is, and the challenges that language users face with the writing system remains.

More recent attempts came in the form of suggestions in journal articles rather than actual proposals for change. For example, Haeri (2009) called for a simplified variety of Arabic to help ease students into the written form. This variety, she continues, should be closer to the spoken variety that the student has already acquired before formal schooling. She sees that the way literacy is practiced in the Arab world now-a-days puts Arab children, especially lower class children, at a disadvantage when asking them to read in a language that is distant from their spoken varieties. This becomes very problematic when it comes to knowledge retention, because “if the pupils do not have a mastery over the vehicle of knowledge, they will perform poorly” (p.426). The literacy situation of upper-class students is not much better, as they are “far more fluent in foreign languages” (p.420). The attempts stated above show that educators and researchers are not satisfied with the current state of literacy in the Arab world. However, there

continues to be a strong resistance from stakeholders and policy makers to any kind of reform.

Beyond the Idealized Picture of Arabic

Given the dynamic nature of languages, it is worth noting here that Ferguson's definition of diglossia paints a deceptive picture of uniformity and exclusivity between the high and the low forms of Arabic. This picture has been criticized by numerous researchers including Ferguson himself, arguing that he was "giving an idealized picture of the situation" (Bassiouney, 2009, p.11). However, Ferguson's initial work on diglossia was comprehensive enough to discuss the stability of diglossic languages over time and how such stability might change. In the case of Arabic, he argues that Arabic has had a long history of being diglossic. Actually the stability of diglossia in Arabic goes "as far back as our knowledge of Arabic goes" (p.327). He also predicted that "diglossia typically persists at least several centuries, and evidence seems to show that it can last well over a thousand years." After this phase of long-lasting stability, he argues, a friction between the two forms of the language might occur, in this case, "[t]he communicative tension which arises in the diglossia situation may be resolved by the use of relatively uncodified, unstable, intermediate forms of the language... and repeated borrowing of vocabulary items from H[igh] to L[ow]" (p. 332). This is what seems to be happening to Arabic in recent years, which is referred to by some scholars as "post-diglossia" (Walters, 2003). This view of diglossia looks at it in terms of a continuum rather than in terms of just two segregated forms.

Diglossia in terms of levels. Among the first researchers to discuss diglossia in terms of levels was Blanc (1960), who identified five levels of diglossia in Arabic: classical, modified classical, semi-literary or elevated colloquial, koineised colloquial, and plain colloquial. Classical here, as I mentioned above, refers to the language of the Quran and the *Hadith*; modified classical is MSA; semi-literary is the form of the language where educated speakers code-switch between MSA and their Colloquial varieties; Koineised Colloquial is the modified form of Arabic that native speakers use to get their message across when they don't share the same native dialect with their interlocutor; and plain Colloquial is the native variety of a given speaker that is only shared with his/her native social/geographic group(s).

Meiseles (1980) also identified diglossia in terms of levels. She identified four levels of diglossia in Arabic: literary Arabic or Standard Arabic, sub-standard Arabic, educated spoken Arabic, and basic or plain vernacular. Literary Arabic and Standard Arabic are used here to refer to CA and MSA respectively, with no distinction between the two; sub-standard Arabic is the native speakers' "attempt to either speak or write in CA" (p. 125); educated spoken Arabic refers to the "informal language used among educated Arabs" (p.126); and the basic or plain vernacular corresponds with Blanc's plain Colloquial above. These are some of the studies that looked at diglossia in terms of levels. They show that the diglossic situation in Arabic can't be easily defined in terms of binaries between the high and the low forms of the language, nor can researchers agree on the different levels of diglossia. This shows that the linguistic situation in the Arab world is much too complicated to be captured by arbitrary labels.

Diglossia and code-switching. The restricted domains or social spheres where the written and vernacular Arabic are used seem to have resulted in an unequal proficiency in one variety over the other. Generally, native speakers of Arabic are more proficient in and comfortable with the spoken variety that they first acquired as children than they are with formal Arabic. Researchers argue that this imbalance in proficiency has led to code-switching between the two varieties of Arabic—formal and vernacular. Code-switching is traditionally defined as “the use of two or more languages in the same conversation or utterance” (Gardner-Chloros, 1997, p.361). Walters (2003) using Tunisian Arabic as his focus, states that, in the case of code-switching in Arabic, “one can imagine two logical possibilities: either the high variety serves as the matrix or the low variety serves as the matrix, with the respective remaining variety serving as the embedded variety” (p. 92). The possibilities of which variety is used as the matrix, is highly influenced by the context in which the interaction is taking place. For example, if the context mandates the use of formal Arabic, then the matrix for that particular interaction is the high variety. An example for this scenario would be a conversation during an “unscripted television interview” (Walters 2003, p. 92). However, the situation is complicated even more when the interlocutors share the same spoken variety of Arabic, but are expected to interact in the formal variety. The interlocutors in this case are more likely to use their spoken variety as the matrix. This also applies to illiterate Arabs who are not necessarily proficient in the high form. They attempt to use the high variety to show that they are capable of using it when they believe that the context requires communication in that variety (Walters, 2003, p. 93).

The phenomenon of code-switching has also been noticed in written communication, where spoken varieties of Arabic are used alongside formal Arabic in situations where only formal Arabic is expected to be used. Belnap and Bishop (2003) studied personal correspondence among native speakers of Arabic from different parts of the Arab world. They found that code-switch happens not only between Modern Standard Arabic and the local spoken varieties, but between Modern Standard Arabic and Classical Arabic.

The findings from Wilmsen's (2010) analysis of newspaper articles corroborate such findings. After analyzing newspaper articles that were written by natives of Levantine and Egyptian dialects, he noted lexical and syntactic traces of these dialects in the newspaper articles that were expected to be written in Modern Standard Arabic, which he identified as "regional *writing styles*" of Arabic (Welmsen, 2010, p. 127, emphasis in the original).

However, Magidow's (2013) study reported contradictory findings. The study surveyed 28 native speakers of Damascene Arabic through their response to a multiple choice test. The multiple-choice responses list prepositional, morphological, structural, and lexical choices that the subjects could choose from. The survey is developed in a manner that some of the choices included one form that is more frequently used in the Damascene variety, while the other form is less frequently or never used. It also included questions that had three forms as options: one spoken and two closer to Modern Standard Arabic (p.149). The findings of the study show that the respondents picked more Modern Standard forms than Colloquial ones on all levels: lexical, morphological, and syntactic. Magidow

(2013) reports that his respondents seem to have consciously avoided the Colloquial form even in instances where the Colloquial option would have been acceptable. After discussing the results of this study along with previous studies with contradictory findings, Magidow (2013) argues that the evidence in this study “suggest that within diglossic environment, there exists multiple and at times conflicting pressures on a speaker trying to use a specific register” (p.159). One thing that needs to be noted here is that the contradictory results in the last study when compared to the first two could be due to the research design itself. While Belnap and Bishop’s (2003) and Wilmsen’s (2010) studies looked at extensive pieces of writing that were composed by native speakers of Arabic, Magidow’s study was limited to a multiple-choice test.

Looking at literacy through the lens of diglossia was an attempt to explain the complex linguistic situation that native speakers of Arabic find themselves in when they write in their native language and how this linguistic situation might affect the way they write in English. I presented the topic of diglossia to make sense of literacy, how literacy is acquired in the context of Arabic, and the problem with defining literacy in the Arab world. Ferguson’s classical definition of diglossia was discussed, along with the implications of identifying the two different levels of a diglossic situation caused by the standard language and localized varieties.

As stated by Alarabaa (1986) and Ibrahim (1983), the difference between the spoken and the written form in Arabic is a key factor in the difficulties some native speakers face with literacy. Moreover, the very definition of what it means to be literate in the Arabic world is at issue. As I mentioned earlier, the definition affects the way it is

addressed. In the case of Arabic literacy, the lack of a clear definition of what literacy is and the lack of reliable literacy rates on all Arab countries will continue to be problematic for any discussion of literacy in the region. There is more to literacy than the ability to read and write. Moreover, the assumption that if students know how to read, they will know how to write by proxy should be questioned.

This way of approaching writing, I would argue, leaves native speakers of Arabic underprepared as writers. This is due to the simple and aforementioned fact that the diglossic situation of reading and writing in Arabic requires different registers. Without the necessary foundation in writing, Arabic students have no way to police themselves, distinguishing what is right from wrong as they transition from one register to another or from one language to another. Up to this point, I have kept the discussion of literacy and literacy acquisition to the Arab world. The following section will discuss literacy in the west.

Theoretical Framework

The debates about literacy and what literacy means have had a longer presence in the west than in the Arab world. This, however, does not mean that researchers have reached consensus about a simple definition of the term. Due to the regional variation in what literacy might mean to individuals in different parts of the world, I believe that doing more research on the topic is an essential step towards understanding it over time and communities and languages. This is exactly what is being done in the west.

The traditional model. The traditional model of literacy views literacy as educational literacy that is defined by and limited to white middle-class children. Literacy here is viewed as a cognitive skill that did not extend to interactions outside of school.

This limited view of literacy was seen as a representation of the whole phenomenon of literacy; the type of literacy that is favored in western middle-class social practice and western education. Street (1984) referred to this view of literacy as the “autonomous” or traditional model of literacy because it looked at literacy as an autonomous entity that exists only in the educational sphere. According to these pre-existing understandings, literacy is primarily an autonomous, cognitive skill—that is, reading and writing are largely based on the ability of the individual to disconnect written language from its original context and to make meaning from the written text. This view, however, is limited, especially if we look at middle-class children’s literacy practices. Due to their social class, they are more likely to have early exposure to preschool literacy when compared to minority children. This shows that there is more to literacy than formal schooling.

The traditional view of literacy also provided a divide between what is known as “oral” cultures and “literate” cultures (Goody; 1986, 1987, 2000; Ong, 1982). These labels valued literate cultures more as they were seen as more sophisticated, civilized, and logical than oral culture. Oral cultures, in turn, were seen as less sophisticated, uncivilized, and illogical (Baynham, 1995, p. 48). The oral/literate divide maintained that the sophistication of literate societies stems from their ability to think in abstraction, since writing involves thinking about and writing to a hypothesized audience. In contrast, oral cultures are more concrete thinkers as all their interactions are face-to-face (Street, 1984, p. 20). What these abstract views of literacy have ignored is the sociocultural context and practices that play a pivotal role in developing and maintaining oral and literacy practices both in and outside of school.

As a result, the exclusion of the out-of-school literacy practices has led to an ongoing literacy crisis, at least in the west. This literacy crisis is manifested in the inability of non-middle class children, usually minorities, to achieve academic success. Thus, the autonomous model of literacy denies the fact that literacy is a situated social practice that is not only restricted to school, but also influenced by power and social class.

New literacy studies. After a number of studies that challenged the autonomous model were carried out, the term New Literacy Studies (NLS) and the ideological model were introduced by Street (1984). Such studies looked at literacy as more than just the ability to read and write and went further to investigate the cognitive effects of literacy (e.g. Scribner & Cole, 1981), as well as the social contexts in which literacy is situated (e.g., Heath, 1983). The ideological model “attempts to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorize it in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded” (Gee, 2012, p. 76).

Street’s (1984) “ideological” model of literacies looked at literacy practices as being multiple in that they are multifaceted. It takes into account, for example, the intended audience and the social settings where literacy is being practiced. Literacy practices are seen as the product of local sociocultural practices and thus are impacted by the local context in which they are used. Looking at literacy practices as complex and context-specific, Street (2003) argues, challenges the traditional approach that is “imposing Western conception of literacy on to other cultures or within a country those of one class or cultural group onto others” (p.77). Heath’s (1983) study was one of the first to use literacy practices to look at how people interact with literacies in a given

social context. Heath's nine-year study of two minority communities in the Carolinas was revolutionary because it challenged the traditional view of literacy as static and provided an alternative view that looked at how literacy is practiced in everyday life. She looked at the literacy practices in these two communities and compared them to literacy practices in mainstream middle-class communities. One overarching finding was that children from minority groups valued literacy differently; and more often than not, they had difficulties transferring school literacy to everyday literacy.

The original purpose of the NLS was therefore to promote an understanding that there are different *literacies* rather than a single *literacy*, and that literacy practices are first and foremost social practices. With this kind of understanding, we can more effectively educate students from non-mainstream backgrounds by working with their pre-existing literacy skills, and we can reform our own models of literacy to be more inclusive and ecumenical.

Adopting this framework to look at L2 students' literacy practices in both their L1 and L2 is crucial to understand the meaning-negotiation process that they go through as they compose in their L2. Investigating the context of a given text is important, as there is a context for every text that gives it meaning and makes it understandable. The investigation of such a context might help answer the following questions: What were the main literacy practices of the students' L1 community? What value does literacy in general hold for the L1 Arab students when they write in English? What kind of literacy practices are the L2 writer exposed to in and outside of school? Thus this dissertation aims to look at this very issue of literacy practices. Below are the research questions that are guiding this research:

1. Where are the participants socialized into literacy practices in their L1?
2. What impact, if any, do cultural, historical, and institutional contexts have on the subjects' literacy?
3. What impact, if any, does diglossia have on the participants' acquisition of reading and writing skills?
4. Where are the participants socialized into literacy practices of their L2?
5. How are their literacy practices in their L2 similar/different from their literacy practices in their L1?
6. How are literacy practices in their L2 influenced by those of their L1?

CHAPTER 3: THE LIFE HISTORY METHOD

This project explores the Arabic and English language literacy practices of a small group of graduate students who are native speakers of Arabic. While preliminary research for this project began in 2011, data collection started in the fall of 2014. The main method of data collection was through oral life-story interviews (e.g., Bell, 1995, 2002, 2011). This chapter begins by defining key terms that are crucial to understanding the life-story method. Subsequently, it will discuss the rationale of selecting this research method despite its inherent challenges. To aid with recall, the research questions will be restated before moving on to the design of the study. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how the data was collected and analyzed.

Life Story

Since the focus of this project is to take a closer look at the participants' past literacy practices and how these practices might shape or influence present ones that the researcher can't have access to, the researcher decided that the best qualitative-inquiry method to serve this purpose is life history. This approach was also selected based on R. Atkinson's (1998) argument that we, as humans, "often think in story forms, speak in story forms, and bring meaning to our lives through story. Storytelling, in its most common everyday form, is giving a narrative account of an event, an experience, or any other happenings" (p.1). In order to present a full account of their life histories, this

project used life-story interviews to gain access to the participants' own life stories and personal experiences with literacy. The researcher draws a distinction between life story and life history following Hatch and Wisniewski's (1995) statement that while life story refers to the story/stories of a person without necessarily referring to the socio-cultural context that might have influenced their account, life history situates such story within the context in which it took place (p.116). As such, while the interviews themselves are life-story interviews, the final presentation of the participants' accounts are considered life histories, as they will be discussed within the socio-cultural and the socio-political context in which they took place.

Life History

In the qualitative research literature, different terminologies have been used to refer to life history under the umbrella of narrative inquiry. These include, but are not limited to: oral autobiography, biographical narrative, life stories, case studies, personal-experience stories, narrative inquiry, in-depth interviews, personal history, and oral history. Hatch & Wisniewski (1995) argue that this variation in terminology is the result of the wide use of life history in different disciplines. Richards (2003) echoes this by stating that life history "presents a terminological challenge" as it is sometimes confused with biographical studies (p.22). As such, he provided a distinction between the two; while in biography, the focus is more on the individual herself, in life history, the focus is on the individual, along with the wider settings where they exist/existed. In order to clearly present the participants' stories, the researcher chose the term "life history" to describe the approach used in this project. Life history is defined here as "any retrospective account by the individual of his/[her] life in whole or in part, in

written or oral form, *that has been elicited or prompted by another person*” (Watson & Watson-Frank, 1985, p.2. As cited in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 125). The researcher chose this term because, it best represents the way the data for this project was collected and presented. Even though the two terms, life and oral history, are very similar in meaning, the way they are used in this project highlights two subtle differences between them. First, while life history could include any form of personal history, including oral, oral history might exclude non-oral accounts. Second, since all accounts are initially generated as oral accounts, which later became life-history representations, the researchers believes, that the two terms are used here to describe different stages of the project.

A Brief History of Life History

While some researchers, (e.g., Nelms, 1992), trace the history of life history, mainly oral history in judicial circles all the way back to the Greeks where “oral and written ‘inartistic’ evidence was generally considered by Greek rhetoricians to be the same in nature” (p. 317), other researchers, like Yow (1994), argue that oral history in the form we know it today began only in 1948 with the work of Alan Nevins, who focused his research on tape-recording oral accounts of male elites (p.3). By the 1960s, tape-recording had spread to non-elites to record memories of ordinary people. Nevins’s early efforts have led to what became known as the Oral History Project at Columbia University, one of the oldest oral history programs in the U.S. (Nelms, 1992). Around the same time, different disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and ethnography, began to adopt oral history, which led to differences in the way the method is being used in these different fields today (Yow, 1994, p.3).

Challenges of using life history. Despite the wide use of life history as a method of inquiry, like any qualitative method, it has been a target to criticism by life history historians and non-historians alike (Nelms, 1992). A number of limitations of life history have been identified in the literature; however, three seem to reoccur: 1) narrow accounts and limited generalizability, and 2) retrospective evidence (Yow, 1994), and bias.

Narrow accounts and generalizability. The near microscopic focus of life history that could be seen as a strength of this approach, due to the “thick” (Geertz, 1973) description it provides, can also be seen as a weakness because it doesn’t allow life history researchers to generalize their findings based on the small sample(s) they observe. Duff (2007) defines generalizability in this context as the “aim to establish the relevance, significance, and external validity of findings for situations or people beyond the immediate research project” (p.48). Due to its inability to provide such generalizability, the life history method, or what is usually referred to as the case study method in the field of SLA, has been considered as “soft or weak approach” when compared to more robust approaches like the quantitative approach (Van Lier, 2005, p. 195).

The idea of generalizing the particular of each case has caught the attention of many qualitative researchers in recent years (Merriam, 2002, 2009; Stake, 2000a, 2000b, 2005, 2006; Yin, 1992, 2003). Although it is difficult to generalize the findings from one or a handful of subjects to a larger group, life history provides researchers with the undeniable benefit of looking at the particulars of each subject, that otherwise, is missed under the broad brush of generalization. Furthermore, the discrepancies

between the findings of different cases could be used as “foods for thought” that could help researchers to further investigate a given issue (Van Lier, 2005, p. 198). Along the same lines, Richards (2011) argues that “the relationship between a particular case and its larger family need not depend on notions of typicality or representativeness... rather the need to learn about the particular case because it raises questions that need to be answered” (p.209). When discussing the value of the particular, D. Atkinson (2005) suggests that “all researchers are actually always somewhere in particular—as well as experiential and human,” thus instead of aiming for objective research, we need to exert “serious efforts to understand the views of the participants” (p.52). However, since “case-by-case uniqueness is seldom an ingredient of scientific theory,” the “search for the particular [continues to] compete with the search for the generalizable” (Stake, 2000, p. 439).

Retrospective evidence. This limitation is at the very core of life history data. One of the main purposes of the life story interviews is to investigate past experiences of the chosen individual/individuals and how such experiences have shaped/are shaping current experiences. Retrospective accounts are seen as problematic here for two reasons: memory distortion and bias.

Memory distortion and bias. The main claim is that the time between the experience and the recollection of the experience somehow “diminishes evidentiary value” (Nelms, 1992). Such claims regarding memory distortion and false representation of past experiences made researchers turn their attention to memory research for answers. For example, Yow (2004) used findings from the research of memory psychologist, David C. Rubin, who found that starting at middle-age, “most

people have more memories from childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood than from most recent years of their lives” (p.19). The distance between the event and the recount might give individuals time to reflect on different experiences and view them as a whole. Other life history researchers present the retrospective account as one of the strengths of life history. For example, Lummis (1988) argues that distance between the event and the recollection is more likely to make these accounts less biased as the people involved are less likely to “feel obliged to defend and justify their current actions” (p.119). Nelms (1992) states that “[f]ew of us would deny the selectivity of human recollection, but it is exactly this selectivity that gives oral history its power” (p.374). The positive aspect of selectivity could be seen in people’s ability to recall incidents that they identify as important or as milestones in their lives (Nelms, 1992; Yow, 1994). Other life history historians, like Thomson (2000), argue that the dispute about retrospective evidence is driven by a more positivist view that claims the existence of an ultimate truth. In this case, life history historians were encouraged to increase the number of interviewees, with the assumption that “the more informants saying the same thing...the greater the likelihood that those things are true” (Nelms, 1992, p. 376). However, with the wide spread use of life history across disciplines, Thomson (2004) argues that the current interest is less on the questioning of the credibility of the method and more on the narrative and the reporting of the information in the final report (p.82).

Bias. In addition to limited generalizability and the unreliability of retrospective memory, bias is seen as another shortcomings of life history. This critique focuses on the researcher herself. Researcher bias has always been a common criticism of

qualitative methods. Here it is targeting the researcher's subjectivity when presenting data. Yow (1994), for example, argues that bias is the trademark of any type of research, qualitative or quantitative. Quantitative researchers use their subjective judgment to choose what they want to focus on in their research. She notes, however, that subjectivity is more apparent in qualitative research. She suggests that qualitative researchers continuously check for bias in their research, to minimize it, but not necessarily eliminate it completely—"We cannot—and do not wish to—pretend to complete objectivity" (p. 10)

Advantages of Using Life History

Despite the criticism of life history, a number of its advocates have pointed out the advantage of using it as a research method. This section will highlight some of these advantages and how this project is benefiting from them.

The first advantage to using life history is the direct access the researcher/interviewer has to the subject of study. This is extremely important when trying to present the interviewee's narrative through in-depth interviews. These interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to "explore the motivations, feelings, and values of informants" (Nelms, 1992, p. 368). The researcher can also question the narrator, should any ambiguity arises in the account.

The second advantage in the case of this project is the retrospective accounts themselves. These accounts provide rich data that, unless documented, might otherwise be lost. Literacy researchers have relied heavily on personal accounts of literacy experiences, as this is one of the most effective, and sometimes only, ways literacy can be understood and recorded as it is experienced in the immediate environments (e.g.,

Heath, 1984). The last advantage is the power that life history has to give marginalized groups a voice. Lummis (1987) argues that the representative power of life history has been one of the driving forces of the life history method. It actually goes a step further than just representing marginalized groups, it calls attention to issues that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Oral History in Applied Linguistics

Even though the term “life history” itself has not been used in the field of applied linguistics, its underlying concepts have been used under the umbrella of narrative or narrative inquiry (Cho, 2010). In recent years, narrative inquiry, especially “learner narratives” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 213) has gained popularity as a research method in the field of applied linguistics (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2011; Bell, 1995, 2002, 2011; Canagarajah, 1996; Cho, 2010; Kouritzin, 2000; Pavlenko, 1998, 2002; Pomerantz & Kearney, 2012). Canagarajah (1996) stated that narratives are gaining popularity:

because they present holistically the local knowledge of the communities studied. In opposition to grand theories and global knowledge structure, narratives present knowledge from the bottom up; in opposition to explicit forms of theorization...narratives represent concrete forms of knowledge that are open to further interpretations. Narratives, then, represent the research process in all its concreteness and complexity. (p. 327)

Narratives give language learners voice and allow “researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity” (Bell, 2002, p. 209). It is “a research method for gathering information on the subjective essence on a person’s entire life” (P. Atkinson, 1998, p.3). It is used to “get accurate descriptions of the interviewees’ life trajectories in social contexts, in order to cover patterns of social relations and processes that shaped them” (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984, p. 215). Like all narratives, the participant in this project

and their personal stories provide essential background information that could help researchers better understand Arab learners.

The life history method, or narrative inquiry, continues to gain popularity in the field of applied linguistics and is widely used to unlock the mysteries of how language(s) are learned in different environments by different learners. As a matter of fact, looking at the onset of the field of SLA, for example, some narrative inquiry studies have actually shaped our understandings of certain concepts like communicative competence (Schmidt, 1986), acculturation theory (Schumann, 1978) (Van Lier, 2011, p. 198), and Duff (2006) argues, more recent studies on identity (Norton, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2001). She continues by stating that “[i]n fact, some of the most influential generalizations and models of SLA have originated from just a small handful of case studies (p. 84). Pavlenko (2002) states that “narrative study in the TESOL field should go beyond what particular narratives are saying and examine whose stories are being heard and why, and whose stories are still missing, being misunderstood, or being misrepresented” (p. 216).

The research on the use of narrative inquiry in applied linguistics has focused more on the power such a method provides for researchers to help them understand language learners rather than to aim for generalizations that are seen as “myths or grand narratives” (Merriam, 2009, p.10). Narratives of language learners allow us to approach these narratives “as discursive constructions rather than factual truths” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 216). In recent years, the use of narrative inquiry in the field of TESOL has been increasing. There is a whole volume of *TESOL Quarterly* (2011) that is devoted to narrative inquiry. This volume presents various methodological tools that language

teachers and researchers alike could use to conduct similar research (e.g., Bell, 2011) as well as some examples of studies that are conducted in the field of TESOL (for a summary of the volume, see Barkhuizen, 2011).

The Focus of the Project

As mentioned above, this project aims to go beyond examining text and, instead, explores literacy in context. That's to say it aims to provide a bottom up view of literacy practices of Arab writers in Arabic and in English. In doing so, this project focuses on the narratives of five native speakers of Arabic's past and present experiences with literacy; more specifically, their subjective understanding and interaction with literacies. The focus on literacy practices, however, does not imply that we should lose sight of the text itself. By exploring these individuals' experiences, and how they process their experiences with literacy in general, this project provides contextual explanations that might help us better understand the L2 text. It is a step towards building an understanding of the context or the different instances where literacy takes place that might contribute, in one way or another, to the production of texts. To challenge the common perception in the literature (See chapter 2) that the written products of the majority of Arab writers is characterized by long sentences and unneeded coordination (Kaplan, 1966; Ostler, 1987), this project, through life history, attempts to show the diversity in backgrounds and literacy practices in a number of Arab countries, to show the impact the environment might have on how literacy is valued and practiced. It will also show the impact diglossia might have on exposure to written Arabic. This project gives voice to five out of the 22 countries in the Arab world. Bilingual/multilingual

individuals from five countries: Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, were interviewed. Their narratives are used to answer the following questions:

1. Where are the participants socialized into literacy practices in their L1?
2. What impact, if any, do cultural, historical, and institutional contexts have on the subjects' literacy?
3. What impact, if any, does diglossia have on the participants' acquisition of reading and writing skills?
4. Where are the participants socialized into literacy practices of their L2?
5. How are their literacy practices in their L2 similar/different from their literacy practices in their L1?
6. How are literacy practices in their L2 influenced by those of their L1?

Using these questions as a guide, the main aim in this study is to present the participants' experiences with literacy and how their experiences have been influenced by the different environments they find themselves in.

Context and recruitment. Four of participants are acquaintances of the researcher. Some were recruited in person, while others were contacted via email. The fifth participant was recruited at a coffee shop on the campus of a large Midwestern university. The researcher asked for her email address and she was later contacted with full details about the study. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, a meeting was set and an interview was conducted. All interviews, except for one, were conducted in person between mid-November and early December 2015. The fifth interview was conducted at the end of July 2015 via Skype.

Participants. All five participants in this project are native speakers of Arabic from different parts of the Arab world. There were three females and two males. All participants were born in their home countries between 1986 and 1978 (See Table 1). At the time of this study, four participants were working on their PhDs and one on her second MS. All participants were residing in the U.S., except for one who was residing in Malaysia.

Project Procedures

Interviews. Following common interviewing guidelines (D. Atkinson, 2002; Anderson & Killenberg, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Spradley, 1979), as well as life-story interviews (P. Atkinson, 1998), the researcher conducted open-ended interviews in person with the subjects who reside in the U.S. and via Skype with the subject who resides outside of the U.S. The researcher used common techniques from general, open-ended, and life-story interviews to help keep the participants on track when they answered open-ended questions about their literacy practices. P. Atkinson (1998) encourages researchers, when conducting open-ended interviews to have a set of “possible questions” that the researcher could draw on should the subjects digress while telling their stories (p. 41)

All interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 45-90 minutes (See Appendix B for focus interview questions). In order to accommodate the linguistic needs of the interviewees, the interviewees were given the option to use Arabic or English, depending on which language they feel better conveys their past/present literacy practices in both languages. The interviewees were also encouraged to code-switch between the two languages if they felt the need to do so. This linguistic

flexibility for conducting the interviews is accounted for for two reasons: 1) previous research found that narratives told in one language might be “shaped by” narrative structure in another language (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 214). This mismatch in narrative expectations in one language and the use of a different language might cause the interviewer to misunderstand the interviewees’ stories; 2) the language in which the interviewees choose to answer the questions might be seen as either a source of empowerment or it might be more immediate to their past experiences with literacy, especially if we assume that most of their early literacy practices happened when they only spoke Arabic. Due to these factors, the choice of the language used to tell their life stories or to answer the interview questions was left to the interviewees.

Data sources and coding. The main sources of data for this project are the narratives that were elicited by the life story-interviews. Historical and institutional reports were also used to construct each participant’s country profile (see Chapter 4). After the interviews were conducted, the audio files were uploaded to *NVivo*³ and the transcription of the interviews began in mid-February 2015 and continued until all interviews were transcribed. However, no codes were created until early July 2015 after all the interviews were transcribed. The researcher used a full-broad transcription technique (Revesz, 2011) to transcribe the data, where little attention is paid to details (e.g., tone, length of pauses, rising intonation, etc.). The researcher transcribed all interviews in English. Arabic words that the participants code-switched to occasionally, were transliterated and the English equivalent was provided next to them (See Appendix C for transcription conventions). Besides omitting false starts, no other modifications

³ *Nvivo* 10 was used.

were made to the original responses. Once all the interviews were transcribed, the data was reviewed multiple times and broad codes were created using the “nodes” function in *NVivo* (e.g., Preschool Literacy, School Literacy, etc.). The initial phase of coding followed the “bucket coding method” (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, p.71) where data was coded in chunks. However, as the coding progressed, some of the categories were expanded and sub-codes or “child nodes” (e.g., Preschool Literacy → Quranic Schools → Literacy at Home) were also created. Other categories were collapsed (e.g., Value and importance of reading/Value and importance of writing → Value and importance of reading and writing). See Appendix D for list of initial nodes.

Due to the adaptive nature of *NVivo*, codes can be generated, expanded upon, or deleted during the coding process. Passages can also be coded under different nodes. For example, a passage that focuses on preschool literacy, can be coded simultaneously under Quranic schools and preschool literacy. Memos were kept throughout the coding process to account for the decisions made as the coding progressed.

Intra-Coder agreement. All interviews were structured interviews in which the researcher used a set of scripted questions to illicit specific responses about the interviewees’ literacy experiences. Each interviewee received the same set of questions and minimal digression from these questions was observed. Due to the nature of structured interviews, the content of the responses is delimited by the questions asked. This is not a phenomenon restricted to this project, other language researchers have identified similar confounds. Leki, (2007), for example, described a similar issue when reporting on case-study interviews. She discussed the choices that the qualitative researcher has to make when reporting on themes that were actually “imposed through

the interview questions” (p.8). This is very much the case in this project. The researcher approached the participants with a clear idea of what the focus of the interview would be. As such, the scripted questions might have controlled their responses and the researcher is acutely aware of that. The researcher is also aware that the interview questions might have restricted the codes that were generated after the data was collected. Thus, the nature of this project makes absolute intra-coder agreement in the coding process a bit of a challenge as the initial codes were generated by the interview questions.

However, and despite the aim for intra-coder reliability in qualitative research, Bazeley & Jackson (2013) question the value for achieving such reliability in projects that are conducted by a single researcher. They argue that “[e]ach person approaching the data will do so with their own goals and perspective, and so each will see and code differently. Coding is designed to support analysis—it is not an end in itself” (p.93). What they emphasize, instead, is the reliability achieved through detailed memos about the decisions made during the coding process. Yet other qualitative researchers argue that some sort of agreement should be provided. One form of intra-coder agreement can be achieved by stepping away from the data and recoding the data in a reverse order to eliminate any factors such as fatigue and boredom from affecting the coding process (Revez, 2012). Miles & Huberman (1991) propose another reliability measure that checks the internal consistency in the coding process. This is measured by recoding the data after some time has passed then comparing the two sets of coded data. Following Miles and Huberman’s (1991) reliability measure, simple agreement in this project was accounted for by: 1) creating a copy of the original data using *NVivo* where only the

transcription and the nodes were selected and imported, giving the researcher a clean data set to work with, 2) recoding the data after three weeks, 3) selecting random fifteen-minute chunks of data at the thirty minute mark of each interview, starting with the first full question or utterance, and stopping at the forty-five minute mark, 4) after the coding was done, generating two separate reports of the “coding summary by source” using the “report” function in *NVivo*, and 5) comparing the two sets of coding; an intra-coder agreement of 90% was achieved.

Since the participants’ experiences with literacy have been influenced by their immediate environment, a consideration of this environment is crucial to situate their experiences within the socio-cultural, as well as, socio political contexts that may have influenced their experiences. In order to situate their literacy practices within the larger cultural, historical, and institutional constitutional contexts, the following chapter will present sociolinguistic profiles of the participants’ home countries.

Table 1 Participants' Demographic Information

Name (pseudonym)	Year of Birth	Country of Origin	Gender	Years Living in the US⁴	Height Degree Earned	Profession	Mother's education	Mother's Profession	Father's Education	Father's Profession
Basma	1986	Kuwait	F	1 year	MS	Student	Diploma (teacher's college)	Teacher (Home economics)	Middle-school Diploma	Retired
Kreem	1987	Algeria	M	6 years	MA	Teaching assistant	Middle-school diploma	Teacher (French)	No formal schooling (Quranic school)	Clerk
Nasir	1979	Saudi Arabia	M	4 years	MA	Teaching assistant	Semi-illiterate	Housewife	High school diploma	Deceased
Shayma	1978	Yemen	F	2.5 years	MA	Research assistant	Middle-school diploma	Housewife	MA (Arabic literature) PhD (Modern History)	Deceased
Summer	1978	Jordan	F	3 years	MA	Teaching assistant	High school diploma	Housewife	MA (engineering)	Retired

⁴ The number of years shown here are cumulative, showing the total amount of time the participants spent in the U.S when the interviews were conducted. Some participants went back to their home countries in the intervening years.

CHAPTER 4: HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS

The information gathered during the interviews indicates that historical, political, and educational contexts have made an undeniable impact on the literacy practices of the participants in this study. As the education system of any given country is the byproduct of its historical and political contexts, the participants' experiences seem to have been influenced by such factors. For example, the participants' experiences show that while their school literacy is influenced by the quality of the education system itself, their home literacy is limited by the degree of literacy exposure of their parents, as well as the overall cultural perceptions of literacy. In order to present the participants' experiences with literacy within their historical and socio-political contexts, this chapter presents profiles of all the participants' native countries: Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Each section begins by providing the geographical location of each country, then sketching a brief sociolinguistic profile and investigating the impact of political issues on education, and concluding with a presentation of the structure of the current education system

Algeria



Figure 1 Map of Algeria

Location. Algeria is located in North Africa, bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the North, Tunisia and Libya to the East, and Morocco to the West. It has a total population of 39,542,166. Though 99% of Algerians are ethnically Berber, only 15% self-identify as such. This minority is found in the mountainous eastern region of Kabyle. The remaining 1% of those living in Algeria are expatriate Europeans (World Factbook, Algeria, 2015).

Overview. Although Arabic is the official language of Algeria, the country is linguistically diverse. The Algerian linguistic landscape has been influenced by its history and tribal culture. The French colonization from 1830 to 1962 resulted in the strong integration of the French language in Algerian society, which presently functions as Algeria's lingua franca. In addition to French, various Berber regional dialects are widely used across the country. These dialects include: Tamazight, spoken by Kabylie

Berber; Tachawit, spoken by Chaouia Berber; and Tamahaq, spoken by Mzab and Tuareg Berber. All these dialects can still be encountered throughout the country.

Education. Due to its colonial past, the history of education in Algeria is very complicated. Like many colonial powers, France attempted to impose its language and culture on the locals. In many cases, these attempts were faced with substantial resistance. Since the onset of the presence of France in Algeria, Algerians opposed the French and thus avoided contact with the French whenever possible. Heggoy (1973) argues that middle class Algerian families were the most successful in minimizing their contact with the French and other European settlers. The wealthy Algerian elites at the top of the social strata and the poor at the bottom had the most contact with the occupying French (p.181).

Algerians stubbornly resisted France's attempts to promote and instill its language and Francophile culture. This resistance was especially apparent in Algerian opposition to French-sponsored education. Large numbers of locals outright refused to enroll their children in French schools. Only a small number of children, mainly boys, were enrolled in such schools. This perceived lack of interest in education began to concern the French rulers. In an attempt to increase the number of students in schools, in 1917, a government decree made primary education universal and compulsory to all Algerian boys (Heggoy, 1973, p.185). Gradually, some Algerians warmed slightly to the idea of allowing the French to educate their children. While most Algerians continued to loathe French colonialism, a few sought to enroll their children in French schools in the hope that it would lead to a better life and future. Still, those who enrolled

their children sought French education as a means to an end. At home, they maintained their steadfast loathing of all things French.

In addition to French schools, two other forms of schools were present in Algeria while it was under French rule: the Association of Reformist Ulama (ARU) and Quranic Schools. The ARU was established in 1931 by prominent Islamic scholar Sheik Abdel-Hamid Ben Badis. The French immediately viewed Ben Badis as an opposition figure, someone who had the potential to foment anti-French sentiment. That said, Ben Badis did not intend to openly oppose the French, but to provide Islamic education to Algerian children and teach them the language of the Quran, Arabic. Still, the occupying French had reasons to be concerned, as there was an undercurrent of nationalistic anti-colonial sentiment being fostered within the ARU schools. In addition to exposing children to the Quran and Arabic, ARU schools taught other subjects like mathematics, history, and geography. In order to reinforce the lessons of the Quran and strengthen students' use of the Arabic language, no subjects were taught in French. It has been rumored that teachers derived an immense satisfaction from not speaking French. By 1936, the ARU founded 130 schools. The slogan of these schools, which resonated with most Algerians, was "Islam is my religion; Arabic is my language; Algeria is my fatherland" (Heggoy, 1973, p.187-188). Quranic Schools in Algeria served the same purpose as in other Arab countries; providing children with basic literacy skills through the teaching of the Quran.

Outside of the ARU and the Quranic schools, exposure to Arabic was limited, as French was used as the predominant means of communication. The teaching of Arabic in French schools was limited to "two and a half hours of Colloquial Arabic a week"

however, the lack of Arabic-language teachers made it difficult to offer such classes (Heggoy, 1973, p.189). As French was the medium of instruction and Arabic was only taught as a school subject depending on the availability of teachers, students who wished to pick Arabic as one of their high-school electives had to take classes after school that wouldn't count towards their GPAs. Yet, again, there weren't enough teachers to meet the need (Heggoy, 1973, p.189, p. 190-191).

It wasn't until 1947 that Arabic was formally recognized as the official language of Algeria and the use of Arabic in schools began to gain ground. However, the lack of qualified Arabic teachers in schools that used Arabic as the medium of instruction continued years after the initial acceptance of Arabic as the official language. Thus, French remained the language of instruction in school.

Despite the availability of free education in Algeria, the vast majority of parents refused to enroll their children in French-run public schools. Student enrollment remained astonishingly low (Hourani, 1991, p. 368). In an attempt to improve the literacy rates, France created a number of adult education programs aimed at teaching youth between the ages of fourteen to eighteen basic reading and writing skills in French to create "Francophile Algerians". The hope was that these students would be better prepared for industrial jobs. These adult education programs were mainly taught by soldiers (Heggoy, 1973, p. 194).

Eventually, the Ulama schools were closed in 1956 due to "nationalistic activities" that were seen as undermining the French's grip on education (Heggoy, 1973, p. 190). By 1960 there was, on average, "one Arabic teacher for every 1,200" (p.

191) students. The lack of qualified Arabic-teachers continued after Algeria gained its independence in 1961.

Education after Independence. When Algeria gained its independence in 1961, four languages were used in the country: Quranic or literary Arabic, Colloquial-Algerian Arabic, Berber, and French. Quranic Arabic was mainly used for literary purposes like reading the Quran and fulfilling other religious duties. Algerian Arabic was used for everyday communication, to a certain extent. French was still the dominant language in schools and for conducting business. Berber was only spoken by a minority group of people in the Kabylia, Aures, and Mazeb regions, and they only spoke it as a home language amongst themselves (Grandguillaume, 2004, p. 2).

It was during this transitional period that the newly independent Algerian government launched a far-reaching language policy. The policy was dubbed “Arabization” (Grandguillaume, 2004; Benrabah, 2007a; Benrabah, 2007b). Arabization was the Algerian government’s attempt to persuade Algerians to return to their roots by promoting the importance of the Arabic language and culture. The aim was to establish Modern Standard Arabic as the dominant language amongst its citizens at the expense of other languages in the country: French, Algerian Arabic, and Berber. In the following years, Arabization was promoted in all sectors, including higher education.

Despite implementing Arabic as its national language in 1960 and gaining independence from France in 1962, Algeria’s illiteracy rates remained absurdly high. In 1962, an estimated 90% of the 10 million ethnic Algerians were illiterate. By 1963, an estimated 300,000 Algerians could read literary Arabic, one million were literate in

French, and six million spoke French (Benrabah, 2007b, p. 194). The number of Arabic-language teachers remained low. In 1962-1963, of the total number of 23,556 primary school teachers, only 3,342 were Arabic-speaking teachers (International yearbook, 1963, p. 13). In primary schools Arabic was taught for seven hours a week and French for twenty three hours. One hour of extra Arabic instruction was added in secondary schools. There was also a restoration of over 150 schools that were either completely or partially destroyed during the liberation war. The improved infrastructure resulted in an overall increase of 43% in student enrollment that year (p.14). Following Algeria's independence, a large number of French teachers left Algeria.

The Algerian government began actively recruiting Arabic and French speaking Algerians to be enrolled in teacher-training programs. These efforts increased the number of teachers in these teacher-training programs from 237 prior to Algeria's independence to 656 in 1962. While the increase in student enrollment in these programs was promising for the future of the education system in Algeria, it did not provide any immediate supply of teachers necessary to alleviate the shortage of teachers at the time. Accordingly, the Algerian government decided to fill this gap by hiring non-Algerian Arabic and French teachers. 12,125 French teachers from French-speaking countries were recruited; 9,900 primary school teachers and 2,225 secondary school teachers. In addition, 1,932 Arabic teachers were recruited from other Arab countries to meet the immediate need (International Year, Algeria, 1964, p. 12-13).

By 1966, the illiteracy rates among Algerians seemed to be improving at 74%. 5.5% of Algerians were literate in Arabic, 10.6% of Algerians were literate in Arabic and French, and 8.9% of Algerians were literate in French only (Grandguillaume, 2004,

p. 15). Modern Standard Arabic continued to be the language of instruction in the primary and secondary stages of education, but French was still used in universities and technical institutes. French was and remained the only foreign language in primary and secondary schools until the 1990s. In 1993, English was introduced as a second foreign language, as a competitor to French, starting from the fourth grade (Benrabah b, 2007b, p. 194). However, enrollment in English classes was noticeably low in comparison to French classes, and the Algerian government's attempt to limit the demand on French failed.

As for Arabic, the Arabization language policy continued to be applied across Algeria until 1999 when Berbers rebelled, claiming that the Arabic language posed a threat to their language, culture, and their self-identity (Grandguillaume, 2004, p. 4). Around that time, President Bouteflika made efforts to relax the government's emphasis on Arabization. As a result, in 1995, one Berber dialect, Tamazigh, became publicly recognized and the first Berber dialect to be taught in schools (Ministry of Education, 2015). In 2001, Berber was recognized as a national language in Algeria (Albirani, 2016, p. 38). This led to a divergence in the educational system towards multilingualism that is still in effect to this day. Table 3 below shows a breakdown of the modern education system in Algeria.

Table 2 Breakdown of the Education System in Algeria

Education Levels ⁵	Attendance	Duration in years	Age range
Pre-school	optional	2	4-5
Elementary school	mandatory	9	6-15
High School ⁶	Optional	2	15-18
College	optional	4-7	18-27

Jordan

**Figure 2 Map of Jordan**

Location. Jordan is located in the northwest of Saudi Arabia, between Iraq and Israel. It is bordered by Syria in the North. It has a total population of 8,117,564. Ethnically, it is comprised of 98% Arabs, 1% Armenian, and 1% Circassians. (The

⁵ Education System in Algeria (n.d.)

⁶ This level of schooling is divided into humanities and science

World Factbook, Jordan, 2015). Arabic is the official language of Jordan, and English is widely used for communication in different sectors.

Overview. Being formed in 1946 and gaining its independence from Britain in 1961, Jordan is considered as one of the youngest countries in the Arab world. Prior to WWI, Jordan like the majority of that area in the Middle East was part of the Arab territories that were under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. However, after WWI, Britain and France were determined to gain control over the Levantine region. On May 19th, 1916 Britain and France signed a secret agreement where they divided the Arab territories in that region that were still part of the Ottoman Empire at the time. That's what became to be known as the Sykes-Pico agreement that is said to have taken place on a map where France and Britain demarcated their desired areas. Trans-Jordan, what became modern Jordan, was one of the territories that Britain claimed (Hourani, 1991, p. 318; Britain and France, 2009). In order to grant semi-autonomy to Jordan, Britain assigned King Hussein to rule the country under its supervision. This marked the beginning of the rule of the Hashemite Dynasty that is still in power today.

Education System. The interest in the development of the education system in Jordan began with the formation of the country. Prior to and during the 1950s, the Jordanian government made a concerted effort to continuously reform and improve the education system. The government did this by conducting periodical evaluations to ensure that the quality of education met set standards (Roy & Irelan, 1992, p. 180). Between 1951 and 1952, there were 56 new schools built with 292 new teachers hired. In addition to the 628 government-run schools, there were 238 Muslim and Christian private schools. There were also 145 Unrwa schools, which were specialty schools that

were established in order to meet the specific needs of Palestinian refugee children (Congalton, 1956, p. 2).

There was also a number of *Kuttab* or Quranic Schools that were operating in the area for centuries. The number of these schools, with the expansion in secular educational facilities, began to decline. By 1952, there was a noticeable decrease of Kuttabs in Jordan except in villages where formal schools were not available (International Yearbook, 1952, p.193).

Despite the emphasis on primary and secondary education, Jordan completely lacked institutions of higher education. Students who wished to gain higher degrees were forced to travel to other Arab countries such as Egypt and Iraq, which had more developed education systems. The Jordanian government recognized the benefits of an educated populace and so took steps to subsidize this student exodus. They did this through providing scholarships for students to study abroad. Between 1951 and 1952, there were 641 men and 42 women studying abroad on governmental scholarships (International Yearbook, 1952, p.194).

Jordan's education system continued to improve. By the 1960s, major educational policies took place: Law No. 16 of 1964 laid out a comprehensive plan for reform that included chapters on "the aim and philosophy of education, types of education establishments, compulsory education, secondary education teacher training establishments, teaching staff, curricula and textbooks, general examinations, private educational establishments, school buildings, health education, scholarships, adult education, etc." (International Yearbook, Jordan, 1964, p. 183). Two major changes this law brought about were making education compulsory for the first nine years of

schooling and the institution of two tracks at the secondary level: academic and vocational (Roy & Irelan, 1992, p.181). Making education compulsory dramatically increased the number of students enrolled in public schools. Suddenly, Jordan found that it did not have the teaching staff to support the added pupils. As a result, the Jordanian government scrambled to expand its teacher training and certification programs.

To properly implement different chapters of Law No. 16 of 1964, the Jordanian government hired curriculum design specialists who revised and augmented old curricula. The new curricula were introduced in 1965. One of the main changes when it came to Arabic language teaching was the introduction and implementation of single a book that combined Arabic grammar and composition; previously these subjects had been treated as two separate subjects. Another change in the approach to teaching the Arabic language was the unprecedented introduction of an Arabic-reading primer. It is said that Jordan was the first Arab country to use such a device; “This primer is used during the first grade in order to prepare for systematic acquisition of reading and writing skills” (International yearbook, Jordan, 1967, pp. 236-237). In line with its mission to provide quality education to all its citizens, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor initiated an adult literacy campaign in November 1965 to provide education to adult learners between the ages of 20-40. This program established 54 literacy centers across the country (International yearbook, 1967, p. 238).

In the 1970s, the Jordanian government began to take stock of its workforce. The government noted deficiencies in its workforce and so moved to develop academic

and vocational programs to better prepare Jordanian citizens to meet the demands of the labor pool (Roy & Irelan, 1992, p.181).

By the 1980s, the Jordanian education system was one of the strongest and most well-organized systems in the Middle East (Roy & Irelan, 1992, p.181). Due to the size of the country in relation its population and the lack of its natural resources, the Jordanian government focused on producing manpower that would help develop the infrastructure and economy of Jordan and neighboring Arab countries. Jordanian citizens came to be respected for their excellent education and training. The country took pride in providing human resources to oil-rich countries, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Such a highly esteemed workforce is not borne in a vacuum. In order to produce the highest caliber of future employees, Jordan had to first establish a functioning system of higher education. In 1985, the Ministry of Higher education was established to provide support to the three national universities in the country: Jordan University, Yarmouk University, and Mu'tah University (Roy & Irelan, 1992 p. 184).

The English language was strongly represented in Jordan due to its history as a British mandate. English was first introduced in a small number of schools as a school subject in the 1920s (Hamdan & Abu Hatab, 2009, p. 402). Since then, English has remained a subject with a strong presence in the country outside of school curricula. By the early 1980s, with the increase in the prominence of English throughout the world, English in Jordan began to be viewed as more than a school subject. It became “a common medium of communication that Jordan can use to promote its relations and cooperation with the world at large” (Hamdan & Abu Hatab, 2009, p. 403). Despite the

Jordanians' acute awareness of the importance of English, it continued to be offered starting in the fifth grade. By 2001, English started to be offered in the first grade. Presently, the English language is widely used on street signs, and there are a number of radio and television channels that broadcast mainly in English. It remains the only foreign language that is offered in Jordanian schools (Hamdan & Abu Hatab, 2009, p. 395)

Nowadays, English is widely used as the medium of instruction at higher education institutions in Jordan, especially for scientific and medical purposes. In order to prepare students for such a requirement, since the 1990s, all secondary school students have had to take two English-language courses that focus on developing their communicative skills (Hamdan & Abu Hatab, 2009, p. 403-404). In addition, all students must take and pass the General Secondary Examination in order to successfully complete secondary school. Students that successfully pass the examination will earn a certificate that allows them to attend universities. Below is the breakdown of the education system in Jordan.

Table 3 Breakdown of the Education System in Jordan

Education Levels ⁷	Attendance	Duration in years	Age range
Pre-school	optional	1-2	4-5
Basic Education	mandatory	10	6-16
High School ⁸	optional	1	17-18
College ⁹	optional	4-7	18-27

⁷ (The Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 13).

⁸ This level of schooling is divided into humanities and science.

⁹ Community colleges are also available at this stage of education.

Kuwait



Figure 3 Map of Kuwait

Location. Kuwait is located on the northwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered by the Persian Gulf on the East, Iraq on the Northwest, and Saudi Arabia on the Southeast. Its total area is 17,818 square kilometers with a population of close to three million. Its population is comprised of 31.3% Kuwaitis, 27.9% other Arabs, 37.8% Asians, 1.9%, Africans and 1.1% of other nationalities (The World Factbook, Kuwait, 2015).

Overview. Trade sustained Kuwait's economy for much of its past. In recent years, Kuwait's economy has been heavily dependent on oil production. Though Arabic is the official language of Kuwait, English is widely used due to previous British colonization and Kuwait's current oil trade-based relations with the West. Kuwait is a constitutional emirate that was under British supervision from 1899 until it gained its independence in 1961. Throughout the British supervision period, Kuwait was under the

rule of the Sabah Dynasty. The Sabah royal family remained in power until Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in 1990. This initial aggression led to what came to be known as the Gulf War. The Gulf War was motivated by a dispute over the ownership of Kuwait's bountiful oil fields. Iraqi forces were successful in briefly occupying strategic portions of Kuwait. However, in 1991, with the help of the U.S. and the UN military forces, the Sabah Dynasty was returned to power and has remained in power ever since.

Education System in Kuwait. The education system in Kuwait began as most education systems in the Arab world did: with the establishment of *Kuttab* or Quranic Schools. Quranic Schools were designed to teach children the Quran, the holy text of the Muslim faith. The Quran was written in Arabic and so, through Quranic studies, students mastered the Arabic language. Traditionally, Quranic schools focus mainly on reading, as reading skill is essential to reciting the Quran which is seen as the backbone of Islamic education. Since the primary goal of Quranic Schools is the memorization of the Quran, writing is of a secondary importance in the majority of Quranic Schools. When writing is used, it is mainly used to aid memorization and improve handwriting. In the case of Quranic Schools in Kuwait, Nashif (1985) argues that there was greater emphasis on writing in Kuwait than there was in other Arab countries. After memorizing parts of the Quran and being able to recite them, children are initially asked to write on wooden slates. As they become skillful, they are asked to use a pen and paper (Nashif, 1985, p. 15). Imams or Sheikhs, religious leaders, who have memorized the Quran in a similar manner, usually either volunteer to teach at Quranic Schools or are hired by families to teach their children in exchange for a small monetary fee.

Quranic Schools were the only form of education available in Kuwait until Al-Mubarakiyah was founded in 1912, becoming the first formal school for boys. This school was established as the merchants in Kuwait at the time realized that education was essential to their trade business. They also realized that the overall advancement of other Arab countries, such as Egypt and Iraq, was predicated on the existence of such academic institutions. The merchants of the town where Al-Mubarakiyah was located also dictated the curriculum. Not surprisingly, the curriculum focused primarily on the teaching of the Arabic language, the Quran, and Arab civilization, and to a lesser extent geometry and division of share: the Islamic custom of dividing the inheritance of a dead relative. Geography was also studied as a subject, especially the geography of the countries that Kuwait was conducting trade with (Nashif, 1985, p. 17). Being the only formal school in Kuwait, Al-Mubarakiyah actively resisted any attempts at reform by the school council. The school insisted on maintaining its focus on traditional curriculum, refusing to teach English or any other contemporary subjects. In response, the school council established Al-Ahmadeya school for boys in 1921. Al-Ahmadeya was named after Emir Shaik Ahmad Al-Jabir who requested the addition of English to Al-Ahmadeya school. All in all, both schools were said to have similar curriculum except for the teaching of the English language (Al-Wadi, 1959; Nashif, 1986).

The Kuwaiti education system remained focused on educating boys. To meet growing demand, a third school for boys was established in 1935. At the time, girls' education was limited to the recitation of the Quran in Quranic Schools. Girls were not introduced to writing to avoid initiating anything that might lead to "love-letter writing" (Al-Wadi, 1959, p.102). The exclusion of girls from formal education began to change

with the discovery of oil in 1938. Overnight, Kuwait went from a local trade-based economy to one based on the production and export of oil. The sudden increase of wealth and global influence fueled a rise of progressivism in the Kuwaiti education system. Accordingly, the first school for girls was established in 1939 (Al-Wadi, 1959, p.102). With the increase in oil revenues, the education system continued to boom. In 1961, Kuwait gained its independence. Since then, public education in Kuwait has been free and compulsory for all males and females from the age of four to fourteen. See table 4 below for the breakdown of the current education system.

Table 4 Breakdown of the Education System in Kuwait

Education Levels ¹⁰	Attendance	Duration in years	Age range
Pre-school	optional	2	4-5
Elementary school	mandatory	5	6-10
Middle School	mandatory	4	10-14
High School	optional	3	14-17
College ¹¹	optional	4-7	18-27

¹⁰ (Kuwait-Education System, 2015).

¹¹ Vocational institutions are also available at this stage of education

Saudi Arabia



Figure 4 Map of Saudi Arabia

Location. Saudi Arabia is located in the Arabian Peninsula north of Yemen. It stretches between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Its total population is 27,752,316. 90% of which are Arabs, and the remaining 10% are Afro-Asians (World Factbook, Saudi Arabia, 2015).

Overview. During its height, the Ottoman Empire controlled much of the Arabian Peninsula. The Ottomans first pushed into what is present day Saudi Arabia in the 1500s. At the time, the most powerful tribe in the region was the House of Saud. They were in the process of attempting to link pockets of regional support and expand their area of control. With the arrival of the Ottoman Empire, the Saud family's expansion was effectively checked. Following WWI, the British found a common ally in the House of Saud. Together, they were able to expel the Turks from the Arabian Peninsula. Through this, the Saudi family rose to prominence and took control of the region. In 1932 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was officially founded.

Education system. Being the birthplace of Islam, *Kuttab*s, Quranic Schools, were established in Saudi Arabia as early as the 7th Century. These schools focused mainly on the teaching of the Quran; sometimes the teaching extended to include developing children's basic reading and writing skills. However, the main purpose and focus of the *Kuttab*s was the memorization of the Quran. Since this form of education was the only type of formal schooling that was available at the time, students who decided to further their knowledge of Islam took part in more advanced Islamic disciplines of study that typically took place at a mosque. These fields of study included: "*Hadith* (prophetic traditions), *Tafsir* (exegesis of the Quran and *Hadith*), *Sharia* (Islamic creed), *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and *fara'id* (law of inheritance)" (Education in Saudi Arabia, 1991, p. 2).

Being one of the trade centers in the Arabian Peninsula and the destination for *haj*, pilgrimage, Saudi Arabia was a great hub for interactions between intellectuals at the time. Such interactions created a fertile environment for scholarship that went beyond religious studies to include arithmetic, geometry, algebra, logic, astronomy, geology, and medicine (Education in Saudi Arabia, 1991, p. 3). Secular research continued to bloom until the 11th Century when the religious entities that were sponsoring such advancements grew concerned about the impact this might have on religious studies. This, combined with the Ottoman Empire's presence in the area did not help with the development of education in Saudi Arabia (Education in Saudi Arabia, 1991, p. 3). As a result, religious education was the only type of education that was available in Saudi Arabia until 1925. In 1925 the Directorate of Education was established, which resulted in the first government-sponsored elementary school in the

country. After that, more and more elementary schools were established and, three years after Saudi Arabia was founded, in 1935, the first secondary school was established (Education in Saudi Arabia, 1991, p. 4).

The discovery of oil in 1938 marked a new era in Saudi Arabia's history, which was positively reflected in the country's investment in education. In the early stages of the development of the education system, male education took precedence over female education. Different educational entities were established to cater to the need for more educational facilities. The Ministry of Education was established in 1952 to supervise general education for all male students. Twenty-three years later, in 1975, the Ministry of Higher Education was established to supervise higher education for male students. It wasn't until 1960 that the General Presidency of Girl's Education was founded (GPGE)¹². The GPGE oversees programs for female students at all education levels, including post-secondary training (World Data, 2010, p. 5). The General Organization for technical Education and Vocational Training is responsible for all vocational programs in Saudi Arabia. In addition to these educational entities, the Department of Popular culture within the Ministry of education is responsible for providing literacy classes to adults to eradicate illiteracy. All literacy classes are evening classes that utilize public school facilities and teachers. These programs focus on teaching basic reading and writing skills as well as arithmetic to provide education that is equivalent to a fourth-grade level. When adults reach that level, they are awarded a Literacy Certificate (Educational System, 2006, p.7)

¹² In 2003, the GPGE was dissolved and its duties were added to those of the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2015)

Even though education for boys and girls is segregated, the curriculum is more or less the same. The only differences between the subjects offered are that boys are required to take physical education while girls must take home economics (Sedgwick, 2001). Due to the conservative nature of the Saudi culture, the gender of the teachers corresponds with that of the students. Still, exceptions are occasionally made. This usually results in a male teacher teaching female students in subjects that are related to science and medicine at the university level. When this is done, the male instructor would sit in a separate room from his female students. He would then lecture through a “close-circuit television” system (Education in Saudi Arabia. 191, p. 13). The only educational institution where male and female students are not segregated and are permitted to take classes together is in King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST). KAUST was established in 2010 and has 840 students, 401 postdoctoral researchers and 132 academic staff (Havergal, 2015).

Between 1967 and 1968, 53 schools were built and 145 were in the process of being built (International yearbook, Saudi Arabia, 1968, p. 417). In the same year, the Saudi Arabian government granted 171 scholarships to Saudi and non-Saudi Arabian students to further their education, above the primary level, abroad (p. 420). Today, education in Saudi Arabia is more secular than before, but the teaching of Islamic studies and the Arabic language have a heavy presence in the curriculum throughout all educational levels. English is offered in the 7th grade. By 2014, there were 25 public universities, as well as a growing number of vocational institutions and private universities (Ministry of Higher Education, 2015).

Table 5 Breakdown of the education system in Saudi Arabia

Education Levels	Attendance	Duration in years	Age range
Pre-school	optional	2	4-5
Elementary school	mandatory	6	6-12
Middle School	optional	3	12-15
High School ¹³	optional	3	15-18
College ¹⁴	optional	4-7	18-27

Yemen

**Figure 5 Map of Yemen**

Location. Yemen is located in the southernmost tip of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered by Oman to the East, Saudi Arabia to the North, the Arabian Sea to the South, and the Red Sea to the West. Its total population is 26,737,317 and is comprised predominantly of Arabs.

¹³ In their junior year, students choose between the following specializations (administration and social science, natural science, and Sharia and Arabic studies (Educational System, 2006, p.3).

¹⁴ Vocational institutions are also available at this stage of education.

Overview. Yemen has, at different times, been occupied by both the Ottoman and British Empires. While the Ottoman Empire occupied what would become present-day Yemen during the 16th and 17th centuries and again from 1849-1918, the British occupied the region from 1839-1967 (Yemen Profile-Timeline, 2015). Following WWII, the northern part of Yemen gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire, but the southern part remained under the British rule until 1967. The difference in the ruling powers prior to Yemen's complete independence caused friction between the Northern and Southern parts of Yemen. This difference, in turn, resulted in the formation of Southern Yemen and Northern Yemen. The two countries were eventually unified as the Republic of Yemen in 1990 (World Factbook, Yemen, 2015)

Education system. Yemen, like most Arab countries, has seen its educational system impacted by decades of foreign colonialism. Neither the British nor the Ottoman colonial powers paid much attention to establishing and maintaining schools in Yemen. As a result, education remained rudimentary. The primary source of education during Yemen's colonial history was Quranic Schools that focused primarily on teaching the Quran to boys. Reading and calligraphy were also emphasized (Yemen Education, 2015). However, religious studies that included the teaching of Islamic science and philosophy were reserved for the wealthy elite, which had lowered the enrollment in these schools to about 5% overall and to 10% for boys (Yemen-Education System, 2015).

After gaining its independence from Britain in 1918, Yemen was under the rule of Imam Yahya (1918-1948) during which some secular schools began to emerge, but they remained limited both in their secularism and in number. In the 1930s, Ahmed

Nu'man, a wealthy landlord who received a religious education himself, established a modern school that was more secular in nature as it offered subjects such as mathematics, geography, and physical education. Due to the conservative-religious nature of the Yemeni society, secular education received pushback. Imam Yahya sent religious teachers to censor and control the curriculum being taught in Nu'man's school. By 1937, Ahmed Nu'man's school was shut down, and he relocated to Egypt (Yemen-Education System, 2015). Since the departure of Nu'aman, the education system saw only minor improvements until the 1960s when a secular military government took power.

Between 1962 and 1970, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of schools in Yemen, and the first school for girls was established (For more on girls' education in Yemen, see Breedy, 2014 and In Yemen, 2013). The Ministry of education was established in 1963. Due to the lack of qualified Yemeni teachers, the Yemeni government turned to Egypt for teachers and curriculum developers. With the help of Kuwait, the University of Sana was established in 1970. By the 1980s, enrollment at the University of Sana continued to increase resulting in the steady expansion of the university. The Yemeni government established scholarship programs and sent 5,000 students to study abroad (Yemen-Education System, 2015). Today, in addition to providing basic education, Yemen has a number of universities, vocational institutions, and training programs.

Starting in the 1990s, children start primary education at the age of six; however, legally they are allowed to join any time between the age of six and nine. The

majority of Yemeni children attend primary schools, but fewer of them pursue secondary education and beyond (Assad et. al. 2009, p. 216).

Despite all the attempts to increase access to education, in 1990, when Northern and Southern Yemen were unified, 64% of the population was illiterate (UNESCO, 2004). Upon unification, education witnessed a minor reform in that the two curricula from the two countries were blended. The education system was standardized, requiring six years of primary education and three of secondary education (Yemen Education, 2015). As part of the Yemeni government's efforts to strengthen its education system, training programs were put in place between 1990 – 2000 which resulted in an increase in number of schools and higher education enrollment (UNESCO, 2004, p. 2). Despite the government's efforts, high illiteracy rates remain an issue for Yemen today, owing to the lack of adult literacy programs and the government's reliance on "general schooling for children" as the only way to eradicate illiteracy (Yemen Education, 2015).

Table 4 below shows the breakdown of the current education system in Yemen.

Table 6 Breakdown of the education system in Yemen

Education Levels	Attendance	Duration in years	Age range
Pre-school	optional	2	4-5
Elementary school	mandatory	6	6-12
Middle School	mandatory	3	12-14
High School	optional	3	15-17
College ¹⁵	optional	4-7	18-27

¹⁵ Vocational institutions are also available at this stage of education

The education profiles above show the undeniable impact of political factors not only on education itself, but also on the citizens' desire to pursue formal education. In Algeria's case, despite the French's determination to educate the Algerians, the illiteracy rates remained low as the locals refused to join such schools. In Jordan, maybe due to its young history, the education system seems to be more established than that of other countries that were discussed in this chapter. During the long presence of the Ottoman and later the British Empires little attention was paid to the development of the education systems in these countries. As a result, Quranic Schools continued to be one of the main sources of education until the discovery of oil and the modernization attempts that followed it. Situating the participants' literacy practices vis-à-vis the historical and sociopolitical contexts that engendered the education systems in their home countries is crucial to understanding their literacy practices.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION I

The previous chapter presented a brief profile of each of the participants' country and education system. These profiles were offered to help contextualize each participant's literacy practices within the sociocultural and sociopolitical context of their immediate community. Literacy practices are seen here as the product of local sociocultural practices and thus are impacted by the local context in which they are used (Street, 2003). Taking these country profiles as a point of departure, this chapter will use the data gathered during the interviews to sketch the participants' stories with literacy and literacy practices in Arabic and English. Findings from the participants' narratives can be categorized into three general groups: literacy experiences and practices in Arabic, literacy experiences and practices in English, and the different domains Arabic and English are being used today. In this and the following results chapters, data gathered will be used to address the research questions that were proposed early in the project. As such, the data will be presented differently depending on the focus of each research question. Some questions are better answered by presenting a case-by-case account of the participants' histories, while others are better presented side-by-side to show similarities and/or difference between participants' literacy experiences. This chapter aims to answer the following questions:

1. Where are the participants socialized into literacy practices in their L1?
2. What impact, if any, do socio-cultural/educational contexts have on the subjects' literacy practices in different parts of the Arab world?

To answer these questions, the participants' narratives will be presented in chronological manner to mirror the stages of their literacy acquisition in Arabic. Thus, this section will present the early stages of literacy acquisition then move on to present later stages of literacy in and outside of school.

Earliest Memories of Literacy

Previous Research that looked at the literacy acquisition of Arab children identified two possible starting points of literacy acquisitions: Quranic Schools (Wagner, 1982; Wagner & Lotfi, 1980) and/or formal schooling (Haerri, 2009). It is in these formal settings that children are first introduced to the written form of Arabic or Standard Arabic.

All participants, except for one, identified the spoken variety of Arabic that is used in their local community as their native language. Being ethnically Berber, Kareem, the Algerian participant, identified Kabyle as his first language (more on his experience later). The participants' early encounters with literacy varied. For example, some were exposed to the tradition of storytelling, while others were not. However, their overall experiences seem to have been greatly influenced by their parents' level of schooling, as well as the Arabic-language pedagogy practiced in school. Below are their experiences:

Reading and storytelling.

Basma. Basma is the participant from Kuwait, who is currently working on a graduate degree in engineering. She spoke fondly of her literacy practices and how much

she enjoys writing her diaries in Arabic. Her first encounter with literacy began at an early age with her maternal grandmother telling her stories: “My grandmother liked telling me a story” (I1, R1). Around the same time, she also remembers her father telling her religious stories: “I remember, my father he is telling me qesas al'anbeya' *stories of the Prophets*” (I1, R6).

Her grandmother's stories were folkloric in nature. These stories focused on passing along community traditions and wisdom from one generation to the next. Since these stories are mostly oral, the storytellers might embellish some of the details to fit the purpose behind telling a given story. For example, if the storyteller wishes to emphasize the importance of respecting elderly, she would exaggerate that part of the story. In addition to these folk stories, Basma's father told her religious stories that are meant to instill religious values in children at an early age. Another form of storytelling that Basma was exposed to was through non-religious chants that are considered more entertaining for children than regular storytelling.

B: I remember my father telling me a story, but sometimes he will read me stories. These are all in Arabic. And also *Anasheed Chants* that are recorded, so we listen to them.

G: When you say your father read to you, did he read to you actual stories in Arabic? Or did he read the stories and tell you what it said? Or how was it?

B: He is telling me the stories in his own way and sometimes it is related to religion or sometimes old stories.

G: But did he actually sit down and have a book that he read from to you as a child? Do you remember any of that?

B: I don't remember having read a story (I1, R3).

Basma's siblings also contributed to maintaining the tradition of storytelling:

B: I remember my sister telling me a story, but I don't remember someone reading a story for me from...

G: But they told you a story more than they actually sat down and read.

B: Yeah (I1, R3)

Kareem. Kareem's experience with Arabic was very different from the rest of the participants in this study. Coming from Algeria and being ethnically Berber, he first learned Berber, Tamazight or Kabyle, at home and had partial experience with Standard Arabic until he started formal schooling at the age of six. Living his childhood in the Kabyle region, a predominantly Berber region, Kareem had a very limited exposure to spoken Algerian Arabic until he attended college in a bigger city in Algeria. This experience is unorthodox to say the least, as most Arab children are exposed to Arabic in a more predictable fashion—spoken variety then Standard variety. He recalled his first encounter with the spoken variety of Arabic in his area by saying:

My earliest experience with Algerian dialect is when some business partners of one of my uncles were invited for dinner at my uncle's home and I was there. We were having dinner, and they were actually trying to see if I wanted to eat more or something. I said, I tried to respond in Standard Arabic, but I responded in Algerian Arabic *Kleet wa rweet* and *Kleet* means I ate, which is kind of normal Algerian Arabic, but *Rweet* is like a Berber word with Algerian Arabic morphology and they were laughing at that because they thought that kid just Barbarized Algerian Arabic. So they thought that was funny. That was my first experience, but I didn't really run into Algerian Arabic until college when I started talking to... I was in a bigger city and I had friends who spoke Algerian Arabic as their native language (I2, R1).

It is worth mentioning here that Kareem wouldn't have felt pressured to use Algerian Arabic had his uncle's business partners been fluent in Tamazight. Another aspect of this interaction that makes it interesting is that his uncle was an Arabic-language teacher who would play an important role in introducing Kareem's literacy in Standard Arabic. Oral storytelling was also practiced in Kareem's household as he was growing up. Unlike Basma's experience where different family members shared responsibility of telling stories, Kareem's grandmother was the main storyteller. All stories were told in Kabyle, below is his experience:

Yeah, they were oral and my grandmother was in charge of that. She would tell me stories when I was a kid (I2, R3).

She would tell stories in Kabyle, you know orally I actually recorded many of them and translated some of them into English, too. But, yeah, she is the one who told me stories. My mom and dad never read or told me any stories (I2, R4)

In addition to oral storytelling in Kabyle, Kareem recalled a bookcase full of books that belonged to his father. It had French and Arabic books that he played with, but yet could not read as he described them as “advanced books” (I2, R4).

Recall that Kareem’s first language is Kabyle, Berber, and he learned Standard Arabic at school. Since he lived in the Kabyle region where everyone spoke Kabyle, he had very limited exposure to Colloquial Algerian Arabic. This situation changed when he started college as he had to move to a bigger city. It was during that time that he started using Colloquial Algerian Arabic. He described his initial use of Algerian Arabic as very sudden:

I just started using it and I never felt like the transition was hard or anything, maybe because of the role of French and how I could easily code-switch to French [G: When you are talking in Algerian Arabic?] Yeah, when I'm talking in Algerian Arabic and my friends and classmates would still understand, you know, it wouldn't sound odd. They wouldn't feel, Oh, you are not speaking Algerian Arabic to us, you know (I2, R16).

This excerpt shows how Kareem’s knowledge of French was very instrumental in learning Algerian Arabic. This could be attributed to the wide use of French words in the Algerian Arabic, due to Algeria’s long colonial history.

Nasir. Like other participants in this study, Nasir’s early exposure to literacy began in the form of storytelling. However, his experience with storytelling was less systematic and not as frequent. As he reflected on the infrequency of storytelling during his childhood, he saw it as something that was not highly valued in his

community. His experience with storytelling was not done individually but in a group during family gathering. Here is how he elaborated on this experience:

As I said, it is not part of the culture, or at least where I lived or at least in my family context, but I know that my friends are the same, but I'm not sure if it is to a more educated families where parents have graduate or undergraduate degrees that they are doing things like this. My parents didn't do it. And I was actually fond of...or probably because I wasn't exposed to, I wasn't actually interested in listening to stories. Stories might be told but it was not intended at a certain time. It might be told incidentally where there is a family gathering, but it was not intended for me, as a child to listen to a story and learn from it or at least entertained by (I3, R2).

I asked for clarification:

G: So, no folklore...or something that you could think...?

N: There are some stories that they used to tell us, but it was for the sake of discipline. They would tell you some of the scary stories to get you disciplined, to get you to not stay outside the house or to get you to bed. It was not intended to enhance literacy. It was the intention of these stories to get us scared, to get us disciplined (I3, R3).

During family gatherings, these stories are usually told by an elder to a group of children who sit in a circle around the storyteller. The children are expected to sit quietly and listen and learn from the storyteller's wisdom. They are also expected to not interrupt with questions unless they were asked. The lack of the routine storytelling in Nasir's childhood could be linked to his parents' background. Nasir's father, the head of the household, worked long hours to provide for his family. He was predominantly absent from the day-to-day routine. Nasir's mother, who is functionally illiterate, was the main caretaker of Nasir and his siblings. Thus, the lack of exposure to oral literacy could be the result of such factors.

Summer. There were a number of factors that positively influenced Summer's early exposure to literacy, mainly television and her older sister. Most children in the

Arab world, who don't go to Quranic Schools, are initially exposed to Modern Standard Arabic through television. In addition to cartoons that are broadcasted in Standard Arabic, there are a number of educational shows like *Eftah Ya Semse*, the Arabic version of *Sesame Street* that are designed to introduce children to Standard Arabic at an early age. As a child, Summer watched these shows regularly. Her early exposure to Standard Arabic made her experience with storytelling a little different from those of other participants. Prior to joining school, she recalled being able to understand stories that her older sister read to her with no need for interpretation in the spoken-Jordanian Arabic:

S: Before school? [G: Any memories you could think of] Probably reading books about...maybe not myself, my sister used to read books for me. She is three years older and she was good at school and she enjoyed reading books, but it wasn't that, like kind of routine that we used to have, because we don't have that kind of reading culture back home.

G: Was she reading stuff in...children's books [S: Yeah] in Modern Standard Arabic then explain it to you or was she just reading...

S: No, need for explanation because we were hooked to the TV whenever we had those kid shows, so it was easy for me to understand Standard Arabic. Yeah, she used to read books in Standard Arabic and no explanation was required (I4, R1).

Even though Summer's experience with storytelling took place in Standard Arabic, her exposure to that form of the language remained primarily oral, as she wasn't yet able to read in Standard Arabic. Similar to Nasir's experience, Summer's storytelling routine was also infrequent. She seems to have relied heavily on television as her main source of Standard Arabic.

Shayma. Similar to Summer's experience, Shayma was also exposed to literacy through watching educational children's television shows where Standard Arabic was

widely used. In addition to television, she was exposed to the tradition of oral storytelling as a child. Her grandmother and mother were the main storytellers:

Sh: It was my mom and my grandma. My dad was always busy. (I5, R5).

G: Do you remember your parents, for example, reading to you when you were little? Or before school? Or telling you stories?

Sh: Yes, stories, but it will not be in formal Arabic. It will be in Colloquial Arabic. Like, in our dialect. It was just like grandma stories (laughter). (I5, R, 3)

Shayma recalled her father, an intellectual who earned a PhD in history, being constantly too busy to sit down and read to her or tell her stories. Despite his absence, he instilled in her his love for reading and writing at an early age; she cherishes this up to this day.

Thus, all participants were exposed to the tradition of oral storytelling, even though the frequency of such practice varied among them. The majority of the stories were told to each participant in their spoken variety, and Standard Arabic was used for the purpose of storytelling with only one participant. The participants' experiences with storytelling corroborates with what had been presented in the literature about the majority of Arab parents who resort to oral-folk stories due to the difficulties their children might face when trying to understand the written form (Doak, 1989, cited in Ayari, 2009, p. 249). However, due to the popularity of television cartoons that are in Standard Arabic, more and more children are exposed to an oral version of MSA prior to joining school.

Early Exposure to Modern Standard Arabic and Other Languages

All participants, except for Kareem, were initially exposed to the Arabic variety that is spoken in their communities, and to a lesser extent, the oral version of MSA through television. Television, as mentioned above, plays a key role in Arab children's early exposure to Standard Arabic. In Summer's experience, early exposure

to MSA through television facilitated her ability to understand stories that were read to her in MSA. Shayma provided another example that further illustrates the importance of television in introducing MSA to children. She recalled how her daughter, who was influenced by cartoons, used to speak in MSA, something that is never practiced for everyday communication:

The television and the cartoons, they are amazing. Because as I told you, my little daughter, she was three-years-old and she was speaking in formal Arabic. It was so funny. Everyone was laughing because that was so cute. She will be like *umee, umee, haya ela alghada' mom, mom, let's go have lunch* (laughter) (I5, R3).

Unlike the male participants Kareem and Nasir, all female participants stressed the importance of television in their early exposure to MSA. This could be attributed to the conservative nature of the Arab culture where it is more acceptable for boys to play outside than it is for girls. Early exposure to MSA through television made Basma aware of the different forms of Arabic at an early age:

G: We talked a little bit about the different between Kuwaiti Arabic and fusha *Standard* and you said you didn't have difficulties learning fusha *Standard*, because...

B: Because we watched cartoons on television, they are in fusha *Standard* not in Kuwaiti, but at home we use Kuwaiti .(I1, R1).

Such exposure was also limited as there weren't as many television channels back then as there are now. The lack of prolonged exposure was something that Summer mentioned:

My only source of Standard Arabic knowledge was, as I told you, television shows and that kind of stuff and the situation wasn't as it is today. We watched television every day for only a couple of hours, or probably three hours at the most. So, there wasn't that much exposure to Standard Arabic (I4, R3)

There was also awareness among the female participants about the quality and the importance of these shows in developing children's linguistic abilities early on, and to some extent prepare them for school:

Most of the television shows when we were children were in formal Arabic for kids, if you remember [laughter]. That also strengthened my Arabic language. You know *eftah ya semsem Sesame Street*? All the cartoons were in very good formal Arabic that helped me more than school (I5, R1)

Nasir and Kareem's experiences with MSA were different. While Nasir first encountered Classical and Modern Standard Arabic in Quranic School, Kareem remembered bits and pieces of his mother and uncle teaching him the Arabic alphabet and later encouraging him to read newspapers in Arabic. Neither participant recalled having oral exposure to Arabic via television. Kareem attributed his lack of exposure to Arabic at an early age to the anti-Arab propaganda that was sweeping the Kabyle region where he grew up:

Maybe one important factor to keep in mind was that maybe part of the reason why I wasn't listening as much to Arabic...There is like a massive anti-Arabic sentiment in the Kabyle region, because of the history and you can read about that and maybe that's part of the reason why I wasn't exposed to Algerian Arabic sooner. If I were to use it, people would be like "oh, you are an Arabized Berber." You are anti-Berber (I2, R4).

Among all the participants' experiences, Nasir's course of literacy acquisition was the only one that follows the predictable path of language acquisition that was previously reported by Wagner Messick, and Spratt (1986). In their study that focused on Arabic language among Moroccan children, they reported that Arab children are first exposed to Standard Arabic in Quranic Schools, which facilitated literacy acquisition in school. The participants' experiences in Quranic schools will be discussed in more details in later sections.

Writing. Most of the participants' experiences at the preschool stage, except for Nasir who attended Quranic School, did not go beyond writing the alphabet and sounding out words. However, Kareem's experience exceeded that of all other participants. He had

the advantage of having an uncle who was an Arabic-language teacher who used to teach him Standard Arabic. Here is how he remembers it:

I remember my mom telling me that one of my uncles was an Arabic teacher in a primary school. He used to teach me, so she gives me some anecdotes about once, for example he asked me to write Mustafa on a piece of paper and instead, I like drew a person like this...so, that was my earliest... (I2, R2)

His early exposure to the written form of Arabic has also aided his ability to read MSA before he started formal schooling:

My earliest thing I can remember is reading a newspaper in Standard Arabic. This was before school and I remember, I would read it as loud as I can no matter if I understood. I remember my mom would be in the kitchen washing the dishes or whatever and she would be talking to herself or talking to neighbors and she was very proud that I could read fluently in Standard Arabic before starting school. I was proud too that I could do that before going to school. (I2, R1).

Other participant's recollections of their experiences with writing at that age were not as vivid. Shayma, for example, recalled her parents' and siblings' excitement about her ability to say or write the alphabet in the right order:

I remember that everyone would get very excited when I write the alphabet correctly or I would say them all in the correct order. I honestly don't remember a lot about that period. It is a long time ago (I5, R. 2).

As soon as she was able to read the alphabet, Shayma was very eager to read in Arabic at an early age, not necessarily with comprehension, but for the sake of reading:

For me, I was exposed to the written forms of formal Arabic as soon as I was able to read. As soon as I was able to read letters, I just started reading textbooks for kids in formal Arabic. I don't think...sometimes, I wouldn't understand everything, but by the time I find myself understanding. I told you because of the television with the cartoons in formal Arabic, we were...we understood formal Arabic in a very, very young. Before school even (I5, R4)

Summar and Basma's experiences were limited to learning the alphabet. Basma remembers having to copy the alphabet multiple times in order to memorize it.

G: So, what was your exposure to reading and writing during that time?

B: I remember maybe just the letters.

G: So, just the alphabet, pretty much.

B: Letters and naskh *copying* (I1, R1).

Literacy in Quranic Schools

Parents who wish to introduce their children to reading and, to a lesser extent writing prior to enrolling them in primary school, send them to Quranic Schools. In these schools, children are mainly exposed to Quranic literacy, through the process of memorizing the Quran (See chapter two). This section will discuss the participants' experience with Quranic Schools.

Nasir's experience with literacy is the most traditional one as he was only introduced to the alphabet the summer prior to joining Quranic School at the age of five. Growing up in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, where *Kuttab*s or Quranic Schools had originated might have played a role in maintaining the tradition of sending children to Quranic Schools at an early age:

Well, my earliest memories of reading basically goes back to when I joined what they call the Quranic school and it was...at my own time kindergarten or preschool was not a popular concept in my country. Basically the expectation is to take people to study the basics of the language in Quranic schools and they get to start them from the alphabet. So my first contact as far as I remember was from the alphabet being taught with the different diacritic like a, e, o and stuff like this and was presented with the script in a very basic environment a board and using a chalk and I got to repeat after the instructor or the teacher. As far as practice is concerned, we would go and read the Quran. Basically, I was unable to read at the age, but I was...I had to memorize. (I3, R1)

My elder sister during the summer, before I joined the school, spent that summer with me teaching me how to improve my handwriting. At that time before I got to school I was able to write the letters. I was able to write basic words, but I got to imitate. I can't actually write by heart. I can't memorize, my ability to be able to write without seeing the words. The actual correspondence between the written form and the pronounced form still was not developed at that time. So, these are my memories before I joined school. (I3, R2).

Nasir's experience in Quranic Schools followed the same teaching patterns that Wagner and Lotfi (1980) had reported. The teachers in his school followed a very traditional method of repetition, both in writing and orally. While repetition was used in writing to improve the children's handwriting, it was used orally to develop a habit and aid with memorization. The memorization process began with a small verse and after the children showed mastery of it, they were introduced to the next verse. After they mastered the first two verses, they would start from the beginning and recite both verses and so on until they memorize a full Surah. This goes on until the children memorized major parts of the Quran or the whole book, depending on how long they stay in Quranic Schools. While Nasir joined Quranic School at an early age, Summer and Basma did not join Quranic School until after they had already started their formal schooling., when they were in the fourth and fifth grades. Here is how they recalled their experiences with memorization at Quranic Schools:

S: It was a memorization program and we used to recite in class, repeating. Although we were able to read and write at that stage, we depended more on rote memorization, so the teacher was saying the verses and we used to repeat after her until we memorized. Sometimes later on when I looked at the Quran and read the verses, it was quite strange for me that I...for example, if you ask me how many verses are there in the surah, maybe I couldn't tell, or I could tell wrongly, because it is based on the pauses that we have rather than just knowing how many aayas *verses*. It was based on recitation rather than reading, yeah. Although, I was able to read at that age.

G: But the teacher did not actually look at the Qur'an itself as you were reading or were you just following or was it just all oral...

S: We did have that as the first reading, but then we were required to close it and just listen to her. We wanted to follow ahkam altajweed *rules governing correct pronunciation of the Quran*, you know (I4, R5)

B: I did tahfeed *memorization* Qur'an and also tajweed *rules governing correct pronunciation of the Quran*. In the summer, for like one month. Maybe I went there for two years, but only for the summer. Once was at the mosque, maybe that

was at the fourth grade. We have to hefiz jozo' amma *a specific part of the Quran*. So, it was like more the teacher with sit with four to five kids in halaqa *circle* and tried to talqeen *recitation* the Qur'an.

G: So it was like, repeat after me kind of thing?

B: Yeah, and then we have to read in order to memorize, then later at the end of the month lazem yseer tasmee' *there must be recitation* and also at home you still need to read the Quran to practice.

G: So, at the mosque the person who was teaching you, did they read the Quran as they read? Did they explain things or was it more like memorization? Did they tell you what the surah say?

B: Yeah, they tell us what's the meaning of the Surah. (I1, R2).

The excerpts above show some variation among the participants' experiences in Quranic Schools. For Summer, reading the original text was done only during the first stage of teaching, while for Basma, the teacher relied heavily on the written text throughout the memorization process. Across participants, writing played a very minimal role in Quranic School. Despite the difference in methods used, the ultimate goal was to help children memorize the Quran, as well as the proper conventions governing the reading of the Quran.

Unlike Nasir, Summer, and Basma, Shayma and Kareem never went to Quranic Schools. Kareem's father, however, went to Quranic School to learn basic literacy skills as an adult. Growing up during the French rule in Algeria, Kareem's father never went to school and by the time he was able to enroll in school, he was deemed too old. In order to gain basic reading and writing skills, his only option was to join Quranic School:

I didn't, but my dad did. Remember that I said that my dad didn't go to school because they told him he was too old. He went to Quranic School because it was free. It helped him get basic literacy. I mean he wasn't necessarily going there because [G: of religious purposes] but because he wanted to acquire basic literacy. That was helpful to him because he was able to get into that training program later in Algiers that helped him. (I2, R1).

In the case of Kareem's father, Quranic School provided him with crucial skills that he needed to build his career. The variation in the participants' experience with Quranic schools highlights the differences among participants in terms of preschool exposure to literacy. Thus, it wouldn't be safe to assume that all Arab children are first exposed to literacy in Quranic Schools.

Arabic Literacy in School

All participants began their formal schooling at the age of six. Since all participants went to public schools in their respective countries, the language of instruction was Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). All textbooks in these schools were written in MSA and some teachers used it orally to deliver their lessons in class, especially Arabic-language teachers. In addition to MSA, local varieties of Arabic and Berber in Algeria were also used during classroom instruction to facilitate understanding.

Yeah, at school it was standard Arabic. That's the official language of instruction and that's what teachers are expected to use and that's what we use. So, it was Standard Arabic in class. I don't remember now but maybe some teachers weren't as strict in using it. So, I might have used Berber at least in the classroom, maybe sometimes, but in the classroom it is mostly Standard Arabic. Like when I raise my hand and respond, it is in Standard Arabic, when teachers talk, they have to present in Standard Arabic. But in the outside, when we play, you know in recess that's Berber. (Kareem, I2, R1).

This section will trace the participants' journey with literacy, starting from their early schooling to more advanced stages of literacy. It will focus primarily on Arabic language instruction, encompassing reading and writing.

In Arabic schools, the Arabic language is taught throughout all grade levels and is usually divided into: mahfodat *memorization*, Ta'beer *composition*, emla' *dictation*, naho *grammar*, and mutala'a *reading*. For the memorization section, the students mainly

memorize poems that were written by well-known Arab poets or some chants that are either national or religious in nature. For example, in Shayma's memorization section of her Arabic class, her lesson plan focused primarily on memorizing poetry:

Sh: Mainly it will be poetry Ahmad Shawqee or like that. Sometimes, we have to memorize them.

G: And recite them in class?

Sh: Yes, we get marked. Also, explain like what does the verse mean? (I5, R3).

The memorized material is sometimes recited orally, other times the students are required to reproduce it in writing. Shayma's narrative showed a strong connection between writing and memorization, in and outside the Arabic class. This was also echoed by other participants as well. Here is Shayma's experience:

G: So, you used writing for that? You read something, you kind of summarize it and reproduce it or were you expected to reproduce exactly the same way after you memorize it?

Sh: Most of the time we have to reproduce the exact way. That's considered really good, you know. But, I wasn't good in that. I would rather understand it and rewrite it (laughter) with maybe simpler words, but yeah, sometimes or most of the time. I try to reproduce it as it is. The exact words as they expected in high school and below. (I5, R7).

The excerpt above shows how writing is used as a tool to reproduce memorized materials. All participants' narratives show that writing was not practiced in itself; rather it was used as a proof to show that the learned material was internalized.

Writing. Most of the writing that the participants practiced in their composition classes was guided-composition, where they were asked to answer a number of questions to help them build their writing:

Yeah, it was just composition or like answering a sort of question, comprehension questions about readings. There is this thing that's called *Ta3beer composition*. That's what we called it and that's what we did. So, that's the kind of writing that I did. (Kareem, I2, R5).

Nasir's recollection of his experience with writing was vivid as he provided a detailed account of his evolution as a writer throughout school grades:

It started with repetition and it was not until the fourth grade where I actually had to start actually writing what we call composition. We call it *ta'beer composition* there. Basically, I am afraid to say that it is the same now, even though it has been almost thirty years since I got this thing. (I3, R4)

Throughout the course of the interview, Nasir shared his dissatisfaction with the way Arabic writing was taught. He mentioned that writing was considered a secondary subject as it did not count towards his GPA. As such, failing the writing section of the Arabic class did not affect the student advancing to the next grade:

There is no failure or fail even though you didn't score the greatest. So, it is there in the curriculum. We have to take it and sit for an exam, but it does not count towards your GPA. It doesn't let you repeat the year and not let you move forward. Strange, I don't know how and what they were thinking, but this is basically how it went. (I3, R4)

Being a non-credit bearing subject, the students received no explicit instruction as how to write. All they received was, as Nasir put it, "a check" (I3, R 7). Based on his experience, the writing teachers provided no guidance. The topics they were asked to write on lacked clarity. Some example topics he shared with me were: cleanliness, Ramadan, spring, the four seasons. The teacher rarely wrote a few ideas on the board to help the students decipher the requirements for the assignment.

I am trying to be nice. I am trying to use nice words. They would just say talk about Ramadan. Talk about your vacation...and the best teacher that we like the most was the teacher that would come and put main ideas on the board, like, focus on these main ideas and my strategy used to be, I would take the main idea and write one paragraph and the other idea and write another paragraph, and another main idea and another paragraph. I don't even have an intro, conclusion or a body. If they don't, I would create my own main ideas. Actually, it wasn't until I saw some of the teachers doing so that I thought that would be a good idea for me to think about what to write. It was always a struggle, OK., what do you want me to say about cleanliness? For example? Talk about cleaning or cleanliness, for

example. They would just give you a list from or Hadith by the Prophet alnadafa men aleman *cleanliness is part of faith* and then talk about it. So, it was really weird. Sometimes, talk about a farmer. What should I do? I haven't met a farmer in my life. It was a challenge. It was really difficult. It made me hate writing in Arabic, so I don't think that the Arabic classes in terms of composition was pleasant experiences to me anyway (I3, R9)

Some of these writing assignments were done in class, while others were done at home. Despite the vagueness of instruction and Nasir's dislike of writing assignments, he continued to get "checks" as a sign of encouragement that he was meeting the teacher's expectations for each assignment, with no feedback:

I finish it and I still receive a good grade. Sometimes they tell you, you got ten out of fifteen, well, I don't know. I am just happy that's OK. I just got rid of it (I3, R11)

In addition to the lack of writing prompts, Nasir expressed dissatisfaction with how his teachers never drew any explicit connections between reading and writing tasks. He felt that providing him with reading texts that were written on the same genre would have familiarized him with the writing task he was expected to finish. This, however, does not mean that reading was not practiced in Nasir's Arabic classes. As a matter of fact, enhancing the students' reading skills received more attention than writing. Nasir also stated that his Arabic teachers did not draw any explicit connections between what he learned in the reading section and the tasks he was assigned in the writing section (more on participants experience with reading in the following section).

Summer's experience with writing in Jordan was a little bit different. In her experience, reading and writing were more closely connected than what Nasir had experiences. For her:

Most of the time, writing followed reading. So, we were supposed to read in a specific genre. Do reading comprehension questions, some grammar questions, and some...I remember, we were supposed at the end to write in the same genre. Yeah. (I4, R1).

Summer's Arabic-language teachers provided her with models that she used as a springboard to produce her own writing. Almost all of Summer's writing was completed as a timed in-class exercise. Moreover, the model the teacher provided was the only example she had on that genre:

Most of the time, we were required to do this in class because the teacher wanted to make sure that it's us who was writing not someone else writing it for us, or we were not using resources, like journals or newspapers to help us formulate our language and ideas. (I4, R1).

Basma's experience with writing was very similar to that of other Summer, except for the emphasis on calligraphy. Throughout the interview, she bragged about how much she enjoyed Arabic writing and how her love for writing led her to join the "Arabic writing" activity after class. When I asked her to describe what kind of writing she did in that class, she said "I entered 'Arabic writing' to improve my handwriting and it was sort of like Khat *Calligraphy*." (I1, R1).

Reading. Unlike their experience with writing, the participants' experiences with reading were more structured. As part of the Arabic class, they practiced reading in MSA regularly. Here is how Kareem compared his experiences as a reader and writer: "In reading I was considered an excellent reader in Standard Arabic, but when it comes to writing, I would say I was average" (I2, R1). He later elaborated on what made his teachers think that he was an excellent reader: "With reading, I remember, the teacher I had for most of primary school. He really valued being able to read fast, loud, and clear"

(I2, R2). Despite being considered an excellent reader by his teacher, he admits that his reading-comprehension skills were not up to the standards:

Reading out loud and if you are able to do that, you are a great reader. I also felt very comfortable reading silently, but when it comes to comprehension, they ask us questions, like synonyms, questions about the content, to make sure we understand it. They ask us those kinds of questions and I wasn't always excellent at that. I think I was decent, but I wasn't outstanding at it. But I was considered outstanding in terms of reading fluency. Reading fast. (I2, R4)

Other participants' experience with reading went beyond fluency to include reading practice as a scaffolding tool for writing. For example, in Summer's experience, reading and writing were always connected. The reading task would almost always be followed by a writing task in the form of answering a list of reading-comprehension questions:

Most of the time, writing followed reading. So, we were supposed to read in a specific genre. Do reading comprehension questions, some grammar questions, and some...I remember, we were supposed at the end to write in the same genre. Yeah. (I4, R)

Reading here is used to provide a model for the students to familiarize them with the genre they were later asked to write in. However, none of the participants who practiced this type of reading recalled being taught how to read effectively by using reading comprehension techniques, such as skimming and scanning. Such skills were taught to only one of the participants, Nasir; the only participant who did not receive adequate instruction in his writing classes.

Nasir's instruction in reading was the most sophisticated among all participants. His reading and literature classes exposed him to a number of genres, such as prose, poetry, and oratory. It wasn't until high school that he was introduced to Arabic novels, short stories, and plays. He believes that the strong focus on reading throughout his

schooling was politically motivated rather than being for the sake of teaching reading and improving the students' reading skills. Here is Nasir's response in his own words:

Reading, it was more systematic. This course was always there. It was meant to...ideologically...it was meant to enhance nationalism. They would talk about topics about how Saudi Arabia was unified and how it, basically, came into existence and what happened there and what happened. Some of the controversial issues like the...well, controversial issues was often presented through the eyes of the government and what they want people to think about it. Just like the issue for women driving and the issue of this stuff. They were actually presented as in a way that it is not good for her to drive. So it was something like this...In...we were taught, no writing was connected to reading, I should say that. It was basically, you read, you answer the questions. The importance of vocabulary, guessing the meaning was there. Scanning was there. Skimming was there. I remember, I was taught exceptionally how to skim and how to scan. (I3, R2).

The explicit reading instruction Nasir received was beneficial in helping him, indirectly develop his writing skills in Arabic composition classes:

I think that, in a way, helped me learn writing in Arabic indirectly. Then, if I would say, the composition class, but the reading class, because others felt like me, but I felt this way. Because there wasn't much instruction in composition. So, by just reading and trying to imitate what I just...I remember, one...some of the times, I would go to a topic that is similar to the topic that was discussed in reading class. I would go read that thing and try to imitate it and get ideas. But this was not taught by anybody. It was my own initiative, I remember. The reading as a separate course stopped in the intermediate school. So, when we went to high school there was no such thing as reading, because the hours...there were only two hours and they were distributed to syntax, Arabic syntax and literature. (I3, R2).

As the excerpts above show, the participant's experiences with reading and writing were more controlled. Reading was seen more as a stepping stone that led to writing than a skill that was worth developing in and of itself. This finding supports Ibrahim's (1982) research which argued that in the Arab world, reading and writing skills are considered interconnected where learning how to read will, by extension, lead to better writing skills.

Literacy at Home

A sense of the participants' literacy practices wouldn't be complete without considering home literacy. In all participants' experiences, home literacy was considered as an extension to school literacy. Such literacy practices took the form of homework that was done with the help of mainly an older sibling, but sometimes a parent. One reason behind diverting the tutoring task at home to an older sibling from a parent was either because the parents were uneducated or busy earning a living. In Nasir's experience both factors played a role in his home literacy. His father worked long hours and his mother who cared for him and his siblings was illiterate. Here is how Nasir recollection of his home literacy:

At home, after school it basically the concept is there is a homework given by the teacher. My parents were not educated. My father completed high school. He was not around the house because his job was away from the city where we lived. He had to commute for a long drive every day, so he didn't has much to do, except following that I was doing well. My elder sister and older brother, they were people who I am indebted to regarding helping me with my homework when I go home. They would stay with me and make sure that I draw the letters in the right way, that I complete my homework, and they would ask what homework had the teacher given me at that time. Their role wouldn't go beyond the fact that making sure I was doing things right and that I was finishing my homework in time. As far as I remember, I don't think they were teaching me per say, rather than the role of a tutor if you will, who actually is trying to make sure you are following the class, like an assistant to the professor. In a way. (I3, R2)

Summer's experience echoed that of Nasir's. Beyond school related work, she stated, there was no parental encouragement for literacy at home: "Although we did read and write and that interest in reading when you come back home is not that nourished and encouraged by parents" (I4, R1). On the other hand, Shayma, whose father held the highest degree among all participants' parents, recalled her father buying her children's

books when she was eight-years old: “I particularly remember that my father used to buy me a lot of stories. Like, for kids in Arabic and I was...I loved to read them that definitely strengthened my Arabic” (I5, R1). However, the father was not around to actually help her read these books, so her sister filled in his place.

Home literacy, in Kareem’s experience was linguistically rich. He was exposed to French, Arabic, and Kabyle at an early age. He shared vivid memories of the books his father kept in a book case at home:

There was Arabic. There was French. Yeah, there was Arabic and French, but not Kabyle. There was stuff by Kabyle authors who wrote in French, but there wasn't [G: Like pure] I can't remember things written in Kabyle on that shelf. But I remember I would grab books and read in Arabic or French. There were these books about Plato and Socrates that are written in Arabic that I used to read. (I2, R2).

Despite his fond memories of reading his father’s books, Kareem did not do any writing outside of school: “I didn't do any writing outside of school. Basically, all the writing that I did was for school” (I2, R1).

Self-Initiated Literacy

Some participants showed self-interest in literacy beyond school and home. Self-initiated literacies were more apparent among the female rather than the male participants. These literacies took the form of dairies or poetry writing that was done for their mere interest in writing in these genres. Here is Summer’s experience:

I started to develop my...I wouldn't call it talent, but interest in writing, probably as a middle schooler. Because I enjoyed the task of writing itself. I felt it expresses much of what I had in feelings and experiences and I did used to have a diary notebook and to write everyday experiences and report whatever I have and reflect on these experiences. I still have them (laughter) (I4, R3).

Summer's diaries were written in a mixture of MSA and Jordanian Arabic, something that would be considered unacceptable in a formal context, such as school. As it is apparent from the linguistic choice, it seems that Summer wrote these diaries for herself.

They were not meant to be shared:

I did not share them, but I pretended as if I was addressing, in my diaries, someone else not myself. Yeah, sometimes, I was addressing the notebook itself. So, I was talking to the pages and the notebook itself and there is a fictional character that I am talking to" (I4, R8).

None of these diaries were read by anyone aside from her until two years ago when her parents moved and found her diaries, so they proceeded to share them, through social media with family members: "Look at Summer, she was so cute (laughter) she wrote these" (I4, R8).

Besides diary writing, Summer practiced writing extensively outside of school. She expressed her love for writing and lack of support in school and at home for her passion: "I did like to write myself and I wanted someone to encourage me, but when I didn't have anybody. I started to write myself" (I4, R18). This practice was the result of her realization that the writing instruction that was provided in school was not sufficient to help her pass her high school exam. The high-school exam¹⁶ is an exit exam that is crucial to students' college admission. To take matters into her own hands, Summer began using writing models that were readily available at local bookstores to improve her writing. These models provide writing samples to help the students practice for the test:

Like if you go to any bookshop. There are certain guides for each subject and they include samples and also, it's a common custom back home that you have tutors during high school to improve your performance. So, they did have their own

¹⁶ It is widely practiced in the Arab world

samples. They were available. Students shared the samples available at their hands with others (I4, R15).

G: Was it supported by school?

S: No, it was not supported by the school. Probably because I was forced into the corner that I had to perform well in writing. So, it was a personal effort. But again back to that point. We were not trained to independent working on our own skills. We were not encouraged to go to do your homework and check out these resources that will help you improve. So, we were not encouraged to work independently to improve our skills. But when I had to do that, because of the situation...what it is in high school, I did have to work on my own skills and that just worked fine. But as a middle schooler, you know, we always wanted to avoid extra work and it's not that culture were we used to have to work independently. (I4, R2)

Summer knew that this was her only way of improving her writing ability. She had to seek help herself. Summer's experience above also shows that her teachers at the time did not encourage her to be an independent knowledge seeker. Rather, Summer grew dependent on what her teachers provided and did not know where to seek help when she needed it.

Unlike Summer who only wrote diaries, Shayma and Basma's passion for writing came in the form of poetry writing. Shayma's father was a poet and that's what inspired her:

In primary school, I started to write kind of poetry, so my handwriting sucked at that time, but I was writing. My father was a poet and I think I was imitating him or something. I started to have a book for poetry, so I would sit down and write. Sometimes it is something good, but mostly it doesn't make any sense. (I5, R1).

Unlike Summer who did not have a clear sense of audience for her writing, for Shayma, her family was her audience. She recalled her parents' encouragements of all her writing. By high school, Shayma began writing short stories in Arabic.

Basma also wrote poetry and diaries that she kept to herself. Additionally, she enjoyed going to the library and reading short stories in Arabic. She recalled her mother taking her to the annual book fair in Kuwait:

B: We also have every year, ma'arad alketaab *book fair*. I like to go there. Sometimes I pick a book like kalila wa dimna. I start reading some of it, but I didn't finish it.

G: How old were you?

B: Maybe 12.

G: Did you manage to finish it later?

B: No, I read parts of it, but... (I1, R1)

Basma's aunt also wrote poetry and kept a diary. She recalled: my aunt writes khawater wa as'ar *reflections and poetry*. I like to read hers, but she never published them. (I1, R1).

All female participants' literacy practices went beyond what was required by their teachers in school. They showed interest and enjoyed the act of writing. However, one thing that is worth mentioning here is that their writing practice was restricted to two genres: poetry and diary writing. The genre of diary writing in Arabic is not as structured as other genres of writing. This flexibility stems from the fact that most diaries are not written to be read by people other than the writer. A good example for this is Summer's diaries that were written in a blend of Standard and Jordanian Arabic. As for poetry, despite the fact that the genre of Arabic poetry writing is well-established in Arabic literature, none of the participants expressed their knowledge of this genre. They mainly practiced writing free poetry. A more flexible genre where the poems are written in columns and each line does not exceed a number of words.

Linguistic Expectations

Given the diglossic nature of Arabic where different forms of the language are used in different contexts, one theme that all participants discussed repeatedly was their awareness of the linguistic expectations of their immediate community at an early age. Here is how Basma put it "From the time I was little, we learned that writing in Arabic is

in Fusha *Standard* not in Kuwaiti. My Kuwaiti was more for talk, like at home or with friends, but at school or reading is in Fusha *Standard*" (I1, R1). Since Standard Arabic was the language of instruction in all participants' experiences, occasional code-switching to spoken varieties of Arabic was a common classroom practice. Arabic-language teachers were more likely than others to abstain from code-switching in class: "The Arabic teacher, yes. But the other teachers use Kuwaiti, but when they read they use Fusha *Standard*" (I1, R2). This shift to the spoken variety in the classroom could be attributed to the teachers' attempts to facilitate learning that otherwise might be more laborious for the students,

In Kareem's case, this linguistic awareness was present not only within Arabic, but also across languages. Being a native speaker of Berber, Kareem was exposed very minimally to Algerian Arabic as a child. Standard Arabic was a school language for him: "Standard Arabic was something that I purely used in the classroom in like math and Arabic class and all those essential subjects" (I2, R1) and Berber, Kabyle, was his home language: "Kabyle was something I used with my peers outside of class and with my relatives and family members all that kind of stuff" (I2, R2). This early initiation to the different forms helped the participants transition smoothly from one linguistic context to the other.

Calligraphy and Handwriting

An aspect that is related to writing that was stressed by the participants during the interviews was the importance of penmanship to them and their teachers. Intelligibility and the esthetics of the students' handwriting were and still are highly valued in Arabic schools. The importance of Arabic calligraphy in Arabic culture could be traced back to

the Islamic era, where it was viewed as an Islamic art. Arabic calligraphy is a sophisticated art that is widely used to decorate the anterior walls of buildings, such as mosques and royal palaces. It is also used to decorate other objects, such as coins and textile. Arabic calligraphy is presented as “[w]ords in endlessly varied forms, repeated or in sentences, [which] were blended with vegetal or geometric forms.” It is mostly used to write verses of the Quran (Hourani, 1991, p. 56-57). As such, the importance of penmanship seems to have been engrained in the participants and is seen as an inseparable part of the writing act. For example, Nasir recalled: “My elder sister during the summer, before I joined the school, spent that summer with me teaching me how to improve my handwriting” (I3, R1). Remember that Nasir was the only participant who actually followed the Arabic-language acquisition stages that were previously documented in the literature. His formal journey with literacy began when he enrolled in Quranic School at the age of five where calligraphy is usually practiced. The emphasis on calligraphy continued in later stages of schooling, where a section of the Arabic course was devoted entirely to calligraphy and dictation: “the focus of that course is to teach you the different arts of calligraphy along with dictation” (I3, R2).

The emphasis on penmanship at school was echoed by Summer. When she was asked about the topic, she replied: “We did that kind of activities early in elementary school. Starting in the first grade we were supposed to improve our handwriting” (I4, R1). However, her teachers focused more on the intelligibility of the students’ writing: “Some of them were concerned about handwriting. If it isn't readable then it is not there, to them.” (I4, R3). This was because all of the participants’ assignments were handwritten.

The discussion about penmanship also showed that some of the participants confused writing with penmanship. Both Shayma and Basma provide great examples for this. Shayma mentioned that, as a student, she used to receive check marks on her writing, so I asked:

G: Do you consider yourself a good writer? Based on the kind of checks that you got from the teacher? Were you a decent writer? Where you a...

Sh: No, I didn't like my handwriting back then, and I don't like it now.

G: I think it is interesting that you are talking about writing and talk about hand writing every time you talk about writing.

Sh: Because at that age, whatever they are giving you is to just improve your handwriting I think. Because it is mainly copying whatever on the book or whatever on the board. (I5, R2)

Basma, on the other hand, took pride in the fact that her mother is a calligrapher and she taught her calligraphy at home:

I remember in my school I was good at writing in Arabic and because my mom is khatata *Calligrapher*, so she learned me a lot of writing at home, like me and my cousins sitting. (I1, R1).

After the school they make, like, activities. I entered "Arabic writing" to improve my handwriting and it was sort of like Khat *Calligraphy*. (I1, R3)

I entered the activity after school, the Arabic one because I like writing and I like to improve my handwriting too. As I told you my Arabic teacher is very happy with my writing always. (I4, R4).

These excerpts show, Basma's definition of writing in Arabic is limited to penmanship. Throughout the course of the interview, she was not able to see or elaborate on her experience with writing outside calligraphy.

Value of Literacy

In order to better understand why literacy was not adequately fostered at home in all participants' experiences, it is important to understand how literacy is valued in their immediate communities. Despite the participants' exposure to literacy at school and the existence of written texts, such as books and newspapers at home, the majority of the

participants expressed lack of encouragement towards developing literacy skills beyond what can be measured with a grade at school. Across their experiences, the participants attributed that not only to their immediate community, but to the Arab culture at large. Even the ones who were encouraged did not have good examples to follow in their communities:

We don't have that reading culture back home. So, the only thing that I can tell you is that (laughter) I practiced reading and writing just for school requirements. Not for fun, not that I wanted to read children books. I did so, but this happened probably once every three months or so. It wasn't a routine that I do every day, but it was rather, reading in school, coming back home doing the homework, and that's it (Summer, I4, R1).

B: I think, like, my mom encourages us to go to ma'rad alketaab *book fair* to pick a story. I don't think she follows what she advises. My mother and father don't read a lot or my father has a library. It is more like religion things, not like you know. So, my mom encourages us to read at an early age, to pick stories, read stories.

G: So, more of outside reading?

B: Yeah.

G: Your dad's reading is more focused on religion?

B: Yeah. (Basma, I1, R1)

Nasir was asked about whether or not storytelling was something that was practiced in his household while growing up. He responded:

As I said, it is not part of the culture, or at least where I lived or at least in my family context, but I know that my friends are the same, but I'm not sure if it is to a more educated families where parents have graduate or undergraduate degrees that they are doing things like this. My parents didn't do it. (I3, R1)

S: It is a cultural thing. Yeah. But I think that things have changed nowadays. People are becoming more aware of the importance of reading and writing at home, but generally speaking when I was a child, I never recall that I had friends who were encouraged at home to read and write outside of the school requirements. So, writing for school or writing at school. That's it. I feel like it was a cultural thing. (Summer, I4, R2).

The way literacy is valued in the participants' immediate communities and the

Arab culture, coupled with the limited exposure to Standard Arabic, seem to have had an impact on the way the participants themselves valued their literacy practices in Arabic.

Summary

Let me revisit the questions stated at the beginning of this chapter:

1. Where are the participants socialized into literacy practices in their L1?

The participants are mainly socialized into literacy practices in Arabic in school. Their literacy exposure at home is an extension to their school literacy. In addition, female participants have more experience with personal literacy when compared to their male counterparts. Despite the fact that all participants were exposed to literacy at an early age, the quality of their literacy practices was questionable. The majority of the participants did not feel that their home and community at large provided a fertile environment for their growth as knowledge seekers.

2. What impact, if any do socio-cultural/educational contexts have on the subjects' literacy practices in different parts of the Arab world?

Based on the participants' stories, two factors emerged as influential in these contexts: 1) Parents' education level and presence at home, and 2) the impact of the socio-political situation on education in their home countries. There seems to be a strong relationship between the parents' level of education and the amount of written literacy the participants were exposed to at home. Another factor that is related to the parents' education was the presence of that parent to help with school literacy. In both Summer and Shayma's experiences, their fathers had terminal degrees, an MS and a PhD respectively, however both parents were busy earning livings outside of the home. Thus,

they were not closely involved in the daily development of their children's literacy practices and this task was diverted to a sibling.

The other factor is the socio-political situation in all the participants' respective countries. As discussed in chapter four, the historical and socio-political factors have had an undeniable impact either on the participants themselves or their parents and their communities at large. This impact has had a lasting effect on the quality of their education systems. In addition to these factors, the diglossic nature of Arabic seems to have added another layer of difficulty to the participants' literacy acquisition and practices. The following chapter will discuss the impact of diglossia on the participants' literacy acquisition and literacy practices in more details.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION II

In chapter two, I argued that one factor that might influence the literacy practices of native speakers of Arabic is the diglossic nature of Arabic. The discrepancy between the written and the spoken forms of Arabic might hinder their socialization into the written form due to limited exposure to this form, especially in writing. This chapter will look at the impact diglossia has on the participants' language socialization. Using the participants' stories, it will answer the following question:

1. What impact, if any, does diglossia have on the acquisition of reading and writing skills?

To answer this question, this section will look at the participants' own interpretation and reflection on Arabic as a diglossic language. Based on the responses during the interview, all participants had partial exposure to Standard Arabic. This exposure was limited to school and cartoons and news on television. Even school, however, did not provide a full exposure to this form of Arabic as the majority of teachers, with the exception of the Arabic teacher, code-switched to Colloquial Arabic. The lack of prolonged exposure to this form of Arabic had a negative impact on the quality of their writing in their composition classes. For example, Summer expressed her dislike of her Arabic composition class where she was not given explicit instructions

about the assignments, given very little time to finish them, and lacked the vocabulary needed to express herself in Standard Arabic:

I recall that I didn't like composition classes in Arabic, because we were given the topic and go ahead and start writing. You have forty minutes. So, twenty minutes for the first draft and twenty or a little bit less for the final copy. There wasn't much instruction during the composition class. As a school child, I was having a hard time coming up with ideas. I did have ideas, but it was hard for me to express them, because my only source of Standard Arabic knowledge was, as I told you, television shows and that kind of stuff and the situation wasn't as it is today. We watched television every day for only a couple of hours, or probably three hours at the most. So, there wasn't that much exposure to Standard Arabic. Although we did read and write and that interest in reading when you come back home is not that nourished and encouraged by parents. I remember that I didn't like it because the teacher did not give us detailed instructions...how to start. How to conclude, or give us a formulaic expressions that can be used to address this topic (I4, R2).

The excerpt above shows how the linguistic nature of Arabic impeded Summer's ability to write in Arabic. Despite the fact that she had the ideas to write on a given topic, she was not able to translate her ideas into a linguistic code that was acceptable in a classroom setting. This in turn led to feelings of frustration and inadequacy:

This is something that made me sometimes feel frustrated and felt like I didn't do well enough. Not because I did not want to write on this topic, or I didn't like it. It's rather because I didn't receive the quality of education required for this. I wish I had better education or better instruction in writing to perform well there, especially until the end of middle school. I had that kind of resistance to write during composition classes, because this is the way it was. Probably it developed later on in high school, because I started to practice writing myself to get prepare for the high school certificate. The certificate exam. So, I started to read samples that are like model samples that will get high scores according to the standards, the national standards. I started to imitate them and it started to be more fun for me to write for school (I4, R1).

Recall that Summer was the participant who kept a diary that she did not share with anyone. Her diary was written in a blend of Standard and Jordanian Arabic, a form that is not acceptable in the written discourse. This shows her love for writing, as well as her

inability to fully express her ideas in Standard Arabic. As the high-school exit exam was looming, Summer's only choice was to be proactive and improve her writing skills by exposing herself to more texts written in Standard Arabic. It was then that writing became more enjoyable to her.

Other participants who were exposed to Standard Arabic at an early age expressed their awareness of the distinction between the written and the spoken forms, what Shayma called a "huge distinction" (I5, R2). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Shayma was the participant with the most developed home literacy. She found her early exposure to Standard Arabic both on television and at home very beneficial for the development of her reading skills:

I was exposed to the written forms of formal Arabic, as soon as I was able to read. As soon as I was able to read letters, I just started reading textbooks for kids in formal Arabic. I don't think...sometimes, I wouldn't understand everything, but by the time I find myself understanding. I told you because of the television with the cartoons in formal Arabic, we were...we understood formal Arabic in a very, very young. Before school even. In a very young age, we were able to understand formal Arabic and even like, I know a lot of kids they start at three years old or four years old speaking in formal Arabic because they are exposed a lot to cartoons. (I5, R4).

As an English major in college, shayma remembers taking two *magala*; essay writing classes. These classes were devoted mainly to developing the students' grammatical skills. Particularly, case endings as they are considered of an immense importance when it comes to writing in Arabic. The class also provided some partial instruction on effective writing techniques; effective ways of writing introductions, a conclusions, etc. These classes provided minimal help for Shayma as they did not require her to produce any writing and practice what she had been taught. These classes were mainly a how-to classes. Shayma had to pass an exam at the end of each class that tested

her ability to restate what she had learned rather than whether or not she could produce a piece of writing that implement what was taught:

But the focus, the whole focus was just giving you rules, like nahoo, *grammar*, like giving you rules. Almagala, *essay writing* it would be just focusing on whatever...how to write in a correct way or something (I5, R9)

G: Did you actually practice? Or did they just show you the how-to, but you never practiced.

Sh: Yeah, I don't think there was time for practicing. It was just to tell us, lesson one this. Lesson two that. The practice will be in the exam (laughter) they will just give us questions. How to do this? Is this correct? Just apply the rules. It was mainly automatic, I think. (I5, R10).

Even with her extensive experience with Standard Arabic in comparison to other participants, Shayma still disliked writing in Arabic. She found no room for creativity and thus lost interest in writing in Arabic, except for poetry. All the writing samples that were given to her in school were full of cliché constructions that she was required to imitate in her own writing:

As I told you, they would use the same sentences, maybe in every lesson madrasati jameela wa ra'e'a *my school is beautiful and wonderful*. Nahnu nohafed a'ala alsaha nadeefa *we keep the school yard clean*. manzelee nadeef wa ra' *my home is clean and wonderful*. Same things (laughter) you know. Then we have to write something similar to it. Like, really? It is not fun. (I5, R16).

Nasir was exposed to the written form of literary Arabic at an early age. He found that his early exposure to the Quran at the tender age of five had helped develop his reading skills tremendously:

I read in Arabic. I don't have any trouble reading in Arabic. I think this is has to do with the...I hadn't had this problem with reading, since my beginning as a child, because I joined the Quranic school, and you know how difficult it is to read the Quran. So, I mastered that even before I joined the school. Since I mastered difficult texts in the Quran, it makes anything easier to me after that. So, I didn't even find it difficult to read old literature. It was easy for me to understand old literature and be familiar with what's going on. (I3, R3).

Despite his familiarity with the Quran and interest in reading, Nasir reported his inability to produce an acceptable piece of writing in Arabic that followed the rules and expectations of the language. Nasir's experience contradicts previous research which found that the rhetorical structures native speakers of Arabic employ in their L2 writing were the reflection of the rhetorical structures used in Literary Arabic (e.g., Kaplan, 1966; Connor, 1996). As is apparent from his experience, Nasir's exposure to literacy in Quranic School did not provide him with the knowledge needed to produce acceptable texts in Arabic.

Later in his professional career, Nasir had to learn how to write in Arabic to meet the expectations of his job. As he began to do so, he was faced with a number of challenges that made the process of writing in Arabic more difficult. First was his inability to use the Arabic keyboard to produce his writing and second, interference from his L2 (more on this in the next chapter). To overcome the first difficulty, he resorted to writing things down then typing them:

When I try to type things in Arabic, that's what makes it difficult, so I would start first writing by hand in Arabic, then type it. Because when...by the time I am looking for letters, I forgot the ideas. (I3, R4)

As for the second issue, he found comfort in sharing his writing with a colleague who speaks English as his second language to go over his writing and help him eliminate structures he unconsciously borrowed from English. Through practice on the job, his writing skills in Arabic improved: "I started to master most of the things that I need" (I3, R4). However, they remained restricted to certain genres.

Reflections on Diglossia as a Linguistic Phenomenon

Given the diglossic nature of Arabic, the participants raised a number of concerns regarding the status and the future of the Arabic language. These concerns ranged from personal to political. In addition, the new demand on the use of technology in the Arab world is adding to the confusion as to which form should be used and at what time. For example, all participants use social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, some also use Whatsapp, which is a free app that allows users to send text messages and make international phone calls free of charge. However, none of the participants seemed confident about which form of Arabic should be used on these platforms. Based upon their shared experiences, it appears that the users of these platforms have created their own conventions in this regard. For example, Summer shared her concern that if users of Arabic keep on using the spoken form on these platforms, the essence of Arabic or Standard Arabic will “go extinct”. While she admits using Jordanian Arabic to post comments online, she believes that there is still a place for Standard Arabic. She seems to be conscious about how little Standard Arabic is being used online, as she noted that she does her best to use it online because she doesn’t want to “contribute to that process” of the Arabic language going extinct (I4, R6). She also seems to be vigilant about the forms of Arabic that are being used by the online communities she participates in:

I actually liked some pages on Facebook in which you have a community exchanging ideas and it started to be uncommon to be sharing ideas...like, there are ladies on the community page from Jordan and they share their daily problems. It is anonymous and people start to suggest solutions and reflect on the problem. It is barley happens that someone...although some of these ladies are educated enough to write in Standard Arabic, but what I notice sometimes is that whenever one of the ladies writes in Standard Arabic, some people start to mock her and make fun of her and if she is...(laughter) as if she comes from the classical ages. Why? [G: So, do they write mainly in English or in Spoken?] In spoken

Jordanian Arabic. If they write in Standard Arabic, they feel like they are not...it is kind of strange it started to be quite strange to share ideas even in the written mode in Standard Arabic. (I4, R6).

The excerpt above shows that misinterpreting the unwritten rules of language use on social media could be a source of ridicule on these platforms. When using Arabic online, deciding on which form of the language to use is no longer dictated by the mode of the communication, written versus spoken, it is dictated by the audience and the genre itself.

Of course, it depends on the audience of the page. For example, if you participate in a page about political views, things are different. People maybe prefer to write in Standard Arabic. Mostly, I feel, that people started to ignore Standard Arabic. Their spelling, their grammar started to be contaminated with the spoken languages. It doesn't make me happy. So, why is the situation as such in Arabic? I would like to avoid contributing to the process of killing Arabic that way. (I4, R6).

The statement above shows that even when the genre dictates the use of Standard Arabic, the users can't use sound Standard Arabic without code-switching to their spoken varieties. Walters (2003) argues that in code-switching scenarios, which form of Arabic is used as the matrix is highly influenced by the context. In the example above, Standard Arabic seems to be the matrix as it is the variety that is expected to be used in that context. However, due to the language users' unbalance knowledge of Standard and Colloquial varieties of Arabic, they resort to the variety they know best, colloquial, to fill in the gaps in their knowledge of the Standard. Language users who resort to this technique, in Summer's opinion, are contaminating Standard Arabic with their regional varieties. Moreover, since Standard Arabic is the only form of Arabic that is shared across the Arab world, one would expect that language users would use it to reach out to more people in the Arab world, especially on political forums.

Another aspect of language use that is prevalent in today's social media age was pointed out by Summer and Shayma. This was expressed in terms of which form of Arabic to use on Facebook, mainly between the status and the comment functions. While a status is an update that a given Facebook user shares with their friends, a comment is what other users or the user herself wishes to write as a reaction to the initial status post. These posts are usually short, a few lines at the most. Summer feels that Standard Arabic is more appropriate for these posts, but Colloquial Arabic is more appropriate for the comments:

Whenever I share a status with friends on Facebook, it feels more like a speech that I am delivering in front of my friends and acquaintances on Face book, but when you have that continuous process of communication via Whatsapp, its rather like a communication process that I am talking to you face-to-face, in which we are not trained to use Standard Arabic. But when it comes to a status, it is rather a letter that I want to...it is a speech that I want to deliver in front of my audience and I feel it is more appropriate to use Standard Arabic for that. I wish I could use Standard Arabic instead of spoken for communication, but I don't think I am proficient enough to continue doing this for a long time. We didn't receive enough training for that. I tried this before and to me, it is interesting. (I4, R10)

Despite Summer's advocacy for the continued use of Standard Arabic, she acknowledges her inability to use it for an extended period of time due to lack of proficiency. She mentioned that when she was in high school, she tried to challenge herself and her knowledge of Standard Arabic by signing up for an activity where students were required to speak only in Standard Arabic for a full week. It was meant to raise awareness about the beauty of the Arabic language:

Back when I was in high school, I was in a club, students' club. They started something called the Arabic week and we were supposed to speak Standard Arabic during that week. It was an activity to revive Arabic and show some respect to Arabic. It is interesting that to many of us, like speaking in English when you started to speak in Standard Arabic. Sometimes you need to look for the word in Standard Arabic or whether you want to process the grammatical structure of your

sentences. So, you don't speak as spontaneously and as fluently in Standard Arabic as you do with spoken Arabic, unfortunately. (14, R10).

In this excerpt, Summer goes as far as to suggest that the continuous use of Standard Arabic was as taxing as speaking a foreign language.

Shayma¹⁷ also made the same distinction between the status post and the comment section. When I asked her if she consciously made the distinction regarding form use, she responded by saying: “Ha, I don't know. Because I think...I never asked myself that question. I don't know. I think it is inappropriate to write in social media in Colloquial Arabic” (15, R42). She explained further why she thinks it is inappropriate: “because my friends in Facebook are mainly PhDs and my students and I feel like I should speak to them appropriately. It is not only family and friends” (15, R44). She perceives the comments section of her posts as a platform where she should use her variety, Yemini Arabic. For her, the comment section is more private. It is where she has conversations with people who are close to her, like her family and dear friends.

Unlike Summer and Shayma's views regarding diglossia which were more personal, Kareem's were more political in nature. Given his ethnicity, the Arabization process that was implemented in Algeria, and his strong affiliation with the Berber language and culture, Kareem sees that Standard Arabic was imposed upon Algerians to give the illusion of Arab unity. He strongly believes that Standard and Colloquial Arabic should be considered as two different languages. As such, he thinks that Colloquial Arabic should be institutionalized to facilitate literacy acquisition:

Unfortunately, I would say. Yeah, because I think it would be a lot easier for most native speakers of Arabic, if they had...if the version of Arabic they had to write in were a lot closer to their vernacular, to their variety than to you know, Quranic

¹⁷ Shayma has two Facebook profiles one for her Arabic friends and one for her English-speaking friends.

Arabic. In my case, as a Berber native speaker, it is even further distance between Standard Arabic and my native variety. So, yeah, it would be a lot easier for people like me and all Arabic speakers if they were taught to write in a variety that's closer to how they speak. (I2, R1)

Kareem further elaborated on what Standard Arabic meant to him, identifying it as the official language of Algeria that was imposed upon him at school:

It is the language that...I feel it was imposed on...like I wouldn't have seen myself using Standard Arabic if it wasn't imposed in school. I always say that if Kabyle was the language I was taught in and wrote in in school, I wouldn't have learned Arabic, studied, or spoke Standard Arabic. (I2, R4).

Kareem believes that the idea of preserving the purity of the Arabic language is a wasted effort. More specifically, the Arab linguists' conscientious efforts to preserve Arabic by disapproving countless attempts that aimed at simplifying Standard Arabic to make it more accessible to its users. Despite their opposition to these attempts, they haven't been able to bridge the gap between Standard and Colloquial Arabic. Kareem claims that his gap could be bridged if Arab countries began to devise a nationally recognized variety that combines both Standard and Colloquial features:

So, instead of saying oh, you people speak this variety of Arabic and you have to correct it and we have this pure Standard Arabic that we want you to learn, I feel like each country needs to do their own work in terms of codifying their own variety of Arabic and this variety of Arabic would bring in parts of Standard Arabic and parts of the vernacular to come up with a coded standard that's still Arabic, to a certain extent, but also unique to that region or country. (I2, R11).

Even though he learned Algerian Arabic after Standard Arabic, he considers it closer to him than Standard Arabic:

Not the same thing. I feel more affinity towards Algerian Arabic. Maybe because I have friends who speak it, you know. I never use Standard Arabic with my friends or anybody. It is like very ideologically charged language for me, but Algerian Arabic is the language that is much more human, because we can speak it. (I2, R6).

He elaborated further on the idea of Standard Arabic being an ideological language:

K: It's very political because people have this ideal of an Arab Islamic nation and Standard Arabic is essential to that political agenda. So, they force themselves to use it on television even if it is not necessarily their native language or the language they are most comfortable in. So, usually newspapers that write in Standard Arabic are newspapers that belong to that ideology and personally. I feel like I see Algeria or the rest of the Arab world. I mean other countries, but particularly Algeria, I see it as a multicultural diverse country and Standard Arabic is part of the ideology that wants Algeria to be the opposite, wants Algeria just to be Arab and Islamic. It is sort of like Standard Arabic is used as a tool to oppress diversity and ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in Algeria. (I2, R8).

Kareem recalled seeing Algerian political figures' amateurish use of Standard Arabic on television as they delivered their speeches to the nation:

You see Algerian Ministers trying to give a speech in Standard Arabic and it sounds really awkward. It sounds like they are uncomfortable speaking in Standard Arabic. I mean, why? Why would you want to speak in a language you don't feel comfortable communicating in? Why don't you just speak Algerian Arabic? Which is what Algeria's most favorite president used to do. Like in the 1990s we had a president who suddenly started talking in Algerian Arabic and everybody loved him. You know, I mean Standard Arabic is important religiously for Muslims. I mean it is valuable in that sense, but to me every time I hear Standard Arabic it is used more for ideological purposes. (I2, R8).

It is undeniable that Kareem's views about Standard Arabic are highly influenced by the political and the linguistic contexts in Algeria. For example, the Arabization campaign that focused on Standard Arabic at the expense of other languages in Algeria, has caused minority groups, like the Berber, to distance themselves from anything involving Standard Arabic in order to preserve their language and heritage. However, they still used Algerian Arabic in their everyday communication with other Algerians who are not part of their Berber community. According to Kareem, his community's affiliation with Algerian Arabic became stronger when Abdelaziz Bouteflika (1999-present), started an unprecedented trend of using Algerian Arabic on national television. His initiatives

did not focus solely on Algerian Arabic, but also on relaxing the Arabization language policy and recognizing Algeria as a multilingual nation.

Summary

This chapter investigated the impact that diglossia has on the participants' acquisition of reading and writing skills in Arabic. It also presented some of participants' reflections and viewpoints regarding diglossia. The gathered data demonstrates that early exposure to Standard Arabic resulted in strong reading, but not necessarily writing skills. This can be seen in both Nasir's and Shayma's experiences. Nasir's early exposure to Classical Arabic in Quranic School did not contribute to developing his knowledge and skill as a writer. Even though Shayma had the most developed home literacy, her school instruction was insufficient in terms of helping her improve her writing skills. Her writing instruction focused primarily on grammar and how to write rather than actual writing practice. This lack of practice in writing in general and the use of Standard Arabic in particular was echoed by Summer, who saw that her partial exposure to Standard Arabic contributed to her inability to express her thoughts in an acceptable written form. This caused frustrations during the writing act, as Summer was unable to express her thoughts in Standard Arabic.

Another aspect of diglossia that was discussed is the future and the wellbeing of the Arabic language. Summer's and Shayma's reflections were more personal in nature, as they centered around the importance and use of Standard Arabic in their lives. One issue they shared is the use of Standard and Colloquial Arabic on social media. As language users, they both identified the unwritten conventions of which form of Arabic they use on such platforms. While, they see that Standard Arabic is more appropriate for

a status post, they see that Colloquial Arabic is more appropriate for writing a comment. Their viewpoints in this regard are important as they show, as Summer had mentioned, that it is difficult for Arabic users to sustain a conversation in Standard Arabic for an extended period of time. In Kareem's case, the attitudes towards Standard Arabic are causing language users to resist the permeation of Standard Arabic into their daily lives.

To this point, I have discussed different aspects of the participants' literacy practices in Arabic. In order to provide a complete picture of their biliteracy practices, the following chapter will focus mainly on the participants' literacy practices in English and will conclude with presenting their current use of literacy in each language.

CHAPTER 7: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS III

The previous chapters discussed the participants' literacy practices in Arabic. They focused mainly on tracing the participants' acquisition of literacy in their first language (L1), Arabic, as well as the impact diglossia has on developing their reading and writing skills. In order to provide a complete picture of the participants' biliterate experiences, this chapter will explore the literacy practices of the participants in their second language (L2), English. It will also examine the different domains in which the participants use Arabic and English today. This chapter will address the following questions:

- 1) Where are the participants socialized into literacy practices of their L2?
- 2) How are literacy practices in their L2 influenced by those of their L1?

To answer these questions, the first part of this chapter will trace the participants' acquisition of literacy in English. The second part will discuss the influence of the participants' literacy practices in L1 on that of their L2. It will conclude by looking at the participants' current uses of Arabic and English.

Experiences with English and Other Languages

All participants shared their knowledge of English as their second/additional language. Kareem is the only participant who is also proficient in French. His exposure to French began at an early age as his father read newspapers and watched television in

French. He also had cousins who lived in France at the time and would come visit during the summer. Kareem was formally exposed to French as a school subject in fourth grade:

With French, we had dictation and it's kind of the same thing. We had French as a subject. That's it and we sometimes did dictation and sometimes we do reading where they ask you questions about comprehension and sometimes we do writing, but it is all one subject. (I2, R11).

Looking at French as a mere school subject changed in ninth grade, when Kareem failed French and had to retake ninth grade the following year. French became his focus and he was determined to improve his French that summer. Television played an important role in this transformation:

I remember I had post it notes where I would write down the French words that I learned, and all the information I had learned from like game shows, television shows, movies, news in French. After that summer my grades in French became better and I felt a lot more comfortable and French has single-handedly saved my academic career, because I wasn't doing well at school until I felt I was doing well in French. My grades in French really helped bring me up. So, since then I got into French. (I2, R12).

Kareem's first informal exposure to English was when he was in second grade. He recounted a childhood memory where his cousin, a flight attendant at the time, came back to Algeria for a visit: "when she came back to Algeria, I was doing second grade and that got me excited about English, because she was teaching me all these new words" (I2, R6). After this brief exposure to English, Kareem was not exposed to English again until he was in eighth grade, that's when he began learning English in school. During his middle-school and high-school years, English instruction and use were limited to the classroom. In high school, Kareem began to show more interest in English as he became acquainted with a girl who was fluent in English:

I was around her a lot. She would give me, like, lyrics of Michael Jackson and that type of thing and we would talk in English [G: Was she Algerian?] yeah, she

was Algerian and that's the thing. It is very rare for an Algerian to be fluent in English and she was and we spent a lot of time together. I learned a lot and I got interested in English. I started listening to Michael Jackson and find the lyrics in English and then I was practicing with my cousin who was visiting us and that got me excited about English. (I2, R6).

This experience marked Kareem's personal interest in English. He majored in foreign languages in high school and later became an English major in college. In his English-language program, the majority of the subjects were in English with the exception of Arabic and Islamic studies. When he joined college, Kareem described himself as being proficient in French, not English. However, in order to fulfill the requirements of his major, he learned English through the subjects he was taking as his program did not provide any language classes that were designed to help him improve his language skills prior to starting his degree. He described his struggle in these classes as the English classes he took in high school failed to adequately prepare him to be an English major in college. He described his English classes in high school as:

Exam-based. I think it was modeled after the French system. I think of the European system in the sense that, like with Arabic as a subject, in English, we would have a text that we would have to read for the exam and comprehension questions, some vocabulary questions, and some grammar questions, and written expression where you have to write an essay (I2, R3)

The essays were about four-five paragraphs. Actually, it was three paragraphs. An introduction, body, and conclusion. That's how they taught us in high school. But I wouldn't say there was a massive difference between how they taught us Arabic, Standard Arabic, as a subject and English as a subject (I2, R4)

This limited practice with English in general and writing in particular had led Kareem to struggle in his college classes. As a junior in college, Kareem came to the U.S. as an exchange student. His experience with writing in the U.S. was very different from the exam-based, three to four paragraph essays he had practiced in Algeria:

They were massively different. I remember, for example after I wrote my first seven-page paper during my first semester, I [as a junior high school student?] Yeah, I felt like I did something amazing. I felt like I have published something on Time Magazine or something. It felt like a massive achievement, because I had to work so hard. I had to go to the writing Center every day. I had to go talk to the teacher. I had to spend so many hours in my room, you know, writing. And so, to me, I was so proud of it. To be able to write a seven-page paper. It was like this huge thing. And reading, I had to do a lot more reading. I really enjoyed doing that. It was really a lot of fun to me to be exposed to all of these new topics. Talking about tattoos or other controversies that I have never heard of before, was really fun for me to read about this kind of stuff. So, although it was different, it was a lot, I still found a way to enjoy it. (I2, R5).

The writing environment in the U.S. provided Kareem with the material and the support he needed to improve his writing. It also gave him a sense of accomplishment that motivated him to work even harder to improve his writing. Today, Kareem describes himself as a proficient writer in English as he identified English as his dominant written language. He rarely writes in French and almost never writes in Arabic: “I am way more comfortable with expressing myself in writing in English than French or Arabic” .(I2, R7).

Nasir. Nasir’s initial contact with English was through watching cartoons. These cartoons were not widely available at the time; they were broadcasted for a couple of hours a day. In addition to cartoons in English, movies with Arabic subtitles were also available, but he was not allowed to watch them because he was considered too young. Watching these cartoons and not understanding English motivated and inspired Kareem to learn English as an attempt to unlock the mystery of this foreign language:

I was just looking at the cartoons and I can only get a clue based on the motions there, but I didn't actually understand. That's when I actually said, it would be nice to learn this language and I know that this language is taught in our schools.(I3, R4).

When he was first introduced formally to English in school in the seventh grade, he was presented with the alphabet and some basic words and sentences. It wasn't until the second semester that he was introduced to short, three to four line paragraphs. These introductory activities were aimed at teaching reading and strengthening vocabulary. After reading these short paragraphs, Nasir was given a passage with missing words and was asked to fill in the blanks using a list of words that was provided for him. Later during that semester, he was introduced to what he called "guided writing":

They would give you this is about X, now write about yourself. You are supposed to say he is saying I am, I am, so basically all you change is the name. The content, so the grammar is there. So, if he is saying I am Alex, I would say I am XXX. I come from the UK. I would say, I come from Saudi Arabia. I was born blah, blah, blah. I would say I was born in blah, blah, blah. It was something like this. So, that's how I started actually writing (I3, R1).

As he advanced in his schooling, he noted more complexity in vocabulary and grammar and more sophistication in the topics presented:

They would talk about astronauts, for example, they would talk about Neil Armstrong. They would...well, it was not Neil Armstrong. It was about a prince who participated with NASA, but basically...they went with an expedition with NASA. Then, they would talk about historical events like how Saudi Arabia was unified. Talking about Ibn Battuta's¹⁸ travel. (I3, R1)

Reading and writing were taught simultaneously in these classes. Nasir was first introduced to a given writing genre through reading, then he was asked to emulate the conventions of that genre in his own writing. As he reflected on his writing experience in English during these years, he noted that "reading and writing were more connected in this way, to me" (I3, R,1).

¹⁸ Is a Moroccan explorer (1304-1377) who is considered one of the greatest explorers of all time (Hourani, 1991, p. 129)

He sees that combining reading and writing in his English classes has helped his progress as a writer. He also recalled that he received explicit instruction about writing in English. For example, he was introduced to different writing genres, like letter writing, formal versus personal, and application letters. These experiences have helped his development as a writer in English, contrary to what he had experienced in Arabic. Writing in English was more natural to him. "I remember that I didn't have much difficulty in English as I did in Arabic" (I3, R3). Even though English writing was widely practiced in school, Nasir's English-language teachers followed a more traditional method when evaluating the students' writing. They focused primarily on grammar and usage. There was less emphasis on ideas and the overall cohesion of the students' writing. One reason behind the teachers' lack of focus on content, Nasir argued, could be due to the fact that Nasir and his peers were given models to guide them through the content they were expected to produce. These practices continued throughout high school.

In College, as an English major, Nasir spent the first two years of his college career taking English-language courses to help him improve his English before he started taking classes in his major:

When I joined the English department, they have this belief that the preparation in high school is not enough for you to get started with reading literature and reading about phonology and syntax and this stuff. So, the first two years were spent on developing our language skills. So, it was a kind of intensive English that we received in the first...at least the first three semesters or four semesters, so we are focusing on the language issue, but there are two courses that I would say actually were thrown in the curriculum to get you started and prepared you for the next two years in your Bachelor degree. So, we started by writing one. Speaking and listening one, grammar one, and reading one. So, this is how the curriculum was divided. Speaking and listening were joined together and reading and writing were separated and grammar is a separate course (I3, R3).

As part of the preparation for classes in his content area, Nasir continued to receive explicit instructions in writing in English:

We had a book from sentence to paragraph. It was pretty similar to the way it was taught in high school, but towards the end of that semester, we started to write our own paragraph. There was a focus again on grammar. There wasn't much talking, but we learned about the concept of topic sentence. It was the first time, I learned about topic sentence and body. After that, we took what we call writing two. In writing two, we started learning about writing processes, well, not writing processes, but writing a story and writing stuff like this. I remember in writing two, the professor followed many techniques. He would do something like close reading, like organizing the sentences. Scrambled sentences we had to organize. But also we write free writing. (I3, R3).

Around this time, Nasir's lessons in writing began to move from controlled to semi-controlled. Brainstorming techniques were introduced and as he progressed into college, writing became less controlled and the idea of drafting was introduced. Writing conferences were widely practiced as well:

That's when we started doing drafting and the concept of writing labs. The concept of writing labs started with us from the very beginning. Like, we would come to two classes, three classes. General classes for everyone and the fourth class is basically the teacher would divide the class into three groups, each group would come. There is much focus conferencing going on there. From composition one and composition two. (I3, R3).

During conferences, Nasir received feedback on his writing that targeted specific points in his papers. The feedback during these conferences began to expand beyond grammar to include content and style. It was around this time that Nasir became more comfortable with writing in English.

This extended contact and practice with English and English writing gave Nasir a strong base, which resulted in a smoother transition to his graduate career. His only challenge as a graduate student was estimating the length of time it would take him to

finish an assignment. Throughout his academic career, he has been confident and proud of his writing ability.

Basma. Basma was first introduced to English in school in the fourth grade. She recalled that her English class met once a week and focused primarily on teaching basic reading and writing skills. Among all participants, Basma's experience with English was the least developed. As a science major, she realizes the importance of English for her academic and professional career, but she did not show any interest in improving her English beyond that. Basma recalled how her mother enrolled her in language course during the summer of her fourth grade:

She pushed me to do English maybe twice in a ma'ahad Engleyzi *institute of English*. It was like...I think it was general speaking, writing, and reading, and at the end we would have exam. So, but I have never read a book in English. I am not really interested in reading in English or writing. At school it was the English class writing. (I1, R5).

This excerpt shows her resistance to learning English as she described how her mother “pushed” her to take English-language courses. In elementary school, Basma continued to receive instruction on writing in English. This instruction was mainly done through models. She was first given a model that she was then asked to summarize and ultimately imitate:

At the school. Yeah, we do writing. I remember the summary, where you have a reading topic and you have to summarize it. They teach us the skill of some writing. This is elementary school. And then we have writing where they ask you to write about some topics...(I1 R2).

This type of writing instruction continued through high school. As a science major in college, almost all of Basma's classes were in English:

B: In Kuwait, the science college, we study all the things in English, except if we have like a class for education or religion, that would be in Arabic, or altareekh *history*. I would take only like four subjects in Arabic, but all the science is in

English.

G: So the book is in English, so does the teacher explain the things in English?

B: It depends on the teacher. Most of the teachers would switch between Arabic and English in the class. Like, they explain more in Arabic, but write...formulas and things like that in English.

Even the comments and discussing are in English, but when the teacher tries to explain something, he explains it in Arabic. (I1, R6).

Despite her exposure to English from elementary school to college and beyond, Basma remained instrumentally motivated to study English. Her only motivation was her academic success in her major, engineering, which is strongly connected with her proficiency in English.

Summer. Summer started to show interest in English when she was in third grade. Her father had a great influence on her desire to learn English. When she was a child, Summer's father left Jordan for the U.K. to earn an MS in engineering. Summer and her siblings were left behind in Jordan with her mother. During his summer trips back to Jordan, he brought English-language books with him to teach his children English. She recalled:

My father received his education in Britain and he did want us to improve our language skills in English early enough. I started to read and write in English, probably around the age of eight as a third grader because of the support I received from my father. He did have some resources for us. Some books that he brought with him to help us improve that kind of proficiency in English (I4, R4).

His experience in the U.K. had a positive impact on how he viewed English, which positively influenced Summer's. While there, he took English-language classes to improve his English language skills and he found these classes to be interesting. From the way she talked about English, these positive attitudes that Summer was exposed to at an early age have positively impacted the way she viewed English and the importance of English in her life.

Summer was first introduced to English in school in fifth grade. Her first two years of English-language classes focused primarily on teaching the basics of the language, such as the alphabet, grammar, basic sentence structure, etc. Writing instruction was introduced in seventh grade. In eighth grade, she began to participate in writing competitions that were held among schools in her area. She was one of few students who participated in these competitions, because the majority of the students disliked English in general and writing in particular:

I remember the topic was about the four seasons. So, I wrote (laughter) a couple of pages piece of composition and I won. I don't think that the competition is that fierce, because it was among public schools and many students had that English complex, I would say. They didn't like the subject. To them, it sounded like a hard subject, because teachers were not well-trained in...Students, to me started to learn it late. Fifth grade is late to me to start learning a language. Many students didn't like writing in English. There were some competing, but I don't think there were many, because I could see that every time during the English class, I noticed that my classmates did not enjoy the task of writing in particular. But I did like that and I think I was exceptional in the environment, because of the support and encouragement I received at home to study English (I4, R3).

The support she received at home was what made her like English even more. As can be seen in the excerpt above, the majority of her classmates did not share her passion for English. She attributed this to the traditional methods that her teachers used to teach English. Here is how she put it:

So traditional. So classical. It was always about reading a text and doing the questions. Even teachers...the curriculum was imported from Britain. The ones that we used in elementary school, but now it is American. So, teachers always avoided the tasks in which we were required to write much or we need to brainstorm and think of creative ideas. They wanted to do the easy tasks for us. The easy tasks for them as well, because it takes time to get out of that context, in which the students are used to the traditional, spoon feeding teaching (I4, R5).

She elaborated further:

In the stage of elementary school, I remember most of the exams were in grammar and vocabulary and most of them were objective, so matching or filling the gaps. But later on when we were in the middle school, every time we had a test there was always a short paragraph or a short passage, I would say with three or four questions following them to answer reading comprehension questions then we had grammar and vocabulary. So, basically, it was reading, grammar, and vocabulary (I4, R7).

In high school, there was more focus on writing, but still writing did not get as much attention as grammar did. The focus on grammar began to shift towards writing as the high school exit exam was approaching. Teachers started to provide more instruction on writing as writing was one of the skills tested in the exam. Summer still did not find the writing instruction she received in school satisfactory:

I did some personal effort to do my own writing. Sometimes, I gave the teachers samples of my writing to give me feedback, regardless she required us to do so or not. Although, the ultimate purpose was the exam, the high school exam, but I did like to write myself and I wanted someone to encourage me, but when I didn't have anybody. I started to write myself (I4, R12).

Her positive attitude towards writing encouraged her to seek help to improve her writing beyond the requirements of the test.

Shayma. Shayma was first exposed to English when her older sister began to teach her a few sentences in English. She instantly became interested in English. This initial contact with English was fostered more later as Shayma's father bought her an introductory English-language book that came with cassettes. She still remembers the summer before English was formally introduced to her in school. It was in the summer following her sixth grade that she thought to start listening to the cassettes her father had bought her:

I was in summer vacation alone at home. Then I decided it would be fun just to study it. Then, I studied it alone at home, tried to imitate the way they talked and tried to understand the meaning of all the sentences. Oh my God, my English was really improved after that (I5, R2).

This experience jump started her knowledge in English, something that distinguished her from her class the following school year when she started learning English formally in school:

When I went to seventh grade, other students were still studying the alphabets and he does, she, does, and I do. I was already able to use sentences and speak like in a correct pronunciation. So, I remember all the teachers favoring me in the class. I worked harder because I liked that. I liked how I was really good in it (I5, R2).

Writing in Shayma's English class was taught early and it took the form of controlled writing where she was asked to fill in the blanks and do some more exercises that focused mainly on grammar:

It would be sentences that use certain forms of grammar. For example, have verb to have or verb to be and then there are sentences, then we will do some writing exercises about it. Like, how to put in the blanks. Or how to reproduce similar sentences. Something like that .(I5, R2).

This way of teaching writing continued until high school. In high school writing practice was still controlled, but focused on providing the students with a set of questions that would help them illicit their writing. After all the questions were answered, the answers would be combined to create the passage. Despite the controlled nature of writing in English, Shayma still found it more interesting than the way she was taught to write in Arabic:

It was a lot better, because I just can write whatever, I think or there was in the questions, like what you think about this or how you feel about this. I would just write. It was very exciting, for the first time in my life (laughter) After all that education. (I5, R12).

As an English literature major in college, Shayma's writing was limited to exams.

Writing during exams was used as a tool to show that the students learned the material that was covered in class.

As a Master's student, Shayma was the only ESL student in her program. She struggled with the demands of the U.S. higher education as she wasn't accustomed to reading long novels or writing term papers. Here is how she recalled her challenges with reading in English:

Big words. Difficult words. Unfamiliar words. Sometimes, the way the author...some authors are very difficult to read. Even for English speakers. The style. Maybe, sometimes, not straightforward and that would make me feel, not challenged, but, you know, giving up. I don't want to read it any more (I5, R2).

Yes, I just try to do my best. Sometimes I would skip some pages and try to keep notes, because the whole novel, sometimes I can't keep up with the whole novel when I read throughout the week. But sometimes, I would not finish the novel. Yes, that's what happens. So, I was like, OK. I am going to the class. I didn't finish it. What should I do? I did my best (I5, R5)

During these hard times, Shayma's safety net was her classmates and the professors in her program:

Definitely, my classmates. They would explain to me how to do things whenever they have time. The Internet. I would go. How to write this or how to do this. Try to find an example and then do my own. So, the Internet and my classmates and some professors were very understanding, very helpful, and very patient with me. I needed that. I was the only foreign student in my class. The other students were Americans and I was from Yemen and my mother tongue is Arabic. So, I had difficulties, but the others were moving smoothly (I5, R3).

All this support helped her improve her writing and overall knowledge in English.

Today, she feels more comfortable with her abilities as a writer. Towards the end of the interview, she described herself as an aspiring writer in English as she had just published a short story in a local literary magazine.

Influence of L1 on L2

Previous studies that looked at the influence of the learner's L1 literacy practices on that of their L2 have indicated complex, but mostly positive relationship between the two (e.g. Bialystok, 2002; Collier, 1999). For example, Bell's (1995) autobiographical study that reported on her own literacy progress in Chinese, her L2, and how much her literacy in English, L1, complicated the acquisition of her Chinese literacy. Such studies suggest that L1 literacy skills might influence the acquisition and use of L2 literacy skills.

In the case of the participants in this study, there was an undeniable influence of the diglossic nature of Arabic on the acquisition and socialization into Standard Arabic. Such socialization mostly took place in school with no much scaffolding beyond. As a result, none of the participants reported any influence, negative or positive, from their L1 onto their L2. Due to lack of prior training in Standard Arabic, they actually learned how to write on the job. Unlike in the U.S., writing on the job in the participants' home countries was limited to administrative tasks and the writing is mostly formulaic in nature, such as requesting a leave, resigning, writing memos (Haeri, 2009). The majority of the communication is done face-to-face, but some participants reported using email for interdepartmental communication. However, English is almost always used in these emails (more on this below).

Summer, for example, who was an English teacher, had to write her weekly lesson plans in Arabic and present them to the school principle for approval: "Yeah, we were required to write lesson plans for when I was a school teacher and this was supposed to be in Arabic even if I was teaching English" (I4, R10). Another instance where the participants needed to write in Arabic on the job was to write an appeal or a

request for vacation. Nasir, Summer, and Shayma had to do such tasks as they all had jobs in their home countries prior to coming to the U.S. For example, Shayma used writing on the job occasionally to write “formal letters asking for vacation or other formalities” (I5, R8). She later explained her unfamiliarity with writing in this genre in Arabic at first:

At first, I used to ask the head of the department, how do I write this letter? He would give me instructions you do this, this, this and then I would show it to him. This is at the beginning and by time, you just get used to it and how it is written (I5, R10).

According to Shayma’s experience, as well as Nasir’s and Summer’s, these letters are usually a few lines long, a paragraph at the most: “it is a paragraph, usually. If it is longer, nobody would read it (laughter) three, four lines and you are good” (I5, R12).

The participants’ limited experience with writing in Standard Arabic in and outside of school provides no basis for the conclusions reached by previous researchers regarding the implementation of Classical and Standard Arabic structure when writing in English (e.g., Kaplan, 1965; Ostler, 1987). Some participants reported positive transfer from English into Arabic in their career as professionals. For example, Nasir, who went back to his home country after finishing his MA in the U.S., saw that writing in English actually helped him write in Arabic. Even though the rhetoric he produced in Arabic sounded “foreign” at first, since he employed English rhetoric when he was say writing a letter to his supervisor, it eventually led to a written product that probably wouldn’t have been produced without his knowledge and experience writing in English. Here is Nasir’s experience in his own words:

I remember, my colleague, who was also my boss, he used to tell me OK...I would write and give it to him and ask him to proofread it for me or tell me what I

had to add and he told me one thing, it is interesting you are using English to write in Arabic. He noticed that. He is an English major as well. [G: so the structure is different?] Yeah, the structure is different. The genre is not supposed to be this way in Arabic. So, I would rely on this, because I haven't actually received much instruction in writing in Arabic. It is all my own initializes to teach myself (I3, R1).

It is very normal for me when I start to write in Arabic to rely on such knowledge. What I meant by borrowing from English, sometimes, borrowing some of the formulaic expressions. I use it in writing and try to translate it into Arabic. It is used in Arabic, but it is not used in the context where I have to. It is used. It is there. Like in Arabic, we say, *men jeha wa men jiha okhra on the one hand and on the other hand*, which is similar to what we say in on the one hand and on the other hand. But it is used similarly. However, some other words in English that also have its bases in Arabic, but they can't be used the same. So, that's, actually where I got into trouble. Because it has similar meaning, but in this context, it is not used. The organization issues. Like in Arabic, we do not start our argument at the very beginning. It always comes last. So, when I write a letter, where I try to convince someone of a problem and to call for a meeting or to call for something, I usually present it from the very beginning, because that's actually where I know that the readers are oriented that they want to know what do you want from me, but in Arabic, it is not the case. You have to start by justification [G: set it up] Yes, set it up and then you have to send it with the argument. So, based on this, we should do x,y, and z and I think this can be done by holding a meeting. So, I used to come and say, I am writing to call for a meeting regarding the issue of x, y, z and then explain why this is a problem and why we have to attend to. Then they would come to me and say, no. People need to know. You need to guide people why you should do this. Then I found it to be exactly the expectation (I3, R2)

An aspect of writing in Arabic that Nasir found challenging was typing using an Arabic keyboard. He described how his lack of computer skills in Arabic hindered the progress of writing in a genre and a language that he found challenging to begin with. In order to circumvent typing in Arabic, he resorted to writing by hand and asking his secretary to type up what he wrote.

Reflections and Self-Worth

This section focuses on the participants' evaluations of their own literacy skills in their first and second/additional languages. This includes their own sense of literacy in terms of strengths and weaknesses in the languages they know.

Kareem. In terms of writing, Kareem identified English as his strongest language, followed by French then Standard Arabic: "I would say I am...in terms of writing, I am most proficient in writing in English at this point, because I haven't written anything in French in a while. Actually, I am a better writer in French than in Standard Arabic either" (I2, R2). Even though he identified English as the language he feels most comfortable in, he still is not confident in his writing abilities in English:

Yeah, I would definitely say that my proficiency is higher in English. I mean, I'm not saying that I am great, a perfect writer in English, but I still struggle to write in English, but I am way more comfortable with expressing myself in writing in English than French or Arabic (I2, R5).

His major weakness in writing in English is integrating sources when writing academically. Outside of this weakness, he considers English as his strongest language when it comes to expressing his ideas in writing.

Nasir. He identified writing in Arabic as "incidental," something that he picked up later in life as a professional. Even when Arabic writing was taught in school, the focus was more on using the language as a tool to deliver memorized material as a way to prove that that the students had internalized what had been learned:

When I reflected in this in a paper I wrote, it make me think of writing in Arabic as incidental, as not necessary. As not important, unless you are actually a writer. But if you are learning or studying, you can go to the exam. You can answer the questions the way you want to answer the questions to demonstrate that you memorized (I2, R1).

His experience with writing in English, on the other hand was and still is a source of joy for him. He sees this as the result of the way he was introduced to English; the explicit way writing was taught and the nontraditional approaches his teachers used to teach writing in English:

I had the knowledge in English and I had to kind of contrast... and that was really helpful to me. I don't know, maybe probably...my interest into learning to write and learning to teach or specialize or major in writing, basically grew up out of my love for writing in English, because I found myself writing very well in English. I don't know why, but I don't have much of grammatical...I do have, since English is my second language. I am not implying that, oh, I can write perfectly from the first time, but I can notice all ...most if not all of my mistakes when I revise. That's number one. Number two, I can tell the organization. I can tell (unintelligible) because that's what I have been taught from the very beginning (I3, R2).

As we saw with Kareem, Nasir did not express an ultimate knowledge of English.

Nonetheless, English is still the language he most identifies with.

Summer. Throughout the interview, Summer expressed her love for Arabic.

Among all the participants, she was the most concerned about the status and future of Arabic. She expressed her apprehension about the growing trend of writing in Colloquial Arabic on social media and text messaging. Despite all these concerns, she acknowledges her limitations when it comes to writing in Arabic. She is aware that despite her belief that Standard Arabic must be used more frequently in order to be preserved, she has been unable to do so. She blames her inability to express herself in Standard Arabic on the education system that did not provide her with the instruction she needed to become a proficient writer in Arabic.

Shayma. Shayma believes that English and Arabic complement one another in her life. She identified both languages as close to her for different reasons. While she sees Arabic as a language that is more intimate to her, she sees English as “a professional

language.” Looking at English as “a professional language” goes beyond her graduate studies, to include her aspiration to be a writer in English.

Basma. Basma expressed her love for reading and writing in Arabic. She expressed her dislike of the English language as she thought of it as dry, lacking the imagery and beauty of Arabic: “English lugha jamda *frozen or dry language*” (I1, R1). However, being an engineering major, she realizes the value of English to her professional career. She even lamented her inability to learn English earlier in her life as she compared herself to a friend whom she admires:

My best friend, I like her mother's way. Her mother is strict, so she entered her to the British Council in Kuwait. She learned English from an early age. Everyday she goes after the school. Her English is very good and I learned from her because sometimes she texts me in English. She expresses herself more in English than in Arabic, I think I learned from her, and I like how her mother made her study English (I1, R2).

She believes her dislike of English stems from her inability to express herself due to her low proficiency in the language:

Sometimes I blame myself that I didn't work on my English, even when I am in Kuwait. I always get A's in the classes, but I would get an A- in English, like not the top. I know I have a problem in English, but never work on it. This is my fault and even like in the high school. So, this accounts for writing too, so it is not only...it is English in general (I1, R1)

Exploring how the participants valued their biliterate experiences in Arabic and English is very important to understand how they make sense of their experiences across languages and contexts. All participants highlighted the importance of English for them. Even Basma' dislike of English was due to lack of proficiency necessary to express herself in the language.

Current uses of Literacy

The participants' ability to use multiple languages enriches their communicative abilities in different contexts. For example, all participants use English to send and receive emails at the professional and the personal level. Basma, who expressed her lack of control over the English language, prefers to use English when she communicates via email with her professors back in Kuwait:

The emails I feel the English is more formal, because I email more in English than in Arabic. Even in Kuwait University, if I sent an email to Arabic professor, I prefer to send it in English, because I feel it is more formal and I think about sending it in Kuwaiti or in English. Doctor Al'arabee badezla eemail bel'arabee *the Arabic professor, I email him in Arabic*, I think about writing it in Kuwaiti. I don't feel good about writing the email in Fusha *Standard* and I don't think that the email will be formal if I write in Kuwaiti, so I prefer to write in English (I1, R1).

The excerpt above captures the confusion that the participants shared when writing an email. On the one hand, if the writer chooses to use his/her variety to write the email, they are excluding readers from other Arabic varieties, as these readers might not be able to read that particular variety. On the other hand, if they chose to write the email in Standard Arabic, it will sound more formal than what the writer had intended. As such, Basma feels more comfortable using English an in-between language, more formal than Colloquial Arabic and less formal than Standard Arabic:

When I speak to my professors, I speak in Kuwaiti. Even if he is not from Kuwait, he will understand if he lives in Kuwait. I don't speak with him in Fusha *Standard*, so when I try to write something for him, I don't feel good to write in Fusha *Standard*, because I talk to him in Kuwaiti, I prefer English. I can write short sentences and to the point and formal. (I1, R2).

During the interview, I presented Basma with a hypothetical scenario where a friend of hers sends her an email in Standard Arabic. She responded in a mocking voice:

“I would feel it is strange, like *alsalamu alaykum, kayfa halooke* *peace be upon you. How are you?* Just strange (laughter)” (I1, R3). In this context, she sees that Kuwaiti or Colloquial Arabic is more appropriate. Thus, whether to use English or Colloquial Arabic for Basma depends primarily on the context and audience.

Another platform where the participants feel more comfortable using Colloquial Arabic is text messaging and social media. The majority of the participants use their spoken variety of Arabic when exchanging texts with friends and family. They also use English if they know that the recipient spoke English, even if they both spoke Arabic as their first language. Here are Nasir’s thoughts on this:

If the person knows English, I would send it in English [G: native speaker of Arabic?] Yeah, even if he is a native speaker of Arabic, if he replied to me in Arabic, then I would understand that his preference is Arabic and I would continue in Arabic. So, it is a matter of testing the waters, but I personally prefer to write in English. Not because I don't like Arabic and not because I don't know how to write in Arabic. It is just faster to me to write in English. Because I know where the letters are. It is a practicality reason rather than...I find myself better doing it. (I3, R4).

In addition to the use of Arabic and English separately in texting, Arabish is widely used these days. Arabish, or the use of Arabic chat alphabet is when Arabic language users use a mix of Roman alphabet along with numbers to communicate in Arabic. For example, *sabah al-ḡayer* or *good morning* is written as *saba7 al-5ayer* where the numbers are used to represent sounds that do not have direct correspondence in English. Even though this writing technique is widely used, Nasir still finds it challenging as it requires learning a new linguistic code in order for such interaction to be effective:

My wife is pretty good at this. She knows exactly what three means. Sometimes, she would send me a message and I would say can you send it to me in Arabic. It is much easier to me. But I started to make sense of what three means, what S means, what kh means. They use five for kh [they use seven for h] they use seven

for h and [six for T] and six for T. I started to get to know this stuff, but I don't know how to use it. And I don't use it. (I3, R, 2).

Writing in standard Arabic, among the participants who use it, remains restricted to corresponding with their employers in their home countries, writing Facebook statuses, and Twitter updates, which do not exceed writing a couple of sentences:

Concerning writing, I am a Facebook fan, depending on who I want to address in my message when I write a status in which I want to address people whom I am not sure are proficient enough in English, I would like to write in Arabic to express my ideas and I am sometimes, I am happy with the amount of...range of vocabulary and proficiency in Arabic writing that I have, so I can share my ideas and express them efficiently in Arabic. Probably nowadays this is the only place where I practice writing in Arabic right now. So, in Facebook, I comment or share a status (I4, R2)

In their current literacy practices, Standard Arabic is used mainly for reading purposes:

When it comes to reading, I always try to stay up to date with the news, so I read them in Arabic. I read them in English, too, but I enjoy reading them in Arabic. I like to read column articles reflections on what's going on in the area where I live (I4, R2)

Reading, I would read the newspaper to follow the news. I read in Arabic, basically...although we have English-based newspapers in Saudi Arabia, but I just don't...I don't know. I just don't think reading...I would read sometimes, especially with the online stuff. I would like to read it in English, because I want to see the perspective of the people in our issues. Some people who are residents in my country and sometimes they may comment in these news and Arab news and I get to hear what they think and their perspectives. Their outsider perspective, but I wouldn't read the news for the sake of reading it in English (I3, R1)

The participants identified Colloquial Arabic, Kabyle for Kareem, as the language they use to communicate with family and friends back home. They also feel comfortable to either code-switch to English or use English altogether when they communicate with native speakers of Arabic who speak a different variety:

I must admit that even when I talk with fellow Arabs, especially here I feel comfortable to code switch to English. Because, although I am a native speaker

and I consider myself to be proficient enough, but sometimes, a specific word in English, might hit the idea that I want to convey (I4, R4)

In addition to using English occasionally for texting and social media, all participants

identified English as their academic language and to a certain extent a personal language:

As far as English is concerned, I use it, of course in my academic studies. I use it. I think for my personal stuff. I use it when I think. I don't know why, I just...this is me...even when I went to do my to-do-list, I would do it in English. I wouldn't do it in Arabic (Nasir, I3, R2).

[How about English?] English is my academic language. It is my love. I would call it that language that I loved. Let me put it this way and I wanted to learn and I wanted to excel in it and I think I achieved that to some extent, at least it is something that's good for me. Good for what I want to do. I might not be perfect, but...which is for sure I am not. It's something that I like and it is my professional life (Nasir, I3, R3)

[English?] English, I would say is my favorite, but it is the language that I feel most comfortable in [why?] because I have spent almost seven years of my life using English for everyday for everything I need to do and I have learned a lot of things in English that I didn't know how to do even in my native language (Kareem, I2, R3)

I write in Facebook in English sometimes, of course, all my communication in Malaysia is in...I know a little Malay, but usually I speak in English. I speak with my roommates in English. She is from Thailand and the previous one was from Iran. So, English is a medium between us. So, everyday communication is in English. My university. My professors. My job. All the written emails are in English, concerning my studies, my work (Shayma, I5, R1)

Of course for my education. Sometimes I code-switch to English at home when I talk to my children because they started to miss up with some Arabic vocabulary. So, if they don't get it in Arabic, I am forced to use the English equivalent [How old are they?] seven, eight, and nine. I have been here for two years and a half so for the youngest, she is almost a monolingual of English. She has difficulties understanding Arabic and she never speaks in Arabic. But for the older ones, it is kind of OK not so bad (Summer, I4, R3)

I use English, I write to communicate with friends and professors in science (Basma, I1,R1)

Code-switching between languages and within different forms of a language is heavily used among the participants. The use of different languages and forms is highly contextual, as it follows unspoken rules of language use. These rules are generated by language users as part of the communication act.

Note on Language Use

As mentioned in the methods section, the choice of which language to be used during the interview was left to the interviewee. For all participants, English was the language of choice. This included Basma who was not comfortable with her English-language skills. There were instances of code-switching to Arabic, but that was very minimal. This language choice is interesting, especially if we consider the relatively short period of time in which the participants have been residing in the U.S (see table 1). This could be attributed to the participants' lack of exposure to my variety of Arabic, Libyan Arabic. Thus, they found English best suited for the interview to avoid any confusion.

Summary

This chapter looked at the participants' literacy practices in their L2 and how such practices are influenced by those of their L1. The participants' narratives present their literacy practices and experiences in English as more systematic and stable than those of their L1. For example, all participants received more explicit instruction in writing in English. There was also more practice with writing in English. It is worth noting here that since all participants are pursuing their education in the U.S. and Malaysia where the language of instruction is English, their most recent academic literacy practices are done in English.

On the personal level, the participants' biliteracy is enriching their interactions with colleagues, friends and family. Their ability to switch between languages or code switch within Arabic is highly determined by social cues that they share with their interlocutors. While the language the participants use for email communication is English, the language choice on social media seems to be more complicated.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Looking at literacy through the lens of diglossia was an attempt to explain the complex linguistic situation that native speakers of Arabic find themselves in when they write in their native language and how this linguistic situation might affect the way they write in English. I presented the participants' experiences with literacy in Arabic and English within the sociopolitical contexts that might have impacted them. As can be seen from their narratives, each participant is influenced, in one way or another by their cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. By discussing their experiences in context, this project attempted to investigate the link between the context where literacy is practiced and the individuals who practice it.

The bulk of the participants' literacy practices in Arabic is done at school and on social media. The teaching and practice of reading in school seems to be more systematic in terms of frequency and consistency of the form of Arabic used, Standard Arabic, to practice this skill. Writing, however, was less systematic and is mostly taught through models. The data also shows that there is imbalance between the participants' proficiency in Standard and Colloquial Arabic. This imbalance results in code-switching between the two forms, leading to a written style that deviates from the conventions of Standard Arabic. Without the necessary foundation in writing, Arabic writers have no way to

police themselves, distinguishing what is right from wrong as they transition from one from to another.

On the other hand, the majority of the participants' experiences with literacy in English was more well-established. Both reading and writing skills were taught and practiced equally, producing more confident, less confused writers.

Despite the intricate histories of the participants' literacy experiences, an overarching theme among them was their lack of experience and practice with writing in Standard Arabic. This finding challenges the common perception in the literature that the written products of the majority of Arab writers is transferred from Standard or Classical Arabic (e.g., Kaplan, 1965; Ostler, 1987). It would be more plausible to argue that the Arab students' writing is influenced by their Colloquial variety, as this is the form of Arabic that they are most proficient in.

Moreover, the very definition of what it means to be literate in the Arabic world continues to be an issue. As mentioned earlier in this project, the lack of a clear definition of what literacy is, coupled with lack of reliable literacy rates on all Arab countries will persist to obstruct any discussion and/or initiative to improve literacy in the region. There is more to literacy than the mere ability to read and write. Moreover, the assumption that mere reading knowledge will lead to writing ability should continue to be questioned. Literacy is and should be seen as “a dynamic process that encompasses reading and writing, and the meaning resources necessary to read and write, together with the social practices in which those meanings emerged” (Kumagai, López-Sánchez, 2016, p. 1).

The findings from this research are extremely important for two areas of second language research: intercultural rhetoric (IR) and second language writing (SLW). For IR

researchers, it provides evidence that challenges and invites researchers to revisit the recurring findings about the influence of Classical Arabic on the rhetorical structures in English. For the field of SLW, it presents new vein of research that focuses on the influence of vernacular Arabic on English academic writing. I see this project as a first step towards investigating these issues further.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Protocol

This dissertation was approved by the Human Research Protection Program Institution Review Board (IRB) at Purdue University, under protocol # 1410015395.

Questions concerning this protocol should be directed to:

Human Research Protection Program Institutional Review Board
Ernest C. Young Hall, 10th Floor
155 S. Grant Street
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114

Appendix B: Interview Focus Questions

Demographics

- Year of birth
- Place of birth
- Place of rearing
- Gender
- Grandparents' schooling and occupation (literate or illiterate)
- Parents' schooling and occupation (literate or illiterate)
- Date of coming to the U.S.
- Places where they had lived in the U.S.
- Places they lived in aside from their home country.
- Names and locations of schools attended
- Degrees, dates of graduation.
- Present/future occupations

Arabic

- Earliest memories of reading/ story telling at home.
- Earliest memories of reading/ writing at home.
- The role of Quranic schools in promoting reading/writing
- The type of instruction Quranic schools provides
- Earliest memories of reading/ writing outside of school and home.
- Earliest memories reading/writing in school
- Memories of reading/writing done in school
- Memories of reading/writing evaluations at home
- Uses of assignments/other school writing and reading
- Audience of school-based writing
- Knowledge/resources used to complete assignments
- Materials used for school-based writing/reading
- Kinds of materials used
- Role of technologies
- Types of reading and writing done in school
- Role of memorization in finishing writing tasks
- Difference between home language and school language
- Self-initiated writing or reading
- Purpose of writing and reading at different stages outside of school

- Genres

Writing on the job

- Purpose of reading/writing
- Genres
- Audience
- Resources drawn on to complete job-related reading/writing
- Role of technology such as computers, emails, and online chatting to finish job-related tasks

Influential people

- Parents'/older siblings' role in developing reading/writing skills

Influential events

- Significant events that has a positive/negative impact on your writing

Values

- Relative importance of reading/writing
- Motivations
- Consequences

Current uses of reading and writing

- All reading/writing done in the six months leading up to the interview.

Sense of literacy learning

- Interviewee's sense of how he/she learned to read and write
- Interviewee's sense of what reading/writing in Arabic means to him/her
- Sense of how people in general learn how to read and write in Arabic
- Sense of how people value reading and writing the interviewee's immediate community.

Appendix C: Transcription Conventions¹⁹

Transcription Mark	Meaning
[Indicates the point of overlap onset
]	Indicates the point of overlap termination
()	A stretch of unclear or unintelligible speech
<i>Italics</i>	Translations into English are italicized and located next to the original utterance.
(laughter)	Indicates laughter
...	Indicate unfinished thought

¹⁹ Adopted from Richards and Seedhouse, 2005

Appendix D: Initial Node Structure

Hierarchical Name	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Nodes\Calligraphy_Handwriting	No	None
Nodes\Current uses of literacy	No	None
Nodes\Current uses of literacy\Arabic	No	None
Nodes\Current uses of literacy\Arabic\CA	No	None
Nodes\Current uses of literacy\Arabic\MSA	No	None
Nodes\Current uses of literacy\Berber and French	No	None
Nodes\Current uses of literacy\English	No	None
Nodes\Early Memories	Yes	Green
Nodes\Early Memories\Exposure to MSA, SA, or any other language	No	None
Nodes\Early Memories\Reading and story telling	No	None
Nodes\Early Memories\TV Exposure	No	None
Nodes\Early Memories\Writing	No	None
Nodes\English experiences	No	None
Nodes\English experiences\Reading	No	None
Nodes\English experiences\Writing	No	None
Nodes\Influential people	No	None
Nodes\Linguistic expectations (Fusha, ameeya, and English)	No	None
Nodes\Literacy at home	No	None
Nodes\Literacy in Qur'anic Schools	No	None
Nodes\Literacy in School	No	None
Nodes\Literacy in School\Memorization	No	None
Nodes\Literacy in School\Reading	No	None
Nodes\Literacy in School\Reading\Resources Used	No	None
Nodes\Literacy in School\Reading\Task Purpose	No	None

Hierarchical Name	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Nodes\\Literacy in School\\Reading\\Task Type	No	None
Nodes\\Literacy in School\\Writing	No	None
Nodes\\Literacy in School\\Writing\\Resources used	No	None
Nodes\\Literacy in School\\Writing\\Task purpose	No	None
Nodes\\Literacy in School\\Writing\\Task type	No	None
Nodes\\Reflection on MSA and CA, and Writing	No	None
Nodes\\Self-Initiated literacy	No	None
Nodes\\Self-Initiated literacy\\Reading	No	None
Nodes\\Self-Initiated literacy\\Writing	No	None
Nodes\\Self-worth	No	None
Nodes\\Self-worth\\Arabic	No	None
Nodes\\Self-worth\\Other (English, French, Berber)	No	None
Nodes\\Use of technology	No	None
Nodes\\Value and importance of reading and writing	No	None
Nodes\\Writing on the job	No	None
Nodes\\Writing on the job\\Audience	No	None
Nodes\\Writing on the job\\Genre	No	None
Nodes\\Writing on the job\\Purpose of reading and writing	No	None

VITA

VITA

Ghada Gherwash was born in Rome, Italy, on December 17, 1981. After finishing high school in 1998, she entered Al-fateh University to study English, and in June 2002 she was awarded a Bachelor of Arts Degree. In the fall of 2002, she enrolled in the graduate program at the same university to earn a Masters of Arts degree in Phonology. This step of her academic career was interrupted when she was awarded the Fulbright scholarship in 2006 to teach Arabic as a foreign language at Appalachian State University. She was in the first group of Libyan students ever to receive a Fulbright scholarship. She received an M.A. in English literature from Appalachian State University in December 2009 and a Ph.D. in second language studies from Purdue University in May 2016.