

# Family Language Policies for Maintaining Arabic as a Home Language in Italy: The AHLI Project

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**Abstract** The AHLI Project, focusing on Arabic as a Home Language in Italy, explores family language policies among Arabic-speaking communities. Employing an interdisciplinary approach and a mixed-method design, the research reveals a complex linguistic spectrum. It uncovers the dynamic interplay between language maintenance and shift, the desire to transmit Arabic, attitudes, and family choices. While highlighting the significant presence of Arabic in linguistic repertoires, disparities between practices and beliefs emerge. The findings bear theoretical and practical implications for promoting democratic plurilingual education and guiding language policy actions at both micro and macro levels.

**Keywords** Family language policy. Language maintenance and shift. Arabic. Home language. Plurilingualism.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Arabic Language(s) and Arabic-Speaking Communities in Italy. – 3 Maintaining a Home Language: The Role of Family Language Policies. – 4 Research Methodology. – 4.1 Q-AHLI: Creation, Piloting, and Validation. – 4.2 Q-AHLI: Structure and Topics. – 4.3 Q-AHLI: Dissemination and Analysis Procedures. – 5 Overview of the Participants. – 6 Overview of FLP in Arabic-Speaking Communities in Italy: Initial Findings from the AHLI Project. – 6.1 Language Practices and Plurilingual Repertoires. – 6.2 Managing Plurilingualism Between Practices and Ideologies. – 7 Discussion and Conclusion.



## Peer review

Submitted 2024-02-21  
Accepted 2024-06-17  
Published 2024-07-25

## Open access

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**Citation** Abdelsayed, I.; Bellinzona, M. (2024). "Family Language Policies for Maintaining Arabic as a Home Language in Italy: The AHLI Project". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 60, 5-40.

**DOI** 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2024/01/001

## 1 Introduction

The maintenance of Home Languages (HL) presents a multifaceted and pressing opportunity and challenge that deeply involves linguists, policymakers, educators and, most notably, families and individuals (Polinsky 2015; Pauwels 2016; Hollebeke, Struys, Agirdag 2020). Today, this challenge has become more significant than ever before. This collective endeavour transcends linguistic boundaries, encompassing political and social dimensions, and its outcomes reverberate on both a societal level and within the lives of individual community members.

The shared commitment of families and institutions to maintaining home languages aligns with efforts to promote sustainable and democratic multilingualism and plurilingualism (Council of Europe 2022). In this perspective, linguistic diversity serves as a cornerstone, enriching the cultural fabric of societies and as a fundamental right that requires safeguarding and protection.

As we delve into the complexities of HL maintenance, we find ourselves at the intersection of issues related to language, identity, and rights. Pursuing home language maintenance is not just a matter of choice but a necessity to ensure the continued flourishing of diverse linguistic repertoires and landscapes.

Building upon these foundational principles, the AHLI Project, an acronym denoting 'Arabic as Home Language in Italy', embarks on a purposeful journey. Although the term 'heritage language' is more widely used in the literature (Polinsky 2015), we considered it more appropriate to use the term 'home language' (HL). This term encompasses all language varieties used in the context of domestic communication and those acquired in early childhood (Council of Europe 2022, 13). The name of the Project has been thoughtfully chosen (in Arabic, *'ahl-ī* literally translates as 'my family') to direct attention towards the pivotal role and significance of Family Language Policy (FLP) (King, Fogle, Logan-Terry 2008) in the transmission and maintenance of the Arabic language(s) as a home language. The primary objective of the AHLI Project is to explore and describe FLP in relation to the maintenance of Arabic as HL in Italy, identifying practices, management choices, and ideologies (Spolsky 2004) that influence the intergenerational transmission of the language.

The AHLI Project was born out of a complex web of reasons, primarily due to the gaps and limitations in the current scientific research on this topic. While there have been numerous notable studies

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The structure of the paper reflects the collaborative efforts of the co-authors. Ibraam Abdelsayed is responsible for paragraphs 2, 4, 4.2, 5, and 6.1, while Martina Bellinzona is responsible for paragraphs 1, 3, 4.1, 4.3, and 6.2. Both Authors jointly contributed to the composition of paragraph 7 and the Bibliography section.

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on FLP in relation to the maintenance of Arabic as a HL worldwide,<sup>1</sup> a comprehensive review of the literature reveals certain shortcomings.

One significant drawback is the prevalence of qualitative studies, often focused on specific case studies. It is also important to note that existing research often addresses the maintenance of a generic 'Arabic' without acknowledging the diverse range of Arabic dialects.<sup>2</sup> This broad approach could lead to the oversight of crucial differences that impact language maintenance in various ways. Moreover, this generalisation could undermine the effectiveness of any (language) policy actions, as they might be based on inaccurate assumptions, potentially leading to inefficiency or even counterproductivity.

Moreover, within the Italian context, it is critical to emphasise the absence of comprehensive research regarding the maintenance of Arabic language(s) and its intergenerational transmission (but see D'Anna 2017). This research void takes on heightened significance when we consider that citizens with Arabic backgrounds represent one of the largest and most substantial immigrant groups in Italy, making up more than 14% of the entire immigrant population in the country (ISTAT 2022).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, this leads to a major gap in understanding the challenges and perspectives these communities face at the micro and macro levels.

Taking into account these considerations, the AHLI Project is dedicated to exploring the domain of FLP as it pertains to maintaining the Arabic language, or more precisely, the various Arabic languages, as HLs in Italy. The AHLI Project is characterised by its strong interdisciplinary approach, ongoing nature, and adoption of a multifaceted research framework. This approach encompasses the collection of a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data organised in a layered manner. These datasets are designed to provide insights into the overall vitality of the Arabic languages in Italy and to delve into specific aspects related to their usage, contexts, and the motivating factors that underlie intergenerational language transmission.

Considering the vastness and heterogeneity of the collected datasets, and the space limitations, this contribution has two primary objectives. Firstly, it aims to introduce the AHLI Project, providing the contextual and theoretical foundations underpinning its execution. It also seeks to explain and justify the methodological choices and describe the research instruments developed. Secondly, it aims to provide an overview of the initial findings, with a specific focus on addressing two main research questions:

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**1** Sawaie, Fishman 1985; Al-Sahafi, Barkhuizen 2006; Goma 2011; Gogonas 2011; Dweik, Nofal, Qawasmeh 2014; Wardini 2017; Alasmari 2023; Bahhari 2023 *inter alia*.

**2** But see Albirini 2016; Bassiouney 2020; Azaz, Abourehab 2021; ElHawari 2021.

**3** Retrieved from: [http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCIS\\_POPSTRES1](http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCIS_POPSTRES1).

RQ1: What languages contribute to the structuring of the linguistic repertoires of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy? What is their proficiency in each language and what role do these languages play in usage?

RQ2: What are parents' ideologies towards bilingualism? How does the multifaceted sociolinguistic situation of Arabic impact family language management about HL maintenance?

In the following sections, we will start by delineating the sociolinguistic landscape of the Arabic language and providing data on the presence of Arabic speakers in Italy (§ 2). Following this, we will introduce the theoretical framework guiding our research (§ 3). Subsequently, we will present a detailed explanation of the methodology employed (§ 4), along with an introduction to the sample of participants in this study (§ 5). Furthermore, we will provide a comprehensive overview of the prevailing trends in the maintenance of Arabic as a HL in Italy, addressing the research questions (§ 6). Finally, we will draw conclusive insights (§ 7), and outline future research prospects.

## 2 Arabic Language(s) and Arabic-Speaking Communities in Italy

Arabic is a widely spread language that has secured its place as one of the six official languages of the United Nations, highlighting its substantial global impact and presence worldwide. An estimated 400 million individuals worldwide utilise a variety of Arabic as their first language, ranking it among the top six most widely spoken languages. Arabic<sup>4</sup> is the (co-)official language of 26 countries, but most countries and regions have their own variety of Arabic, commonly referred to as 'dialect' or 'colloquial Arabic.' The Arabic language, as a 'historical language' (Coşeriu 1980), is characterised by its complex linguistic diversity, encompassing a wide range of dialects that reflect the rich cultural heritage of its speakers.

Sociolinguistic research often distinguishes three linguistic varieties in the Arabic-speaking world: Classical Arabic (CA), Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and Dialectal Arabic (DA).<sup>5</sup> CA, often con-

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<sup>4</sup> Here, the term 'Arabic' primarily refers to what is commonly called 'Modern Standard Arabic'.

<sup>5</sup> In Arabic terminology, the term 'dialect' is referred to as *dāriġa* (derived from the adjective *dāriġ*, meaning 'circulating' and 'common') or *ʿāmmiyya* (derived from the adjective *ʿāmmiyy*, meaning 'popular'). The structural deviation of dialectal varieties from Standard Arabic frequently exhibits notable disparities, affecting various facets across the spectrum of linguistic analysis. This deviation extends beyond superficial characteristics such as vocabulary and pronunciation, permeating into the realms of morphology and syntax, signifying a profound and multifaceted divergence.

sidered the archaic form of Arabic used in the Quran,<sup>6</sup> refers to a standardised version of the language that emerged around the tenth century. Conversely, MSA is a literary form derived from CA, adapted to meet modern needs. While MSA is the official language of Arabic-speaking countries, it is not the mother tongue of any speaker (Holes 2018). The innovative differences brought by MSA compared to CA are mainly lexical and stylistic, but the reference grammatical model has always remained the same. It is important to note that the distinction between CA and MSA does not correspond to any Arabic terminology. In Arabic terminology, there is only the distinction between *fushhā* (from *faṣāḥa*, meaning ‘linguistic purity’, ‘clarity’, and ‘eloquence’) and *‘āmmiyya* or *dāriġa*. Ryding (2005, 7) states that both MSA and CA refer to the Arabic terminology *al-luġa l-fuṣḥā* (literally ‘the language of eloquence’). In contrast, DA is the daily language used for communication (both orally and in writing),<sup>7</sup> and it is the native language of speakers, exhibiting regional variations across (and within) different Arab countries.

The sociolinguistic context of Arabic is often described as ‘diglossia’ (in Arabic, *al-izdiwāġiyya fī l-luġa*, meaning ‘language duplicity’). The term ‘diglossia’ in the sociolinguistic context of Arabic was first used by Marçais (1930) and later popularised by Ferguson (1959). Ferguson’s model posits the existence of two poles: a high, formal variety (CA/MSA) that largely corresponds to written language, and a low, familiar variety (DA) that is represented by vernacular Arabic languages.

Ferguson’s model is an abstract and idealised representation of a much more complex linguistic situation. While this is not the appropriate context to delve into the sociolinguistic situation in the Arab world, it is essential to highlight that any discussion on the Arabic language must consider its ubiquitous linguistic variation. Ignoring this fact would be to engage in mythmaking. For this reason, while acknowledging the potential oversimplification of sociolinguistic reality, this paper consistently addresses both language varieties: Standard Arabic (henceforth SA, which refers to both CA/MSA, i.e. *al-fuṣḥā*) and so-called Arabic dialects (DA).<sup>8</sup>

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**6** It is important to note that the Quranic language should be classified as pre-Classical Arabic, as it exhibits linguistic features that would be considered deviations from the norms established in CA.

**7** With the rise of new virtual communication channels, dialectal varieties are spreading more than ever before, not only in their oral form, but also, and possibly even more so, in their written form. This written form can be seen in many domains, from the vast number of texts produced on virtual channels, to movie samples, advertisements, and even popular literature (Rosenbaum 2004).

**8** When we use the term ‘Arabic’ without any additional specification, we are specifically alluding to the Arabic language in its complete form, encompassing both its

The linguistic diversity of Arabic speakers' repertoires becomes further complex by emigration because of the relationships established with the host country's language and other languages in the language space, including local dialects, minority languages, other immigrant languages, and languages for international communication. From this point of view, Italy provides an ideal context for exploring these relationships, given the substantial presence of citizens with Arabic backgrounds, representing one of the country's largest and most deeply rooted immigrant communities.

In modern times, the first migratory flows from Arab countries to Italy date back to the late 1960s, particularly in Sicily where, in 1968, organised recruitment by ship owners in Mazara del Vallo began to hire Tunisian citizens on fishing boats (Colucci 2018).<sup>9</sup> However, data shows that the presence of Arab immigrants in significant numbers was recorded from the 1990s, and even more so with the last wave of migration, which began in 2011 with the Arab Spring. From 2011 to today, the annual progression of Arab immigrants has slowed and come to a halt.

The overall number of immigrants residing in Italy (including, therefore, EU citizens), based on ISTAT (2022), reaches 5,030,716 (approximately 8.5% of the total Italian population). As can be observed in table 1, the three Arabic-speaking communities with the largest presence in Italy are Moroccan, Egyptian, and Tunisian; all three together constitute the overwhelming majority (approximately 93%) of the entire Arabic-speaking group in Italy, which counts a total of 711,309 individuals (equivalent to 14.1% of the total number of immigrants in Italy) [tab. 1].<sup>10</sup>

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standard and dialectal forms. We are aware that the term 'dialect' is not linguistically precise. However, for simplicity's sake and to facilitate understanding among participants in this research, who are often not linguists, we use DA to refer to these languages. For us, DA encompasses the set of local linguistic varieties shared among communities that perceive them as part of the same language.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed exploration of the sociolinguistic aspects of the Tunisian community in Mazara del Vallo, we recommend consulting D'Anna 2017.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that this number does not include the children of neutralised Arabic-speaking parents, which are estimated to be more than 300,000.

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**Table 1** Arabic-speaking communities in Italy

Country of origin	Total	%
Morocco	420,172	59,070
Egypt	140,322	19.727
Tunisia	99,002	13.918
Algeria	17,998	2.530
Somalia	8,370	1.177
Syria	6,109	0.859
Iraq	6,043	0.850
Lebanon	4,082	0.574
Libya	2,642	0.371
Sudan	2,444	0.344
Others	4,125	0.58
Tot	711,309	100

As shown in figure 1, based on ISTAT data (2022), the distribution of Arabic-speaking communities in Italy reveals a more prominent presence in the northern regions, notably in Lombardy (212,407; 29.86%) and Emilia-Romagna (92,883; 13.06%), followed by Piedmont (69,456; 9.76%), Veneto (56,321; 7.92%) and Lazio (45,111; 6.34%) [fig. 1].

Despite the well-established presence of Arabic-speaking communities in Italian society and the numerous European recommendations that stress the importance of maintaining HLs among the second and third generations of migrant communities (Council of Europe 2016; 2019; 2022 *inter alia*), top-down language policies still fail to implement focused and structured measures and actions in Italy. The absence of explicit top-down language policies places the responsibility for HL maintenance mainly on families.

For this reason, commencing our examination from the family domain is crucial to comprehend the factors that shape FLP and the resulting consequences of these policies. In the next section, we will briefly discuss these concepts to frame the AHLI Project from a theoretical point of view.

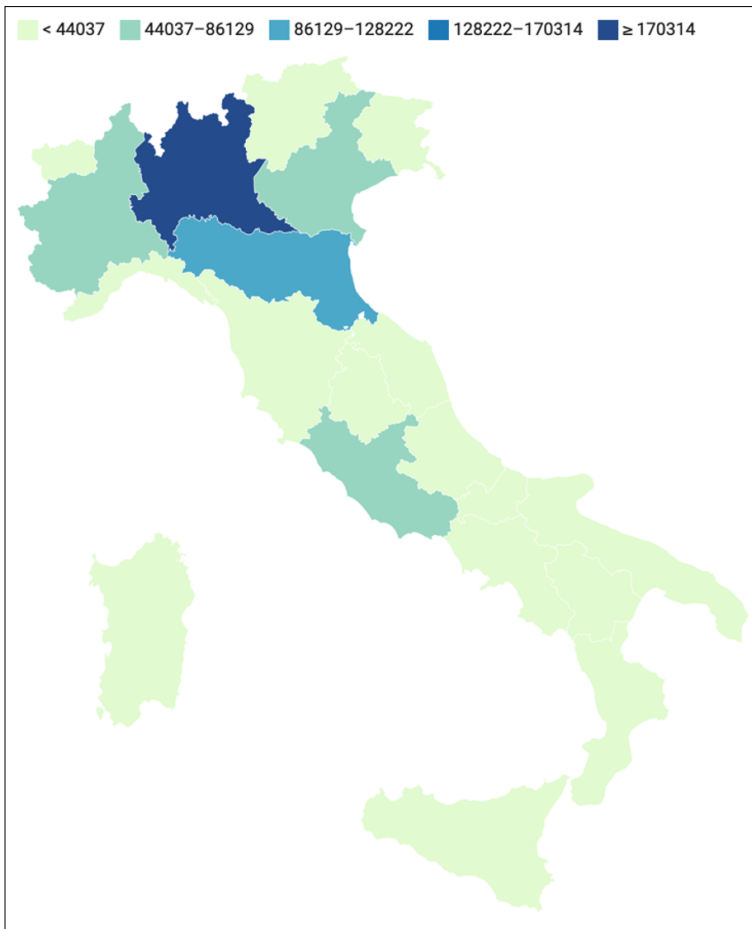


Figure 1 Geographical distribution of Arabic-speaking communities in Italy<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The data visualisations presented in figs 1 and 3 were generated using the online tool Datawrapper (<https://www.datawrapper.de/>).



### 3 **Maintaining a Home Language: The Role of Family Language Policies**

Language maintenance, as defined by Pauwels (2016, 20), is a complex and ongoing process that involves the continued use or retention of an L1, a minority or heritage language in various spheres of language use. The preservation of a heritage language is a perpetual challenge, a struggle, as it is in constant contact with the majority language, which permeates all (or almost all) contexts and domains of use, imposing its social power and cultural strength. Languages, as suggested by Blommaert (2009, 263), are the very fabric of social behaviour, integral to the distribution of power and resources in all societies, and a mechanism for social control. Therefore, the policies that regulate language use and practices reflect and (re)produce the distribution of power in society (McCarty, May 2017).

The decision to transmit one's own language, especially when this is not the majority language, is not a neutral act, but rather a 'political' one, which underlies worldviews, ideologies, beliefs, identity factors, emotional ties, and much more. This is what we refer to as family language policies, a term that encompasses the conscious planning of language use among family members (Quay, Montanari 2018). This planning can be explicit, *overt*, and composed of all the

observable efforts made by adults and their conscious involvement and investment in providing linguistic conditions and context for language learning and literacy development. (Curdt-Christiansen 2018, 420)

However, we also recognise an implicit, *covert* component in FLPs (Fogle 2013; Hollebeke, Struys, Agirdag 2020). This component, observable in the language practices of individuals (Spolsky 2017; Shohamy 2006), often does not correspond to the explicit one, either due to lack of resources or to ideological beliefs and convictions (Schiffman 1996; Schwartz 2008).

All these concepts, planning and management, practices and uses, beliefs and ideologies, find an organic synthesis in the language policy model proposed by Spolsky (2004), which is taken in this study as the reference theoretical framework. In this model, the three essential components (language management, practices, and ideologies) contribute to the definition of language policy and are closely connected to each other.

Language management refers to any specific intervention to modify or influence a specific linguistic situation. This is the set of rules, more or less explicit, aimed at determining linguistic uses inside and outside the home (Hirsch, Lee 2018; Moustououi, Poveda 2022). Language practices are

the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its [of a speech community, ed.] linguistic repertoire. (Spolsky 2004, 5)

It is from the practices that the real language policy emerges. By ideologies, we finally mean “the beliefs about language and language use” (Spolsky 2004, 5). These are beliefs about the appropriateness of linguistic uses,

the set of behaviours, assumptions, cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes, ways of thinking about language, and religio-historical circumstances associated with a particular language (Schiffman 1996, 5)

as well as towards bilingualism itself (Piller 2002; King, Fogle 2017). Without ideologies, (family) language policies would not exist (Palmviainen, Bergroth 2018), as they are the underlying forces that influence any decision and choice (Curdt-Christiansen 2013). Management, practices, and ideologies are closely connected: beliefs strongly influence management, which can seek to legitimise or produce a change in dominant ideologies and practices. Likewise, beliefs can originate from practices or, in turn, shape the practices themselves (Spolsky 2004, 14).

In this study, as mentioned previously, we will explore the FLPs in relation to the maintenance of Arabic as HL in Italy, considering the various factors, both internal and external, capable of influencing this ‘political’ project.

## **4 Research Methodology**

The AHLI Project is grounded in the pragmatic paradigm, prioritising the research question as the focal point of reflection and rejecting the notion of a singular scientific method (Mertens 2005). The foundational belief is that only by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods can we effectively interpret reality, including the sociolinguistic one (Tashakkori, Teddlie 1998; Creswell, Plano Clark 2011). In alignment with this perspective and the objectives of our project, a mixed-methods approach has been selected as the optimal choice for obtaining meaningful inferences, minimising the limitations associated with a single method, and ensuring a broader diversity of perspectives (Tashakkori, Teddlie 2003).

The AHLI Project has adopted an explanatory sequential design (Creswell, Plano Clark 2011), a two-phase approach where the use of qualitative data follows the collection and analysis of quantitative data. This approach was deemed necessary due to the unexplored nature

of the situation concerning the maintenance of Arabic as an HL in Italy. We first captured a general overview of the situation and research problem by planning the collection of quantitative data. These were obtained through the distribution of a specifically designed and validated questionnaire (Q-AHLI; see further details below).

Based on the outcomes derived from the questionnaires, focus groups were conducted with Arabic-speaking families in Italy. They were organised online using Google Meet (Gaiser 2008; Stewart, Williams 2005), subsequently transcribed, and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis with NVivo Pro 11 (Braun, Clarke 2021). Given the purpose of this article and for space constraints, the results of the focus group analysis will not be presented here. Nevertheless, it was necessary to mention them to provide a comprehensive overview of the AHLI Project. In the following sections, we will present the Q-AHLI's development, pilot testing, and revision process, focusing on its structure, addressed themes, and distribution and analysis procedures.

#### 4.1 Q-AHLI: Creation, Piloting, and Validation

The authors developed the questionnaire based on the objectives and research questions of the AHLI Project. Following the review of the literature (cf. §§ 2 and 3), it became evident that there was a need to create a specific tool capable of eliciting both the sociolinguistic characteristics of Arabic-speaking communities in Italy and the various dimensions, as well as how they intersect, of FLP. The target population of the AHLI Project consists of individuals with Arabic backgrounds, whether first- or second-generation, encompassing all those who could reasonably have Arabic (in a broad sense) as their HL.

Considering the guidance provided by Brown (2001) and Dörnyei (2002; 2007), the general characteristics of the Q-AHLI were established regarding its division into main sections, layout, format, and length. Google Form was chosen due to its advantages in terms of cost-effectiveness (researchers' time, effort, financial resources) and user-friendly nature, ensuring accessibility for the target population (Dörnyei 2002; Ruliyanti et al. 2021).

After formulating and randomising the items, instructions were written. In compliance with EU Regulation 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation - GDPR) and following ethical principles of scientific research, all information about the study, the researchers, the affiliated institution, the research purpose, data management and retention, and the consent statement were explicitly stated on the first page of the survey. Additionally, the researchers' contact information was provided to allow interested individuals to access study results or send comments, questions, or requests for clarification.

To ensure a quantitatively and qualitatively significant number of participants, a strategic decision was made to offer two linguistic versions of the questionnaire, one in Italian and one in SA. This decision, though challenging due to the absence of specific terminology and conceptual overlap on certain topics, was a testament to the project's adaptability and inclusivity. It not only ensured a wider distribution of the survey but also proved to be valuable for the interpretation of the data, as will be discussed later.

Before its distribution, a pilot version of the questionnaire was administered to a small group of 20 participants who met the characteristics of the research target population. Based on the qualitative results from the pilot, specific questions were removed, and others were slightly modified.

To assure reliability and validity in the results, a panel of three experts, selected based on their well-established experience in the research topic, rigorously reviewed the questionnaire items. A blind evaluation module was developed, focusing on clarity, coherence, relevance, and sufficiency (Escobar-Pérez, Cuervo-Martínez 2008). The evaluations and valuable suggestions received led to further adjustments in the structure and items of the Q-AHLI. Following a second round of evaluations, the interrater agreement among the experts, measured using Cohen's Kappa statistics, was found to be significant and excellent,  $p < .05$ ,  $k > .80$  (Hernández-Nieto 2011). The final version of the survey, available in duplicate in both Italian and Arabic, consists of 101 items. Participants can activate various items based on their responses to specific questions. The structure of the questionnaire and the addressed themes will be presented in detail in the next section.

## 4.2 Q-AHLI: Structure and Topics

The Q-AHLI is structured into 5 sections, and their titles and essential characteristics are provided in table 2 [tab. 2]. As can be observed, some sections are common to all participants (sections 1 and 2); in contrast, others are reserved for participants with specific characteristics (sections 3 and 4 only for parents and section 5 only for children). The decision to offer distinct paths is linked to the project's objective, which, as previously highlighted, aims to investigate FLPs and their effects. In this regard, it became necessary to involve not only parents, who are the primary drivers of language policy at home (Hollebeke, Struys, Agirdag 2020) but also the children themselves, who are both recipients of these decisions and active social agents (Luykx 2005; Paugh 2005).

**Table 2** Essential characteristics of the Q-AHLI sections

<b>Section</b>	<b>Addresses</b>	<b>No. items</b>	<b>Items format</b>
1. Sociodemographic and sociolinguistics data	All (both parents and children)	25 items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multiple choices</li><li>• Likert scale</li><li>• Open ended questions</li></ul>
2. Language practices	All (both parents and children)	24 items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multiple choices</li><li>• Open ended questions</li></ul>
3. Language management	Parents	17 items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multiple choices</li><li>• Likert scale</li></ul>
4. Language ideologies related to bilingual parenting	Parents	16 items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Likert scale</li></ul>
5. Language attitudes related to the different languages of the repertoires	Children	19 items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multiple choices</li><li>• Open ended questions</li></ul>

The first section of the Q-AHLI consists of 25 items, comprising open-ended questions, multiple-choice queries, and Likert-scale questions (ranging from 1 to 5). This section aims to gather information about the sociodemographic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural background of the participants. The questions included in this section are designed to collect data on gender, age, birthplace of parents, length of stay in Italy, educational qualifications, occupation, and linguistic repertoires. Additionally, it includes a self-assessment of language proficiency (both in written and oral production and comprehension) in Italian, SA, and DA.

The second section consists of 24 items with open-ended or closed-ended responses. These items are specifically designed to investigate language practices and some factors that may potentially influence them, such as relationships with the country of origin and with Arabic speakers and communities in Italy. Language use is thoroughly explored across various social domains to identify communication patterns within and outside the family. This in-depth exploration helps to understand which language is predominantly used depending on the interlocutor (parent, sibling, relative, friend, colleague, etc.) and the activity being undertaken (work, study, leisure, etc.).

The third section is intended for parents and is internally divided into two parts. The first part outlines the family units' profile (number and age of children, linguistic proficiency of children, partner's origin, etc.). The second part seeks to gather information about language management at home and outside regarding frequency of language use, awareness of linguistic choices, and the contexts in which children use and learn the HL. This section, consisting of 17 items,

is formulated using multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions (1-5), providing a comprehensive view of the family's language dynamics.

The fourth section, also exclusively for parents, consists of 16 items on a Likert scale (1-5). These items are designed to investigate language ideologies regarding Italian-Arabic bilingual parenting. As highlighted in § 3, positive ideologies are a prerequisite for successful language acquisition and can influence not only practices and management decisions but also the language attitudes of the children themselves (Spolsky 2004; Pearson 2008). Given the breadth of possible language beliefs, a choice was necessary. Considering the consulted literature, we opted to use four distinct scales, considered suitable for covering the most relevant advantages of bilingual parenting, namely cognitive, instrumental, linguistic, and sociocultural advantages (Grosjean 1982; Bialystok 2001; Sorace 2010 *inter alia*). Each scale consists of 4 items, with two formulated positively and two negatively.

Finally, the fifth section is dedicated to children and comprises 19 items with closed and open-ended questions. This section also aims to investigate language ideologies. However, exploring attitudes towards the different languages in the repertoire (particularly Italian, SA, and DA) concerning value associations was deemed appropriate in this case. Respondents were asked to indicate their preferred language, associate three adjectives with each language under examination (following the 'Free Response Experiment' model, cf. De Pascale, Marzo 2016 *inter alia*), and briefly describe their own relationship with each language. Furthermore, following a well-established model in the study of language attitudes, respondents were asked to indicate which of the three languages they considered as the most beautiful, useful, easy/difficult, prestigious, linked to religion, culture, identity, etc. (Dweik, Qawar 2015 *inter alia*; for further details, cf. Abdelsayed, Bellinzona forthcoming).<sup>12</sup>

### 4.3 Q-AHLI: Dissemination and Analysis Procedures

Various methods were employed to disseminate the Q-AHLI among the target population.

First and foremost, we leveraged personal contacts and networks, utilising word-of-mouth and the so-called snowball effect (e.g. Noy 2008). This strategy proved valuable in obtaining initial data; it also highlighted noteworthy dynamics regarding the desire and pride of many second-generation Arabic speakers to have their linguistic

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<sup>12</sup> The Q-AHLI is available in Italian at this link: <https://forms.gle/TFvDTK1HVh-gtrM2BA>; and in Arabic at this link: <https://forms.gle/Q9Ud7RT5wWtA8tC49>.

situation at the centre of scientific research. However, due to our own characteristics and social networks, the sampling was not representative of the entire population but rather skewed in terms of geography and socioeconomic factors.

Therefore, we surveyed Arabic language schools, mosques, *madrasa*, *kuttāb*, and churches throughout the national territory. We emailed or, when possible, called them to explain the project and request their collaboration in disseminating the questionnaire through their websites, newsletters, mailing lists, and forums. Unfortunately, this approach proved unproductive, as none of the contacted institutions expressed willingness or interest in the project.

Recognising the evolving communication landscape, we heeded the recommendations of Kayam and Hirsch (2012) and strategically shifted to the power of the web and Social Media Networks, particularly Instagram and Facebook. On Instagram, we contacted influencers and users with a substantial following who actively promoted the Arabic language in Italy. On Facebook, we joined or became members of the most active and popular pages and groups frequented by our target audiences.<sup>13</sup> We requested moderators to post the links or post them ourselves whenever possible. In the context of our research, this approach proved to be the most effective and allowed us to gather quantitative and qualitatively significant data in a short period.

The data we collected were rigorously analysed using the SPSS software (v.23). In addition to descriptive analysis, we conducted various inferential procedures, including parametric tests such as regressions, correlations, T-tests, and ANOVA tests, as well as non-parametric tests.

As the AHLI Project is an ongoing research initiative, and data collection is still in progress, we will now present the characteristics of the sample of respondents who completed the questionnaire during the first two months of dissemination (July-August 2022), providing a glimpse into the early stages of our findings.

## 5 Overview of the Participants

This section provides an overview of the informants who participated in the AHLI Project. The study included 168 subjects who completed the questionnaire, excluding those from the pilot group and those who did not meet the selection criteria. Most of the participants were female (62%). On average, the participants were relatively young, with the highest proportion falling within the age range of 18 to 30 [fig. 2].

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<sup>13</sup> The search for groups and pages to contact was conducted using keywords such as 'Arabs in Italy', 'Moroccans in Italy', 'Egyptians in Lombardy', and so on.

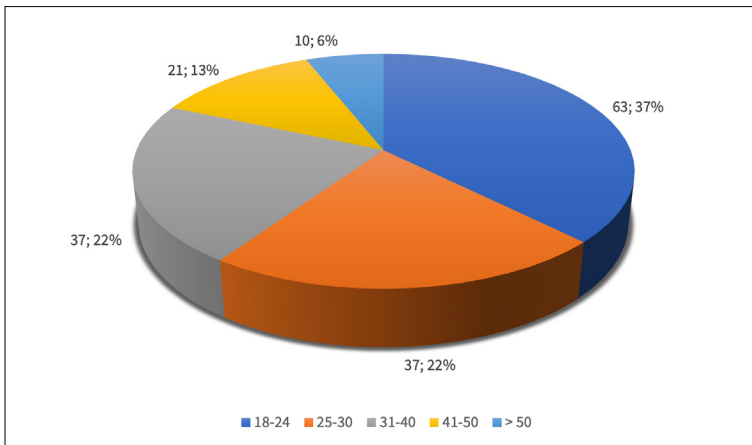
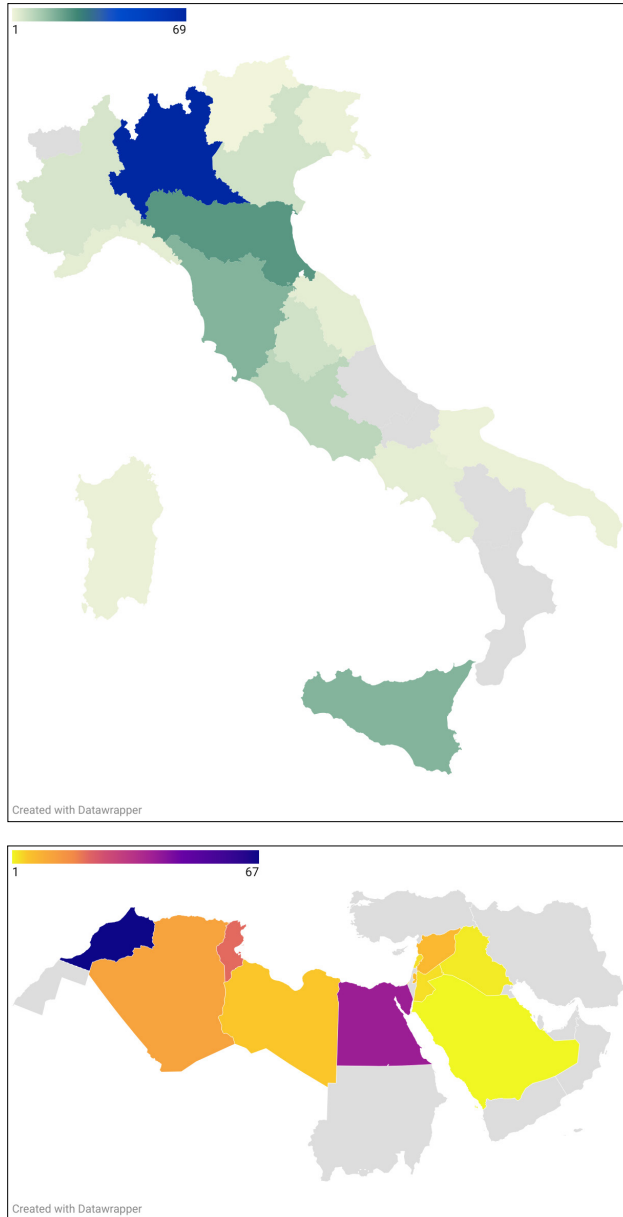


Figure 2 AHLI Project Participants' Age

As presented in figure 3, the geographical distribution of informants closely mirrors the distribution of Arabic-speaking individuals in Italy, which was discussed in § 2. Indeed, it is worth noting that most of the study participants are concentrated in Lombardy (69; 41.1%) and Emilia-Romagna (23; 13.7%), followed by Sicily and Tuscany (each 17; 10.1%) and Lazio (9; 5.4%).

The participants come mainly from countries that closely reflect the overall national composition, with a significant proportion of respondents originating from Morocco (67; 39.9%), Egypt (39; 23.2%), and Tunisia (21; 12.5%) [fig. 3].





**Figure 3** Geographical distribution and origin of AHLI Project Participants

To conduct a thorough analysis of the survey responses, it was deemed necessary to classify the participants into three distinct groups based on their generational status: second-generation immigrants (85; 51%),<sup>14</sup> first-generation immigrants with children (46; 27%), and first-generation immigrants without children (37; 22%). Given the importance of understanding the experiences of immigrant families and their children, our primary focus here will be on the first two groups.

All the parents in the sample were born in an Arab country. However, 62% of the second-generation immigrants reported being born in Italy. Among those second-generation individuals born outside of Italy, the vast majority arrived at a very young age and completed the entire education, at least from middle school onwards, within the Italian school system. This suggests a structural shift in the migration phenomenon in Italy. Immigrants are increasingly integrated into Italian society and are raising families of their own, a promising development.

Figure 4 shows that the participants are predominantly highly educated, with qualifications that are at least equivalent to or exceed high school level [fig. 4]. This trend is noteworthy not only among the younger second-generation respondents but also among the first-generation groups. Furthermore, about 80% of the ‘parent’ respondents reported having a university degree or higher.

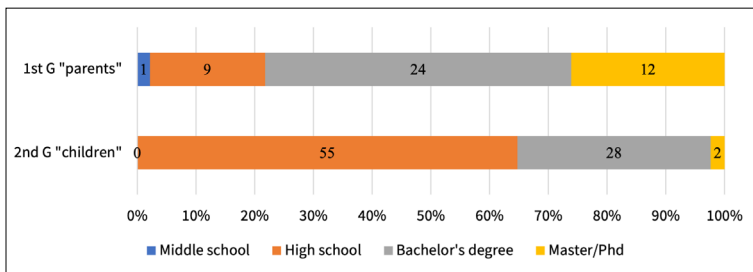


Figure 4 AHLI Project participants' level of education

**14** In this initial reconnaissance phase of the AHLI Project, we use the term ‘second-generation’ in *lato sensu*, which cover various groups as identified by Rumbaut (2004), and Rumbaut and Ima (1988). Specifically, the term ‘second-generation’ in this article encompasses children born in Italy to two Arabic-speaking parents (i.e. 2.0 generation), children born in Italy to a mixed couple with one Arabic-speaking parent and the other speaking a different language (i.e. 2.5 generation), as well as Arabic-speaking children who arrived in Italy at different developmental stages: 1.75 generation (who arrived as pre-school children, ages 0-5), 1.5 generation (who arrived in middle childhood, ages 6-12), and 1.25 generation (who arrived in adolescence, ages 7-13).

The high level of education among the participants is also reflected in their job profiles, as demonstrated in figure 5, which are largely related to intellectual or highly specialised professions [fig. 5].

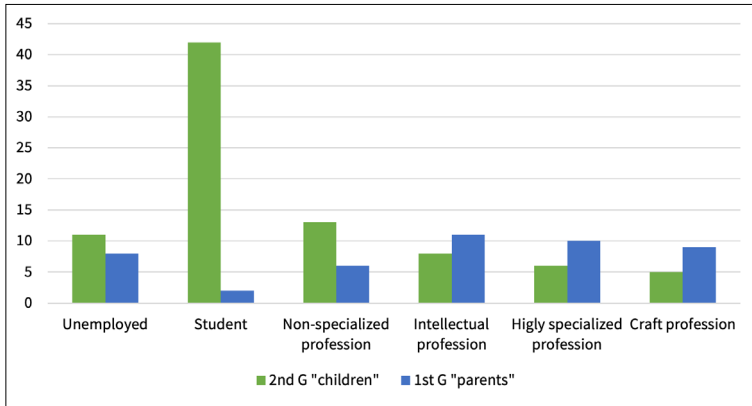


Figure 5 AHLI Project participants' occupations

## 6 Overview of FLP in Arabic-Speaking Communities in Italy: Initial Findings from the AHLI Project

This section offers an overview of the results to answer the research questions formulated. Therefore, we will begin by exploring the linguistic repertoires of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy, surveying the level of proficiency in different languages and their respective contexts of use. Subsequently, we will delve more into family language management concerning the HL, paying special attention to the different roles, importance, and meanings assigned to SA and DA.

### 6.1 Language Practices and Plurilingual Repertoires

Our first foray into the initial findings of the AHLI Project commences with an investigation into the language practices and repertoires of second-generation individuals. The analysis illuminated their repertoires' remarkably plurilingual and diversified nature, with an astonishing average of 5 languages reported by the informants. Italian and English were the most widely known languages (respectively 85; 100% and 79; 92.9%). However, the DA was also prevalent, with almost 92% of the sample including it as part of the linguistic repertoire (78 informants). In contrast, compared to the DA, the percentage dropped by c. 27% when it came to SA, which was reported in

only 65.9% of cases (56 participants). Other known languages among the sample included French (60; 70.6%), one of the dialects of Italy (32; 37.6%), Spanish (32; 37.6%), German (10; 11.8%), and other languages (2; 2.4%). This self-reported plurilingualism reflects a commendable level of language awareness and recognition of the value of linguistic diversity. However, it is important to note that merely including a language in one's linguistic repertoire may not accurately represent the actual proficiency in those languages.

Delving deeper into the self-assessment of individual linguistic skills (oral and written comprehension, oral and written production) in reference to each language, more detailed trends emerge. The data in Table 3 showcases that the overall average knowledge of Italian is high, with a mean score of 4.89 on a scale that ranges from 1 to 5. This suggests a high degree of integration into the host society, at least from a linguistic standpoint. In contrast, the overall mean proficiency score for the DA is 3.77, indicating a lower level of proficiency compared to Italian. However, further investigation into the individual language skills of participants reveals that the lower average proficiency score for DA is primarily due to weak writing skills, both relating to comprehension (M = 3.48) and production (M = 3.12).

On the other hand, when examining proficiency in SA, two significant data points emerge: first, the overall mean proficiency in SA is quite low (M = 3.00; SD = 1.16). The t-test results underscore a significant difference in the mean proficiency in SA not only compared to Italian (M = 4.89; SD = 0.27),  $t(84) = -15.049$ ,  $p < .001$ , but also in comparison to DA (M = 3.77; SD = 1.22),  $t(84) = -6.131$ ,  $p < .001$ . Second, it is observed that the weakest skills are those related to production, both in written (M = 2.55) and oral (M = 2.85) aspects [tab. 3].

**Table 3** Self-evaluation of proficiency in Italian, DA, and SA

	Comprehension		Production		Overall proficiency
	Oral	Written	Oral	Written	
Italian	M = 4.92; SD = .28	M = 4.93; SD = .26	M = 4.85; SD = .39	M = 4.85; SD = .36	M = 4.89; SD = .27
DA	M = 4.34; SD = 1.18	M = 3.48; SD = 1.47	M = 4.15; SD = 1.27	M = 3.12; SD = 1.49	M = 3.77; SD = 1.22
SA	M = 3.53; SD = 1.31	M = 3.08; SD = 1.36	M = 2.84; SD = 1.29	M = 2.55; SD = 1.26	M = 3.00; SD = 1.16

Therefore, a good level of maintenance in Arabic, particularly in the DA variety, is observed. Furthermore, Pearson's correlation test between the levels of proficiency in SA and DA showed a significant positive correlation,  $r(85) = .674$ ,  $p < .001$ . Consequently, as proficiency in one variety increases, so does proficiency in the other. However, despite this high level of heritage language maintenance, some data

suggest potential tendencies of language shift, particularly when examining the linguistic choices made while completing the Q-AHLI. Of the 85 informants considered, 80 (94%) chose to complete the questionnaire in its Italian version, with only 5 opting for the SA version. It is also important to note that these 5 informants belong to the 1.5 generation group (cf. Rumbaut 2004), meaning they were born in an Arab country and later moved to Italy as children.

Certainly, to correctly interpret the data relating to the proficiency it is necessary to consider a series of factors, both internal and external to the person. We will explore some of them below. In this regard, considering what has just been said about the choice of the questionnaire, it is necessary to verify to what extent the place of birth impacts linguistic skills in the HL.

Regarding SA, the 32 participants born in an Arab country ( $M = 3.445$ ;  $SD = 1.184$ ) compared to the 53 participants born in Italy ( $M = 2.731$ ;  $SD = 1.065$ ) declared a significantly higher proficiency,  $t(83) = 2.871$ ,  $p < .005$ . The same trend is observed considering the DA, as the informants who were born in an Arab country ( $M = 4.109$ ;  $SD = 1.032$ ) self-evaluate a higher proficiency in DA than the ones born in Italy ( $M = 3.571$ ;  $SD = 1.284$ ). This difference was statistically significant,  $t(83) = 2.012$ ,  $p < .05$ . Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe a distinction in the magnitude of the impact of birthplace on language proficiency between SA and DA. In the case of SA, the effect size (measured by Cohen's  $d$ ) is medium-large,  $d = .617$ , signifying a robust influence of birthplace on language proficiency. Conversely, the effect size for DA is medium-small,  $d = .443$ .

This implies that the endeavours of Arab families in Italy to convey and uphold their HL manifest in the heightened proficiency levels among individuals born in an Arab-speaking country, particularly concerning SA. This underscores the intricate interplay between home languages, dominant languages, and the environment in which language learning and usage occur. The relatively smaller effect size observed for DA suggests the involvement of additional influential factors. These factors may encompass a higher degree of exposure to DA in the home environment and the more spontaneous use of DA within the community, in contrast to the somewhat abstract nature of SA. These elements contribute significantly to maintaining proficiency in the home dialect among second-generation individuals born in Italy.

In this regard, to unravel the complex network of languages comprising the linguistic repertoires of second-generation Arabic speakers, it is not just important, but essential to comprehend the languages they use with various interlocutors and in diverse contexts.

In addition to the family domain, to which we will return shortly, the questionnaire highlighted some of the social contexts in which participants more easily establish relationships with Arabic speakers. As evident from the data reported in table 4, the university

environment appears to be the one in which one most easily deals with the Arabic language, followed by places of pleasure, mosques, and schools [tab. 4].

**Table 4** Social domains in which relationships are established in Arabic (excluding the domestic domain)

	No.	%	% cases
At the university	44	24.0%	63.8%
In places of leisure	36	19.7%	52.2%
At the mosque	25	13.7%	36.2%
At school	23	12.6%	33.3%
At work	21	11.5%	30.4%
In shops	19	10.4%	27.5%
In associations	9	4.9%	13.0%
At the church	4	2.2%	5.8%
Others	2	1.1%	2.9%

These are very different social domains, visited with different frequencies, with different purposes, and in which people interact differently. This can only impact the languages learned, the individual linguistic skills developed in the different varieties, and the very role assigned to languages. In this regard, it is useful to see the association between languages and activities carried out. The analysis reveals that Italian is the most used language across most activities, as demonstrated in the graph in figure 6 [fig. 6]. However, a closer examination reveals four major groupings based on the responses received.

First, Italian takes the lead in what can be aptly termed as ‘intellectual activities’, encompassing work, study, reading, and writing. SA is the language of choice for religious activities, highlighting its cultural and spiritual importance. ‘Recreational activities’, including browsing the internet, watching movies, and listening to music, are performed in all languages, indicating a shared global, multilingual culture irrespective of origin. Finally, for ‘personal and intimate’ activities, such as thinking and dreaming, Italian language and DA are equally divided, suggesting Italian-DA bilingualism among participants.

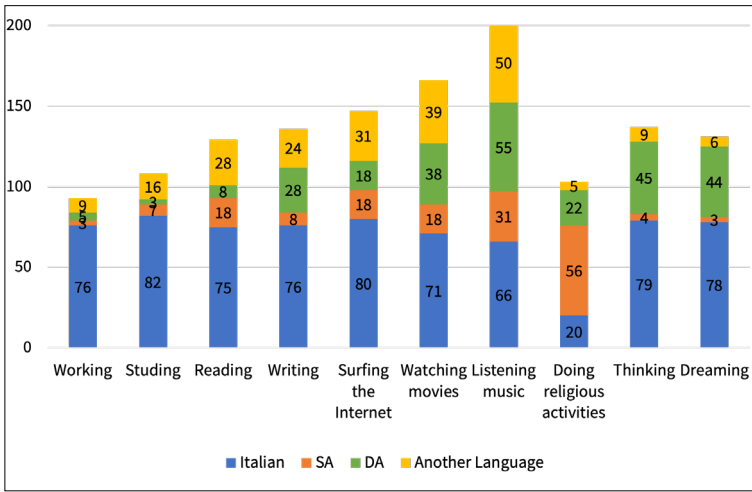


Figure 6 Languages of the repertoire associated with the different activities

As mentioned, in addition to the activities, it is important to explore how language practices vary depending on the people in the interaction. The graph in figure 7 provides a first overview of these uses [fig. 7]. First, we note that with parents and other family members, the most used language is Arabic, in particular DA. Notably, no participant declared using SA as the prevalent variety with any of the categories of people considered. Interestingly, the data reveals also that when children communicate with siblings, friends, acquaintances, and strangers, they report using Italian more frequently than Arabic.

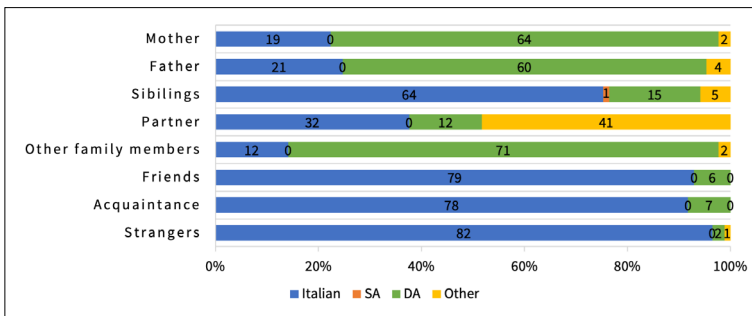


Figure 7 Language uses according to different people

## 6.2 Managing Plurilingualism Between Practices and Ideologies

With the second research question, we explored parents' ideologies and management choices in relation to the maintenance of the HL. It is necessary to look at numerous elements to answer such a complex question. First, it is worth highlighting how the study results suggest strongly positive ideologies towards bilingual parenting ( $M = 3.8668$ ;  $SD = .49924$ ). These, as can be seen from table 5, are mainly due to the recognition of the instrumental ( $M = 4.0598$ ;  $SD = .60135$ ) and sociocultural ( $M = 3.9130$ ;  $SD = .62409$ ) advantages of an Arabic-Italian bilingualism (cf. § 4.2) [tab. 5].

**Table 5** Ideologies related to bilingual parenting

Scales	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Instrumental advantages	46	3.00	5.00	4.0598	.60135
Cognitive advantages	46	2.50	5.00	3.6359	.64487
Linguistic advantages	46	2.50	5.00	3.8587	.72390
Sociocultural advantages	46	3.00	5.00	3.9130	.62409
Tot.	46	3.00	4.88	3.8668	.49924

On the one hand, there is awareness of the importance of language learning for school success and for future job opportunities; on the other hand, particular importance is given to the possibility of guaranteeing double access to the cultural sphere, both Arab and Italian, while at the same time maintaining a link with the country of origin.

At first glance, these ideologies seem to be reflected in the linguistic uses in the family, as can be seen from the graph in figure 8, which accounts for the frequency of use of the languages under analysis within the home context [fig. 8]. The language used most frequently to communicate with children appears to be the DA ( $M = 3.87$ ;  $Mdn = 4.00$ ;  $SD = 1.327$ ), followed by Italian ( $M = 3.13$ ;  $Mdn = 3.00$ ;  $SD = 1.204$ ). Conversely, SA is used less frequently ( $M = 2.15$ ;  $Mdn = 2.00$ ;  $SD = 1.115$ ).



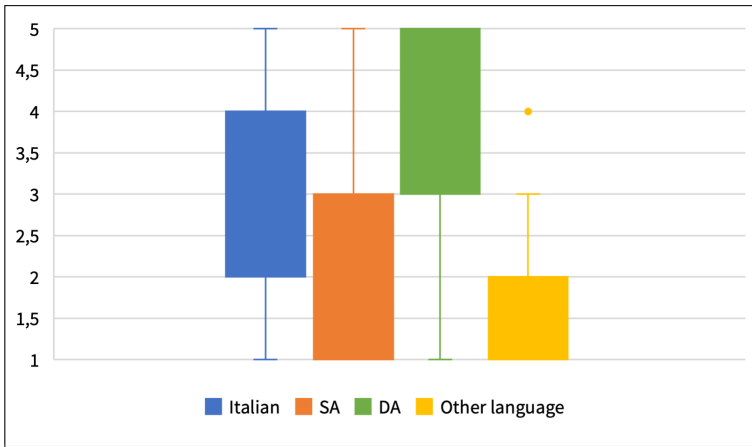


Figure 8 Frequency of use of different languages with own children

However, it is interesting to observe how the decision to speak Arabic with one's children, in most cases, is not the result of thoughtful reflection or discussion but of a spontaneous behavioural attitude. As evident from the graph in figure 9, of the 42 individuals who said they mainly use Arabic with their children, 50% declare that they have not thought about the reason for this choice [fig. 9]. Small percentages of informants say they made their decision following a discussion with their partner (7.17%) or with relatives in their country of origin (2.5%), and even fewer with experts (2.5%) or for other reasons, mainly university studies (3.7%).



Figure 9 Awareness and reasons behind language practices

In any case, language practices seem to impact children's linguistic proficiency, at least as evaluated by the parents themselves. The link between the two variables (for all three languages – Italian, DA, and SA) was tested through a Pearson correlation, which highlighted a significant correlation with a linear and positive relationship:

Children's proficiency in DA and frequency of DA use with children:  $r(46) = .688, p < .0001$

Children's proficiency in SA and frequency of SA use with children:  $r(46) = .639, p < .0001$

Children's proficiency in Italian and frequency of Italian use with children:  $r(46) = .310, p = .03$

This hypothesis is further bolstered by the insights shared about the places and contexts of language learning [fig. 10]. Notably, of the 38 respondents who said they had their children study Arabic, 21 (55%) pointed to the domestic context as the primary learning environment, sometimes combined with other contexts, such as mosques and cultural associations (11 each; 29%), at school (8; 21%) and in the country of origin (6; 16%).

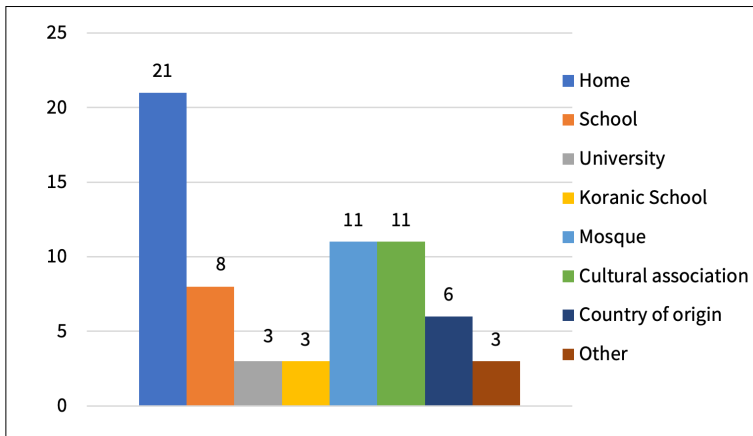


Figure 10 Language learning contexts

Nonetheless, it is necessary to highlight how language practices do not always correspond to the linguistic proficiency declared by parents. Also in this case, the link was tested using a Pearson correlation, which gave the following results:

- Parents' proficiency in DA and frequency of DA use with their children:  $r(46) = .382, p < .005$
- Parents' proficiency in SA and frequency of SA use with their children:  $r(46) = .226, p > .05$

- Parents' proficiency in Italian and frequency of Italian use with their children:  $r(46) = .383, p < .005$

While proficiency in Italian and DA significantly correlates with parents' language practices, the same cannot be said in the case of SA. This, on the one hand, raises questions about the real practices related to the maintenance of Arabic (and of which variety of Arabic) and, on the other, suggests the presence of very strong and deep-rooted beliefs towards SA.

In this regard, and before concluding the section, we would like to highlight one last fact. Although the ideologies towards bilingualism are positive and there is an attempt, both at home and in other contexts, to transmit the HL, contrasting attitudes are observed towards the various varieties within the so-called 'diglossia' of Arabic. To the question 'What language(s) do you think is important for your children to know?', in fact, 35 informants (76.1% of the total) indicated SA, 34 Italian (73.9% of the total) and only 27 DA (58.7%).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, as evident from the graph in figure 11, while almost all the respondents (43; 93.5%) would be interested in enrolling their children in an SA course, less than half (22; 47.9%) would do the same for a DA course. This trend, which is consistent with studies on Arabic-speaking communities in other European countries, underscores the strong preference for SA over DA in formal learning contexts. Similar results were found in research on Moroccan immigrant communities in the Netherlands and France, where most respondents favoured MSA over dialects (Extra, de Ruiter 1994; Boumans, de Ruiter 2002).

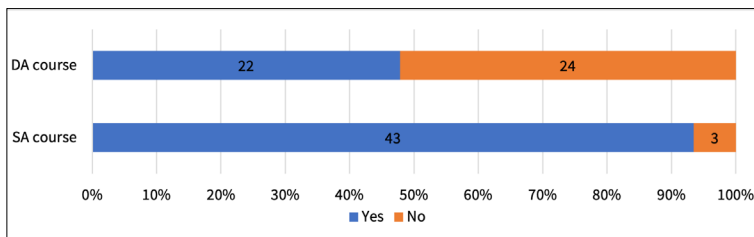


Figure 11 Predisposition to enrol children in HL courses

<sup>15</sup> 18 informants (39.1%) indicated another language in addition to these.

## 7 Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we presented the AHLI Project, which stemmed from the need to explore the vitality and maintenance of the Arabic language - both SA and DA - in Italy. This necessity is intertwined with the distinctive characteristics of migrations in Italy (Colucci 2018). The project addresses research gaps in FLPs and HL maintenance, particularly concerning Arabic, owing to its complex and multifaceted nature (Albirini 2016; Holes 2018).

We examined several research results to address two questions: firstly, how the linguistic repertoires of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy are structured and which role the Arabic language(s) plays in this context; and secondly, how the presumed 'diglossic' situation of the Arabic language (Ferguson 1959) impacts the ideologies and beliefs of parents and, consequently, their FLPs.

The results shed light on the intricate interplay between home languages, dominant languages, and individual language skills, emphasising the nuanced complexity of linguistic repertoires among second-generation individuals. This finding offers a deeper insight into the relationship between language proficiency and contextual variables. It underscores the notion that mastery of a language is closely intertwined with lived experiences and language's natural use within the community and the home environment. Consequently, it reaffirms the pivotal role of cultural and environmental factors in shaping linguistic repertoires and achievements within immigrant communities.

The analyses have suggested an ongoing language shift process, although it is still in its initial stages. This trend becomes apparent, firstly, through the high proficiency of the second-generation in Italian, the majority language, as indicated by both their self-assessed proficiency and their preference for filling out the Italian version of the Q-AHLI. Secondly, the shift is evident when considering bilingualism and the diglossic division of linguistic usage across various social domains, activities, and interactions with different individuals. Notably, the use of Italian in communication between siblings, as observed elsewhere (Barron-Hauwaert 2011 *inter alia*), is emblematic in this context.

Nevertheless, the results still reflect a commendable level of maintenance of the Arabic language. The data highlights linguistic dynamics and practices within second-generation individuals, where the HL holds significant importance alongside proficiency in dominant languages like Italian. This is suggested by the high proficiency levels among second-generation individuals, as self-evaluated and evaluated by parents. Furthermore, the maintenance of Arabic is in line with what emerged from the analysis of parents' ideologies, which appear strongly positive towards bilingualism (Curdt-Christiansen 2013).

The results, however, suggest that we cannot speak of maintaining a generic Arabic; instead, it is mandatory to distinguish between its varieties (although aware that it is a linguistic *continuum* or, more accurately, a composite language space; cf. Abdelsayed 2021) to understand what the true HL is (and act accordingly). As highlighted by Albirini (2016) *inter alia*, in fact, the findings underscore the enduring significance of the DA as the primary linguistic variety maintained among Arabic speakers. The DA is the variety in which the second generations have a higher proficiency; it is the most used in the various social domains and the domestic context, configuring itself as the real HL. Furthermore, the data relating to proficiency in the various linguistic skills highlight greater skills in orality, unlike SA, which appears limited in contexts of use, activities, and production skills.

However, the lack of competence in writing skills raises important questions regarding the maintenance of DA itself, intersecting with issues related to educational policies (at local and national levels) and literacy. As known, oral and written HL proficiency requires linguistic reinforcement in both school and home environments. It is not always (indeed, rarely) possible to access formal or informal pathways responsible for maintaining DA, considering the lack of structured educational programs designed for DA. Nevertheless, data have shown that proficiency in DA is positively and significantly correlated with proficiency in SA. Consequently, policy and educational decisions should consider that any action supporting the learning or maintenance of one variety can also positively influence the other.

Furthermore, the data stresses a further obstacle linked to the generally negative attitudes of parents towards this linguistic variety (Shalaby 2021 *inter alia*). Although they communicate with their children mainly in DA (Albirini 2016), which is also used to maintain relationships with relatives in the country of origin (one of the most positively evaluated aspects of Arabic-Italian bilingualism), few parents would enrol their child in a DA course. This reluctance stems from two main factors. Firstly, there is a belief that learning the DA in formal educational settings is less essential during the emigration process. Secondly, this attitude can be viewed within the broader context of language policies in Arab countries, where educational systems typically do not include provisions for teaching the native Arabic dialect.

It is worth underlining how the absence of provisions for the maintenance of the DA can only negatively influence attitudes, which in turn determine practices, in a circle that can only lead, in the long term, to harmful consequences for language maintenance (Spolsky 2004). In other words, FLPs are influenced by personal beliefs, values, and socio-economic factors, which shape family language decisions and practices. This circumstance can result in a decline in the use of the HL, particularly among future generations, as there

is no wider support network. The absence of structured and targeted measures to maintain HLs may also foster negative attitudes towards these languages and the cultures they represent. These results, among others, need to be considered for implementing more targeted language policies and interventions focused on the real sociolinguistic condition of their recipients.

The research presents some limitations related to the sample of informants, the research tools, and the analyses. We are aware, in fact, that the sample is not completely representative of the target population, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, as a large part of the informants were young, highly educated, and with generally high-profile jobs. Thus, in the next stages of the research, we aim to address this limitation by expanding our sample to include individuals from low socio-economic and cultural backgrounds who may be difficult to reach through online surveys.

Furthermore, although a quantitative overview is essential and constitutes one of the merits and innovations introduced by the AHLI Project, it is not sufficient to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Arabic's vitality in Italy and the FLPs in relation to its maintenance. The focus groups already conducted, which have not been considered here for space reasons, contribute to fill this gap, allowing us to enter the depth of ideologies and language management. However, we believe it is necessary in the future to combine these approaches with an ethnographic investigation, which includes case studies and observations, indispensable to investigate implicit FLP (Schiffman 1996; Schwartz 2008).

Further and more in-depth analyses of this group's language skills, needs, and challenges are also necessary to understand how Arabic-speaking immigrants navigate the complex interplay between their HL and the Italian language and to grasp the factors that contribute to (or conversely, hinder) language maintenance and proficiency (King, Fogle 2006; Curdt-Christiansen 2018). This is essential to targeted policies and programs supporting their integration and success, addressing their unique needs, and promoting their linguistic and cultural identities.

At the same time, however, the AHLI Project presents itself as a novelty thanks to its broad, stratified, and multidisciplinary structure. The variety and quality of data collected, and the analyses proposed can provide an accurate, though partial, snapshot of the presence and integration of Arabic speakers in Italy, their linguistic repertoires, and their FLP. For example, the data relating to the time of arrival in Italy, the qualification, and the proficiency in Italian itself suggest that these individuals have likely been heavily influenced by Italian culture, social norms, and educational practices, which may have significant implications for their experiences and identities as immigrants. Furthermore, the results allow us to frame

the linguistic issue of Arabic 'diglossia', at least in the migration context, starting from concrete data and not based on prejudices and inaccurate assumptions. This finding underscores the need for policies that consider the evolving needs and experiences of these communities, particularly regarding issues such as education and social integration. These need to consider linguistic aspects and the socio-cultural dynamics that impact language maintenance and proficiency. Embracing such a holistic approach is essential for nurturing immigrant communities' linguistic and cultural identities and facilitating their successful integration into the host society. Therefore, AHLI's mission represents a vital effort to delve into these nuances and complexities, shedding light on the subtleties of the FLP and its role in transmitting and maintaining Arabic as a HL, contributing to more informed and tailored language maintenance strategies.

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