Maryam Borjian* and Charles Häberl*

Introduction: At the intersection of language and social variables: the case of Middle Eastern languages in the United States

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1 Introduction

> The entire destiny of modern linguistics is in fact determined by Saussure's inaugural act through which he separates the 'external' elements of linguistics from the 'internal' elements, and, by reserving the title of linguistics for the latter, excludes from it all [...] the political history of those who speak it, or even the geography of the domain where it is spoken, because all of these things add nothing to a knowledge of language taken in itself. (Bourdieu 1991: 33)

With these words, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) undermined the foundation of modern linguistics established by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913). Drawing upon the insights of his Russian predecessor, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), Bourdieu argued that language is neither solely a means of communication nor solely a system of internal rules. Situating language within society, he implored linguists to go beyond the internal elements of language to consider its external elements equally, exploring the interaction of language with its surrounding social variables, such as power, politics, ideology, and so forth.

This special issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* can be considered a response to Bourdieu's call. By situating Middle Eastern languages within the diasporic context of the United States, it brings together scholarship that explores the intersection and intersectionality of language with the social variables that exist in society and the implications of such interactions upon languages and their speech communities with regard to language use, attitudes, learning, maintenance, and/or attrition. Although the Middle East is our geographical focus, the eight languages that are brought together in this issue have different origins, belonging to different language families, including

***Corresponding authors: Maryam Borjian, Charles Häberl,** Rutgers, State University of New Jersey, USA, E-mail: mborjian@rci.rutgers.edu; haberl@rutgers.edu

Afro-Asiatic, Indo-European, and Turkic. Not only does this issue focus upon vibrant and widely spoken Middle Eastern languages that are national in their countries of origin, namely Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Hebrew, and more recently Kurdish, but also upon smaller languages that enjoy no official or national status anywhere, notably Western Armenian, Turoyo (a form of Neo-Aramaic), and Juhuri (or Judeo-Tat, a form of Tat and part of the larger Judeo-Persian language family). The questions addressed within this special issue include: What roles/functions do the focal languages play/have for their speakers within the context of the United States, in which the common language is English? What attitudes do the speakers of these focal languages have toward them, as either their heritage or mother-tongues? Are these languages markers of identity for their speakers? Are there any efforts on the part of the ethnolinguistic communities to maintain the languages and pass them along to their American children?

To answer these questions, the contributors of this issue apply both diachronic and synchronic lenses. Whereas the diachronic lens is used to offer a historical overview of the focal languages in their original geographical contexts and in that of the US over time, the synchronic lens is used to reflect on the focal languages and their speakers in the US at the present time. Even though all articles have an identical unit of analysis, reflecting on sociological aspects of the Middle Eastern languages in the US, they differ from one another in their points of departure. This is mainly due to the fact that our contributors belong to different academic disciplines, including area studies, sociology, education, and historical and descriptive linguistics. This diversity of perspectives has produced a rich array of sociolinguistic papers unified in a single issue. The evidence presented here is empirical, directly collected from the field, namely the heart of the ethnolinguistic diasporic speech communities in the US. The contributors employed multiple means of data collection, including:

- participant observation in the focal communities (Juhuri and Turoyo),
- participant observation of community schools (Arabic, Armenian and Turkish),
- discourse analysis (Hebrew and Turkish),
- document analysis of community newspapers, online sources, films and/or school documents (Arabic, Armenian, Juhuri and Kurdish),
- qualitative research by means of structured and semi-structured interviews with the speakers of the focal languages, including parents, children, school administrators, and/or community activists (all articles in this issue), and
- surveys (Juhuri, Kurdish, Persian and Turkish).

With regard to the position of our contributors towards the focal languages and their communities in the US, they provide both insider and an outsider perspective. Whereas some speak a Middle Eastern language as their mother-tongue and are a member of the diasporic speech community (like the authors of the Arabic, Armenian, Kurdish, Persian, and Turkish articles), others have studied the focal languages and maintain either an insider position within the community (as in the case of the author of the Hebrew and one of the co-authors of the Turoyo articles) or maintain close contact with the focal speech community despite their outsider position because of their research on minority or endangered languages (as in the case of one of the co-authors of the Turoyo article and both authors of the Juhuri article).

2 Language and social variables

Every physical-geographical space is socially constructed: there are multiple social variables (e.g. race, religion, ethnicity, education, etc.) constituting the social context of language use in every society. These variables serve many functions, one of which is to divide people and place them into various groups and sub-groups within the society. Hence, they are hierarchal, determining not only the position of the groups within the social hierarchy but also the degree of power the members of each group can claim for themselves in society.

The account provided below reflects on the various ways in which language interacts with these social variables, and the implications of such interactions upon the language and its speech community in terms of language use, identity, attitudes, learning, maintenance, and/or attrition. The thematically arranged sociolinguistic themes are discussed here in light of the findings of the studies brought together in this special issue.

2.1 Language policy, ideology and practices

Language interacts with various sources of authority in society. One such source is the political authority and the ways in which politicians and policy makers plan language to regulate linguistic behaviors in society to achieve a certain goal. These policies are not formed in a vacuum but are rather derived from ideologies – i.e. a set of powerful shared ideas and patterned beliefs that are constructed by those in a position of power, disseminated widely, internalized gradually, to the extent that they are eventually perceived as the truth, common-

sense or reality by a significant group of people within the society. Authority in this sense and its ability to regulate linguistic behaviors through policies is defined by Michel Foucault's concept of *governmentality*, which broadly means, the ability of a governing force (visible or invisible) to regulate actions/behaviors through the enactment of certain acts, regulations and/or policies (Gutting 2005).

One such policy governs the national/official language, regulating language use within the boundaries of the nation-state for its citizens. Today, the majority of world nations have a monoglossic language policy, in which one language serves as the national language (often alongside an ex-colonial language as the official language in the post-colonial contexts). The ideology behind the monoglossic language policy is that of the modernization and nationalization era, with its grand slogan of one nation (soil), one people (blood), and one national identity (cultural and linguistic), derived from eighteenth century German Romanticism (May 2001). Since through this monoglossic lens, nation is perceived as an entity with essential territorial, historical, psychological, and socio-cultural communalities, one language should serve as the national language as a means to bring national unity. In the view of critics (Garcia 2009; May 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1995), the modernist ideology that favors the selection of one language as a prerequisite for the construction of a modern nation-state is inheritably biased, unequal, and unjust. It is an unjustly detrimental treatment of linguistic diversity because it favors the speakers of one language over all others. The outcome of this language policy is inevitably a linguistic hierarchy, in which the top belongs to a few dominant languages (national and official), whereas at the bottom are all other languages that exist within the boundaries of the nation-state. One implication of such policy is the exclusion of the dominated, less-powerful, minority or lesser languages, as Joshua Fishman and Ofelia Garcia (2011) note, from the formal domains of language use such as education, media, state institutions, etc.

The Middle Eastern languages of this issue have, too, been planned, managed, regulated and stratified by the policy makers of both their original geographical contexts and those of the US. In their original contexts, several of these languages serve as the national languages, including: Arabic, which is national in eighteen sovereign Arab states (alongside French as the official language in the former Francophone colonies such as Lebanon) and co-official in several non-Arab nations such as Eritrea, Israel, and Somalia (Zakharia, this issue); Hebrew, the national language of Israel (Avni, this issue); Persian, the national language of Iran, as well as Afghanistan, and Tajikistan in its Dari and Tajiki variants (Bozorgmehr and Meybodi, this issue); and lastly Turkish, which

is the national language of Turkey and closely related to the national languages of five other sovereign Central Asian states and several republics and autonomous provinces of the Russian Federation (Otcu-Grillman, this issue).

In their long lives, three of these languages were even the languages of empires, notably: Arabic, that of the Islamic *Umma* (nation); Persian, that of several successive Persian empires and also, after the fall of Persia into the melting pot of the Islamic *Umma*, the language of diplomacy, administration, and culture across much of the Islamic East; and Turkish, the language of the Ottoman Empire and other Turkic empires. Such linguistic domination has led to the minoritization, marginalization, and even suppression of all the other Middle Eastern languages, four of which are present in the present issue, namely: Western Armenian, the language of a Christian minority of the Ottoman Empire (though its Eastern branch is the national language of the Republic of Armenia, formed after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991) (Chahinian and Bakalian, this issue); Juhuri, the language of the Mountain Jews of the eastern Caucasus (Borjian and Kaufman, this issue); Turoyo, the language of a Christian minority of Syria and Turkey (Weaver and Kiraz, this issue); and lastly, Kurdish, the language of the Kurds, a people without a nation-state, whose speakers reside in various countries, including Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Only after the fall of Saddam Hussein was the official status of the Kurdish language properly recognized in the Iraqi Kurdish Autonomous Region (Sheyholislami and Sharifi, this issue). Of these minority languages, the first three are listed on UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (UNESCO 2010).

Language policies can be either explicit or implicit. Whereas the explicit language policy is stated overtly through official documents, like in national constitutions, the implicit language policy is hidden from official policy documents but can be derived by examining a variety of *de facto* practices (Spolsky 2004). The latter is the case of language policy of the United States. Whereas there is no explicit reference to English as the country's national language, *de facto* practices such as its use in the mainstream media, public schools, state's agencies, etc. point to English being the official language of the US. As such, all the Middle Eastern languages in this issue, regardless of their status in their original geographical contexts, hold a secondary position (after English) in the US. This is not, however, to suggest that they are equal in terms of their power within the context of the US. Due to their domination in their original geographical contexts, the promotion of the dominant Middle Eastern languages (Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish) in the US benefits from the financial support of the governments of Arab countries, Iran, Israel, and Turkey; such support is not provided for the promotion of the minority Middle Eastern languages. On the other hand, the US constitution does not oppose the teaching

and learning of minority languages in minoritized spaces such as "ethnic community mother-tongue schools", so labeled by Fishman (1980), or "bilingual community schools", so labeled by Garcia et al. (2012). As such, after their arrival to the US, speakers of minority Middle Eastern languages which had long been suppressed in their original geographical contexts have had opportunities to teach their own languages to their children in their own community schools through their own community funding. That is particularly true for the revitalization of the Turoyo language by its speakers (Suryoyo people), who have been persecuted in the Middle East throughout centuries. These people, who had chosen linguistic and cultural assimilation as a strategy to protect themselves in their original geographical context, were able to use their language as the medium of instruction in their own community schools in the US (Weaver and Kiraz, this issue). (For more on this subject, see Section 2.6.)

After the events of 9/11 and the US-led war-on-terror, Islam and Christianity seem to have entered a symbolic war. Consequently, the Middle Eastern languages primarily spoken by Muslims (notably Arabic, Persian and Turkish) suddenly found a new role in the US. Labeled as "critical" or "critical need languages", the US National Security Language Initiatives of 2006 allocated the state's financial and technical resources to the teaching and learning of these languages (along with other critical languages from other world regions) to American students for national security purposes. This is not, however, the first time that the US politicians have encouraged the teaching and learning of foreign languages for national security purposes. The US National Defense and Education Act of 1958 equally promoted the teaching of foreign languages, especially Russian, for a similar purpose (for more on these policies, see Garcia et al. [2012]).

2.2 Language and identity

Language is a primary marker of identity. It has a profound influence on one's mind, thoughts, and life. It is a means through which cultural heritage is obtained and passed on. Of all the languages that one may speak, the one with most impact on one's individual identity is one's mother-tongue, regarded as an inescapable part of one's individual identity in Whorfian terms (Wardhaugh 2010). This tongue is the tongue in which one is born and grows up, the tongue close to one's heart, the tongue in which one dreams, the tongue that has evolved over time through its interaction with its natural and social surrounding, the tongue of locally-situated wisdom, knowledge, metaphors and expressions, and last but not least, the tongue that has entered into UNESCO's

Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, which declares the right of every linguistic community to speak, teach, standardize, codify, preserve and promote, etc. their language (UNESCO 1996).

This very tongue is, too, at the heart of this special issue. What all the articles in this issue commonly report is the desire, or at least aspiration, on the part of the American immigrant communities to teach their tongues to their American children as a means to make individuals proficient in the wider language of communication (English) and at least comprehend their heritage language, no matter how important this language is; it can be a forgotten tongue at the edge of disappearance like Juhuri, originally spoken by Jews in isolated enclaves in the eastern Caucasus (Borjian and Kaufman, this issue), or a tongue with a prestigious literary reputation like Persian, whose literature was once widely read across a vast region, extending as far as Bengal in the East to the Balkans in the West (Borjian and Borjian 2011). It can be an endangered tongue like Western Armenian that is losing its vitality both in the US and in its original geographical contexts (in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey) (Chahinian and Bakalian, this issue) or it can be a vibrant and widely spoken tongue like Arabic, whose speakers are spread across a vast geographical region from Morocco in the West to Iraq in the East (Zakharia, this issue). In their interactions with English, these languages may or may not have any economic value for their speakers in the US; yet their speakers are willing to allocate their time, energy, and financial resources to promote bilingual practices on the part of their children. These bilingual practices may consist of learning how to read the scripture in Turoyo in a small church in New Jersey (Weaver and Kiraz, this issue), acquiring literacy in Hebrew in well-established day schools in New York City (Avni, this issue), playing traditional music and singing Kurdish songs in California (Sheyholislami and Sharifi, this issue), acquiring literacy in Turkish in a bilingual community or Saturday schools in New York City (Otcu-Grillman, this issue) or simply contemplating the possibility of revitalizing Juhuri by organizing a conference on the theme of "what we know about the language of our heritage" (Borjian and Kaufman, this issue). The psychological rewards of these acts (as opposed to economic ones) are the main drivers behind the language preservation efforts of these ethnolinguistic communities. Such efforts attest to what Joshua Fishman (1991) regards as the engagement of ordinary people in reversing language shift. They equally attest the power of language and its ability to function both as a carrier of culture and as a shaper of identity.

But identity is multi-dimensional (individual, societal, and national) and multilayered. As for the latter, it can include the ways in which one defines oneself (self-image) and the ways in which one is defined by others (ascribed or

assigned). If there is harmony between the two layers of one's identity, then there is hardly any negotiation needed on the part of the individual/community. However, if there is a conflict between the two, then endless negotiations and renegotiations are needed on the part of the individual/community, whose layers of identity are in conflict. The latter seems to be the case of minority languages throughout the world, including in the US. But how does this multidimensionality of identity interact with minority ethnolinguistic communities and their language maintenance endeavors in the majority-minority language-contact situation of the US? To answer this question, we need to address other social variables, namely religious identities and language attitudes (for more on language and identity, see Coulmas [2013]).

2.3 Language and religion

Religion is no less a marker of identity than language, and likewise a potential barrier to full assimilation into a majority population, as well as a powerful factor in the maintenance of a heritage language when the diaspora communities are not assimilated into their host communities. This is evident from the languages featured in this issue. Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, as the official language of states, are spoken by the present and former citizens of those states irrespective of their religions, as represented by Arabic-speaking Lebanese Christians in Bay Ridge, Persian-speaking Iranian Jews in Beverly Hills, and Turkish-speaking Greeks in Astoria. By contrast, unrecognized languages such as Western Armenian, Juhuri, and Turoyo are spoken exclusively or near-exclusively by members of specific religious communities. Furthermore, the vernacular forms of all of these languages lack the prestige of the national languages and the liturgical languages of these communities, which often come to supplant them as the subject of community language education efforts in the diaspora.

The success of Hebrew is the exception that proves the rule that the heritage languages of ethno-religious minorities gradually give way to national languages, even in the diaspora: as one of the most popular "less commonly taught languages" in United States, the study of Hebrew has a long history in the Americas precisely because of its scriptural associations for Christians as well as Jews (Goldman 2004); yet the form of Hebrew most commonly taught is the modern-day language of the State of Israel, as Avni (this issue) notes. Even so, and despite Hebrew's perennial popularity in the United States and the cultural and religious associations that it holds for American Jews and Christians alike, it does not serve as a vernacular for most American Jews, as that function is fulfilled by English (Avni, this issue).

In this regard, it is illustrative to compare it to another traditional American Jewish vernacular: Yiddish. Today, Yiddish survives and even thrives as a vernacular language in Hasidic communities, having successfully made the transition from a language spoken purely by first generation immigrants to the language of a stable and growing American minority (Isaacs 1999), despite the complete and total lack of any official support in the United States or abroad. In addition to its vernacular use, it is also taught to young men and women in universities, but those (largely secular) Jews who use Yiddish and teach it as the subject of scholarship at universities are almost completely separated from those (almost exclusively Hasidic) Jews who use it as their primary vernacular by another religious boundary, which Dovid Katz (1998: 15) calls an "iron curtain". Yiddish survives as a vernacular minority language precisely because its native speakers religiously and socially segregate themselves both from other non-Hasidic Jews and greater society.

A similar division is apparent from the long history of the Arab-American community in New York; as Zakharia notes in this issue, after the majority of the Arab-American community shifted to English, the vitality of Arabic language education shifted to the arena of Islamic education. It is precisely this perception of Arabic as the language of Islam that has led to conflict with the communities in which it is taught, even when (as in the case of the Kahlil Gibran International Academy) it is taught in a rigidly secular school named after a Lebanese Christian poet. Today Arabic language education in the US, whether it be at a community day school, a private Islamic school, a charter school, or a university, is almost universally synonymous with education in Modern Standard Arabic (i.e. *fusḥa*), an idiom consciously derived from and modeled upon the Arabic of a millennium ago, rather than any of the widely divergent vernacular forms of Arabic spoken at home, as such is the power of state policy and religious authority.

2.4 Language attitudes

"Why is it that one minority group assimilates and its language dies, while another maintains its linguistic and cultural identity?" This question was posed by David Bradley (2002: 1), who perceives language attitude to be the key factor in language maintenance. Obviously, language attitudes can either be positive or negative. They encompass both the attitudes of the speakers of the minority language towards the language they speak (positive or negative self-image) and that of the speakers of the majority language towards the language of the minority group (positive or negative ascribed linguistic identity).

There are various factors that determine the type of attitudes minority-majority speakers develop towards a given language, including the perception of the society towards bi/multilingualism, the roles and functions of the language within society, the domains of language use, whether the language is written or non-written, whether it is standardized, whether it has an identical orthography, whether it is regarded as a core part of their cultural values, to name but a few. One implication of the monoglossic national language policy, as discussed in the preceding section, is the marginalization of minority languages. Consequently, minority languages most often lack orthography, are not standardized, are used most often only in informal domains of language use (e.g. family domain), and play limited functions for their speakers in society (Bradley 2002). Another key factor for developing negative language attitudes is immigration. Immigration provides a context, a circumstance, for linguistic identity change. Within majority-minority language-contact situations (both in the US and in other parts of the world), bilingualism is often widespread among ethnolinguistic minorities, but rarely the other way around. Within such a context, the speakers of the majority language tend to have negative attitudes towards the languages of the minority groups. Consequently, the children of minority communities tend to drop (faster than their adult counterparts) the features attributed to their heritage language and culture. Likewise, children tend to favor the language of their peers rather than their parents, which explains why minority children in a majority context most often abandon their home language (Coulmas 2013). All these factors can set the stage for negative language attitudes to emerge. Such attitudes may or may not be articulated explicitly.

One way to detect negative language attitudes on the part of the speakers of a minority language is their perceptions towards maintaining their heritage language. In the case of Juhuri in this issue, for example, language attrition began far before the immigration of the Mountain Jews to other lands (Israel and the US). It was under the Soviet rule that Juhuri yielded to Russian. As such, today, the Juhuri speakers of the US (proficient either in Russian or Russian-English) do not mind the loss of Juhuri as, for them, the language belongs to another time and space, somewhere in the nearly forgotten past (Borjian and Kaufman, this issue). In the case of Kurdish, negative attitudes are articulated in the difficulties of maintaining the language. Whereas both the first and second generation of Kurds strongly believe that Kurdish is a symbol of their identity and a means of building and maintaining relations with each other in the US and their relatives in the homeland (meaning in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey), they equally find language maintenance extremely difficult due to a lack of standardization, a lack of unified orthography

(Kurdish is written in Perso-Arabic script in Iran, Iraq, and Syria whereas in Roman script in Turkey), and the loyalties of some Kurds to their national identity. As such, Kurdishness in the US may not always be situated in the acquisition of the Kurdish language but rather in Kurdish cultural elements, music, cuisine, etc. (Sheyholislami and Sharifi, this issue). Similarly, Chahinian and Bakalian (this issue) find that the mission of Armenian schools has moved from the transmission of the Armenian language to abstract terms such as the "Armenian spirit" or culture, due partly to the inadequacies of their teaching methodology, partly to the shift from Western Armenian to English, and partly to the lack of any standardization for the language or official recognition, unlike Eastern Armenian, which is the national language of the Republic of Armenia. Even the findings of Bozorgmehr and Meybodi (this issue), who report a highly positive attitude on the part of both Iranian parents and their Iranian-American children towards Persian, do not refute the claim that immigration provides a circumstance for language loss and language identity change, as the authors equally report the emergence of a new form of hybrid identity on the part of second generation Iranian-Americans, no longer rooted in the acquisition of the Persian language.

2.5 Language, border-crossing and hybridity

Throughout most of human history, societies would define themselves and others by situating the "self" and the "other" inside and outside the borders of their physical-social environments, in which they were born and raised, and by which they would, most likely, be surrounded throughout their lives. At the time, identity was something immobile, like a centuries-old tree, having its roots solely in one geographical space. But the twenty-first century has opened a new chapter into the human way of life, in which yesterday's homeostasis can no longer be maintained. Because of the interwoven, multifaceted, multidimensional nature of the phenomenon that we have come to know as "globalization", our planet is now experiencing an enormous flow of information, goods, capital, and people across national borders. Thus, today, for many people identity, in general, and linguistic identity, in particular, is no longer a solid tree with roots in one space. It is rather more fragmented and more fluid, like the seed head of a dandelion that travels across time and space, being shaped and reshaped while on the move. Consequently, the immobility of the past centuries is being slowly, if not fully, replaced by the mobility of our global time (on globalization and mobility, see Ritzer [2010]).

This fragmentation of linguistic identity as a consequence of border-crossing is not, however, something novel in the context of the United States, which has been a home to immigrants, first from Europe and subsequently from all other parts of the world. Throughout its relatively short history, the US has witnessed the rise and fall of many ethnolinguistic communities who crossed national borders and settled down in the US in search of a better life. These immigrants who had brought their languages with themselves and even taken part in maintaining their languages in the US – like the yesterday's Italians, Irish, Armenians, Dutch, and Germans, among others – eventually assimilated into the melting-pot of America, dominated by the English language; thus, leaving the floor of bilingualism and bi-culturalism to their successors from Asia, the Middle East, and all other parts of the world. This linguistic assimilation can be seen in the case of Western Armenian in the US, which is presented in this issue. Whereas in the late 1980s, speaking Western Armenian was a crucial feature of Armenianness, today this feature is no longer a prerequisite as Armenian identity in the US is now situated in Armenian cultural elements such as music, food, church practices, theater, and arts (Chahinian and Bakalian, this issue).

Whether the liquidity of our global time will lead to a rapid attrition of minority languages not only in the US but also throughout the world (thanks to the global domination of the English language) or whether it will give birth to the rise of a new form of fragmented, fluid, dynamic, hybrid, and transnational identity, it is yet too early to say. This ambivalence is echoed in the equally split findings of the studies of this issue. Whereas the emergence of a fluid and multilayered identity on the part of the focal Middle Eastern speech communities in the US is reported by most contributors of this issue (especially in the cases of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish), rapid linguistic attrition on the parts of these communities is equally reported. As such, at the moment, all that can be concluded from the findings of the studies of this issue is the fact that both linguistic hybridity and linguistic assimilation are the two outcomes of border crossing, which is intensified in the backdrop of the globalized world of the twenty-first century.

2.6 Language and education

Of all the social domains of language use, the most notable one is perhaps education. It is through school that one learns how to read and write in one's native tongue or how to replace this tongue with another one, like that of the nation-state. It is primarily through school that one learns to develop positive

or negative attitudes towards one's native language and those of others. It is equally in schools that one develops, or is conditioned to develop, a particular type of linguistic identity for oneself, most often in tune with the medium-of-instruction policy of the school, itself determined by the larger language policy of the nation-state or reactions to it (as in the case of minority language schools). As such, schools are sites of multiple interactions – between policy and practice, between the speakers of majority languages and those of minority, and last but not least, between language loss and language preservation.

This very site is at the heart of language maintenance efforts of the Middle Eastern ethnolinguistic communities that are brought together in this issue. Excluding Juhuri, which lost its function as the medium of instruction in mid-twentieth century in eastern Caucasus, yielding to Russian under Soviet rule (Borjian and Kaufman, this issue) and Kurdish, which is taught only sporadically in Kurdish community schools in the US, all other languages of this issue are taught in ethnic community mother-tongue schools in the US, though such bilingual practices differ from one another in their size and scope. Whereas Turoyo is taught in a Sunday school, a weekly Aramaic school, and a summer day camp in New Jersey (Weaver and Kiraz, this issue), Hebrew is taught in well-established clusters of private day schools and supplementary afternoon programs, in which there are currently half a million Jews learning Hebrew in liberal and Orthodox Jewish schools throughout the US (Avni, this issue). Arabic, which ranked the eighth and ninth among the languages most studied and spoken in the US in 2009 and 2010, respectively, is taught both in bilingual community schools and in the US public schools (Zakharia, this issue). Armenian, Persian, and Turkish all enjoy their presence in community bilingual weekend schools. At the university level, these languages are offered either as the medium of instruction or as the object of scrutiny.

And yet, as the insights of the articles in this issue alert us, it is difficult to rely solely on schools for language maintenance and preservation. Firstly, since bilingualism is not valued in the US public schools, the bilingual community practices of minority groups in the US are pushed to the margins of society. According to Garcia et al. (2012), US public schools function as an island, entirely detached from their surrounding ethnolinguistic communities and the linguistic needs of their children in schools. Currently, there are 31 states in the US that have English-only laws, meaning that bilingual education is banned in the public K-12 schools of these states. Excluding Arabic, which is taught in public schools of those states that have bilingual education due to national security purposes, all other languages of this issue are excluded from US public schools. As such, little (if any) recognition is given to the children of the

ethnolinguistic minorities who attend bilingual community schools to acquire their heritage languages. Consequently, these children tend not to reveal their knowledge of their heritage languages to their teachers or peers (a main reason for negative language attitudes being developed on the part of the second generation). Likewise, private schools are costly. Due to a lack of funding minority community schools often suffer from many shortcomings, including a lack of a qualified teaching force, outdated curricula, textbooks and teaching materials. Some of these language teaching materials are even designed by the ministry of education of their representing nations and are such not entirely suitable for American children who are, after all, Americans with a bilingual and bicultural identity. Thus, both the internal and external elements surrounding the ethnic community bilingual schools limit the potential of such schools to be effective agents of language preservation.

3 Conclusion

The contributors to this special issue examine the intersection and intersectionality of the Middle Eastern languages with the social variables that exist in the context of the US, and the implications of these intersections for these languages and their speech communities with regard to their use of these languages, their attitudes towards them, their educational functions, and any efforts to maintain them or stem their attrition.

They demonstrate that the focal languages play a variety of roles for their speakers against the primarily English-speaking backdrop of the US. National languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Kurdish, Persian, and Turkish serve to reinforce a sense of community, connecting them to their national homelands and (in the case of Arabic and Hebrew) with coreligionists of different ethnic and national backgrounds both at home and abroad. Unrecognized minority languages such as (Western) Armenian, Juhuri, and Turoyo serve a slightly different purpose: endangered in their homelands, they serve instead to connect the far-flung members of their diasporas and reinforce their distinct identity, which is ethno-religious rather than national in character. When they interact with other citizens of their former national homelands, they use other languages such as Arabic, English, Persian, Russian, and Turkish, increasingly even when they are interacting with members of their specific ethno-religious groups.

In all cases, the speakers and their children have positive attitudes towards the languages, but not necessarily as vernaculars. In the case of Arabic and the other state-sanctioned languages, the focus of language education efforts is

generally the standardized language of the state and the press rather than the (linguistically far removed and less prestigious) language of the home. In many cases, the contributors also found a gap between the expectations of first-generation adults and language choices of their second-generation children. In extreme cases, such as Juhuri and Turoyo, the gradual withdrawal of the language from progressive spheres of usage began long before its speakers migrated to the United States, with the result that the speakers' attitudes toward the language are ambivalently positive at best and the prospects for preservation or revival are dire. These languages, which once thrived in their original rural settings, remain indelibly associated with the former denizens of those rural settings by their urban descendants, even when those settings have long since moved from the realm of physical geography to a purely mental and imaginary space. Even so, because these languages remain powerful, almost talismanic markers of identity, serving as a connection not only to members of their diaspora communities throughout the world but also to their communal past, there was a consensus among each of the communities that their languages were worthy of preservation, even when their efforts to maintain them and pass them along to their American children were ineffective or non-existent. Every generation cherishes these languages and values them for these reasons, even the American-born children who have already shifted to other languages as their chosen vernaculars, but the loss of these languages is felt most acutely by their first generation parents. Taken all together, the findings of the articles in this issue attest the importance of the external elements of language, echoing Pierre Bourdieu (1991), and their impacts on language, its use, learning, maintenance and/or attrition within the society.

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