



## Language Shift Among Saudi Children Studying in Riyadh International Schools: Fact or Fiction?

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**Abstract**

The study aimed at identifying whether there exists a language shift towards English among Saudi children studying in international schools in Riyadh. This was approached by investigating the code choices they prefer to use in different life domains (such as the home domain (parents and siblings), school domain (friends and teachers), neighbors, and relatives...etc.), i.e. from their parents' perspectives. To achieve the aim of the study, a descriptive survey approach was followed, where the study sample consisted of (382) parents. The questionnaire was also used as a data collection tool. The results revealed that Saudi children studying in international schools in Riyadh showed different tendencies towards language choice, while communicating in different domains. More specifically, they tend to use English more than their native tongue (Arabic) in daily spontaneous communication. The findings thus indicate that the children are in fact going through early stages of Language Shift.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language may change at any time, even over a short period, like a decade or two. This discovery is found to be thought-provoking by many researchers, as it adds to the list of language researchers who are interested in measuring 'language evolution' and variations (Gutierrez, 2022). Meakins (2023) asserts that the diversity of the world's languages is under great threat. She maintains that language loss could accelerate rapidly (triple in 40 years) if it is left without intervention. Thus, she believes there is a pressing urgency to understand the 'drivers' of language change, in order to improve 'language vitality' and slow down the rapid rate of global language loss. In agreement, Kwasau & Kingsley (2022) indicate that it is not surprising that many languages today face the danger of extinction due to speakers shifting to more 'economically viable' languages. According to the authors, not only is this condition expected but also 'unavoidable', as a result of the numerous competitions of the more dominating languages.

Moreover, there is a strong connection between language and identity. Abdelhadi (2017), for instance, noted that language is the key factor representing identity in multicultural contexts. Similarly, Sacic (2018) confirms that language is the most important means of communication because we usually communicate and interpret our social and national identities through language.

However, a shift in one's language from his/her mother tongue to a more dominant language can contribute to an unintentional cultural merge or loss of original identity. According to Fishman (1991), the loss of one's language may also lead to a loss of their identity. He asserts that the 'destruction' of a language is the destruction of a 'rooted' identity. In agreement, Nowak (2020) stresses that, in so far as we are worried about the diminishing diversity of cultures, we should worry about the loss of languages. Although the loss of languages is a different linguistic phenomenon than language shift, i.e. our point of interest, some linguists see that one could eventually lead to the other.

According to Ostler (2019), language shift (LS) is a social phenomenon, whereby one language replaces another in a given society. In other words, LS means the process, or the event, in which a population changes from using one language to another. Similarly, Mufwene (2020) explained that LS refers to situations where a population 'gives up' their heritage language for another. Afterwards, that other/new language will function as their 'vernacular'. He further maintains that the important question to answer is: 'How LS happen'. He explains that language loss does not happen suddenly, i.e. in the same way that a person dies. Mufwene states that LS takes place in a particular process, i.e. gradually and driven by specific circumstances.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of LS has received the attention of numerous researchers. A number of possible explanations for LS were proposed, such as the use of social media, which facilitated communication between speakers belonging to different linguistic backgrounds, especially among the young generations (Latip-Yusoph, 2016). Another suggested explanation is the promotion of multilingualism from an early age by educational policies worldwide (Holmes, 2013). For, Grenoble and Osipov (2023) maintain that much of the language change occurs in bilingual and multilingual settings. In this respect, they stress that it is important to account for the use of all languages in 'ecologies of change'.

Additionally, multilingualism can be said to be accelerated by the presence of foreign domestic workers in some households. Several studies have found that 'live-in' foreign domestic workers have a strong and undeniable effect on the language of children living in the same house (Yelland et al., 2013; Tang & Yung, 2016). Needless to say, this phenomenon is very common in the Arabian Gulf countries, in which foreign domestic workers, coming from different linguistic backgrounds, communicate with the children daily, i.e. by using a foreign language. Consequently, younger generations may sometimes find the use of a foreign language, mostly English, easier than the heritage language (i.e., Arabic). This can be due to various reasons, like the use of a foreign language in everyday communications, i.e. in domains other than school, like among family, friends, and relatives. This claim can be supported by Hua's (2022) study of language shift across three generations in northern Australia. Hua found out that there is nearly '100% certainty' that each generation uses the Western language more often than the previous generation.

In addition, a change in language behaviour has also been witnessed in some Saudi families residing in Saudi Arabia, especially in the past few decades. It has been observed by the researcher that there exists a high tendency of the younger generation to shift from Arabic to English in their daily communication, to a degree that is far more pervasive than mere code-switching (CS). This wide-spreading phenomenon, the researcher believes, may pose a silent threat to the heritage language, i.e., Arabic, of these families. However, due to the lack of scientific research in this area, such a shift in language behavior among the younger generation cannot be backed up by evidence so far. Nevertheless, this observation is subject to scrutiny, for the aim of this study is to learn more about language shifts in the targeted population (i.e. Saudi families with children in international schools).

### **1.1. Research Questions**

This study attempts to answer the following question: What are the perspectives of the sampled children's parents towards their children's language choice in different domains? The answer

to the question will be regarded as an indicator of the presence/ or not of a language shift among the sampled children.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Definition of Language Shift**

Fishman (1991) defined language shift (LS) as a process whereby the 'intergenerational continuity' of the 'heritage' language is proceeding 'negatively'. Hoffman (1991) maintained that LS occurs when a group 'gradually' adopts a new language instead of maintaining its native tongue. On a similar note, Andriyanti (2019) explained that LS takes place when a community 'increasingly' uses one language at the expense of another. In other words, LS happens when the speakers choose to use a language of a wider (more dominant) society instead of using their mother tongue. He asserted that, consequently, this new 'adopted' language replaces the range and functions of the native language.

Moreover, according to Abtahian (2020), language shift can be considered one of the most noticeable effects of language change. She addresses 'linguistic insecurity' in her study, in particular, cases of indigenous language loss in the Americas, where she noticed that the younger speakers use English far more than the older speakers. The author also stressed that speakers in the 'transitional generation', i.e. in the context of language shift, are fluent speakers themselves. However, those speakers live with the fear that the 'generation behind them' is under threat of losing their native language. She further asserted language shift does not only carry 'linguistic ramifications', i.e. 'words for things' are lost, but rather it also carries social consequences; that ways of being 'intimate with others' are also threatened of being lost.

Bichani (2015) explained that many studies on LS have concentrated on ethnic minority groups that have migrated to other countries for different reasons. In such groups, the dominant language (the one spoken by the majority) is in daily contact with the language spoken by the ethnic communities. Similarly, Clyne (2003) described that language shift emerged as a product of 'pre-migration' and 'post-migration' experiences.

However, some sociolinguists believe that language shift is not always a result of migration. For example, Fishman (1991), Michieka (2012), and Holmes (2001) all affirm that sometimes political, social and economic changes can cause language shifts in non-migrant communities. Michieka (2012) further asserts that when different languages are in contact, i.e. within one community, the language spoken by the more 'powerful' speakers is more likely to be maintained while other languages face gradual decline.

Based on the definitions above, the current study aims at investigating the change in the linguistic behavior of the Saudi younger generation studying in international schools in Riyadh, in order to examine if the change in code-choice reflects the existence of a Language Shift phenomenon. In other words, to see whether the 'intergenerational continuity' of the heritage language is proceeding 'negatively', and consequently affecting the younger generation's use/proficiency of the native language (Arabic) and if so, in which domains. For, as mentioned above, some sociolinguists (like Fishman, 1991; and Holmes, 2001) believe that LS does not always occur as a result of migration. The authors affirm that it can also occur in non-migrant communities due to certain political, economic and social changes.

### **2.2. Stages of LS**

A number of stages that a speech community goes through (i.e. when it experiences an LS) have been identified by researchers. If proven to exist, determining which stage a particular speech community is going through, how severe the LS is, and what kind of maintenance actions might be recommended, all depend on identifying these stages.

Eight stages were developed by Fishman (1991) to determine the degree of 'endangerment' that a particular language is experiencing, which may subsequently result in LS. He named it 'Graded Intergenerational Disruption (GIDS)'. The scale can be explained as follows:

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- The 1<sup>st</sup> stage refers to the case where the native (endangered) language holds official domains, like the governmental, professional, educational and media domains.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage refers to the case when the native language is used only in the mass media and lower spheres of the government.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> stage refers to the situation when the endangered language becomes limited to the lower work-level domains.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> stage describes the case when the native language is limited to basic school education.
- The 5<sup>th</sup> stage refers to the situation where the education using the mother tongue is confined within the native community or at home.
- The 6<sup>th</sup> stage describes the case when the first language is only attained orally by the older generation.
- The 7<sup>th</sup> stage describes the situation where people keep speaking the endangered language very little. In other words, they are fully integrated into the dominant language. This, according to Fishman, consequently impedes direct 'intergenerational transmission'.
- The 8<sup>th</sup> stage happens when the first language is spoken by a reduced number of the elderly. These speakers are described by Fishman as 'passive' or 'semi-speakers' because they do not have much syntactic structures or vocabulary.

In reference to the current study, and its relation to the above stages of LS proposed by Fishman, these stages can be used to determine the targeted sample's degree of shift from Arabic to English, i.e. if an LS is proven to exist among the study population, after applying the study tools and reaching the findings. In other words, how advanced is the shift in the study population if it proves to exist?

Another account of the stages of LS was provided by Puthuval (2017), who studied LS in Mongolian families over the past eighty years. Although the LS stages he suggested seem to be specific to the Mongolian community, nevertheless they are significant to point out. Puthuval maintained that there were three stages of LS:

- The 1<sup>st</sup> stage refers to people who were born before 1950. In that specific era, the Chinese spread gradually and only in certain locations.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage refers to people who were born during the period of 1950-1980. At that time, the use of the Chinese language rapidly spread and more Mongolian speakers became bilingual.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> stage refers to people who were born on 1980 and later. At this time, most of the Mongolians were proficient in the Chinese language by early adulthood.

Puthuval explained that the shift to the Chinese language has gradually proceeded throughout all three stages. He also made clear that although the children in that community would sometimes grow up speaking only Chinese, they would more often maintain both Mongolian and Chinese. The author further explained that communities experiencing LS usually go through the same process, where they are at first monolingual in their mother tongue, then bilingual in both their mother tongue and a foreign language, and then monolingual in the foreign language. Such description is important to consider since many researchers regard bilingualism as not only connected to the LS phenomenon but also as a 'precursor' that must exist before a LS can occur (Holmes & Wilson, 2017).

Similarly, Andriyanti (2019) proposed that language shift has three stages, as follows:

- The first stage demonstrates growing pressure on speakers of minority languages to use the dominant language, especially in certain fields.
- In the second stage speakers still use both minority and majority languages, yet the number of minority language speakers decreases especially among the younger generation.
- The third stage is when the minority language has been replaced by the majority language. In other words, it is only remembered by a small group of speakers (the older generation), i.e. it is no longer spoken widely within the community.

Moreover, in reference to the close relationship between LS stages and bilingualism, Aljohani (2016) explained that there is a precise system for the 'utilization' of 'habitual language' in communication within any community. She maintained that, to measure the 'degree of bilingualism', this system requires different 'instruments' with the relevant sociological dimensions. Aljohani further explained that the 'degree of bilingualism' is recognized through proficiency and 'intact' grammatical levels, while the 'stage of bilingualism' and LS require investigation of their functionality.

On a similar note, Agyekum (2010) investigated the shifting stages from the Ghanaian language to English in Ghana. Agyekum affirms that in order for LS to occur, some major conditions have to exist, such as: 'language contact', 'language diffusion', bilingualism, and multilingualism. He further maintains that 'language contact' is a prerequisite for LS. The author explained that, in one society, when two or more languages operate 'simultaneously' for a long period, one language group may be pressured to 'abandon' their language and use another's language. Agyekum further stressed that, if one language is eventually replaced by a new one, then 'language death' occurs. The author also explained that the shift usually takes one direction, i.e. it moves from a 'lower-status' linguistic group to a 'higher-status' linguistic group and not the reverse. In other words, LS, according to Agyekum, is usually a 'down-to-top' approach. He also maintained that the superior language is normally associated with prestige, status, wider context of usage and social success. Thus, according to Agyekum, the dominant group has little or no incentive or motivation to adopt the language of a minority. He further made clear that this situation is prevalent in Ghana, where most people go through stages while shifting to English in their daily communication.

However, although the above study is significant, it is necessary to point out that it does not apply to the current study population, as the shift to English in some families, and by some members, is not considered a threat to the existence of the Arabic language. Indeed, language shift may lead to language death, but it is possible for the shift to occur without the death of a language, especially if it is socially powerful, like Arabic.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This section provides an account of the methodological procedures followed during this study. More specifically, it sheds light on the research approach and methods that the researcher utilized. It also provides details about the study population and sample, as well as the study tool used for data collection. This section also demonstrates the procedures of the study and discusses the statistical methods that were utilized to analyze the collected data.

#### **3.1. Study Methods**

To achieve the objective of the study, and answer its question, the descriptive quantitative approach has been followed to collect data from the children's parents using a questionnaire.

#### **3.2. The Study Population and Sample**

The study focused specifically on Saudi children studying in international schools in Riyadh in the elementary stage (i.e. ages ranging from 6-12 years old). The study population consists of (31787) children, of which (24941) are females and (6846) are males, according to the statistics for the year 2023 obtained by the researcher from the Planning and Development Department at the General Administration of Education in Riyadh. However, the study sample specifically included (382) parents of children studying in the specified international schools.

#### **3.3. Study Tool**

To answer the question of the study, a questionnaire has been sent to the children's parents, consisting of (11) questions, to investigate the child's choice of language in different domains. Furthermore, questions devised by Al-Khatib (2001) were also found suitable to accommodate in this questionnaire. The questions were adapted and modified to suit the sample and the exact aim of the study.

#### **3.4. Statistical Methods for Data Analysis**

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To answer the question of the study, "What are the perspectives of the sampled children's parents towards their children's language choice in different domains?", the descriptive analysis was used to calculate the average of the parents' responses. In addition, the standard deviation, and the percentages of the parent's responses to their child's language choice while communicating in different domains (siblings and family, friends and peers, neighbours, and teachers), were calculated, i.e. based on the collected data from the parents' questionnaire. According to this, the collected qualitative data represented by the responses that ranged between (1) and (5) was turned into quantitative data. In other words, more specifically, the qualitative data (1) for Only Arabic, (2) for Mostly Arabic, (3) for Arabic & English, (4) for Mostly English, (5) for Only English, was turned into quantitative data by using the 5-point Likert scale as shown in table 1:

**Table 1: Categories of the Saudi Children's Language Choice According to the Parents' Perspectives**

Children's language choice	Categories
Only Arabic	1-1.80
Mostly Arabic	1.81-2.60
Arabic & English	2.61-3.40
Mostly English	3.41-4.20
Only English	4.21-5

## 4. RESULTS

To answer the question of the study "What are the perspectives of the sampled children's parents towards their children's language choice in different domains?", the researcher calculated the percentages, standard deviation, and averages of the parents' responses through the questionnaire, which detailed as follows:

**Table 2: The percentages of the parents' responses towards their children's language choice in different domains**

#	Questions	Only Arabic	Mostly Arabic	Arabic & English	Mostly English	Only English
1	What language do you commonly use at home with your kids?	16.49%	18.06%	48.95%	15.71%	0.79%
2	What language do you use when you speak with your relatives/neighbours outside the house?	47.12%	30.10%	17.28%	4.71%	0.79%
3	What language does your child use when he/she writes a personal letter, email, or mobile/social media messages?	0.00%	0.00%	8.12%	22.25%	69.63%

#	Questions	Only Arabic	Mostly Arabic	Arabic & English	Mostly English	Only English
4	What language does your child use at home with his/her parents and siblings?	6.54%	10.21%	38.48%	31.41%	13.35%
5	What language does your child use when he/she meets friends at school?	0.00%	0.79%	11.26%	33.25%	54.71%
6	What language does your child use when he/she meets friends in the neighborhood?	4.97%	11.78%	28.80%	30.10%	24.35%
7	What language does your child use when he/she speaks with friends whenever they visit at home?	3.40%	5.50%	30.10%	39.79%	21.20%
8	What language does your child use when he/she is excited?	4.71%	4.71%	17.54%	28.80%	44.24%
9	What language does your child use most commonly when he/she is angry?	11.26%	7.07%	17.28%	28.80%	35.60%
10	What language does your child use when supplicating (asking God for any wishes)?	44.24%	22.51%	15.71%	9.42%	8.12%
11	What language do you think your child dreams in (if they ever told you)?	12.04%	7.07%	26.44%	30.63%	23.82%
<b>Total averages</b>		<b>13.71%</b>	<b>10.71%</b>	<b>23.63%</b>	<b>24.99%</b>	<b>26.96%</b>

As shown in Table 2, by looking at the total averages in general, 26.96% of the sampled children's parents stated that their children choose to use *Only English* when communicating with siblings, family, friends, peers, neighbors, and teachers, while 24.99% of the parents said their children use *Mostly English* in the same domains. On the other hand, 23.63% of the parents stated that their children use both *Arabic and English* at the same time, in their daily communication. In addition, 13.71% of the parents showed that their children use *Only Arabic*, and 10.71% said they use *Mostly Arabic*, i.e. in the above-mentioned domains.

To go further into the details of the statistical results, the numbers reflect that most of the children's parents stated that they commonly use both *Arabic and English* at home with their kids, at a percentage of 48.95%, while 47.12% of the parents stated that they use *Only Arabic* when they speak with their relatives or neighbors outside the house. On the other hand, a high percentage 69.63% of the parents stated that their child uses *Only English* when he/she writes a personal letter, email, or mobile/ social media messages.

Moreover, the children's parents indicated that their children use both *Arabic and English*, or *Mostly English*, at home with his/her parents and siblings, at a percentage of 38.48%, and 31.41% respectively. The parents also maintained that their children use *Only English* or *Mostly English* when he/she meets friends at school, at a percentage of 54.71%, and 33.25% respectively. On the other hand, 30.10% of the parents confirmed that, when their child meets friends in the neighborhood, they tend to use *Mostly English*, while 28.8% stated that they use both *Arabic and English* in the same situation.

In addition, 39.79% of the parents stated that their child uses *Mostly English* when he/she speaks with friends whenever they visit at home, while 30.1% stated that the child uses both *Arabic and English* in the same situation. In addition, 44.24% of the parents mentioned that their children use *Only English* whenever he/she gets excited. Similarly, 35.6% confirm that their children also use *English only* when they get angry. The children's parents also confirmed that, at a percentage of 44.24%, their children use *Arabic only* when supplicating and asking God for any wishes. As for the language their child dreams in, 30.63% of the parents believe that their children *mostly* dream in *English*, while 26.44% believe they dream in both *Arabic and English*.

Furthermore, in order to reach more detailed results and connect the results to the LS stages, the researcher calculated the overall average of the parents' perspectives towards their children's language choice in different domains and the standard deviation of each indicator in the questionnaire. This was accomplished by using the 5-point Likert scale (suggested earlier in Table 1). In other words, the collected qualitative data, represented by the questionnaire responses (which ranged between (1) and (5)), was turned into quantitative data. More specifically, (1) was given to the qualitative data *Only Arabic*, (2) for *Mostly Arabic*, (3) for *Arabic & English*, (4) for *Mostly English*, (5) for *Only English* (see Table 1). The results are as follows:

**Table 3: The overall perspectives of the parents towards their children's language choice in different domains**

#	Questions	Average of the parents' perspectives	SD	Language choice	Rank
3	What language does your child use when he/she writes a personal letter, email, or mobile/ social media messages?	4.62	0.633	Only English	1
5	What language does your child use when he/she meets friends at school?	4.42	0.719	Only English	2
8	What language does your child use when he/she is excited?	4.03	1.110	Mostly English	3
7	What language does your child use when he/she speaks with friends whenever they visit at home?	3.70	0.975	Mostly English	4
9	What language does your child use most commonly when he/she is angry?	3.70	1.320	Mostly English	5
6	What language does your child use when he/she meets friends in the neighborhood?	3.57	1.127	Mostly English	6



#	Questions	Average of the parents' perspectives	SD	Language choice	Rank
11	What language do you think your child dreams in (if they ever told you)?	3.47	1.262	Mostly English	7
4	What language does your child use at home with his/her parents and siblings?	3.35	1.046	Arabic & English	8
1	What language do you commonly use at home with your kids?	2.66	0.958	Arabic & English	9
10	What language does your child use when supplicating (asking God for any wishes)?	2.15	1.300	Mostly Arabic	10
2	What language do you use when you speak with your relatives/neighbors outside the house?	1.82	0.934	Mostly Arabic	11
<b>Total average</b>		<b>3.41</b>	<b>1.035</b>	<b>Mostly English</b>	

Table 3 shows that the overall perspectives of the parents towards their children's language choice in different domains is *Mostly English*, where the average of the parent's perspectives was (3.41 out of 5.00) (see Table 1), with SD (1.035). The high standard deviation indicates that the children's language choice based on their parents' perspectives are not consistent. The details are presented in the following:

- It is clear from the results that, based on the parents' perspectives, their children choose to use *Only English* language in some domains, where the question "What language does your child use when he/she writes a personal letter, email, or mobile/ social media messages?" ranked first with an average of 4.62, followed by; "What language does your child use when he/she meets friends at school?", which ranked second with an average of 4.42.
- The results also indicated that, according to the parents, their children choose to use *Mostly English* language in some situations, as the question "What language does your child use when he/she is excited?" ranked third with an average of 4.03, while the questions "What language does your child use when he/she speaks with friends whenever they visit at home?" and "What language does your child use most commonly when he/she is angry?" are ranked fourth and fifth respectively, i.e. by taking into account the different SD because both questions had an average of 3.70. That is followed by "What language does your child use when he/she meets friends in the neighborhood?" which ranked sixth with an average of 3.57, after that came the question; "What language do you think your child dreams in (if they ever told you)?", which ranked seventh with an average of 3.47.
- The results also shows that the children choose to use both *Arabic & English* languages in other domains, where the question "What language does your child use at home with his/her parents and siblings?" ranked eighth, with an average of 3.35, followed by "What language do you commonly use at home with your kids?" which ranked ninth, with an average of 2.66.
- Furthermore, according to the parents, both the children and the parents themselves choose to use *Mostly Arabic* in some situations, where the question "What language does your child use when supplicating (asking God for any wishes)?" ranked tenth, with an average of 2.15, followed by "What language do you use when you speak with your

relatives/neighbors outside the house?" which ranked eleventh and last, with an average of 1.82.

Therefore, based on the results of the parents' questionnaire, the sampled Saudi children do show a specific tendency towards language choice, while communicating in different domains (e.g. siblings and family, friends and peers, neighbors, and teachers). Furthermore, the results show that the differences in the children's language choices are in favour of the English language.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

When looking at the results obtained from the questionnaire that was directed to the parents of Saudi students studying in Riyadh international schools, we find that the highest percentage was for the children who choose to use *English only* (26.96%) during their daily communication with others, followed in the second rank by those who use *English most of the time* (24.99%). Then in the third rank were those who use *both Arabic and English* in different domains (23.63%). Whereas *Only Arabic* and *Mostly Arabic* scored low percentages (13.71% and 10.71%) respectively (see Table 2).

The questions directed at the parents were classified into a number of categories. Some of them were addressed towards the child's own linguistic behavior, i.e. without any interference from the parents, relatives or brothers at home, as in question No. (3) "What language does your child use when he/she writes a personal letter, email, or mobile/ social media messages?". Another example was question No. (5) "What language does your child use when he/she meets friends at school?", which also addressed the child's own linguistic behavior, while communicating with his schoolmates. Both questions obtained the highest percentages of using *Only English* at a rate of (69.63% and 54.71%) respectively. Similarly, question No. (11) "What language do you think your child dreams in (if they ever told you)?" also attempted to address the child's own linguistic behaviour, which scored relatively high, at the rate of (30.63%), indicating that they use *Mostly English* in their dreams, according to the parents' beliefs.

The second category of the questions related to the child's emotions, as in questions No. (8 & 9), where the highest scores in both questions went to using *Only English* (see Table 2). This finding means that when the child gets excited or angry and begins to express his emotions spontaneously, he turns directly to choosing the English language, whereas he/she resorts to using Arabic to a lesser degree in such emotional situations.

The third category revolves around the child's interactions with neighbors, or friends outside the school community. It is limited to questions (6 and 7). In these questions, we can see that the highest percentages were for the *Mostly English* category. This may be due to the fact that the type of education for such a community may be close but not similar to the child's. It may also be an indication that the child's language choices are also affected in his dealings with others, not only schoolmates. The researcher also believes that the child's attempt to slightly decrease his/her use of English, i.e. embed a little Arabic, when communicating with such a community may be seen as a spontaneous but rather socially smart attempt to ease the communication process.

Moreover, the fourth category of questions was addressed towards the child's language choice within the home domain. More specifically, the language choice of the parents themselves with their children, as in question No. 1, "What language do you commonly use at home with your kids?", and the child's everyday dealings with the house members, as in question No. 4, "What language does your child use at home with his/her parents and siblings?". In both questions the highest percentages were for the *Arabic & English* category (48.95% and 38.48%) respectively. This result means that the home domain has a clear influence on the child's language choices as well as his/her progress towards Language Shift, as the child is influenced by the language that his parent/sibling uses with him. In other words,

the child is a recipient of the language used by members of the family, and consequently he/she interacts with them by using the same language the parent/sibling uses.

As for the fifth category of the questionnaire's questions, it was directed to the parents' language use only, i.e. with no mention of the child's language choices. This category was limited to question No. 2, "What language do you use when you speak with your relatives/neighbors outside the house?". This question was developed to identify the type of language use among the parents, as it is believed to be an influential factor in the language choices of their children. It was noted from the parents' responses to this question that the highest percentage (47.12%) was for using the *Arabic language only*.

In addition, question No. 10, "What language does your child use when supplicating (asking God for any wishes)?" which related to the child's religious practices, also had the highest rate for *Only Arabic* (44.24%). A natural explanation for this is that the child naturally uses the Arabic language during prayer and when reciting verses from the Holy Qur'an. This fact may be due to the child being influenced by the religious culture in which he is raised. Not to mention the fact that all Saudi schools, including international schools, teach the religious subjects in the Arabic language. However, considering that some of the parents answered that their child sometimes uses both Arabic and English in supplication, can be explained as a result of his/her mixed linguistic competence.

These results are confirmed by Table 3, which indicates that the children mostly choose the English language in their daily communications, i.e. according to the parents' perspectives. If we look at the categories according to which the questionnaire questions were divided above, we will find that they are completely consistent with the results of Table 3, which shows that Saudi children studying in international schools in Riyadh are showing signs of shifting towards the English language. More specifically, they are significantly advancing in the stages of Language Shift mentioned by Agyekum (2010) and Andriyanti (2019). For, the findings confirm that, while they still use Arabic in some domains, the sampled children tend to use English in most of the domains.

Such findings confirm that the children's choices of the language they use in their daily interactions are influenced by those surrounding them, whether in the school community, or outside school with relatives and neighbors, or even at home, not to mention the type of language used with parents and siblings.

The above results are consistent with Chung's study (2020), which concluded that, in cases of language planning, it is very 'crucial' to take into consideration family and 'parental perspectives' regarding language. For, the author asserted that parents' beliefs about language and their 'language ideologies' affect both the languages they choose to speak at home, and also the linguistic decisions of their children. Furthermore, Chung stressed that the language ideologies are not only 'context-specific', but also related to the educational experiences of the parents and their expectations. Chung also asserted that language ideologies are also 'interwoven' with linguistic, political, economic, and socio-cultural factors. He further added that the parents' expectations, education and even their language experience (such as their knowledge of bilingualism), may all impact the children's language choices. Chung explained that such past experiences serve as a 'driving force' for school choices and 'family language policies'. Chung's views are also confirmed by the findings of the current study. For, the results do indeed show a high correlation between the family's education level and their language behaviors (as well as their children's). The same goes for the economic and socio-cultural factors the family lives in, as will be discussed in the following section.

Moreover, the current study findings agree with Mirvahedi & Cavallaro's (2020) study which showed that the aim of research on family language planning was to examine the linguistic ideologies and beliefs of parents as the 'language managers' at home. They explained that this growing body of family language planning work (based mostly on interviews and surveys) focuses on how family members use 'interactional strategies' to socialize with each other, i.e. through their choices of language. The authors added that recent 'ethnographically

informed studies' on the language socialization patterns of bilingual/multilingual families have also highlighted the children's role in influencing family language planning.

In agreement, Zou's (2022) study stressed that the initiative of children, i.e. children's choice of language, also greatly affects the actual language use in the family. This explains why some children refuse to speak their mother tongue at home, as they prefer to use the language of their peers at school. Such research confirms the findings of the current study, as it emphasizes the infinite influence of family discourse on the child's linguistic choices, and consequently, accelerating, or impeding, the LS process during childhood.

Additionally, the results of the current study are also found to be consistent with Williams & Gregory (2002) who found, in their study on Bangladeshi British and Anglo-British primary school children, that there is an 'agentive role' of parent-child interactions and siblings' talk in shaping the linguistic ecology of families. Similarly, the current study results agreed with Obied's (2009) study on Portuguese-English bilingual children raised in Portugal. The study demonstrated how older children functioned as 'intermediaries' in initiating the younger members of the families into the values and practices of the school. In other words, the younger siblings apprentice themselves to their older role models.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The study aimed to investigate the existence of a Language Shift towards English among Saudi children studying in international schools in the city of Riyadh, through examining their code choices (i.e. English or Arabic or both) in different daily life domains. To achieve the objective of the study, the descriptive survey method was followed, where the study sample consisted of (382) parents of children studying in the elementary stages in international schools in Riyadh. In terms of the tool used to collect data, a questionnaire was distributed among the sampled parents. The researcher completed the regulatory procedures to obtain the necessary permits to conduct the study. As for the findings, according to the parents' perspectives, the sampled Saudi children did show specific tendencies towards language choice while communicating in different domains (e.g. with siblings and family, friends and peers, neighbors, and teachers). More specifically, the findings confirmed that, while they still use Arabic in some domains, the sampled children tend to use English in most of the domains, i.e. in their daily communication. Therefore, the results prove that Saudi children studying in international schools in Riyadh are in fact showing signs of shifting towards the English language. In other words, they are significantly advancing in the early stages of Language Shift.

## **7. Recommendations**

In light of the findings reached by the study, the researcher recommends the following:

- 1) In order to validate the findings of the study, and reach more conclusive results, the researcher recommends applying the same study on the private and government (public) schools in Riyadh, to investigate the existence of the LS phenomena in the other schools. Followed by conducting a comparative study on the phenomenon of LS between international, private, and governmental schools in Riyadh city.
- 2) The researcher also recommends applying the same study in the other cities/regions of the Saudi Kingdom, to explore the existence of the phenomenon among the younger generations in KSA as a whole.
- 3) As the results of the study showed that Saudi children studying in international schools in Riyadh are still in the early stages of the LS (towards English), the researcher recommends conducting a study to reveal the degree of threat of the LS phenomenon on the native tongue (Arabic) in the Kingdom.
- 4) The researcher also recommends taking the necessary procedures in the Ministry of Education to motivate and encourage children in international schools in the Kingdom to use the Arabic language more, i.e. as a necessary measure to maintain the Arabic language and slow down the phenomenon of LS among children, and consequently, maintain the children's identities.

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