A Two-case Study of Arab Family Language Policy

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This qualitative two-case study aimed at exploring the language policies of two Arab families, one from Libya and one from Saudi Arabia, living in the United States. Interviews, observations, parents’ written narratives, children’s artifacts, and the researcher’s diary were used to collect data. Findings revealed the language beliefs, practices, and management within each family and across both families. The importance of Arabic for both families stemmed from religion, cultural heritage, and pressure from extended family. The families’ language policies were influenced by their past experiences. While school, social life, and American culture reinforced children to use English in the Libyan family, parents in the Saudi family supported their child’s bilingual identity. In addition, children in both families were influenced by TV to different extents. Reading was perceived as an English practice. To help their children learn Arabic, the Saudi family focused on verbal skills and depended on a biliteracy-rich environment while the Libyan family focused on literacy activities and games. Both families experienced the shortage of Arabic resources and worked on findings possible solutions. Moreover, the Libyan parents had clear language roles and rules compared to the Saudi parents who had developing ones. In both families, children resisted the Arabic language and parents responded by implementing different techniques. The study offered important implications for parents, schools, teachers, and educational policymakers.