"What is carrot in ‘arabee?’ the role of family language policy and language ideology in the maintenance of Arabic as a heritage language.

Fatma Said
University of York, UK

This sociolinguistics paper looks at the role family language policy and parental language ideology(ies) play in the learning, use and subsequent maintenance of a heritage language (Rothman, 2009; King & Fogle, 2006). The data was collected over a period of 12 months and consists of video recorded family mealtime conversations, later transcribed according to LIDES (MacWhinney, 1995) and analysed from an applied Conversation Analytic (CA) perspective. The family consists of four members: the parents (both 2nd generation Arabs, who are sequential bilinguals) and the children (aged 6 and 9 are 3rd generation Arabs and simultaneous bilinguals). The data suggests that a positive and open family language policy within the home and an ideology that views both Arabic and English as equal languages (albeit with different roles) promotes the use and maintenance of the heritage language (He, 2011; Seong & Sarkar, 2007). Such policy and ideologies create an environment in which the children are able to use both Arabic and English (without occasion or ceremony) thus giving rise to the use of the heritage language at an advanced and often very creative level. The heritage language plays a pivotal role in this family because the parents use it to socialise their children into appropriate and desired behaviours, to give commands and to communicate deep emotion (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Lukyx, 2003).

Importantly, Arabic is also the language of religious discourse and is perhaps the strongest motivation for the parents to encourage their children to learn Arabic and take measures to ensure that they sufficiently do so (Kulick, 1992; Fishman, 2011). Finally, the data indicates that due to the constant use of the
heritage language, together with its formal learning at a weekend school the children are able to use Arabic competently due to the level and quality of input.

References


