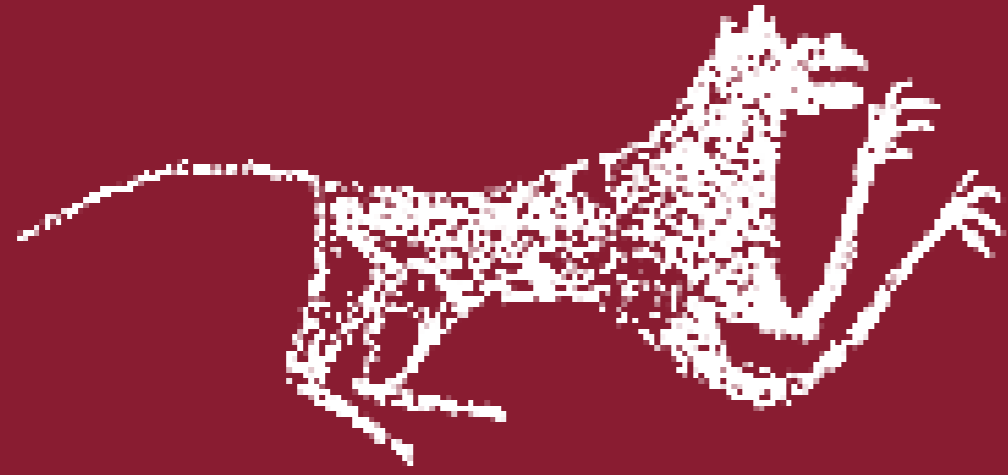


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Volume 22

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MAP OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

GUIDE TO AUTHORS

The Journal of Oman Studies was established in 1975. It is published by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman. It is a scholarly journal that publishes original and refereed research in both Arabic and English in areas relating to natural and cultural heritage relevant to the Sultanate of Oman. The journal publishes research in various areas of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. For example, the journal publishes research in various kinds of movable and non-movable archaeology, rock art, inscriptions and writings, sculpture, traditional architectures such as forts, castles and old neighborhoods. The journal also publishes research on modern buildings with unique architecture specific to Oman. It also publishes research on intangible cultural heritage such as research in the areas of Omani traditions and customs, different forms of expression including language and oral practices, various forms of performance arts, rituals, ceremonials, social practices, various forms of interaction with nature such as agriculture, falaj and irrigation system, traditional medicine, skills related to Oman's traditional handicrafts and others. The journal also publishes research dealing with topics related to Oman's natural heritage and these include studies of natural landscape, geological structure, natural sites like mountains, wadis, caves, flora and fauna of Oman. The journal also invites book reviews in relevant areas.

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Contributions are submitted in Microsoft Word format with a margin of 3cm in all sides. The number of words of the manuscript should not exceed 10,000 words for a full paper and 1200 for the book review including footnotes. Submissions should be double-spaced with Times New Roman size 12.

Submissions should be sent electronically with the following details provided on the cover page: title of the paper, author(s) full name(s), academic titles, their affiliation(s) and the type of submission (paper, translation, book review... etc.) in both Arabic and English, full address of the author(s) including email, P. O. Box, phone and fax number.

The submission should include an abstract in both English and Arabic and it should not exceed 250 words in each language. The abstract should give a summary of the content, significance, methodology, contribution and the main findings of the study. The abstract should also provide 5 keywords.

In-text citation of sources should be documented in the main text not as footnotes or endnotes. The surname(s) of the author(s), date of publication and page number should be provided between brackets as follows:

- **Single author sources:**

(Smith, 2005:22)

- **Two or three authors:**

(Smith, Jakobson, and Gibbs, 2005:22)

- **More than three authors:**

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The title of the source is given in the citation sentence and when brackets are used then only a key word or two from the title is mentioned.

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- When **quoting more than one source**, the sources should appear alphabetically ordered in the brackets with a semi colon separating them, for example, (Gibbs, 2007; Lyons, 2008; Smith, 2005).

- If an author has **more than one publication** in the same year, alphabets should be used after the date to show the sequence, for example, Gibbs (2011a), (2011b) ...etc.

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- If there is **no date of publication**, the phrase (no date) should be used.

- If a **source is cited more than once** consecutively the expression (ibid) should be used, and if the page number is different, then the new page number should appear next to the expression as follows: (ibid, p. 20).

- All **other notes** can be provided as endnotes.

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e.g. Smythe, K. (1983) *Seashells of the Sultan Qaboos Nature Reserve at Qurm*. Retrieved on April, 4th, 2015 from http://doc79.gangqinbooks.com/seashells-of-the-sultan-qaboos-nature-reserve-at-qurm-smythe-kathleen_P-less2.pdf.

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e.g. Ministry of Tourism (2011) *Sultanate of Oman: A Special Issue*. June 4th, 2017, http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/wcm/connect/a9b89d0048dd4e268443f6fde0ccbc90/FINAL+MAGAZINE.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHED=A9b89d0048dd4e268443f6fde0ccbc90.

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The metric system should be used and this should be reflected in the text by using the following abbreviations: m = meter, g = gram, s = second, l = liter ... etc.

- **Dates**

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Contents

FOREWORD

- HE Salim bin Mohammed Al Mahrooqi** xi
- From the Paleolithic to the Islamic Era in Wilayat Yanqul: The Archaeological Water Histories of Oman (ArWHO) Project Survey 2011-2018** 1- 21
Michael J. Harrower, Smiti Nathán, Ioana A. Dumitru, Joseph W. Lechner, Paige Paulsen, Eli Dollarbide, Frances Wüig, Alexander J. Sivitskis, Hélène David-Cuny, Jennifer L. Swerida, Joseph C. Maz ariello, R my Crassard, Abigail Buffington, Sean P. Taylor, Martha C. Anderson & Suleiman Al-Jabri
- Landscape of the Living: A Predictive Model of Early Bronze Age Settlement, Sultanate of Oman** 22- 40
Bo Ejstrud
- Funerary Evidence and Reuse Practices: The Cairn Burials at Al-Jamma in the South Batinah Foothills (Sultanate of Oman)** 41- 72
Francesco Genchi & Nunzia Larosa
- Funerary Architecture in the Wadi Suq Period and an Unusual Type of Third/Second-Millennium Grave: Initial Results from the Excavation of Prehistoric Burials in the Salut Archaeological Park, Central Oman** 73-98
Michele Degli Esposti, Simona Spano, Enrica Tagliamonte, Philip Ramorino, Marzia Sasso & Waleed Sultan Mohammed al Muzaini
- A Bronze- and Iron Age Cemetery at Wadi Tanuf, Ad-Dakhiliyah: A Preliminary Report of Years 2019-2020 Survey** 99- 125
Taichi Kuronuma, Takehiro Miki & Yasubisa Kondo
- Excavations at Salut 2015-2019: A First Overview and New Chronological Data** 126-157
Michele Degli Esposti
- The Archaeological Site of Mudhmar East (Adam, Ad-Dakhiliyah, Oman): Results from the 2019 Excavations** 158- 185
Mathilde Jean, Maria Paola Pellegrino, Louise Bigot, Josselin Pinot, Victoria de Cast ja & Guillaume Gernez
- Trilith Stone Monuments of Oman (TSMO) Research Project: Field Campaigns 2018-2019** 186- 213
Roman Garba
- 3D Digital Documentation of Archaeological Features, A Powerful Tool for Research and Dissemination. Case Studies from the Oasis of Salut (Sultanate of Oman).** 214- 227
Filippo Brandolini, Michele Degli Esposti & Andrea Zerboni
- Traditional Star Knowledge from Falaj Al Hammam in Rustaq, Oman** 228- 245
Harriet Nash, Wadha Al-Shukaili & Talib Mohammed Al-Rumbi
- The Current Linguistic Status of Modern South Arabian Languages in the South of Oman** 246- 266
Murtadha J. Bakir & Khalsa Al-Aghbari

Foreword

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism works on documenting the cultural and natural heritage of the Sultanate of Oman in a number of publications, the most important of which is The Journal of Oman Studies published annually by this ministry. The Journal has been publishing new original research that is carefully selected through a rigorous academic review process. What characterizes the research published in this Journal is that it presents the findings of fieldwork excavations carried out by a number of archaeological missions operating in different regions of the Sultanate of Oman and presenting their discoveries in the form of research papers exclusively submitted for this Journal.

Continuing these significant efforts, we are pleased to present to our readers the 22nd volume of the Journal of Oman Studies, which includes eleven research articles covering a timeframe extending from the Paleolithic to the Islamic periods. These research articles address various topics in the cultural heritage of the Sultanate Oman, including the study of water history in Oman throughout the ages, in addition to the study of the settlement landscape of the Early Bronze Age, and the burial practices of the Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age (Hafit, Umm an-Nar, and Wadi Suq periods). The topics also include the study of evidence on Iron Age settlements and tombs, ritual complexes from the Early Iron Age, and the trilith monuments from the Iron Age, in addition to the aflaj system and the use of stars in the timing of this system. The linguistic research as part of the cultural heritage of Oman focuses in this volume on the current linguistic situation of the South Arabian Languages in southern Oman. The articles also include the results of using the latest digital technologies in the field of archaeological investigation in the Sultanate of Oman, such as the three-dimensional digital documentation of archaeological monuments. It should be noted that these articles provide high quality visual illustrations which help the reader to easily follow and understand the discussions and arguments. The research articles cover a wide range of different geographical regions of Oman such as the archaeological sites in the governorates of Al Dhahirah, North and South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Dhofar, Al Wusta, and South Al Sharqiyah.

I hope that the general readers and specialist researchers will find this volume useful and the information included therein about the cultural and natural heritage of the Sultanate of Oman beneficial. The Journal, its editorial board and its support team deserve our thanks for their efforts in promoting this Journal and achieving its vision and will continue to receive our fullest support.

Salem bin Mohammed Al Mahrouqi
Minister of Heritage and Tourism

The Current Linguistic Status of Modern South Arabian Languages in the South of Oman

Murtadha J. Bakir & Khalsa Al-Aghbari

ABSTRACT:

This study examines the current linguistic status of indigenous Modern South Arabian Languages (MSAL) in the South of Oman. It reports the attitudes of their speakers and attempts to look into their future, exploring whether they are in maintenance or regress. In Oman, where Arabic is dominant, the use of these languages is reduced to oral interaction between their native speakers at home and with friends. The speakers' attitudes towards them vary in the face of counter-pressures from the dominant language. In order to assess their present status and speakers' attitudes, a questionnaire was distributed to 77 subjects at two local universities in Oman. The study reveals that although these languages are confined in their use to limited domains and settings, they are highly valued by their native speakers as ethnic and cultural symbols, which may secure their maintenance. Garrett (2010:11) stated that "...attitudes can play a key role in whether they [indigenous minority languages] survive, revive, re-flourish, or whether they die out...".

KEYWORD: Modern South Arabian; attitude; sociolinguistics; Oman; language regress

الوضع اللغوي الحالي للغات العربية الجنوبية في جنوب عمان

مرتضى باقر، وخالصة الأغبرية

الملخص:

تسعى الدراسة إلى استقراء الوضع اللغوي الحالي للغات العربية الجنوبية المحلية في جنوب عمان. وتعرض الدراسة توجهات المتحدثين بهذه اللغات، كما تحاول التنبؤ بمستقبلها لتستقصي ما إذا كان حضورها سيستمر أم أنها ستندثر. ففي عمان، حيث تطفى اللغة العربية، فإن استعمال هذه اللغات لا يتعدى التواصل الشفهي بين المتحدثين الأصليين لهذه اللغات سواء في البيت أو بين الأصدقاء. وبالتالي تختلف توجهات متحدثيها نظرا للمجابهة التي تمارسها اللغة العربية ضدها. وبغرض تقييم الوضع الحالي لهذه اللغات ومعرفة توجهات متحدثيها فقد قام الباحثان بتوزيع استبانة لـ 77 متحدثا باللغات العربية الجنوبية في جامعتين محليتين، وتكشف نتائج الدراسة محدودية استعمال هذه اللغات من ناحيتي المجالات والأماكن على الرغم من تقدير متحدثيها لهذه اللغات كونها رموز عرقية وثقافية، وهذا التقدير قد يساعد في استمراريتها. فقد ذكر جاريت (2010: 11) أن «التوجهات قد تلعب دورا أساسيا في تحديد ما إذا كانت هذه اللغات ستبقي أم تنتعش وتزدهر مجددا أم تندثر...»

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغات العربية الجنوبية؛ توجهات؛ دراسات لغوية اجتماعية؛ عمان؛ الاندثار اللغوي

1. INTRODUCTION

The Southern region of the Arab Peninsula is home to six non-Arabic languages, known together as Modern South Arabian Languages (MSAL)¹. These are: Jibbāli, Mehri, Harsūsi, Baḥari, Hobyōt and Soḳoṭri. The first five of these are found in southern Oman. Jibbāli is spoken in the mountains and coastal plains of Dhofar (Zufār, in Arabic). Mehri is spoken in southern Oman, eastern Yemen, and southern and eastern Saudi Arabia. Harsūsi speakers originally come from Jiddat Al-Ḥarāsīs in Oman, while Baḥari is spoken in the mountains facing the coast of the Ḥalāniyyāt Islands. Hobyōt is widely found at and around the border that is shared between Oman and Yemen. The sixth language, Soḳoṭri, is spoken in the Soḳoṭra archipelago in the Indian Ocean, 300 km to the south of Yemen.

MSAL are an independent branch of West Semitic (Rubin, 2018). These languages² are not written, i.e. they lack a specific writing system and hence no writing tradition has been developed.

In Oman, there has been an ongoing wave of modernization exercised by the Omani government, resulting in noticeable linguistic, social and economic changes. However, in the South of Oman, uniqueness is not only manifested through ethnicities, traditions and cultural differences but also finds expression in language. This is why it becomes of paramount importance to explore the current status of MSAL and examine the attitudes of their speakers towards them especially after five decades of continuous government efforts to modernize the country socially and economically. These socio-economic

¹ Research about MSAL goes back to the middle of the 19th century beginning with a series of articles by Fulgence Fresnel, the French consul in Saudi Arabia in 1838. In more recent years, research has picked up with works on Jibbāli by the renowned Johnstone, 1970, 1973, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1984; Al Tabuki, 1982; Author, 2012; Rubin, 2014 and 2018; Hofstede, 1998; Simeone-Senelle, 1997; Lonnet, 1985, among others. The earliest work on Mehri was done by Wellsted (1840) and most recently by Rubin (2018). Morris (2007) and Simeone-Senelle (2003) wrote about Soḳoṭri and Baḥari respectively. This list is by no means comprehensive.

² For the annually updated online bibliography of MSAL, refer to <https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/modern-south-arabian-languages/doc/resources-2>.

changes have had a profound effect on the MSAL speaking communities, resulting in drastic changes. The spread of Arabic as a medium of education has affected the language situation in the region, reducing the functional role of MSAL.

This is a sociolinguistic study that aims at exploring the current status of MSAL in the South of Oman where Arabic is the dominant language. It also reports the attitudes of their speakers towards them (aka the speaker paradigm approach (Garrett, 2010:37), providing an insider view about the role these languages currently play in their life and whether they find them useful in a community where Arabic is more functional and prestigious. The study also attempts to predict the future of these languages, whether they maintain their relevance to everyday interactions or whether they are in regress. The paper comprises five main sections: section two gives a sociolinguistic overview of MSAL including a subsection about the history of Oman and Dhofar in 1970³. In section three, we report on the methodology and procedures used to collect the present data, and provide a detailed analysis for them. In the fourth section, a discussion of the questionnaire is provided. The final section concludes the paper.

2. SOCIOLINGUISTIC OVERVIEW

In what follows we sketch a sociolinguistic overview of MSAL that showcases their linguistic and social background, and highlights the changes that took place in Oman and Dhofar in 1970.

2.1. MSAL Linguistic and Social Background

In the South of Oman, there exists an isolated province, Dhofar (Zufār, in Arabic), which exhibits a diversity of languages and displays cultural and social features that distinguish it from the North of the country. The physical size of the province is approximately 99,300 km². Although the province is relatively small, its overall linguistic and social variations deserve special attention.

³ This is a significant year in modern Oman as it marks the time when Sultan Qaboos assumed power, and exerted efforts to modernize the country and its people.

Dhofar is a hub for four non-Arabic languages in Southern Arabia, collectively named Modern South Arabian Languages (MSAL). Except for Soḳoṭri, which is spoken in the Soḳoṭra archipelago and Harsūsi which is spoken outside Dhofar in Jiddat Al-Ḥarāsīs, the other four languages (Jibbāli, Mehri, Hobyōt and Baṭhari) are all spoken in the mountainous and coastal regions of Dhofar. Mehri is also spoken in certain parts of Southern Yemen and in the border zones between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. These unwritten languages are commonly thought by their native speakers to be the descendants of the Old South Arabian (OSA) languages of the ancient Yemeni kingdoms of Ḥimyar, Maʿīn, and Sabāʿ⁴. Although the presence of these languages continues to mark the South of Oman culturally and socially as distinct from the North, Peterson (2004:260) argues that the wave of modernization, which Oman has undergone since 1970, will soon minimize the linguistic, social and traditional distinctions between the North and South.

Mehri is the largest in terms of speakers and area. It is spoken in Eastern Yemen, the South of Oman and East and South of Saudi Arabia (Watson and Al Mahri, 2016). Harsūsi and Baṭhari are the most endangered of all since they are spoken in limited areas in Jiddat Al-Ḥarāsīs and the eastern coast of Dhofar, respectively. The communities in the South of Oman comprise about 200,000 speakers of MSAL (Simeone-Senelle, 1997). There are about 30,000 to 50,000 speakers of Jibbāli (Rubin, 2014); according to Rubin (2018), the total number of Mehri speakers is unknown. However, he estimates it to be 130,000 speakers with over half of this number living in Yemen, while Baṭhari has only 20 or so elderly individuals (Eades, 2014:21). Ḥarsūsi is estimated to have fewer than 1000 speakers (Hatke, 2019:8). There are only about 100 speakers of Hobyōt in Oman and 400 in Yemen (Simon-Senelle, 2013).

In the South of Oman, MSAL speakers take pride in their language. This is manifested in their commitment to teaching these languages as a first

⁴ It was noted by an anonymous JOS reviewer that although this may be the case, most linguists think that the languages are not closely connected.

language to their children and their continuing to run their social life based on their native traditions and lifestyle. However, when the national educational system spread in these areas, in which the medium of instruction is Arabic, accompanied with rapid economic and social changes, these communities have undergone huge changes in their lifestyle, occupational and employment opportunities and aspirations for social mobility since 1970. Moreover, they have all become bilingual speaking both their native MSAL and Omani Arabic.

This has had the effect of weakening the ties of the people with their native languages. “Young generations no longer require, have or understand the extensive knowledge and practical skills of their elders, and much earlier expertise has been lost.” (Watson and Al-Mahri, 2016:2). The knowledge of Arabic has become so widespread that these communities are virtually bilingual. This has also led to a situation in which MSAL have been assuming a more limited function in the contexts where they are used.

On the other hand, in their personal contact with them, the authors observe that MSAL native speakers highly regard their language and MSAL in general. They see them as manifestations of their traditional identity and long existence in the Arabian Peninsula. They consider them to be more like secret⁵ languages that distinguish them from their Arabic-speaking fellow countrymen, and give them priority in the exchange of views on sensitive matters in the presence of Arabic speakers. Hence, MSAL speakers tend to be loud and assertive when they talk about and in their language. These languages can seem to set their speakers apart from Omanis in the North.

2.2. The Current Status of MSAL

Various dialects of Omani Arabic are spoken in Oman⁶. Arabic is the language used in offices,

⁵ By secret languages, we mean only MSAL people speak them. Hence, in the presence of non MSAL Omanis, MSAL speakers can keep the knowledge of many discussed issues hidden from others.

⁶ It is important to note that there is not a single variety of Omani Arabic. Oman is a large country with a bundle of dialects.

education and religious worship. Hence, all Omanis who aspire to social advancement are expected to acquire it to be able to cope well with the modernization efforts in the social and economic spheres of life in the country. The speakers of MSAL had to go along with the government's efforts to spread and encourage Omani Arabic in education and the job market⁷. This move has had the effect of changing the speakers' perceptions of their languages as capable vehicles that may be of help in their new education and career opportunities. Accordingly, they have begun to encourage their children to learn Omani Arabic, which resulted in limited fluency in the young generations of the native MSAL community. Watson and Al Mahri (2016:1-2) argue that "MSAL are threatened by intense social, economic, cultural and environmental change, and even where the languages continue to be spoken, the significance behind many terms is lost through urbanization and modernization". This change in MSAL status is the result of a change in their speakers' attitudes towards them.

2.3. The History of Oman and Dhofar in 1970

Oman is a large country in the Arabian Gulf with rich linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Before 1970, Oman was isolated from the outside world. Tribal leaders controlled the interior of the country, while the official reigning Sultan stayed in intentional isolation in Dhofar. In 1967 when oil was first discovered in the area, Sultan Taimur bin Faisal, despite his isolation in Dhofar, was aware of the wealth oil had brought to Saudi Arabia and the nearby Gulf countries. But this regime faced constant challenges from the tribal leaders until 1970 when Sultan Qaboos decided to take over with the support of the British.

Oman was the only state in the Gulf whose regime was challenged by its people. According to Allen and Rigsbee (2013: xvii), "Dhofar war predated the coup of 1970 and in large part motivated the change in government." Since Dhofar was physically isolated

⁷ We are not aware of any effort taken by the Omani government to promote these languages in any way, including the national or regional education system.

from the tribal leaders, it sought independence. Sultan Qaboos fought hard with the support of the British and a few loyal MSAL speakers to keep Dhofar as part of Oman. The war of Dhofar defined the nature and direction of the Omani government. It had pushed Sultan Qaboos to devote attention and money to military and defense. After this war, the Sultan appointed those who fought with him in elite posts in the Omani government.

3. THE STUDY

3.1. Data Collection and Methodology

Crystal (1997:215) defines language attitudes as "the feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others". Garrett (2010:10) argues that attitudes are often discussed in terms of three components: cognition (beliefs about the world and its objects), affect (feelings) and behavior. Beliefs, feelings and behaviors about language are largely subjective, and they are not necessarily based on facts (Myers-Scotton 2006: 120). However, they are believed to represent judgments on how people view a language and the usefulness they assign to it. Hence these attitudes have a direct effect on whether people make an effort to learn it. These consequences are observed to impact whether these languages are maintained or go into regress.

In this section, we will discuss the procedure we followed to obtain detailed responses about the use of these languages and their range, the MSAL native speakers' attitudes towards them, and what may be predicted about their future. Towards this end, we designed a questionnaire⁸ that was distributed to MSAL participants in two universities in the Sultanate of Oman: Dhofar University (DU) and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). The participants came from Phonetics, Phonology and Morphology classes at SQU⁹. The authors also asked the participants to recruit more MSAL subjects in

⁸ The language of the questionnaire is Arabic. The participants are university students who are fluent in Arabic, the official language in Oman and the medium of instruction at its universities.

⁹ One of the authors was teaching these classes at the time of data collection.

SQU hostels. Moreover, the authors emailed a soft copy of the questionnaire to a colleague at DU. The colleague made copies, distributed them to his students at DU, collected them back and mailed them to the authors.

The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions that may be divided into two sections. First, there are demographic questions that concern information about the participants' age, gender, mother tongue, parents' mother tongue, and the domains and functions in which MSAL are used. These questions are meant to assess the linguistic status in the participants' communities; that is the functions their MSAL play in their life, the domains and the contexts they are used in, and those that are reserved for Omani Arabic. The second group of questions addresses the participants' attitudes and beliefs about these languages; their social status, their roles in preserving the social identity of their speakers, and how they see them in relation to Omani Arabic. There are some open-end questions to encourage participants to freely express their views. This also helps researchers to identify untapped attitudes in the study. Besides, the questions of this group investigate how the participants see the increasing predominance of Arabic, the future of these languages, and if they feel that they should be maintained, and the ways to do so.

The population of the study, those to whom the questionnaire was distributed, consisted of seventy-seven persons (19 male and 58 female) who are native speakers of MSAL¹⁰. Their ages ranged between 18 to 39. The population has been grouped into two sub-groups in the following manner: sixty-eight respondents come from 'MSAL-homes' where both parents are native MSAL speakers. The majority of these, fifty-nine in number, came from homes where both parents are Jibbāli speakers, or are of mixed MSAL speakers, eight are Mehri speakers, and in one case, the parents are Harsūsi native speakers. The second sub-group comprises the other nine respondents who come from 'mixed Arabic/MSAL' homes, where one of the parents is a native speaker of Omani Arabic, while the other

is a native speaker of MSAL. The answers of these respondents to the questions are tabulated and discussed in the following section.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The first question was about the native language of the respondent, his/her mother tongue, or the language they first acquired at home. To this question, sixty-four of the sixty-eight MSAL-home respondents stated that MSAL were their mother tongues. Three of them said Arabic was their mother tongue, and one listed both Arabic and MSAL as his/her mother tongue. However, the mixed Arabic/MSAL respondents reported different answers. Six of them stated Arabic as their mother tongue. Only one said that it was MSAL, and another said it was both Arabic and MSAL, as shown in Table 1.

That Arabic was stated to be the mother tongue of three MSAL home respondents implies that Arabic was the parents' preferred language for their children, the dominant language of the country, which will help them integrate into the bigger community and enable them to climb the social ladder. This is also true of the seven A/MSAL-home respondents, as indicated in Table 1, who stated that Arabic is their mother tongue. Here, it seems that a change of ethnic identity is under way, moving away from an isolated community and integrating into the predominant one, to which one of the parents belongs. In either case, a language shift seems to be in progress.

A second question asked about where the respondents learned Arabic. As shown in Table 2, eleven of these said they learned it at home, while twenty-five said they learned it at home, school, and from other children. This means that in thirty-six (53%) of the cases the respondents were introduced to Arabic at home. Twenty-eight of the respondents said they learned Arabic at school, and four said they learned it from other Arabic-speaking children. Two of the mixed A/MSAL respondents said they were introduced to Arabic at home, and another two said they learned it at school. Three said they learned it at home, at school, and from other children. The remaining two did not answer the question because they stated that their mother tongue was Arabic.

¹⁰ In Oman universities, females outnumber males.

Table 1: *Mother tongue*

	MSAL	Arabic	Arabic & MSAL
MSAL-homes	64	3	1
A/MSAL homes	1	7	1

Table 2: *where Arabic was learned*

	home	school	from other children	all three
MSAL homes	11	28	4	25
mixed A/MSAL homes	2	2		3

The next group of questions checked the contexts and domains that MSAL are used. In Table 3, sixty-four, (94.1%), MSAL-home respondents reported their native MSAL as the one spoken at home, and only four (5.9 %) said they use Arabic. Some mentioned more than one language. Of these,

ten said that Arabic is also used at home. Of the mixed A/MSAL-home respondents, only two (22.2 %) reported that they use their MSAL language. Arabic, however, is the language reported to be used at home in the remaining seven (77.8 %) of these homes, with MSAL in two of them.

Table 3: *Language used at home*

	MSAL	Arabic
MSAL homes	64 (94.1%) + Arabic 10 (15.6%)	4 (5.9 %)
mixed A/MSAL homes	2 (22.2 %) +Arabic 1 (50%)	7 (77.8 %)

The large number of MSAL homes in which MSAL are used, i.e. 94.1%, reveals that in these bilingual homes, where the people are conversant in both their native MSAL and Arabic, MSAL are the predominant languages in this private domain. However, (5.9%) of the MSAL respondents reported that Arabic was the only language used in their homes, or in addition to MSAL in conversations among the family members in ten (15.6%) MSAL homes, which is the primary domain of the indigenous languages, tells us about its dominant role in the linguistic repertoire of these communities. It may also be a sign of a possible language shift in these homes, where one language, Arabic, is being used in a setting where the MSAL are expected to be used.

One question was about code change, if any, at MSAL homes in private conversations between the parents. This was to check a somewhat different function that such languages perform. It was found that such change does occur in twenty-six of these homes. Respondents reported Arabic to be used for this function in eight of them, where the language generally used at home is one or more of the native MSAL. The second result is that in the four mixed Arabic/MSAL homes in which such change can be noticed, the change is from Arabic to the native MSAL language. This shows that in these homes, Arabic had been adopted as the language for communication and that the MSAL were chosen for more private role. Eight of MSAL-home respondents, reported using their native MSAL for

such conversations while they reported that they alternate between Arabic and MSAL in the general home conversations. Again, this also shows that these languages serve a special private role. In the other homes, the alternation seems to be between any two of these languages that the parents know.

The next question in the questionnaire was about language choice in different settings and situations, and if they varied from one to another. The investigated settings involved variables of topic and role-players. These were: (1) conversations about general affairs and news exchange at home and with friends, (2) discussion of serious topics and religious matters, (3) poetry and proverbs, (4) and (5) prayers to God to reward good deeds and punish

wrongdoers respectively, and (6) angry exchanges.

The first concerned the language used for conversations of general manner and exchange of news at home and with friends, as in Table 4. The responses were as follows: Of the MSAL-home respondents, only fourteen (20.6 %) reported that they use Arabic in this context, while fifty-four (79.4 %) respondents said they use their native MSAL. However, it is interesting to notice that in twelve of these cases Arabic is used in addition to the MSAL. Six of the nine A/MASL-home respondents reported that they use Arabic in this context, while three reported using their native MSAL, one of whom also reported using Arabic in addition to MSAL.

Table 4: *Language used for general conversations and exchange of news*

	MSAL	Arabic
MSAL homes	54 (79.4 %) + Arabic 10 (18.5%)	14 (20.6 %)
mixed A/MSAL homes	3 (33.3 %) +Arabic 1 (33.3%)	6 (66.6 %)

As indicated in Table 5, Arabic is reported to be used in the discussion of more serious topics like religion, than in the preceding situation. The results seem to bear this out. Arabic is reported to be used by twenty-four (35.3%) of the MSAL-home respondents for such discussions. Twelve respondents reported using their native MSAL in dealing with general topics and news, and three of

them reported using both MSAL and Arabic for those conversations. The change in the language used for the two functions is obvious. The remaining forty-four (64.7 %) reported to use their native MSAL. However, seven of these reported to use Arabic in addition to their native MSAL. Only one of the nine A/MSAL home respondents reported MSAL in this context; the other eight reported using Arabic.

Table 5: *Language used for discussion of serious and religious topics*

	MSAL	Arabic
MSAL homes	44 (64.7 %) + Arabic 7 (16 %)	24 (35.3 %)
mixed A/MSAL homes	1 (11 %)	8 (89 %)

The third setting, Table 6, was poetry and proverb citation. The results show that forty-five (66.2%) of

the MSAL-home respondents reported using their native languages, and twenty-three (33.8%) reported

to use Arabic for such a purpose. However, of the forty-five respondents who reported using MSAL, more than half of them, twenty-four in number, said they would also use Arabic. On the other hand, for the A/MSAL-home respondents, only three reported using MSAL, while six reported using Arabic. The MSAL enjoy a very rich oral tradition of poetry and

formulaic expressions, proverbs, wise anecdotes, etc. Thus, it is not strange that MSAL speakers use their repertoire of such expressions in their native languages when quoting them in their speech. On the other hand, one cannot ignore the cultural weight of Arabic in the community, which would render such expressions in Arabic readily accessible.

Table 6: *Language used in poetry quotations or proverb citation.*

	MSAL	Arabic
MSAL homes	45 (66.2 %) + Arabic 24 (53.3 %)	23 (33.8 %)
mixed A/MSAL homes	3 (33.3 %)	6 (66.6 %)

We also wanted to investigate the languages used in offering prayers to God to reward people for their good deeds, or wrongdoing. This is a setting in which formulaic expressions, words and phrases are frequently used.

In praying to God to reward people who are benevolent, charitable, and perform good deeds, forty-five (66.2%) MSAL-home respondents said they would use their native MSAL, while 23 (33.8%) reported using Arabic, as Table 7 shows. However, in the first group, twenty (44.5%) reported using Arabic too in such contexts. As for

the A/MSAL-home respondents, three reported using Arabic. Six stated they use their native MSAL, two of whom also reported using Arabic. This shows that fifty-two respondents reported using Arabic either exclusively, or in combination with MSAL. On the other hand, MSAL are reported as being used by fifty-two respondents in total, either exclusively, or in combination with Arabic. We may also remember here that many of the expressions used in these settings are from Arabic, which is the language of Islam and its religious texts and traditions.

Table 7: *Language used in prayers to reward good deeds.*

	MSAL	Arabic
MSAL homes	45 (66.2 %) + Arabic 20 (44.5 %)	23 (33.8 %)
mixed A/MSAL homes	6 (66.7 %) +Arabic 2 (33.3%)	3 (33.3 %)

In calling on God to punish wrongdoers (Table 8 below), fifty-five (80.9%) MSAL respondents reported to use their native MSAL and only thirteen (19.1 %) reported using Arabic. Twenty-eight (53.3 %) of the MSAL-home respondents who stated they use MSAL said that they also use Arabic in this context. Only

two (22.2 %) A/MSAL-home respondents reported using Arabic here, and the other seven reported using their native MSAL, one of whom reported also using Arabic. All in all, the use of Arabic in this context, whether exclusively or in combination with MSAL, amounts to forty-four respondents.

Table 8: *Language used in prayers to punish wrongdoers.*

	MSAL	Arabic
MSAL homes	55 (80.9%) + Arabic 28 (53.3 %)	13 (19.1 %)
mixed A/MSAL homes	7 (77.8 %) +Arabic 1 (14.2 %)	2 (22.2 %)

The question about what language(s) the respondents use when they are angry with someone yields different results. Of the sixty-eight MSAL-home respondents, only nine (13.2%) reported using Arabic, as shown in Table 9. The other fifty-nine (86.8 %) reported using their MSAL. Eleven of them may also use Arabic. Four of the nine A/

MSAL-home respondents said they use Arabic, while the other five use their MSAL. The total number of respondents who reported using Arabic in this context, either exclusively or in combination with MSAL, is only twenty-four. This context is highly emotional and is one of the first contexts in which bilinguals revert to their native language.

Table 9: *Language used in angry exchanges.*

	MSAL	Arabic
MSAL homes	59 (86.8 %) + Arabic 11 (18.6 %)	9 (13.2 %)
mixed A-MSAL homes	5 (55.6 %)	4 (44.4 %)

The next group of questions solicits answers about the respondents’ use of their MSAL and their opinions about such a use, in addition to their opinions about how they see these languages, their status compared to Arabic, origin, future, and ways of maintenance.

The first of these questions was about what the respondents think about the origin of these MSAL. Four alternative statements were given to them to choose from. (a) they are indigenous languages in southern Arabia that have descended from ‘Himyari’, a name they give to Old South Arabian languages; (b) that they are descended from Arabic; (c) that they are independent languages; and (d) that they are ancient Arabic dialects, and are the origin of the Arabic language.

Table 10 shows that fifty-one of the MSAL-homes (86.8%) chose option (a) which asserts that MSAL are indigenous to the region, as seen

in the respondents’ belief that these languages are related to a group of languages that flourished in ancient times in the region. Only one respondent (1.5%) chose option (b). Nine (13.2%) chose (c), which asserts that MSAL are independent languages, and seven (10.3%) chose (d), which asserts that they are ancient Arabic languages, and that they form the origin of the Arabic language. The respondents reported pride in their language. The majority emphasized the indigenous nature of these languages and their uniqueness to the region. However, the variable responses also reveal some uncertainty about the origin of these languages. The same uncertainties are also felt by scholars whose life work is the study of these languages.

The nine mixed A/MSAL-home respondents expressed somewhat different beliefs. Although the majority, five respondents (55.6%) chose (a), showing the same trend as that in MSAL-home respondents; two (22.2%) chose (b), and two,

(22.2%), chose (c). We may remember here that (b) states that these languages have descended from

Arabic and that only one (1.5%) out of the sixty-eight MSAL respondents chose this alternative.

Table 10: *The origin of MSAL and their relation to Arabic.*

	MSAL-homes	mixed A/MSAL- homes
Indigenous languages, descending from Old Southern Arabian.	51 (75%)	5 (55.6%)
Languages descending from Arabic	1 (1.5%)	2 (22.2%)
Independent languages	9 (13.2%)	2 (22.2%)
Ancient Arabic dialects	7 (10.3%)	

The next question asked the respondents to report their feeling about using MSAL with friends who speak these languages. Six statements are given from which they could choose one or more that express their feelings. The responses point clearly to the centrality of the factor of solidarity in the use of MSAL in this context. Table 11 shows that many MSAL-home respondents, thirty-five out of sixty-eight, (51.5%) reported that the use of MSAL in this domain comes naturally. Thirty-two respondents (47%) reported that the mother tongue is more capable of expressing feelings and thoughts. Eleven (16.2%) stated that speaking Arabic in this context is unnatural, and an equal number said that there is

no difference between speaking MSAL or speaking Arabic here, which probably reflects the equal ease they feel in the use of either. Nine (13.2%) said that using MSAL will make them feel closer to the addressee, and only five (7.4%) said that they use MSAL to show that they speak them. The nine mixed A-MSAL respondents gave similar responses. Three (33.3%) said it is natural to use MSAL, and two (22.2%) reported that the mother tongue is more expressive of their feelings. Two (22.2%) reported that their use of MSAL will make them feel closer to the addressee. The unnaturalness of Arabic received one (11.1%) response as did the idea that the use of MSAL is to show that you speak them.

Table 11: *Reasons for using MSAL with friends.*

	MSAL-homes	Mixed A/MSAL-homes
Natural	35 (51.5%)	3 (33.3%)
MSAL more expressive of feelings	32 (47%)	2 (22.2%)
Speaking A is not natural	11 (16.2%)	1 (11.1%)
No difference between A & MSAL	11 (16.2%)	
Closer to the addressee	9 (13.2%)	2 (22.2%)
Show knowledge of MSAL	5 (7.4%)	1 (11.1%)

The questionnaire included a question about whether the respondents would switch to MSAL in talking to strangers when they realize that their addressees speak it, or continue to speak Arabic, as shown in Table 12. The responses revealed a contrast between the two groups of respondents, i.e. those from MSAL-homes, and those from mixed A/MSAL-

homes. The majority of the MSAL-home respondents, forty-five of them (66.2%) said that they would switch to MSAL, and twenty-three (33.6%) said they would continue with Arabic. On the other hand, only three of the nine A/MSAL-home respondents (33.3%) said they would switch to MSAL; while six (66.7) said they would continue with Arabic.

Table 12: *Switching to MSAL with strangers*

	switch to MSAL	continue with A.
MSAL homes	45 (66.2 %)	23 (33.8 %)
Mixed A/MSAL homes	3 (3.33 %)	6 (66.7 %)

The responses of the MSAL-home group show clearly the solidarity function of MSAL within their communities. They also show that these languages serve as identity symbols in those communities. However, for the mixed A/MSAL-home group, the MSAL appear to have stopped playing this role because the respondents no longer have such a sense of belonging to these communities. They have started identifying with the dominant language community.

The respondents were also asked what language, MSAL or Arabic, they would like their newborn children to acquire as a mother tongue as in Table 13. Again, the two groups were in contrast. Forty-six of the sixty-eight MSAL-home respondents (67.5%) said they would teach their children MSAL,

and only nineteen (28 %) said they would teach them Arabic. Three respondents (4.5%) reported that they would teach them both MSAL and Arabic. That two thirds of the respondents from this group chose MSAL clearly shows the strong and distinct ethnic belonging that the respondents have, and how important it is for them that their children acquire their native languages. They also understand that they will eventually acquire Arabic. The mixed A/MSAL-home subjects responded differently. Five of them (55.5%) said they would teach their children Arabic, and one (11.2%) said he/she would teach them both languages. The other three (33.3%) chose MSAL. These reported that their identification with their ethnic community has eroded, and they would rather identify with the dominant community.

Table 13: *Language to let children acquire as first language*

	MSAL	Arabic	MSAL & Arabic
MSAL homes	46 (67.5 %)	19 (28 %)	3 (4.5 %)
Mixed A/MSAL homes	3 (33.3 %)	5 (55.5 %)	1 (11.2%)

Related to the preceding question, two questions attempted to elicit the MSAL respondents' opinions about the language acquisition of their children. Those who chose Arabic as their children's mother tongue were asked about their reasons behind this choice. This was an open-answer question where

the respondents were asked to give their opinions freely. The primary reason given by most of them was that Arabic is the language of Islam, their religion. Other responses cited the important status of Arabic as the common language of the country, whose acquisition would help their children

integrate into society, and would help in their social and professional advancement. Some even thought that since MSAL were local dialects, there was no good reason to acquire them compared to the many advantages of acquiring Arabic.

The second question was asked to the respondents who chose MSAL as mother tongues for their children. It asked what they thought about those who chose Arabic as a mother tongue for their newborn children. This was also an open-answer question. The general response was that of resentment. They accused those who would rather have their children acquire Arabic as a mother tongue of not caring about the revival and maintenance of their native languages. They also thought that those who do this do not care about their cultural traditions and that they have no sense of belonging to their native communities. They also expressed their fear that such a tendency will cause the death and extinction of MSAL, whereas every possible effort should be made to preserve them. They felt that the teaching of Arabic to their children at home is not necessary since children are going to acquire it anyway when

they go to school, or even earlier.

A further question was about which language the respondents felt to be of higher status. The responses as shown in Table 14 were very interesting in that more than half of the MSAL-home respondents, thirty-six in number, recognized Arabic, which is not their native language, as the language with the higher status. Thirty-one (46.3%) respondents said that their native MSAL have a higher status. One would have expected that the people who have a strong sense of identity and a distinct ethnic belonging would attribute to their language, like other cultural symbols, a higher status than other languages. However, the fact that Arabic is the language of their holy religious book, the Quran, and the carrier of their religious Islamic tradition, plays no small role in their conclusion that it has a higher status than any of their native languages. The mixed A/MSAL-home responses were expectedly pro-Arabic. Seven (77.8 %) of them said Arabic has the higher status and only two (22.2 %) felt that their native MSAL were of a higher status.

Table 14: *Language status*

	MSAL	Arabic
MSAL homes	31 (46.3 %)	36 (53.7 %)
Mixed A/MSAL homes	2 (22.2 %)	7 (77.8 %)

One question was about how the respondents saw their native MSAL in comparison with Arabic in terms of beauty and eloquence of expression. Three options were given from which they might choose: (a) that their native MSAL are more eloquent in expressing their feelings than Arabic, (b) that Arabic is more so, or (c) that the two are equally expressive. Results in Table 15 show that thirty-two (47.8%) of the MSAL-home respondents reported that their native MSAL languages are more expressive and eloquent, while only eighteen (26.8%) chose Arabic, and seventeen (25.4 %) reported that they find their languages

equally expressive. The rich and centuries-long literary tradition of Arabic, to which these respondents have been exposed, appears to have influenced their opinions about the expressiveness and eloquence of Arabic, compared to the limited and oral literary traditions of their native MSAL languages. Only one mixed A/MSAL-home respondent (11%) found his/her MSAL to be better in this respect than Arabic. The other eight (89%) chose Arabic. Again, this is not surprising from community members who have grown up in homes that are witnessing increasing integration into the dominant community and culture.

Table 15: *Eloquence and expressiveness*

	MSAL	Arabic	MSAL & Arabic
MSAL homes	32 (47.8 %)	18 (26.8 %)	17 (25.4 %)
Mixed A/MSAL homes	1 (11 %)	8 (89 %)	

The next question asked respondents about the situations and domains in which they think MSAL are suitable for use. Table 16 shows that six such situations were provided for them to choose from. The home domain got the highest responses. Sixty-two (93.9%) of the MSAL-homes respondents reported that MSAL could be used at home. Thirty-three (50%) said they could be used with friends, while nineteen (28.8%) said they could be used for discussions of general affairs. Use in religious discussions got twelve (18.2%) responses, but use in composing poetry got sixteen (24.2%), and use in literary writing got only ten (15.2%). Eight (89%) of the mixed A/MSAL-homes respondents reported that MSAL could only be used at home. Only one

of them (11%) reported that they could be used in conversations between friends or in discussions of general affairs.

The MSAL-homes responses clearly indicate that the MSAL are used in private domains and informal contexts, i.e. the first three contexts: conversations at home (93.9%), between friends (50%), and in the discussion of general affairs (28.8%). Once the level of the discourse increases in formality or seriousness of topic, these languages are not reported to be suitable. One exception may be in the composition of poetry. A good number of respondents said that MSAL can be used for composing poetry (24.2%). This is because of the rich oral tradition of poetry composition and recitation that these communities have.

Table 16: *Domains and situations for using MSAL.*

	MSAL (66n)	A/MSAL (9n)
Home	62 (93.9%)	8 (89%)
With friends	33 (50%)	1 (11%)
Discussion of general affairs	19 (28.8%)	1 (11%)
Discussion of religious topics	12 (18.2%)	
Composing poetry	16 (24.2%)	
Literary writing	10 (15.2%)	

Another question was about writing in MSAL in informal contexts. The respondents were asked if they use their MSAL in taking notes, writing letters to friends, or texting messages, all being contexts that are low on the formality scale. As can be seen in Table 17, out of the sixty-four MSAL-home persons who responded to this question, forty-five (70.3%) said they did¹¹, while nineteen (29.7%) said they

did not. Of the mixed A/MSAL-home respondents, only three (33.3%) said they did, and the other six (66.7%) said they did not.

¹¹ Respondents who reported that they write in the indigenous

languages, though the orthography of these languages has not been standardized, are assumed to use the available resources (i.e. the existing Roman script). They replace consonants not found in the Roman-script board with the one found on original Blackberry phones.

Table 17: *Using MSAL in writing*

	Yes	NO
MSAL-homes	45 (70.3 %)	19 (29.7 %)
A/MSAL-homes	3 (33.3 %)	6 (66.6 %)

As a sequel to the previous question, the following one asked those respondents who did not use MSAL for writing about the reason for this. Table 18 shows that four suggested reasons were given from which the respondents could choose one or more. Eight of the MSAL-homes respondents said MSAL are not written, i.e. they do not have an established writing system, or that they did not learn how to write them at school. Five said MSAL have sounds that do not have corresponding ones in Arabic, and therefore, there

are no letters in Arabic that represent them. Eight said writing in Arabic is easier, and two said the reason was that their friends prefer to receive letters and messages in Arabic although they speak MSAL. Respondents from mixed A/MSAL homes suggested similar reasons for not writing their messages and notes in MSAL. Four said because they are not written, and two said that Arabic is easier to write. Another two said it was because their friends preferred to write and receive written messages in Arabic

Table 18: *Reasons for not using MSAL in letters, notes, texting.*

	MSAL-homes	A/MSAL -homes
MSAL are not written	8	4
Some sounds without special letters	5	
Arabic is easier to write	8	2
Friends prefer Arabic	2	2

The fact that MSAL do not have their own writing system and that they were not taught how to write them at school was the most common reason why these respondents reported to write their letters, notes, and text messages in Arabic. These people are bilingual with full mastery of Arabic because of school education. They were taught how to read and write Arabic at school and Arabic is the medium of instruction at all stages. In citing the absence of corresponding letters to certain MSAL sounds, the respondents were referring to the difficulty that they would face in settling on established symbols to represent these sounds. The difficulty to agree on a shared set of symbols for the special sounds makes it easier to write in Arabic and explains why their

friends would want them to write to them in Arabic.

The next question asked respondents if they wish to have MSAL taught at schools. To this question, it is noticeable that some participants did not wish to respond. Out of the sixty-eight MSAL-homes respondents, thirteen did not give any answer as to whether or not they would like to have their native MSAL taught at schools, as shown in Table 19. Similarly, five out of the nine mixed A/MSAL-home respondents left this question without any response. A possible reason is that these abstainers did not see the use or the feasibility of this venture since these languages are only spoken and limited to only informal situations of interaction. However, thirty-two (58.2%) of the remaining fifty-five

MSAL-home respondents said they would like their languages to be taught at schools, like Arabic, and twenty-three (41.8 %) said they would not. Three

(75%) of the remaining four mixed A/MSAL-home respondents said they would, and one (25 %) said he/she would not.

Table 19: *Teaching MSAL in schools*

	Yes	No
MSAL-homes	32 (58.2 %)	23 (41.8 %)
A/MSAL-homes	3 (75 %)	1 (25 %)

That a majority of the fifty-nine responses were in the affirmative is expected since many of the respondents from MSAL-homes and some from the mixed A/MSAL-homes, care about MSAL maintenance, and teaching these languages at schools will naturally lead to their preservation. However, the negative responses require an explanation. We believe that these responses stem from the belief that it is not possible to teach these languages in schools because they are not written. The respondents understand that teaching languages at schools is associated with the development of reading and writing skills, neither of which is possible without an established writing system, which these languages lack. This also seems to be the reason behind the fourteen abstaining respondents. Furthermore, we know from the responses to the previous questions that the MSAL are stigmatized, and that some of these respondents, especially from the mixed A/MSAL homes, assign them a very low status. Thus, they believe that there is no use in doing this since they are no more than local ‘dialects’, and all efforts should be directed to teaching Arabic instead.

This is corroborated by responses to the related question about the importance of teaching these languages for them. Those who had responded positively to the teaching of these languages at schools said that this would help in their maintenance. Teaching them at schools will “encourage us to continue using them instead of transferring to Arabic.” Those who said no to this suggestion said “there was no use in doing so because these languages have local and limited use as dialects of a low status.”

The last question attempted to elicit the respondents’ opinion about the strategies that would be most fruitful in maintaining the use of MSAL (see Table 20). Five options were provided from which they could choose and list in terms of significance. These were: (a) the establishment of a special MSAL medium TV channel; (b) the introduction of MSAL-speaking programs in the existing Arabic channels; (c) the establishment of an MSAL newspaper; (d) organization of cultural festivals to promote MSAL oral literature; (e) and organization of seminars to raise people’s awareness of these languages. The responses of the two sub-groups do not show any significant difference, as may be seen in table 20 below. Between them, fifty-one respondents were for the establishment of an MSAL-speaking channel, with twenty-nine of them finding this as the best way to promote the use of MSAL. Fifty-four respondents thought that introducing MSAL-speaking programs in the existing TV channels would also be useful, fourteen of whom felt this was the most important thing to do. This is a less ambitious, and therefore, a more plausible target. Fifty-three chose the organization of MSAL-literature festivals, with fourteen of them giving this strategy priority over the others. The organization of seminars to raise MSAL awareness was also reported to be effective in this effort by fifty-three respondents, while nine thought that this was the most effective strategy. Establishing an MSAL newspaper was reported to be an important promotional instrument by forty-five respondents, with only six choosing it as the most important measure.

Table 20: *Ways to promote the use of MSAL.*

	MSAL -homes	Mixed A/MSAL-homes
MSAL TV channel	43 (22%)	8 (7%)
MSAL TV programs	47 (14%)	7 (1%)
MSAL newspaper	39 (6%)	6 (1%)
MSAL Literary festivals	47 (14%)	6 (1%)
MSAL awareness seminars	47 (9%)	6 (1%)

Of the five ways to promote the use of MSAL, the least 'agreeable' appeared to be the establishment of an MSAL newspaper. At first glance, this seems surprising since a widely distributed source of MSAL usage like a newspaper should be readily taken up by all concerned as a very fruitful venue for the promotion of these languages. However, the fact that these languages do not have an established writing system would make the idea of a MSAL newspaper untenable to the respondents' minds. Conversely, one could argue that a wide-scale publication of material in MSAL would definitely help in establishing any writing system that is chosen to render these languages in writing.

DISCUSSION

The general picture that emerges from the responses is that of societal bilingualism. We are facing minority communities, every member of which has two languages: their native MSAL and Arabic, in its two varieties: Spoken Omani Arabic with its regional variations, and Standard Arabic. In these ethnically distinct communities, the two languages seem to be used equally fluently in various situations and settings. The responses to the questions of the first group about the domains and situations of use of MSAL show that the respondents use both languages in exchange of news, discussion of religious topics, poetry and proverb citations, prayers and angry exchange, but with different frequencies. MSAL are used by more people in the home domain than in the different settings of conversations about general affairs and exchanging

news with friends and at home, as the comparison of Tables 3 and 4 clearly shows. In the interviews¹², MSAL students were asked about why MSAL are mainly used at home and when talking about general affairs. Two interviewees stated that it is easier to use MSAL than Arabic in these contexts. The third interviewee said "wouldn't it be strange if you talk English to your parents when you can use your own language?" He further commented that MSAL are more personal and easier to express oneself in especially when in the company of MSAL speakers. The fourth interviewee contended that it feels awkward to use a different language than their own MSAL as it is more accessible and one may express himself well using it. Sometimes conversations with friends need to be made in Arabic when these friends are native speakers of that language. Another situation in which an increased number of respondents use their native MSAL is when they are involved in angry exchanges with others (Table 9). The use of the native language feels more natural in such an emotional context. MSAL students were also asked about why angry exchanges tend to occur in MSAL. The majority of the interviewed students gave two reasons. First, they stated that they do not want outsiders to understand their anger. Secondly, they agreed that speaking MSAL happens uncontrollably in angry exchanges. One interviewee said they do so to attract the attention of others to come and interfere. The last interviewee said the MSAL felt more sensitive and expressive than Arabic.

¹² The interviewees are English specialists at Sultan Qaboos University; the interviews were conducted in English.

The use of Arabic increases when the topic of the conversation becomes more serious, as in the discussion of religious matters (Table 5) or in poetry and proverb citation (Table 6) where a good amount of the poetry and the proverbs cited seem to be originally from Arabic, both standard and spoken. Similarly, the use of Arabic shows some increase in the context of praying to God to reward good deeds and punish wrongdoers (Tables 7 and 8). In these contexts, many frozen religious expressions in standard Arabic may be used. Therefore, the use of Arabic is not unexpected. Nevertheless, the responses show that their native MSAL are used by the majority of the respondents in all these contexts. The authors asked MSAL students why they use MSAL to recite poems and proverbs. They gave three main reasons. First, MSAL constitute the essence of their identity and culture. Secondly, they stated that doing so shows respect for MSAL and culture. Third, the use of MSAL in these contexts reveals the urge MSAL speakers have to express thoughts and ideas in a more poetic and imaginative way which, according to them, helps in communicating ideas better. It is worth mentioning that one of the interviewees stated “one cannot translate poetry productively without losing the magic of the spoken word, the rhyme and rhythm.” On the other hand, they all show that Arabic is also in use in these contexts. This is important because it indicates that there is no domain, situation, or topic in which MSAL are used exclusively by the respondents. In all those language intercourse situations, we find Arabic is sometimes used by some of the respondents, or by the same respondents.

The second group of questions attempted to reveal the respondents' attitude towards their MSAL. In responding to the question about the origin of their native MSAL, they asserted their independence, and distinction from Arabic, tracing their indigenous history to the ancient extinct languages of the region, as Table 10 shows. This reflects the respondents' pride in their languages, which they take as symbols of their own distinct ethnicity. The responses to the questions about the eloquence of MSAL and their ability to express their thoughts and feelings give

the same conclusion (Tables 14 and 15). Although the comparison here is with Arabic, which holds the highest status and esteem among the general populace because of its close relation to Islam, the responses still show many of the respondents' belief that their native languages are not less expressive and eloquent than Arabic, if not more so.

The status of MSAL as a symbol of identity for community membership is also made clear in the responses to the question about the language they would want their children to acquire as a mother tongue (Table 13), and those to why they would want to do this, and how they felt about those who wanted to teach their children Arabic instead. The majority opted for MSAL rather than Arabic as a mother tongue for their children. As a reason, they offered the fact that MSAL are the languages of their communities and those of their ancestors. They expressed their strong wishes for the maintenance of their native languages and their concern about their extinction if neglected. The symbolic social function of MSAL is also clear from the responses to the question about teaching these languages in schools (Table 19). The majority of respondents said they would like to have these languages taught in schools. The reason they gave was that they feared the gradual death of these languages. They authors interviewed MSAL students to elicit why they like or dislike teaching their native languages to their children. One interviewee stated that very few people use these languages. He does not wish his languages to vanish. Another interviewee said since most of the MSAL are not written, the only way to preserve these languages is to teach them to the new generations. The interviewee emphasizes the need to keep the identity alive as long as possible. Finally, they agree that Oman should continue to be linguistically *colored* by having many languages. They were very much aware of the threat that Arabic poses in this respect. Their concern was also expressed in their suggestions as to the steps that should be taken to maintain these languages via establishing general venues where they are used: SAL-speaking TV channel, MSAL-speaking TV and Radio programs, MSAL newspaper, literary

festivals, and public awareness seminars (Table 20). It is worth mentioning that *al-Burnāmiy* was an MSAL radio program that ran from Oman until the late 1970s, and Qanat al-Mahrah, which was run from Riyadh.¹³

The questions about the use of MSAL in writing pointed out the respondents' opinions about their suitability to achieve this function. Together with the responses to the questions about teaching them at school, they revealed that the respondents think that MSAL are not totally acceptable to be used for writing. This linguistic function is reserved for Standard Arabic, the highly codified language variety which they have learned to read and write at school. It is true that the majority said that they write in MSAL (Table 17), but we have to remember that the question concerned types of informal writing practice like texting, note-taking, and writing letters to friends. In situations like these, the writer will tend to be free from many of the constraints that writing discourse imposes, e.g. correct grammar, spelling, style, etc. The language variety that is used here is the one used for informal interaction. The absence of an established writing system for these languages is given as a reason for not using them in writing. Some respondents did not see any use in teaching MSAL at schools. One of the reasons given for this was that they are local dialects of limited functions.

This is closely related to the respondents' opinions about the linguistic functions of MSAL, i.e., their context of use in terms of setting, topic, and role players. There appears to be a general consensus that the appropriate contexts for their use are general, informal discourse at home and with friends (Table 16). When the topic or setting of the discourse rises on the formality scale, very few respondents feel that MSAL are, or should be used. The respondents' answer to the question about their actual use of MSAL was similar.

As was mentioned above, MSAL have been found to be most extensively used at home and with friends in conversations about general affairs and news exchange. Once the topic or setting gets more

¹³ Unfortunately, no more information is available on this.

serious or formal, MSAL will be less used, and the spoken variant of Arabic, spoken Omani Arabic, is used instead. This raises the question about which language variety is used in highly formal and prestigious interactions, like formal writing, high literature, prepared formal lectures and speeches, religious texts and sermons, and newscasts on radio and television. In this apparently diglossic situation, all these contexts are covered by Standard Arabic, standing as the H(igh) variant. As such, both spoken Omani Arabic and MSAL feature as the L(ow) variants for the concerned MSAL communities. What we seem to have here is a bilingual community whose native language, L1, shares the linguistic load with two varieties of L2, each being used for specific functions, albeit with a large amount of overlap between the two low varieties.

What about the linguistic choices and attitudes of the Arabic/MSAL-home respondents? Their responses reflected a different pattern of language choice and attitude towards MSAL that contrasts with that of the MSAL-home respondents. In these responses, the use of Arabic takes precedence over MSAL in all domains and situations of interaction. The majority of these respondents stated that their mother tongue is Arabic, so this is the language used at home. Arabic is also used by the majority in all other contexts. They assigned Arabic a higher status than that of MSAL. They also thought it is more expressive and eloquent, whereas the majority of the MSAL-home respondents thought the opposite. They also thought that MSAL are only suitable in interactions about general topics at home and with friends, to the exclusion of other domains and situations. The majority said they use Arabic and not MSAL in writing their informal notes or texting messages, because these languages are not written. Five of them did not respond to the question about teaching MSAL at schools.

All this suggests that there is a shift in the ethnic belonging of the members of this group. It is clearly indicative of an attempt to integrate into the major Arabic-speaking community, as demonstrated in their very limited use of MSAL and the opinions they expressed about those languages

and their diminished role in the repertoire of linguistic functions. The fact that members of this group come from homes in which one of the parents belongs to the major ethnic community is behind this noticeable shift towards adopting the language of this community.

CONCLUSION

What emerges from the discussion above is a picture of indigenous minority communities that are ethnically and linguistically distinct from the major community. However, they have added Arabic, the main language of the country, to their linguistic repertoire. This is the result of the socio-political and economic changes that took place in the country, as mentioned above. The native MSAL are used for in-group purposes, in the private domains of home and friendship, with co-MSAL speaking friends, and in talking about general topics. When the setting or the topic increases in seriousness and formality, Arabic, in its spoken variant in the country, is used more and more frequently. As to the highly formal settings and uses, like serious writing, written literary and religious texts, prepared general speeches, the higher Standard Arabic, which is the variant learned at school, is used. This focus on language as especially powerful and important is based on a more performative view of language. However, this performative view differs from how speakers of definitively endangered Tewa display it (Kroskrity, 2018: 139). To them, “language [is viewed] as a shaper of, rather than a set of labels for, reality- that is itself ceremonially based and extends to the areas of identity. Tewa speakers limit their use of Tewa to ceremonies while MSAL speakers use their languages on daily bases.

What does that tell us about this bilingual situation in terms of its stability or change? A number of proposals have been put forward as to the factors that influence language shift, and others that influence maintenance (Meyers-Scotton, 2006:89; Garrett, 2010:7). At first glance, the present situation shows signs of an expected language shift in favor of Arabic. It is characterized by various features that

stand as factors that encourage language shift. At the societal level, the MSAL-speaking communities are not physically separated from the larger dominant community. Many of the MSAL speakers are employed in various positions in the government outside their original communities. Mastery of Arabic certainly helps in their socio-economic mobility. Educationally, MSAL are not taught at schools, neither as a medium of instruction, nor as a subject. They are not written, nor codified, and do not have a standardized variety. There are no newspapers, and no current radio or TV programs in MSAL. Politically, there is no in-group sense in these communities that they make a separate nation from that of the Arab majority. On the contrary, they are proud of their Arabism and feel that their tribes and region constitute the historical original home of the Arabs.

On the other hand, there exist factors that strongly promote the maintenance of MSAL, revealed by the views that the questionnaire’s respondents expressed. First, the MSAL-speaking communities exhibit “an overall sense of subjective ethnolinguistic vitality” (ibid.,90). They sustain highly distinctive indigenous cultures. Their native languages stand as symbols of their ethnic independence, as witnessed in the common use of MSAL in appropriate in-group settings among the members of these communities. Their tribal ties promote high-density in-group networks, and emphasize highly cohesive community structures. These languages also have a rich oral literary tradition, and their speakers have a high awareness of their history. The views expressed by the individual respondents reveal their pride in their ethnic heritage and language, giving the latter a status equal to that of Arabic, the prestigious language of the country and the nation. Kroskrity (2018:133) states that “the practice of multilingualism was differentially influenced by distinctive language ideologies such as those regarding purism/syncretism and the expressive/utilitarian functions of language.” Although MSAL speakers show a language shift, their ideological beliefs propel them to maintain their languages.

Like all other similar cases of societal bilingualism, competing factors are at work in the

determination of the future, i.e. whether bilingualism will persevere in the face of counter-pressures or not (Romaine 2000: 49-55). In the present case, it is hoped that the maintenance of the present situation of bilingualism will prevail. It is true that in the mixed Arabic-MSAL homes, we may not find the expected sense of ethnic or language belonging to these communities; rather there is a desire to shift to the language and the culture of the Arabic majority community. However, we believe that the ever-increasing awareness of the members of these communities of their distinctiveness, in ethnicity, history, language, traditions and culture, and their desire and effort to promote them may help preserve the indigenous languages.

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