"When You Lose Your Neighborhood, You Loose Everything..." A Study of Loss of a Language

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"WHEN YOU LOSE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, YOU LOSE EVERYTHING...":
A STUDY IN THE LOSS OF A LANGUAGE
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Research shows that the Syrian population in Fort Wayne, Indiana is losing its connection to the Arabic language of the parent generation. The information obtained was for the purpose of determining why fewer Syrians are able to speak the "mother tongue" and why they seem to be losing their responsibility to the history of their people as well as their identification as Arabic speakers in America. This research was obtained from a series of in-depth interviews with my grandfather (member of the Syrian population; parents immigrated to America during the early part of the 1900s) that revealed a serious side of his character and identity that was previously unknown to me as a granddaughter and as a researcher. Analysis of the study revealed that there are three primary reasons why the children of the older generation have become Americanized in their use of language and why the connection to the Syrian culture has diminished. They are tied to the following ideas and concepts: (1) solidarity and group socialization, (2) being a member of a diglossic speech community, and (3) the lack of strictness and practice as Arabic gets passed from one generation to the next. These results are largely connected to the Social Network Theory, developed by British sociolinguist Leslie Milroy, that discusses the density and multiplexity of a community and how these characteristics influence the group dynamic. Likewise, another concern raised from this study is the vitality of the Arabic language in Fort Wayne. It appears that Arabic is slowly deteriorating into a dead language within this city. This study also demonstrated strongly that the emotional connection to the "mother tongue" in combination with the struggle to be a part of the American culture greatly influences the amount of guilt a Syrian feels later in life. These findings are useful for sociolinguists who continually search for ways to promote diverse cultural settings in which multiple languages can be maintained and for sociolinguists who study language acquisition and vitality. In addition, this research is useful to educators who seek to understand children who grow up in an environment that is driven by the use of multiple languages in different settings (home, school, etc.).