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Article

Family dynamics towards heritage language maintenance: The case of Indian transnationals in Northern Ireland

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Abstract

This article investigates Family Language Policy and grassroots-level practices of the heritage language speakers who are first-generation migrants of Indian background in Northern Ireland. Having been settled since the 1920s, Indians are one of the longest-established ethnic minorities in the region, representing around 0.5% of the total non-white residents. Whilst languages of migrant communities brought further complexity to the existing linguistic diversity of Northern Ireland, discussions around language policy in this geopolitical domain focus primarily on its two indigenous languages: Irish and Ulster-Scots. There is no particular policy to promote the languages of migrant communities. Drawing on ethnographic observations and two focus groups, the article analyses the language dynamics of eight Belfast-based families. It further demonstrates how these parents become policy intermediaries by monitoring their children's heritage language learning through explicit teaching, creating a favourable literacy atmosphere at home, ensuring its use in the family through continuous policing and developing identity through constant dialogue with children about Indian culture. Although the under-the-radar participation of these parents may appear intermittently in the policy discourse, their actions can be interpreted as bottom-up language planning to contest the monopoly of the dominant language and culture in the broader community.

KEYWORDS: Family Language Policy, heritage languages, migration, orientations in language planning, Indians in Northern Ireland

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1 Introduction

Immigration waves in many parts of the world, including Europe, Asia, and the Americas, have contributed to their pre-existing linguistic and cultural diversity through the spread of various heritage languages (henceforth: HL) and cultures.[1] In the context of migration, HL refers to the language(s) practised in the home and familial contexts (Fishman, 2001). For immigrant communities, HLs represent a fundamental means of shared expression and construction of ethnic identity (Corrigan, 2020). In the host society, however, the pressure of dominant language(s) on these minoritised languages is relentless, partly because many users of these languages can see more opportunities if they shift to the majority or dominant language(s). Despite these pressures, HL speakers try to maintain or reclaim their languages as active agents to varying degrees through intergenerational transmission and everyday interactions. Drawing on ethnographic observations and focus groups, the article analyses the language dynamics of eight Belfast-based Indian transnational families who are first-generation migrants to Northern Ireland (henceforth: NI). Their grassroots-level language practices in the home and community will allow us to (1) examine whether there is any hierarchy in practice regarding English and HLs in the home; (2) predict the kind of strategies these parents exercise individually or collectively to maintain their HLs; and (3) identify the factors responsible for success or failure of these strategies. These dynamics will be explored through the lens of language policy, broadly defined as any conscious decision or choice made about language(s) by social actors such as the state, community, or individual based on criteria like efficiency or symbolic value (O'Rourke and Nandi, 2019).

Whereas language policy and planning research has a long trajectory of investigating macrolevel frameworks, researchers' interest in studying how caregivers' decisions and strategies influence children's bilingual outcomes in the form of grass-roots level policies is relatively recent. Family Language Policy (henceforth: FLP) emerged only in the last decade as a sociolinguistic subdiscipline based on the Spolskyian (2004) framework of the interrelationships between language ideologies, planning, and practices. While initial research in the field focused on caregivers' agency and different literacy-related practices in the home (see Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; Armstrong, 2014), more recent studies, particularly those investigating transnational families, have increasingly come to appreciate the importance of children's role in FLP and explained how their experiences outside the home, such as the school, playground, extracurricular activities, and peer groups mediate the family's language dynamics (Nandi, Manterola, Reyna-Muniain, and Kasares, 2022; Selleck, 2022). This analytical

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approach situates FLP as a multilayered disposition of power that recognises the agentive role of each family member and argues that 'home language choices and practices are essentially influenced by the individual family's perception of the macro social structures' (Nandi, 2018: 226). For an elaborate understanding of how situated language practices in the home are influenced by external structures, this article draws on Ruiz' (1984) well-known framework, which includes three basic 'orientations': language-as-problem, language-as-right and language-as-resource.

Ruiz defines the term orientation as 'a complex of dispositions toward language and its role, and toward languages and their role in society' (1984: 16). Together, these dispositions constitute the major arguments linked to language ideology and are therefore foundational to all language policy discourses (Ruiz, 1984: 18; cf. Spolsky, 2004). Although language ideologies and orientations can coexist, the two notions should not be studied as identical; the orientations can be interpreted rather 'as a manifestation of ideologies or a lens through which language ideologies can be examined' (Kaveh, 2022: 3). I am adopting this theoretical framework since research from a wide range of different geopolitical settings worldwide demonstrate that language policies at any level often have components based on one or more of these ideological orientations (Hult and Hornberger, 2016). However, these studies focused predominantly on the intersection between institutional policies and their implementational goals in the educational sphere, and very little attention has been paid beyond these two domains. This article argues that the framework is particularly useful in understanding the ideological challenges transnational families encounter in the intergenerational transmission of HL(s). Hence, it commences with a discussion of Ruiz' framework and connects it to FLP theories. which is followed by an outline of the sociolinguistic scene of NI, including the governmental policies and their immediate impact on the HL speakers and their families. The next section offers an account of the research methodology and culminates with an analysis of the research data.

2 Analysing parental actions through Ruiz' 'orientations' framework

Analysing transnational parents' agency through Ruiz' tripartite framework poses several challenges primarily because this demographic frequently selects the vehicular language of the host society owing to its symbolic dominance outside the home. Various prior studies underscore that these decisions are *de facto*, informal, and unplanned as a default consequence of caregivers' ideological

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beliefs (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry, 2008). For instance, the 'problem' in the *language-as-problem* orientation refers to a monolingual and submersionist ideology (Ruiz, 1984: 20) that considers the 'speaking of languages other than the dominant language as a deficit to be overcome if individuals are to be economically and politically successful and socially integrated into mainstream society' (De Jong, Li, Zafar, and Wu, 2016: 201). Therefore, some transnational parents may not see HL as a 'problem' unless their children struggle in developing competence in the dominant one. This is the case, for instance, with various Eastern European parents who migrated to NI immediately after Poland's incorporation into the European Union in 2004 with young adult children. Even though a large majority of them had limited competence in English, many adopted an English-only FLP in the home so that their progenies could integrate quickly into the host society (McDermott, 2011).

Another recurrent discourse within this assimilationist framework is often linked to the *language-as-right* perspective where the acquisition of dominant or majority language(s) is often associated with the minority language-speaking population's linguistic rights and their effective integration into mainstream society. While English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) courses for immigrants, peer language learning in state schools or similar submersion programmes in the United Kingdom are often erroneously linked to this orientation, Ruiz (1984: 23) actually explained this disposition concerning individual, human, and judicial or statutory rights as consolidating the nexus between minority language and culture. Notably, there is no specific legislation in NI to protect its HLs (Jones, 2021). Ever since the Belfast Agreement was signed (1998) (see Northern Ireland Office, 1998), the language legislation in this geopolitical domain have focused mostly on its two indigenous languages: Irish Gaelic and Ulster-Scots (McDermott, 2008).

Ruiz (1984: 27) proposed the *language-as-resource* orientation to contest the deficit perspective attached to the previous orientations. Although primarily considered optimistic, later research in this area emphasises that this orientation is not entirely unbiased (see Hult and Hornberger, 2016 to explore the relationship between neoliberal ideologies and *language-as-resource*). In the context of FLP, for instance, it can generate a hierarchy among HLs, particularly in homes with linguistically different parents, where one language may be more valued than the other owing to its growing economic importance or for community cohesion (King and Lanza, 2019). This is the case, for instance, with Mandarin Chinese in the United Kingdom. Of the 500 migrant languages spoken in this context, only this specific variety of Chinese receives special treatment from the Government elevating its status from an HL to a modern foreign language

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in the short span of two decades (Tinsley and Board, 2014). Therefore, it can be argued that when there is a perennial transference of majoritarian ideologies, state policy, and media messages from the public sphere infiltrate into the home space, the exterior and home become inseparable (Nandi, García-Ruiz and Manterola, 2023).

The actual language policy of a family, however, is more likely to be found in its situated practices than in planning decisions (Nandi, 2018). HL planning in transnational families normally involves a range of literacy-related activities involving prestige and identity planning of the HL and culture at home (Said, this issue), explicit teaching (Maseko, this issue), private tuition (Fogle, 2013), or discussing school experiences (Karpava, this issue) with them just to mention a few. Sometimes, an individual family's language management may also adopt a larger social role in HL contexts, as it occurred in the United Kingdom, where community stakeholders, often involving transnational parents, created privately funded supplementary schools as a response to the top-down implicit English-only policy prohibiting the use of immigrant ethnic minority languages in mainstream schools (Creese, 2009). These actions for the maintenance of HLs in transnational settings stem from the 'language-as-resource' orientation (cf. Ruiz, 2010: 159). Notably, the impact of these orientations on HLs cannot be studied in isolation without referring to the broader sociolinguistic situation where these languages are being planned. Hence, the next section offers a brief outline of the NI's top-down language policies and their immediate impact on transnational families.

3 Indian transnational migration and language policies in Northern Ireland

Within the broad framework of migration studies, transnationalism refers to 'the social processes by which migrants establish social fields that cross political, demographic, social, and cultural borders, maintaining relationships and connections that span nation-state borders' (King and Lanza, 2019: 720). As such, it intersects a range of political, ideological, economic, cultural, and geographical phenomena associated with social mobility, language, identity, human agency, and religious affiliation (Wei, 2018). The history of Indian transnational migration to the British Isles dates back to the colonial era. Later, during the early 1950s, the United Kingdom became an attractive destination for Indians due to a series of legislative changes introducing temporary skilled worker programmes. Most recent census results from England and Wales underline that India remains the most common country of birth outside the United Kingdom (Office of

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National Statistics, 2021). They speak a range of languages: the most prominent ones include Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, and Gujarati, to mention a few. These are also official languages in India with millions of speakers each. However, their importance in terms of cultural capital, community cohesion, and economic prosperity is often undervalued and research into these languages underlines numerous problematic issues, particularly in the field of intergenerational transmission (Curdt-Christiansen, 2020; Selleck, 2022).

In NI, Indians can be considered one of the oldest ethnic minorities, having arrived as early as the 1930s (Holder, 2003). Unlike their contemporaries (e.g., Chinese), the Indians displayed stronger levels of integration into the host society owing to their ability to interact in English (Irwin and Dunn, 1997). Their language skills facilitated business enterprises in the form of retail outlets and restaurants in two of NI's most populated cities: Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Whereas the initial flow of migration originated from the northern Indian states of Punjab and Gujarat, immigrants from other parts of the subcontinent soon followed. Although transnational migration to this slowed down during the so-called 'Troubles' (1968–1998), an ethnonationalist conflict in Northern Ireland that lasted for nearly three decades. The Belfast Agreement (1998) marked the official end of sectarian violence, and ever since NI has experienced an uninterrupted period of peace and economic stability, making this region an attractive place to live for migrants. According to the 2021 census, nearly 10,000 people of Indian origin resided in NI, representing around 0.5% of the total non-white residents (NISRA, 2022). Moreover, the employment characteristics of the Indian community in NI have become increasingly diversified over the past two decades. While the early settlers mainly operated family-run small or medium enterprises, the presence of the community has become more prominent in the hospitality, healthcare, education, and IT sectors in recent years. It is also worth mentioning here that most of the parents interviewed for this study retain an educated urban middle-class profile.

In terms of language policy, although the Belfast Agreement (1998) demands 'respect, understanding and tolerance' for 'the languages of the various ethnic communities', only Irish-medium education enjoys some protection in the form of a prerequisite to encourage its development (McDermott, 2008). Although NI's only formal language strategy, 'Languages for the Future', recognises the importance of 'mother tongue' maintenance for migrant children and argues that schools should build on the knowledge that transnational children bring to the classroom (Gillespie, Johnston, and Ó Corráin, 2012: 19), it does not make any concrete recommendation for the promotion of these languages. Then, in the

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context of statutory education, the policy rhetoric of *Every School a Good School* (Department of Education of NI, henceforth DENI, 2009) further advocates an English-only approach for non-indigenous children to ensure quicker access to the school curriculum. This submersionist ideology stems from a 'language-as-problem' orientation. Creese (2009) argues that if school policies undervalue the importance of HLs and cultures, it may leave a traumatic effect on their mental health in the long run. A recent study in NI concludes that many transnational students suffer from racism, anxiety, alienation, and 'difficulties establishing lasting friendships beyond their ethnic and linguistic group' due to their cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences with their peers (Jones, Greenwood, and Purdy, 2017: 4).

While various recent reports and studies from the region underline a few key areas of good practice such as the use of classroom assistants who speak heritage languages and events to celebrate the linguistic and cultural diversity in the school environment (see Kernaghan, Webb and Cariddi, 2015), only a few suggestions were taken on board by DENI. It includes the creation of a multilingual website for transnational families, the setting up of a Regional Support Service in the Education Authority to improve support to migrant families and, most importantly, initiating a pre-consultation exercise to review its policy in relation to transnational pupils (see Carruthers and Nandi, 2021 for more extended discussion). Because of the absence of an inclusive policy, the teaching/learning of HLs in NI settings normally takes place outside mainstream schooling, through various grassroots-level community initiatives, charities, or particular religious groups on a voluntary basis. This policy dimension has been elsewhere termed as the policy of self-reliance (Wei, 2018). Indeed, under such a policy of self-reliance, the maintenance of these languages depends mainly on parental interests and grassroots community endeavours, and only communities with adequate economic capacity can support their languages (cf. McDermott, 2011).

In the sociolinguistic scene of NI, Indians can be considered one of the most diversified transnational communities, particularly in terms of language and religion owing to the superdiversity present in the country of origin. The Indian Community Centre (hence, ICC) was established in 1981 in Belfast with the intention to promote awareness of Indian culture. Although the ICC claims to work towards recovering the individual as well as collective memory and identity by organising cultural events and ethnic festivals through HLs (ICC, 2022), it also functions as a Hindu temple, and is therefore frequently renounced by Indians from other religious affiliations. For instance, Indian Muslims are frequent visitors to the mosque associated with the Belfast Islamic Centre since 1978, while the Sikhs in NI converted a former primary school in Londonderry

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to a gurdwara or temple in the late 1990s. Nevertheless, in the post-conflict scenario of NI, organisations such as ICC or the gurdwara at Derry proactively engaged in a range of community development and outreach initiatives that aim to promote HLs and cultures. Irrespective of their diverse religious affiliations, many Indians continue to use ICC as a common space for non-religious gatherings as well. It is also worth mentioning here that part of my fieldwork took place on ICC premises which I will discuss in the following section.

4 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic research design. In policy research, ethnographic data collection tools are of particular importance since they reveal everyday situated practices of various actors at different levels of the language policy cycle. The primary research data were gathered from field notes, observations, and two focus group discussions involving 15 parents. The target research samples are Indian nationals who are first-generation migrants from the city of Belfast between 35–50 years old, from various occupations. To gain access to the participants, I relied on multiple gatekeepers who were participating in different cultural events around Belfast. Alongside the Hindu religious ceremonies such as *Dasera*, *Diwali* and *Holi* organised by the ICC, I took particular interest in assisting the coordinators in organising a range of non-religious events like film screenings, poetry recitations, Bollywood dancing, and India's Independence Day or Republic Day celebrations that attracted a range of linguistically and culturally diverse people. Moreover, as a transnational Indian myself and a native speaker of Bengali and Hindi, I quickly developed a rapport with the parents, and then, through 'snowball sampling' (Noy, 2008), I reached other participants. I communicated with at least one of the parents before the focus group to understand their family dynamics. This filtering process helped me take control over the sample size and select a diverse range of participants.

The observational data were collected in a structured and systematic manner in two phases throughout the period 2018–2019. During the first phase of fieldwork, several visits were made to the ICC. It was observed that the ICC space was transformed into a learning zone during the weekend, often hosting different extracurricular activities associated with different HLs and cultures. For instance, Gujarati, Tamil, and Malayalam were taught by a group of interested parents on Saturdays. Language learning is often accompanied by other cultural activities such as poetry recitation, theatre, food fests, and folk dance performances (particularly by Gujrati parents who concentrate on *dandiya-raas* and

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garba dance forms). Sanskrit, the classical language of India was also taught to children between 5–15 years on Sundays following the *Balagokulam* online curriculum developed by the National Sanskrit University in India (Balagokulam, 2022). Classes in various Indian classical dance forms (e.g., *bharatanatyam*, *kuchipudi*, and *kathak*), Bollywood dancing, and singing were also offered to children for a nominal course fee.

While observing these activities, I looked at the language dynamics of transnational children in various contexts such as the HL classroom and extracurricular activities during the break or when they were having a quick meal with their peers. This involved children's interactions with instructors, parents, and siblings or the same HL-speaking peers. A second observational element of fieldwork involved several home visits to five out of the eight previously interviewed families. I was invited to their homes often for a cup of evening tea or a social dinner where my intention was to gather observational notes to validate the claims concerning their HL practices during the focus group interviews. Focus groups offer insights on more concrete issues including interpretations around language choices, policy alternatives, and grassroots-level ad-hoc decisions linked to policy matters. Two audio-recorded focus groups with four families each were held to document the parental perceptions towards HLs. The following chart (see Table 1) gives an overview of the parents interviewed, including their age groups, HLs, predominant home language, details about children, and occupations. Fictitious names have been used to protect the identities of the respondents.

A range of prompt open-ended questions were designed in advance to engage them in this reflective process. Since individual parents may differ in terms of 'impact beliefs' (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry, 2008: 910), referring to the level to which parents find themselves responsible for determining their children's language practices, the intention was to include both parents in the discussion wherever possible. Each discussion lasted nearly 90 minutes and was conducted in English due to the participating parents' diverse linguistic backgrounds. At the time of this study, the children of these families were attending various primary or secondary schools around Belfast depending on their age group. The discussions were recorded with prior consent by the participants and later transcribed. The discourses from the transcriptions were analysed and the salient themes explored. While examining the pertinent themes, I was particularly interested in understanding how these parents perceived their agentive role as language planners and what (if any) collective narrative of FLP they were constructing through shared history, ethnic identity, and social experiences in the host society.

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Table 1. Profiles of participating families.

Parents' details including their languages	Age	Details about children	Occupations of parents
		Focus group 1	
Family 1			
Laxmi (Malayalam) Pravas (Malayalam) Home languages: Malayalam and English	44 47	Daughter (14) – came to the UK when she was 5.	Classroom assistant Ayurvedic Doctor and yoga teacher
Family 2			
Dipika (Hindi) Abhi (Garhwali and Hindi) Home languages: Hindi and English	43 46	Son (12) and daughter (9); both were born in the UK	IT Professional IT Professional (absent)
Family 3			
Anandi (Gujarati) Rajiv (Gujarati) Home languages: Gujarati and English	41 43	Son (10) – came to the UK when he was 5.	Human resource professional IT professional
Family 4			
Swati (Marathi and Hindi) Pratap (Punjabi and Hindi) Home language: Hindi	41 45	Son (13) was born in the UK	Restaurant owner Electronic engineer
		Focus group 2	
Family 5			
Elisabeth (Malayalam) Immanuel (Tamil) Home languages: English (Mom speaks in Malayalam occasionally to the daughter)	39 43	Daughter (9) – came to the UK when she was 7.	PhD in Zoology (homemaker) Postdoctoral researcher
Family 6			
Neeta (Gujarati) Saket (Gujarati) Home language: Gujarati	38 42	Son (12) – came to the UK when he was 6.	Human resource professional Software engineer
Family 7			
Sarika (Hindi) Piyush (Bhojpuri and Hindi) Home languages: Hindi and English	42 46	One son (13) and a daughter (11) – both were born in the UK	IT Professional Petroleum engineer
Family 8			
Shambhavi (Marathi) Alok (Marathi) Home languages: Marathi and English	42 45	Two sons (16 and 12); both were born in the UK	Software engineer Doctor (GP)

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5 Findings

The 'language-as-problem' orientation dominates the NI educational settings is evident from the top-down educational language policies advocating a rapid English acquisition for immigrant children as an essential component for successful integration (Carruthers and Nandi, 2021). And often, the 'right' and 'resource' ideological orientations are prominent among the Indian parents studied at the expense of their HLs, identity and culture (Purdy and Ferguson, 2012). The excerpts highlighting these themes follow below.

5.1 From ideologies to practice: Language policy negotiations in the family

Most couples, particularly those who come from the same linguistic background or have competence in each other's languages (seven out of eight families studied), unanimously confirmed that they see the HLs as a 'resource' and therefore, had no reservations in choosing it as their primary language in the family. The discussants in both focus groups also recognised the role that HLs play in maintaining ties with extended family members in India. In practice, however, as soon as these parents attempt to reinforce a pro-HL FLP over English, the home space transforms into a complex scenario of constant negotiation between languages. As such, the transmission of HL is a continuous struggle for these parents, requiring determination and constant policing to guarantee that the children reply in the HL. This is the situation, for instance, of Laxmi and Pravas, a Malayalam[2]-speaking couple, who reached Belfast with their teen daughter Bhagya in 2009. Although the parents consider the HL as a resource and are keen to transmit it, their 15-year-old daughter 'now speaks English and mostly English'.

Focus group 1

> Laxmi: We used to teach her Malayalam and especially Pravas [husband] was very keen on teaching Bhagya [the daughter] the language. So, he very strictly followed, I think, during the first three years and then it was the end of Malayalam. She now speaks English and mostly English. When we speak to her in Malayalam, she replies back in English. I constantly stop her and say, 'Can you now repeat that again [in Malayalam]?' And it is very annoying for her, which she doesn't do it half of the time. But, you know, just to make the point that you have to keep on remembering.

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The above excerpt, which shows that the couple made a conscious decision to teach HL to their daughter and 'strictly followed' a routine to implement it, is essentially instantiated by its deployment as a pro-Malayalam family language policy and management. Although they were to some extent successful during the initial years in transmitting the language, the situation changed as soon as Bhagya developed her own agency drawing on 'experiences outside of the home in a myriad of contexts such as school and peer groups' (Fogle, 2013: 178). Since English plays the dominant role in socialisation among adolescents of her age, she quickly replaced her HL, despite her parents' interests in creating the home as a secure place for Malayalam. Notably, Laxmi continues to assume the role of a custodian over her daughter's habitual linguistic practices by speaking to her only in Malayalam or through a continuous interruption during a speech act: 'I constantly stop her and say, "Can you now repeat that again?"'. Bhagya often demonstrates her disagreement with this practice and resists by exercising her own agency: 'she doesn't do it half of the time'. The mother's simple act of remembering [reminding] her daughter continuously about the parental language selection in the family talk and thus 'making the point' underscore that she still individually assumes the role of a stakeholder over his daughter's habitual linguistic practices.

Shambhavi and Alok are a Marathi[3]-speaking couple with two adolescent children, who are also interested in preserving their language. Alok, however, finds the lack of institutional support and the English-dominated exterior as responsible for their very often failed attempts to speak more Marathi at home: 'We are trying to keep our language alive and survive in this country without any external support'. Echoing her husband, Shambhavi further denotes that although they also have initially started teaching the language at home, the children 'haven't managed to carry on'.

Focus group 2

> Shambhavi: Although I speak in Marathi at home, they hear English everywhere. So, we tried to make them sort of read and write in Marathi and they do agree in the beginning. Then they haven't managed to carry on. It's very natural when you are living in an environment, you will try to match up. Here it is English, so, obviously, they will match up with English and that becomes the first language for them eventually. It's a natural thing to happen.

Shambhavi's reference to their children's language shift to English in Belfast as 'very natural' or it's 'a natural thing to happen' when they 'are living in an

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environment' dominated by a global language such as English alludes to the ideology of linguistic naturalism. In this ideology, the language is understood as 'a natural object' and the users speak the 'language unselfconsciously' and 'in an apparently natural way' (Armstrong, 2014: 576). The above extract also demonstrates how the English-dominated exterior penetrates the interior home space creating inconsistencies in parents' desired language practices. During fieldwork, several informal home visits were made to this family and my observational fieldnotes, for instance, confirm the dominance of English during the family talk.

Extract from fieldnote on 29/06/2019

> Even though the parents start a conversation in Marathi with the children, the children only very rarely respond in the HL. The elder son although sometimes answers back in Marathi demonstrating his basic proficiency in the language, he shifts entirely to English as soon as his brother joins the conversation. Soon the whole family ends up speaking only in English.

Hence, it can be concluded that the couple's attestations of commitment to Marathi and their hope for its continuance in the home domain seem to be contradicted by their incessant lapses in English. This discrepancy between the affirmation of HL and compliance to English, as many previous FLP studies have already pointed out, occurs due to the higher social status of a school language (e.g., English in NI), the role of peers in early adolescence (Nandi, 2023) and the symbolic domination of the majority language outside the home (Selleck, 2022).

5.2 When certain ethnic practices appear deviant and as a 'problem' to integration

Northern Irish society with its historiography of segregation, as these transnational parents underline, exerts influence over their linguistic as well as cultural lived experiences. These reagents include the peer pressure, tacit social customs, and school practices that are intimately linked to HL maintenance and Indian identity. While discussing their children's integration, three out of eight families revealed that their children had to go through a range of 'othering' (Staszak, 2008) processes in their school life. These experiences outside the home in the host society ultimately affected their family's dynamics, whether linguistic or otherwise. Otherness is defined as a discursive practice through which a socially dominant in-group represented by 'the Self' and 'Us', creates one or various subdued out-groups identified as 'them' or the 'other' (Staszak, 2008). Although

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the formulation of this discursive agenda may be real or imaginary, the stigmatisation of the term 'other' makes it non-legitimate by definition, therefore, prone to discrimination (Cushing, 2023). The ideology of 'otherness' is closely linked to the 'problem' orientation because it emphasises how majority and minority identity categories are developed based on linguistic, ethnic and cultural practices placing the HL-speakers frequently in a socially inferior position (cf. Ruiz, 2010). For instance, two families from Focus Group 1 revealed that their children were picked upon for their food habits or for speaking their home language in the school settings.

Focus group 1

> Dipika: In some schools, migrant children are not encouraged to speak their language or participate in practices like sharing the lunch box. I used to give them Indian food for lunch, and they were teased, and sometimes made fun of their lunchboxes. So, just to integrate the children, we changed to sandwiches now (...).
> Swati: Yeah, Roshan also went through a lot of this in primary school. So, he stopped taking alu parathas and all which taste like Indian food because his classmates were saying that an awful smell is coming from his food.
> Pratap (Swati's husband): We continued with Indian food at home. But at school, he still doesn't take it.

Akin to these families, Immanuel and Elisabeth, a couple who participated in Focus Group 2, also pointed out a similar experience where their daughter was cautioned in the school for eating with her hands.

Focus group 2

> Immanuel: As Indians, you know – we eat with hands (...)
> Elisabeth: So, she was not accustomed to eating with the spoon. Cathy (the daughter) was warned in the school. Then, the smell of the Indian food is different, and the kids started teasing her. So, she used to close the box and eat.

It has been argued that ethnic culinary practices in multicultural societies are not merely symbolic but function in 'tangible and concrete ways' (Reddy and Van Dam, 2020: 1) through which the migrants preserve their identity. These experiences underscore how children from these families went through an othering process based on their food habits and language choices, denying them opportunities to socialise in the school. Parental experiences where the children were

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'not encouraged to speak their language or participate in practices like sharing the lunch box' or 'warned' about eating with their hands demonstrate how certain Northern Irish schools are dominated by the 'problem' orientation. It also points to the concerns raised by Carruthers and Nandi (2021), where the authors conclude that 'valuing and promoting home languages is probably the element of good practice that is least frequently implemented' and 'is highly dependent on the view of the school leadership' (p. 279). While some parents (e.g., Swati and Pratap) carried on with 'Indian food at home', the children shifted quickly to 'sandwiches' or start eating 'with the spoon' to 'integrate' into the host society.

Another significant element in the othering process, as underlined by some parents, was accentism (Orelus, 2018). This hegemonic language ideology discriminates against someone on the basis of their 'non-standard ways of pronouncing words and towards their racial, social class, national and regional backgrounds' (Nguyen and Hajek, 2022: 195). Three mothers, (Dipika, Anandi, and Sarika) observe how their children swiftly changed their Indian English accent and adapted to a Northern Irish one.

Focus group 1

Dipika: The children are in a very hard position. They also have to match up with the accent. For us, it is very easy as our identity is already formed, they are in that formation stage (…)
Anandi: I mean, whatever they say, their English accent is different now.

Focus group 2

Sarika: When they're speaking with their local friends, they imitate the Northern Irish accent.

There is a body of research in sociolinguistics that focuses on how young immigrants intend to adopt a local accent since a foreign accent can lead to a lack of appreciation from native speakers or, in some cases, language discrimination (Creese, 2009; Cushing, 2023). The above situations – where Dipika notes that 'the children are in a very hard position' since they also 'have to match up with the accent', Sarika's explicit reference to the situations where her children are 'imitating the Northern Irish accent', and Anandi's realisation that her children's 'English accent is different now' – are attached to an accent hierarchy that stems from ideological discourses of authenticity (Woolard, 2016). To be considered legitimate, a speech variety must be perceived as deeply rooted in a social and geographical territory. In the context of this study, English spoken in a Northern

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Irish accent works as an indicator of the final product of integration for these children. Corrigan (2020) noted a similar trend among the immigrant Polish children in NI who quickly embraced the Northern Irish accent to avoid alienation in their school life. While discussing their children's quick adaptation to the Northern Irish accent, Dipika makes an explicit reference to their identity construction and interprets the loss of an Indian accent as one form of identity shift for these children. There is also a strong sense that these HL-speaking children are going through a process of 'cultural erasure' (Allahar, 2005) where the 'other' is forced to adapt the dominant culture removing or erasing their own customs, traditions, and language to become a desirable citizen of the host society (cf. Mirvahedi, 2023).

5.3 Planning language, planning identity: Towards a defence mechanism

While recognising some good practices in selected schools where the administration includes the translation of important official documents in some major Indian languages and celebrates various ethnic festivals (i.e., Diwali and Holi among others), these parents also note a hierarchy among HLs. Pratap, a Hindi-speaking father, criticises that some Northern Irish schools for considering teaching/learning Chinese or other European languages as a resource, whereas Hindi – the fourth most spoken language in the world (Ethnologue, 2022) – does not receive equal treatment. He further reveals that, during the initial school years of their son, the parents were advised by the school to speak 'in English at home' to compensate for their son's deficiency in the school language.

Focus group 1

> Pratap: The school is happy with French, Chinese, all these languages, and Hindi is also a language with many speakers, but they are not open to accepting it. When our son started school here, we're asked to speak in English at home.
> Swati: We speak Hindi in the family, so it was not possible.
> Laxmi: [W]hen we visited your place, I remember that you kept playing Hindi songs. Then, we started watching some TV series where they can learn Hindi.

The above situation not only underlines the school's 'English only' policy but exhibits a complex form of policy negotiation where it is attempted to have the English-dominated exterior penetrate the HL-speaking family's interior home space in order to govern their everyday language practices. However, the parents disregarded the suggestion entirely and carried on with their language practices.

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Swati's firm statement, 'we speak Hindi in the family, so it was not possible', underscores language choice not only as a 'right' (Ruiz, 1984: 22) discourse but also as a bottom-up resistance by the parents to external language governance. The couple's continuous choice of the collective pronoun 'we' while describing their home language practices indicates that they do not differ in their impact beliefs and act as custodians over their son's HL transmission. Therefore, the symbolic capital of English, evident from the principal's comment on privileging it over HLs in the home is to some degree offset by the couple, destabilising the normalisation and legitimisation of the dominant discourse through a counter-hegemonic FLP. Their language planning efforts to develop a favourable ecology for Hindi at home were further validated by Laxmi, a family friend and discussant. She recalls how during a home visit she noticed that these parents introduced Hindi through songs and TV series. When a home environment is rich in literacy materials and when the family members are supportive of home language maintenance, children's literacy development tends to improve (Curdt-Christiansen, 2020).

Another important aspect of HL management in some families involves the planning of a religious identity. This decision is linked primarily to the role that religion plays in NI's education system where most state-funded schools are either 'maintained' (largely Catholic) or 'controlled' (largely Protestant). In the post-conflict society of NI where this core segregation operates, the legacy of religion continues to influence many aspects of migrant parents' lived experiences, particularly for those who do not share either of the above affiliations. Neeta, a Gujarati[4]-speaking mother, stresses the role that Hinduism plays in her son's identity development.

Focus group 2

> Neeta: We were not very religious in India. Then, Om's (the son) principal once suggested that we should explicitly teach him about Hinduism and that he's a Hindu. I had never spoken to him about religion. Then I realised that, since we are migrants here, we have to make that conscious effort to make sure that our kids should understand about their roots because his identity crisis started when he found out in an after-school club that he was not baptised like his classmates (...) he regularly attends Gujrati and Sanskrit lessons in ICC.

India represents one of the most deeply religious societies in the world: religious identity often overpowers the linguistic one (Schiffman, 1996). Neeta declared that her family was not an active practitioner of Hinduism while in India: 'We

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were not very religious in India'. The situation changed when she became aware that her son had been going through an identity crisis since then. Her son was studying in a Catholic school where a large majority of his peers were baptised. For the most part, her HL management strategy closely intersects with identity planning where she makes a 'conscious effort to make sure that' their son understands his religious self as Hindu. Alongside constant counselling and dialogue about Hinduism at home, as the above extract indicates, she wants to infuse a sense of pride and self-identification in the use of the HL and sends him for 'Gujrati and Sanskrit [language of Hindu religious texts] lessons in the ICC'. In the Belfast context, this active proliferation of Gujarati and Hinduism, as Neeta expects, will equip their son with the necessary psychological strength and linguistic skills to enact his Hindu-Indian identity without any embarrassment outside the family. Interestingly, a similar trend was also noted by other researchers investigating the Indian diaspora in diverse situations (e.g., Mesthrie, 1991 in South Africa and Sridhar 2010 in Europe and the United States) who conclude that the first-generation transnational Indians often reproduce their religious affiliations and cultural practices from the subcontinent as tools for their HL transfer and the identity construction of their decedents. Ultimately, the above statement further recognises the role that ICC plays in addressing the parental needs of Hindu identity construction and HL preservation in the context of migration.

6 Conclusion

This article set out to study the language dynamics of Indian transnational families in Belfast and their situated practices in the home and community with regard to HLs. Drawing on the triplite framework proposed by Ruiz (1984, 2010), the intention was also to understand how the external social structure impacts the language selection and planning strategies in the family. In the Northern Irish geopolitical setting, the interaction between social and symbolic power manifests itself in the intangible 'prestige' afforded to English, the dominant language which possesses a greater degree of symbolic capital. If the knowledge of English is imbued with symbolic capital, this knowledge becomes susceptible to the discourses and dictates of power in the host society. In the scenarios described above, parents and children demonstrate the innate plasticity and hybridity in the deliberation between family traditions, ethnic identity, and languages. In essence, the sites for the intersection and overlapping of these discourses are subject to daily negotiations, variations, and appropriations. The individual practices of each family member in these arbitrations constitute a

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diverse and shifting topography. As the findings of the study further underscore, the Indian transnational families must negotiate the struggles between the realities of social pressure and public education demands involving rapid assimilation to the dominant language and culture on the one hand and the aspiration for cultural loyalty and intergenerational transmission of their HL on the other (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013).

Drawing on their impact beliefs, as this article demonstrates, each parent exercises his/her individual agency in the family through a range of language planning activities of which they take full ownership (cf. Nandi, 2017). It must be reiterated that the discursive constructs linked to ethnicity, Indian national identity, culinary practices, and family power dynamics play an important role in this process. While parents like Pravas, Shambhavi, and Alok believed in the explicit teaching of HLs, Laxmi continuously interrupted her daughter during the family talk to remind her about the parental language choice. Aligned with their Hindi-only policy at home, Pratap and Swati's literacy planning involve economic investment where the couple bought a subscription to the children's TV channels in Hindi. Neeta's HL planning, on the other hand, is closely intertwined with the development of Hindu religious identity. The family exposed their son to the HL, culture, and religion simultaneously in the house and in the ICC. Their actions, whether individual or collective, can be interpreted as a bottom-up language planning measure and a stylised form of resistance to contest the monopoly of British culture outside the home.

Whereas various othering discourses in the larger United Kingdom society categorise the HLs and cultures of transnational families as a 'problem' for integration (see 5.2 and 5.3), these parents contest this orientation through their daily practices and attempt to foster them in home as a resource. All Indian transnational parents took pride in being Indian and were not averse to orchestrating their own hegemony of HL and identity within the precincts of family and home. They often transpose this exclusionary religion or HL-based socialisation through private lessons and cultural activities. Moreover, the children's competence in HL is seen as something essential to maintaining a stronger connection with their extended family members in India and therefore pivotal for their progeny's identity development as British-Indians, which most participants aspired to achieve. It remains to be seen, however, whether these parents will be able to create the home as a secure space for HL development and raise their children as young multilinguals. The above interrelationship between various layers of linguistic dominance in NI, as this article validates, could be analysed through the prism of Ruiz' orientations framework and FLP theories and provides scope for further scholarly exploration.

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Notes

1. While 'heritage language' is a commonly used term in the United States and Canada to describe immigrant languages, the expression 'community language' is often used in the United Kingdom and Australia (Creese, 2009). For inclusiveness, I will use 'heritage language' throughout the paper as a generic term embracing all non-indigenous languages, most of which are used by transnational communities in the context of research.
2. Malayalam which belongs to the Dravidic family of languages is one of the 22 official languages in India and is spoken by more than 34 million people across India (Census of India, 2011).
3. Marathi is an Indo-Aryan language spoken by 83 million speakers (Census of India, 2011). It is also one of the 22 official languages of India.
4. Gujarati is an Indo-Aryan language spoken by 55.5 million speakers (Census of India, 2011). It is also one of the 22 official languages of India.

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