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Guest Editorial

Family members at the epicentre of policy discourses: Agency, negotiation, and local practices

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Abstract

The articles in this thematic issue of *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 'Family as a language policy regime: Agency, negotiation and local practices', are concerned with the impact of family (language policy) among the minority population, whether indigenous or otherwise, on the sociolinguistic makeup of the contemporary policy regimes worldwide. Although family language policy is already a well-established domain of inquiry, this issue points to the wide range of cases from around the world, including Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Iran, Lithuania, Northern Ireland, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Zimbabwe, to understand how (individual) pathways are formed and choices made in favour of language and cultural maintenance. While covering a wide range of factors and perspectives that contribute to our understanding of families' linguistic behaviour and the broader social implications of the discipline, these papers emphasise the complex relationships between language, culture, politics, and socioeconomic factors in today's global multilingual and multicultural mosaic. This edition further underlines a number of present-day requirements in the field, such as being able to examine children's or extended family members' agency, use of digital technologies for language maintenance, different forms of parental language planning and activism to mention a few. The collection has emerged in the wake of a symposium 'Family as a language policy regime: Agency, practices and negotiation' at the 20th AILA World Congress (19–20 July, 2023, Lyon, France) and a closed call for papers.

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1 Introduction

The institutional language policy and planning (henceforth LPP) can be described as legislations whose primary intention is to govern the 'linguistic lives' (Shohamy, 2006: 185) of its subjects through a range of normative, regulatory, and situated practices (Nandi, Kasares, and Manterola, 2023). As a named field, LPP commenced in the early 1950s, when the initial focus was to resolve the language-related 'problems' of emerging postcolonial nations through structured macrolevel frameworks (see Fishman, Ferguson, and Das Gupta, 1968). Later, with the advent of a critical research paradigm in the field since the 1990s (see Tollefson, 1991; Ricento and Hornberger, 1996; Stroud, 2001), these top-down mechanisms came under criticism primarily because they tend to ignore the role of human agents in LPP processes and thus implicitly favour the dominant languages in the process (see Johnson, 2013 for a chronological development of the field). Although the discipline continues to retain strong interest in state-run language policy formulation and planning programmes (see for instance Spolsky, 2009, 2021; Fornasiero, Reed, Amery, Bouvet, Enomoto, and Ling Xu, 2020; Yohannes, 2021), contemporary critical research in LPP offers an in-depth understanding of how the macrolevel issues of colonisation, power, ideology, identity, race, superdiversity, and global neoliberal economy determine to a great extent the fate of marginalised languages in multilingual societies (see Blommaert, 2013; Flores, 2013; Bouchard and Glasgow, 2019). When the institutional legislations and decisions are evaluated by their effect on the existing social structure, it offers a more politicised understanding of how policies can act as a mechanism of disciplinary power, hegemony and governance (Nandi and Mirvahedi, forthcoming). Analysed from this perspective, policies can also be seen as one form of a 'regime' (Geismar, 2015). The term refers to 'a set of rules and norms regulating the relations between a state-government and society' (Bendix, Eggert and Peselmannn, 2012: 12; cf. Foucault 1972, 1980). Since there is a constant transference of majoritarian influences, state policy and media messages from the external sphere to the home, the case examples discussed in this issue argue that the policy regimes are always already constrained by such ideologies that rule all institutions (Nandi, Garcia, and Manterola, 2023), ranging from the administration, legislations, religious, and educational bodies to the institution of the family itself (cf. Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; King, 2016).

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The multilingual families stand as an ingrained domain of inquiry within various sub-disciplines of Applied Linguistics for quite some time. Whereas psycholinguists have perceived the family as a pivotal construct for acquiring language and metalinguistic awareness (see Ben-Zeev, 1977; Bialystok 2001, 2011; De Houwer, 2020), the socio/anthropological linguists tend to associate it with the individual's wellbeing (Wilson, 2020; Zuckerman, 2020) and the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural values (Fishman, 1991, 2001; Schwartz 2023; Blommaert, 2019). As such, the family's language decisions towards minority languages and cultures are vital as they offer important insights into the dynamics of identity formation and language maintenance in threatened language communities. Nevertheless, policy researchers' understanding of the family as an LPP regime is relatively recent. Although the term Family Language Policy (hence FLP) was first introduced by Luykx (2003) while she was researching multilingual practices in Aymara households, it emerged as a sub-discipline of LPP only after the publication of King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry's (2008) seminal article. Building on Spolsky's (2004) triplet framework, which explores language policy as an intersection between language ideologies (what the speakers think about their languages), management (what they plan to do with it) and practices (what they really do), it analyses the family as a 'critical domain' (Spolsky, 2012: 3–4) where policies are formed, appropriated, and executed through situated practices (also see Fogle, 2013; Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza, 2018; Mirvahedi, 2023). Ever since, the field has witnessed an incredible diversification and interdisciplinarity across the FLP literature (see Wright, 2020; Wright and Higgins, 2021; Vold Lexander and Androutsopoulos, 2023) where the particular focus has been on parental decisions with a more recent interest in children's agency (Luykx, 2022; Schwartz and Mazareeb, 2023).

2 Arguments for a Critical Family Language Policy (CFLP) research framework

Whilst some studies contributed extensively to various ongoing critical debates within and around FLP,[1] there is not much of an explicit discussion in the FLP literature about understanding the family space as a space for critical research. Hence, recognising the agentive role of individual family members, this issue attempts to contribute to the idea that each family is a 'community of practice' (Lanza, 2007: 46) with its own 'local[ised]' (Pennycook, 2010: 128) norms for speaking, acting, behaving, and believing should therefore be examined as a policy 'regime'. As power operates through regimes that disseminate this power through a knowledge/power nexus (Foucault, 1991), the notion of

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localised knowledge can be understood as views, ideas, and orientations emerging from the social practices (Archer, 2003). Local knowledge and practices, as Canagarajah (2005: 4) argues, are often 'context-bound, community-specific, and nonsystematic because it is generated ground-up through social practice in everyday life'. As 'powerful particulars' (Manicas, 2006: 72), the family members draw comprehensively on their local knowledge while executing their individual agency to either empower or refrain from certain linguistic practices (Nandi, 2017, 2024; Nguyen, 2022). Hence, the family can be analysed as a disciplinary regime where the caregivers seldom take up the role of custodians over their children's daily language conduct (Nandi, 2018: 208; cf. Nandi, 2024, forthcoming). These activities transform each family member into a subject of power discourses (cf. Foucault, 1972). A large majority of FLP research revolve around the connection between the parental ideological positioning pertinent through the choice, application, and use of language in the family, their visible and invisible language planning measures, and how these actions are perceived by their progeny. This is largely because, as principal caregivers, they offer the children material, human, social, and cultural capital whose transference generates 'inequalities in children's educational and occupational attainment' (Tzanakis, 2011: 76).

Akin to other policy regimes (e.g., administration or education) where the language decisions are negotiated and enacted on a daily basis, the meticulous principles, rules, and regulations that govern the family's inner life, the range of daily activities that are organised by the caregivers to ensure some form of 'apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes' (Foucault, 1980: 787) for their children, constitute the family's policy regime (Nandi, Kasares, and Manterola, 2023). This regimentation process in language maintenance or revitalisation contexts may involve a wide range of parental language management activities and situated linguistic practices (e.g., Guardado, 2018). It is also important to note that the language planning decisions tend to vary according to the family's structure, relationships, social relations, the geo-political settings where they reside, parental expectations, their knowledge about bilingualism, the family's access to different types of Capitals (Bourdieu, 1991), literacy environment at home, and so on (Nandi and Devasundaram, 2017). Caregivers' language management techniques regarding their children's language use may involve a range of supervisory techniques such as correcting errors in the target language, explicit teaching, helping with homework, or, in some cases, seeking external professional help from private tutors (see Busani; Mirvahedi and Nawasser; Nandi; Said's articles in this issue). It also important to note that, along with caregivers, children are also active participants in the family's policy regime. Even though the caregivers'

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agency intends to determine the children's linguistic practices, as subjects of this regime, the children may also resist and contest the parental language choices (Wilson, 2020; Smith-Christmas, 2022; Nandi, 2023, forthcoming).

The above discussion further validates the Foucauldian claim of a power/knowledge nexus, as 'there are no instructional approaches [even inside the family domain] where knowledge, language use, and literacy practices are neutral. Access to literacy and languages are limited to unequal power relations' (Shohamy, 2006: 79). How power operates through various agents inside the family domain will be explored in detail in the articles in this issue. Drawing on the dynamics of indigenous and heritage language-speaking families and their grassroots-level language practices in the home and community, this double issue offers nine FLP cases from various multilingual settings around the world including Cyprus, Germany, Estonia, Iran, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Zimbabwe. These case examples bring into focus the multifaceted and multisited nature of families' language dynamics when it comes to decisions about language use and learning, not only within the family itself but also in their relationship with the exterior society.

3 Methodological considerations

Methodologically, the articles address the issue of patterns of the intergenerational transmission of language and culture in multilingual and multicultural families. They show that we can study it systematically to objectively assess the discourse on the threat to language and culture and disregard possible political manipulations on this issue. Whilst the researchers have been using a wide range of innovative research methodologies to study FLP[2] within the broad spectrum of LPP processes the articles in this issue rely to a great extent on qualitative ethnographic research methods in terms of data collection. Whereas some commentators may argue that ethnography lacks one 'clear and systematic taxonomy' (Hammersley 2006: 3), policy researchers contend that ethnographic approaches (e.g., observations, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and related tools) look beyond the propositional meaning in the text of the subjects to reveal how they express their language ideologies through declared or practised decisions (cf. Johnson, 2013; Rampton, Maybin, and Roberts, 2015). These tools also shed light on everyday localised language practices of different policy intermediaries and underline how their situated practices interact with macrolevel policies (Ricento and Hornberger, 1996).

Both content and discourse analytical tools have been used for data interpretation. Employing a multiple case study approach, the purpose is also to reveal

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the key challenges the caregivers come across and the negotiations they must do while implementing their FLPs. This analytical approach is considered useful for policy assessment on the ground since various cases collectively stipulate patterns of good practice during the implementation of a specific policy or programme, providing examples of the policy impact on the ground (Keddie, 2006). The case examples discussed in this issue further reveal how caregivers across different geopolitical settings, whether indigenous or in the context of migration, exercise their disciplinary regime and become policymakers in their families and in the community. As such, the articles in this issue allow us to (1) evaluate how bi(multi)lingual parents create visible and/or invisible language policies across indigenous and migration contexts; (2) predict the kind of strategies parents use individually and/or collectively to contest the linguistic governance of dominant languages; (3) identify the factors responsible for success or failure of these strategies; and (4) examine whether grassroots level mobilisations by various policy actors (i.e., parents, language activists, and educators) serve to promote the use of a minoritised languages.

We hope that after reading this issue someone will suggest universal methods of conducting research on self-description of linguistic behaviour and linguistic ideology in mixed families, interviews, questionnaires, and their triangulation, allowing us to understand how linguistic and cultural identities and language attitudes are universally constructed in a world so diverse but striving for universal understanding.

4 Structure

The issue commences with a 'Foreword' by Lyn Wright Fogle called 'The nexus of family language policy'. In this short segment, the author situates the studies presented in this double issue and underlines the temporal and spatial dimensions of FLPs, their ability to be a means of constructing belonging in transformative times when family members use more or less heritage and societal languages or use them differently, depending on social and historical contexts.

In 'Family language policy in the minority and migration contexts of Cyprus: The issues of heritage language (incomplete) acquisition, use, attrition, maintenance, and transmission', Sviatlana Karpava presents an exploratory study of a heterogeneous sample of second-generation immigrants and speakers of minority languages in Cyprus. Karpava's findings support Spolsky's (2012) model of language policy, as it is the language ideology, language practices, and language management that determine the family language policies of minority and immigrant families in Cyprus. Karpava's main contribution is that she used a mixed

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method to study different language constellations in order to better understand the scope of family language policy as a field of study. Karpava concluded that parental choices, attitudes, and beliefs, implicit or explicit, are critical to mother tongue support and mother tongue literacy development.

In 'Parental ideologies in multilingual Family Language Policies in the Basque Autonomous Community (Spain)', Maite Garcia-Ruiz, Ibon Manterola, and Ane Ortega attempt to discuss the beliefs, hopes, and expectations of a group of parents engaged in multilingual parenting of their children in Basque, Spanish, and English. Using focus groups and individual interviews, the authors argue that parents still have positive attitudes toward multilingualism and that the 'more languages the better' strategy, already identified in the early 21st century Basque Autonomous Community, is still a powerful linguistic ideology. The main contribution of this study is the finding that parents can establish a hierarchical configuration related to the linguistic values attributed to each of the three languages.

'Blurring the binaries of home/school in family language policy: Parents as teachers in heritage language lessons', by Busani Maseko, draws on the concept of 'the family as space' (Lanza, 2021) to explain how the Ndebele language was suddenly allowed to flourish during the home heritage language classes caused by COVID-19 school closures. This is an ethnographic study that first interprets parents' self-reports of their family language policies and looks specifically at how parents use their teacher authority during heritage language lessons to strengthen 'the family as a space' that supports Ndebele and then identifies the consistency of these explicit family language policies with actual practices derived from lesson records. The main contribution of this study, which shows how children's heritage language tasks have become important aspects of family language policies, disputes, and negotiations, is that it draws on and complements family language policy concepts and Bourdieu's notion of 'legitimate language'.

In 'Grandparents as custodians of Arabic as a heritage language in the United Kingdom', Fatma F. S. Said looks at the case of three-generation families where multigenerational families share the same physical space and engage in the same activities, such as the dynamics of raising children, eating together, and how time is spent and allocated. This naturally makes for a different relationship than in families where only parents and their children live together. Not only does Said confirm Harwood's (2000) view that grandparent-grandchild interaction is unique and filled with emotional language, storytelling, sharing, and creative use of language, but she also convincingly shows how this conversation reinforces the need for connection and the expression of love, which certainly makes heritage language learning more appealing than with parents.

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In 'Family Language Policy and dialect maintenance in the Lithuanian diaspora', Meilutė Ramonienė and Jogilė Teresa Ramonaitė use Spolsky's (2004, 2012) concept of family language policy and Curdt-Christiansen and Huang's dynamic model (2020) to study dialect maintenance in the Lithuanian diaspora resulting from three waves of emigration, each with its own language beliefs and attitudes. The emigrants of the first wave were mostly inhabitants of rural areas and left Lithuania at a time when standard Lithuanian was still in the process of formation. Their linguistic beliefs and attitudes towards language were shaped by the linguistic practices and norms of their rural communities. In general, they knew and used only their native dialect since the standardised form of the language was not yet generally accepted. Emigrants of the second wave left Lithuania during the period of pre-war independent Lithuania. The national language policy emphasised the importance and prestige of the standard language. Second wave emigrants probably internalised these linguistic beliefs and attitudes, regarding the standard language as prestigious and important. The language beliefs and attitudes of third-wave emigrants are similar to those of the second wave, that is, they may also value standard language and recognise its prestige. They still have a positive attitude towards Lithuanian, but they do not actively promote its use in their family and do not favour transmitting the language on to the next generation.

In 'Digital technologies and reported language practices within the Russophone families in Estonia, Germany, and Sweden', Natalia Ringblom, Anna Ritter and Anastassia Zabrodskaja, broaden the discussion of family language policy in relation to three interrelated areas, namely language practice, attitudes towards language, and digital technology. Through the analysis of parent interviews, the authors try to find out how digitalisation is changing family language policy, whether native Russian speakers really learn anything by communicating through social media with family members, how digital tools can be used to promote heritage language transmission, and how technology is used in language policy/transmission. It was digital media that helped study participants in the three countries reconnect with their relatives and acquaintances, not only in Russia but also around the world. In Germany and Sweden, respondents said that, because of this, they use Russian to a greater extent again, and in Estonia it helps maintain linguistic and cultural ties in Russophone communities and diasporas. Their study is important because very little is known about the opportunities for children to learn heritage language literacy through digital technology in these countries.

In 'Towards conceptualizing "demographic agency" in family language policy: The case of Arabic-Persian bilingual families in Iran', Seyed Hadi

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Mirvahedi and Kamal Nawasser take Fishman's (1991) emphasis on face-to-face micro-interactions in language maintenance processes as a starting point and argue that, to do so, families must live in a sociolinguistic environment where settlement demographic patterns push for face-to-face interactions. Their research aims to articulate and illustrate, through a realist social approach to the study of family language policy (Mirvahedi, 2021) and the concept of 'demographic agency' (Sealey and Carter, 2004), how densely populated regions or neighbourhoods where minority language speakers live can create conditions conducive to minority language speaking. Children are socialised in it, which leads to successful transmission of the language. Mirvahedi and Nawasser convincingly demonstrate how 'demographic agency' can be a strong competitive advantage against official structures such as top-down monolingualism.

'Family dynamics towards heritage language maintenance: The case of Indian transnationals in Northern Ireland', by Anik Nandi, explores the family language policies and practices at the grassroots among heritage language speakers who are first-generation migrants of Indian origin in Northern Ireland. Methodologically, this study is based on a study of eight Belfast families through ethnographic observation and two focus groups. Employing the analytical framework of 'language as a problem, right or resource' proposed by Ricardo Ruiz (1984), Nandi analyses the FLPs and lived experiences of Indian transnational parents in post-Brexit Northern Ireland. The findings illustrate how each parent exercises his or her individual agency through a series of authoritative resource allocations to achieve the language maintenance and transmission. This is the very first academic article on FLPs of Indian transnationals in Northern Ireland who happen to be one of the oldest ethnic minorities that arrived in this geopolitical territory as early as the 1930s.

To conclude, Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen's commentary article, 'Family language policy: Enriching the field and expanding the scope', highlights the methodological contributions and theoretical approaches used in the case studies, written against the backdrop of current political, transnational, communication, social and economic change and upheaval.

5 Key generalisations and directions for future research

The purpose of this double issue is to analyse the family language dynamics through the lenses of critical theories. Overall, we hope that the extensive use of the critical language policy research frame in various papers in this issue (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen; Busani; Mirvahedi and Nawasser; Nandi; Said; Wright in particular) will inform the reader concerning the complex interplay

between structure, society, culture, and family members' agency more generally. Moreover, our volume also includes one review essay and eight book reviews in the diverse areas of (family) language policy. As guest editors, we hope that the combination of original articles and focused book reviews outlining the current theoretical and conceptual developments in the field may interest the FLP researchers of all levels.

Although some of the articles discuss children's agency, it would also be enlightening to investigate further the emotional wellbeing and experiences of bi(multi)lingual children growing up with linguistically different parents. Moreover, the research on how caregivers' gender impacts children's language choices or siblings' influencing each other's language use is still very limited (for exceptions, see Wright, 2020; Selleck, 2023). Finally, going beyond the westernised idea of the family as a nuclear space, it may be the time to reconfigure the description of 'family' itself (cf. Wright and Higgins, 2022). Until recently, research in this area has drawn comprehensively from Western/Northern theoretical frameworks. What remains invisible from this perspective are the realities that have existed and continue to emerge outside the Euro-American 'Northern' settings, particularly in the contexts of the Global South. To understand these dynamics, more cross-disciplinary collaborative research comparing the contexts of the Global North and South are required.

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Notes

1. See for example, Revis (2019) on the Bourdieusian understanding of *habitus*; Nandi (2018, 2023) on Foucauldian language *governmentality*; Soler and Zabrodskaja (2017); O'Rourke and Nandi (2019) on *newspeakerness*; Lomeu Gomez and Lanza (2020) on *Southern Epistomologies*; Karpava, Ringblom and Zabrodskaja (2020) on *linguistic landscape*; Mirvahedi (2021) on *social realism*; Piller and Gerber (2021); Selleck (2022) for a gendered take on FLP; Karpava, Ringblom and Zabrodskaja (2019, 2021) on *translanguaging* in the family; or Moustaoui and Poveda (2022) on *neoliberal* practices in the family domain.
2. See Nandi (2017, 2024) for families' self-recorded data; Selleck (2017) for ethnographic chats; Wilson (2020) for language portraits; Álvarez-Mosquera, Marín-Gutiérrez and Iglesias-Álvarez (2023) for Implicit Association Test to explore family member's language perception; etc.

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