Family Language Policy: Interdisciplinary Components of an Emerging Research Field in regard to Childhood Bilingualism

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Abstract

Whereas language policy primarily dealt with the wider, state-nation policy on language use, this paper conversely focuses on the micro-level of language policy and aims to point out the critical role of families and family language policy (FLP) in shaping language practices, ideologies and language management at family domain. FLP could resist broader language ideologies by transforming family language ideologies into language practices and language management that support the development of active or additional childhood bilingualism. Through a review of the interdisciplinary components of family language policy, this paper aims to illustrate qualitative aspects of non nonlinear, multilevel and dynamic relationships between each one of these core components and childhood bilingualism. In this review, an introduction to family language policy as a research field is included as well as some of the pioneering researches that attempted to spotlight the way parental agency in regard to each of the three FLP components could shape, explicitly or implicitly, language policy and language use into the family domain. Research on family language policy could be a valuable resource and tool in order for policy-makers or schools to be enlightened and support the maintenance of minority/heritage/community languages and the development of childhood bi- or multilingualism and language learning through language education policy, bilingual education and, for teachers, culturally sensitive and well- structured bilingual methods in classroom teaching.

Keywords: *family language policy, bilingualism, minority/heritage/second language, language acquisition, home literacy practices.*

1. Introduction

Family is a distinct sociolinguistic domain that shapes a significant sociocultural context. Research on linguistic practices of family context, where macro- and micro-sociolinguistic realities intertwine, substantially contributes to the development of theories for children's language socialization and language acquisition.

Diverse family backgrounds – relating to the cultural origin of parents and/or home languages – indicate that children will be socialized into at least two distinct 'communities of practice'. As a 'community of practice', family members could follow different norms in terms of language use and language culture rather than follow the dominant/majority language norms [1]. More specifically, according to Lanza (2007), in case one of the parents or both parents' language(s) is not the language of the wider community ('foster bilingualism'), 'family bilingualism' arises. Especially when social bilingualism or multilingualism is not the mainstream language norm, those families face daily challenges in their attempts to cultivate childhood bi- or multilingualism and maintain minority or heritage language(s) which usually stand as children"s second language(s).

2. Family language policy as a research field

Exploring the relationship between the individual, family and community, family language policy (FLP) aims for answering questions such as: why do some immigrant groups maintain their language, while others do not; why do some children become bilingual in monolingual societies, while others are raised as monolinguals in bilingual or multilingual communities, etc. FLP is a growing and useful field of research, as it bridges the gap between, draws from and contributes to other research fields like (education) language policy, child language and literacy acquisition and language socialization.

FLP refers to parents' explicit and/or implicit language planning for language use between family members [2]. In line with the Spolsky (2004) approach, similarly to language policy, FLP consists of three basic components: language practices, language management or planning and language ideologies [3]. In this field, research focuses on how parental language strategies and ideologies towards language(s), bilingualism and childhood language acquisition are influenced by the dominant

sociolinguistic and sociocultural norms (e.g. dominant language and language ideologies, language education policy, etc.) [4] and how the parental agency, in turn, affects: (a) the awareness of, the implementation, and/or negotiation of language policy and language planning in the family context, and (b) children's mental and bilingual development, school performance and, ultimately, the maintenance of the minority/heritage language(s) [5].
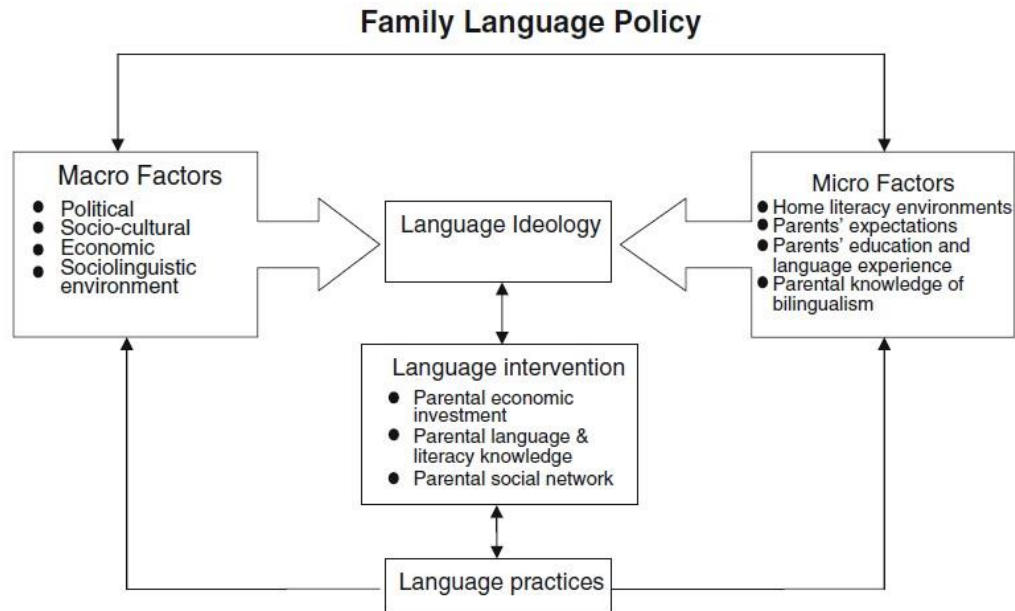

Fig. 1. Interdisciplinary model of FLP (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009)

3. Models of family language use

Language practices refer to patterns of language use within the family, through which family members realize, negotiate and modify their FLP in face-to-face communication. Additionally, the relationship between frequency and the quality of language stimuli in the majority and/or minority language use plays a crucial role in the development of each of the languages.

Barron-Hauwaert (2004) analysed seven types of language use within the family context: (a) 'OPOL-ML' (one parent, one language - majority language), (b) 'OPOL-mL' (one parent, one language-minority language), (c) 'Minority-Language at Home' (mL@H), (d) 'Trilingual or multilingual strategy', (e) 'Mixed strategy', (f) 'Time and place strategy', and (g) 'Artificial' or 'Non-Native strategy' [6].

While OPOL results are varied, research highlights Minority-Language at Home or OPOL-mL as the two most successful models for children's minority language use [7]; in these models, both parents primarily use the minority language at home or both parents speak the minority language at home and one of them uses the dominant language at the same time. De Houwer's findings (2003) showcased that the use of the dominant language at home is not an obstacle for the transmission of the minority language. OPOL"s success could lay on family language ideologies, the quality of the „language input environment" and the very specific parental discourse strategies.

4. Family language management and childhood bilingualism

Family language management (FLM) is defined as the implicit/explicit and subconscious/ conscious parental involvement towards the establishment of those language conditions which support language learning and literacy acquisition of the minority language(s) at home and/or community settings [8]. This definition completes the theoretical framework of Spolsky (2004), taking into account family literacy practices as part of FLM. There are two main trends in FLM: (a) parental language choices on which language(s) to use in parent-child(ren) interactions, discourse strategies that parents adopt, more or less consistently, in their language interactions with the child(ren) and home literacy practices (internal control for F) ( ) parental agency in search of heteroglossic spaces towards the development of childhood bilingualism and/or biliteracy and the maintenance of the minority language(s) (external control for FLP) [9].

Lanza (2007) showcased a link between OPOL language strategies and children's switching languages or language codes. Code-switching or switching from the 'established' language to the

other one is referred to as 'mixing'. The researcher identified five types of strategies represented within a linguistic continuum in which the left end stands for monolingual strategies and the other one for bilingual strategies integrated into parent-child(ren) interactions:
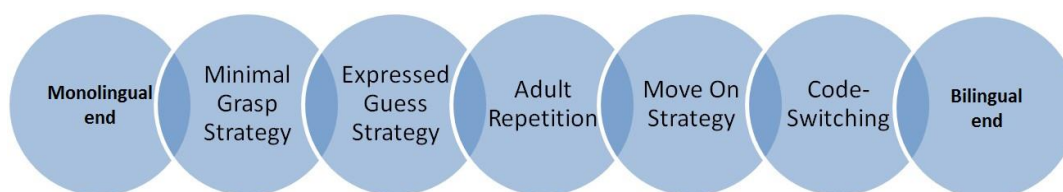

Fig. 2. Language strategies in the monolingual-bilingual continuum (Lanza, 2007)

Lanza's analysis led to the conclusion that childhood active/productive bilingualism is more likely to develop, especially when the parent, who uses the minority language, applies strategies corresponding to the monolingual context. However, Döpke (1992), who studied interactive strategies between parents and children, argued that the quality of parent-child interaction is more important for the development of active bilingualism compared to the number of stimuli in the minority language [10]. A different approach, called 'happylingual', is adopted by some parents to maintain the minority language; in that case, code-switching and the bilingual phenomenon are perceived as a 'qualification' [11].

However, language strategies, such as the above, may not be sufficient for the development of literacy in the minority language; active bilingualism in terms of oral language skills is not equal to additive bilingualism, which includes biliteracy. Biliteracy in the minority and the dominant language involves any form of interaction taking place in two (or more) languages through written text or in relation to a written text ('... in and around the written text") [12]. Schwartz (2008) highlighted the impact of literacy practices on the higher level of performance achieved by children in tests in the minority language [13]. Parental engagement to creative language activities and children's active reading in the minority language is linked to extended knowledge of vocabulary. Hashimoto and Lee (2011) in their qualitative study of three immigrant families of Japanese origin, residing in the USA, revealed that parents modified their practices, materials and resources to stimulate children's interest and enhance the functionality of literacy in the everyday life of the family [14].

Regarding the external control of FLM, parents could explore bilingual education programmes, bilingual schools or minority/community/complementary schools for the maintenance of children's second language. According to research by Leung and Uchikoshi (2012), advanced language skills of primary first-grade children in the dominant and the minority language connect to their participation in their mainstream's school monolingual or bilingual class in conjunction with family language practices [15]. In a survey carried out by Mattheoudakis et al. (2017) on the FLP of Albanian families in Greece, parental language management towards Albanian language literacy, both at home and the community (in the form of complementary classes) are linked to: (a) the acquisition of advanced bilingual skills and (b) children's commitment to the minority language, as shown by the extended use of the Albanian language in parents-children interactions, compared to children whose parents are more committed to the dominant (Greek) language [16].

5. Family language ideologies

The family model of language use could reflect broader ideologies and practices in relation to language(s) as well as parents' attitudes of parenting and children"s ilingual development. According to Schiffman (2006), language ideologies are unconsciously evaluations of the social usefulness of a language or language variety in a given society that reflect values and patterns embedded in language culture [17]. According to Myers-Scotton (2006), attitudes are distinguished from ideologies, as ideologies are more constructed evaluations [18].

Yamamoto (2001) studied bilingual families in Japan and showcased that the international importance of the English language and the high status of English in the Japanese educational system encourage parents' positive attitudes towards the bilingual development of their children. On the contrary, parents who express negative attitudes towards bilingualism and discourage the development of the minority language at home attempt to eliminate the linguistic, social and cultural distance in relation to the wider Japanese society [19]. Curdt-Christiansen (2009) studied how values, beliefs and practices as well as power differences in a minority context shape language ideologies and relevant language practices of immigrant Chinese parents in Quebec of Canada. However, parents'

linguistic ideologies and positive attitudes towards languages or bilingual development are not always transformed into relevant language practices and language management that contributes to active or additional childhood bilingualism [20]. Parental beliefs and attitudes towards family language planning may be influenced by public discourses (media, school, etc.) and specific aspects of parenting in the host country, although parents may rely on their language experiences and selectively draw information from expert advice and popular literature (press, internet, textbooks, articles on bilingual development and education, etc.) [21].

A different group of research focuses on parental beliefs and attitudes which are related to children's language acquisition. De Houwer (1999) represented parental attitudes towards a particular language, bilingual development or specific language choices and strategies in a continuum (negative/neutral/positive attitudes) and distinguished them from parental impact beliefs. Impact beliefs are related to parental perceptions of how parents view themselves as (un)capable of shaping and monitoring their children's bilingual development. De Houwer (1999) also represented strong and weak parental impact beliefs in a continuum.

6. Conclusion and further perspectives

The effect of FLP on children's bilingual skills is not unidirectional and linear but dynamic and multifaceted. Although parents' language ideologies might be the driving force of FLP, Schwartz (2008) showcased that children's practice in reading in the minority language, parents' language practices and children's positive attitudes towards the minority language are the strongest factors in acquiring the vocabulary in the minority language and that parental ideologies had a minor impact on children"s command of the minority language. Therefore, future studies need to include and extensively investigate child agency towards language use as part of the formation of FLP and its relevant outcomes for children's bilingual skills.

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