

Approaches to Language Maintenance through Family Language Investigation: a comparative study of four multilingual families in Manchester

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Abstract:

This study focuses on how the experience of multilingual speakers portrays their patterns, practices and instances of linguistic behaviour that feeds into their family language policies. Individuals, families, and broader communities are a primary means of contextualising those concepts (Kheirkhah, 2016). By looking at the experiences of four multilingual families, I examine how multilingualism is present and enacted in linguistic practice. In this respect, the concept of Family Language Policy (FLP) is useful in studying families' experiences of multilingualism (Schwartz and Verschik, 2013) and this was going to be analysed by observations, field-notes in addition to both audio-recordings of spoken interactions in the family and semi-structured interviews but were later removed given the pandemic of Covid-19 where only audio-recordings and semi-structured interviews were meant to go as planned: firstly, to know more about the linguistic experiences of the four families I am investigating, and secondly, to understand why they happen and thirdly how their linguistic diversity links to their identity positioning. Hence, investigating the linguistic practices of the multilingual speakers will help determine whether minority/heritage language maintenance is something my families consider important. Also, their ideologies and beliefs will assist me in providing an insight into the extent to which heritage language maintenance is present, and what are the factors that determine this. Ultimately, the project will enrich the literature about FLP and inform wider broader policy decision-making for minoritized bi/multilinguals and education. This research will provide further empirical data after investigating the variations in minority communities especially in times of a global pandemic where social encounters are very limited and advised against. The relationship between multilingual practices and identity construction has the potential to bring about greater recognition by society of the benefits of multilingualism in such a contemporary world through policies, teaching in schools and societal support of minoritized groups by learning about effective multilinguals communicative strategies in the family context (Seals & Shah's, 2017).

Keywords: Multilingualism, minority language, heritage language maintenance, identity

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