

Heritage language maintenance in multilingual families: Children's role in language socialization and shaping family language policies

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Theoretical framework

Language socialization approach (Goodwin, 1996; Ochs, 1996)

Family language policy (Fogle, 2013; King et al., 2008; Spolsky, 2004)

Interactional sociolinguistics (Schiffrin, 1994)

Family language policy

Language ideologies

Language management

Language practice



Participants

Five bi/multilingual Iranian families in Sweden

two school-aged children (3-17 years) born in Sweden

-Swedish schools

-'home language' classes

Focus family:

persian-speaking mother with passive knowledge of Kurdish

Kurdish-speaking father with high command of Persian

A 12-year-old daughter

A 7-year-old daughter

Data

video recordings of everyday family interactions (family mealtimes and sibling play) 5 hours at each family

Ethnographic observations

Interviews with parents and children

two phases with a one-year interval

The study

- Parents' and children's language practices and the ways they contribute to the construction, negotiation and instantiation of FLPs
- Parents' heritage language maintenance practices and children's responses highlighted children's active role in shaping FLPs
- Parents' language ideologies highlighted during interviews and their impact on parental language strategies and language practices

The focus family's language policy

One-parent one-language: The father used Kurdish, the mother Persian.

The children were encouraged and requested to use the respective language to each parent.

The language of sibling talk was Swedish.

The shared language of family interaction was Persian.

The parents associated language competence with being able to use each language separately.

Findings

- The children predominantly adhered to the family language policy in parent-child interactions especially during the first phase of the study
- When children engaged in language mixing, the parents oriented to this as a deviation from the language norms
- The primary target of these practices was the younger daughter who had a more laid-back behavior toward languages especially during the second phase of the study

Findings

The child's language mixing occasioned parents':

- request for translation* (Lanza, 2004): routinized questions such as *what's x called?*
- Announcements of alleged incomprehension of the item, *I didn't understand what you said.*
- Negotiation of monolingual heritage language context of interaction

Findings

The child's responses:

- She recurrently produced the translation however often, not immediately.
- Entailed accounts about her lack of knowledge in heritage languages e.g. *I don't know Persian.*
- Displayed negative affective stances demonstrating her resistance e.g. shouting or banging the table.

Findings

The child's non-forthcoming responses:

- entailed self-definition as someone who does not understand, speak or wish to learn the languages.
- Contributed to the extended trajectory or termination of parent-initiated language instruction.

Parents' explicit (and at times implicit) strategies:

- interrupted the child and flow of the interaction
- often led to the child's expression of anger and display of negative stances
- led to parents' termination of the language strategy at the moment of interaction



Mom *Mona what should we do?*
 Mona *>nothing<*
 Mom *we tell grandma not to come here =*
 Mona *=but SHE IS NOT COMING*
 (2.)
 Mom *((nodding, mouthful))*
 Mona *you're not even going [to Iran*
 Mom *[(I wanted to tell her to come*
 (5)
 Mom *but now I say Mona cannot speak Persian*
 Mona *ht::: ((big high pitch sigh, looks bored))*
 Mom *can you?*
 Mona *au ((nod, open mouth, bored))*
 Mom *prove it*
 Mona *((smile)) nm*
 Dad *she can even write*
 Mom *hm?*
 Mona *no*
 Dad *what, you can write A B C D*

Mona *um:: I don't know all the letters*
 Dad *you can write A write B write C*
 (2.) *((Mona looks at Sara))*
 Dad *okay*
 Mona *c (.) not c*
 Dad *you know D you know x*
 Mona *ou ((shaking head))*
 Dad *Sami do you know D?*



Mona **Dad** | | (.5) **dad** scho- (.5) e Sara
 Dad **sara what**
 Mona *sara gets (.) sara:*
 Sara *speak p- Kurdish with dad*
 Mona *no ((shaking her head))*
 Dad **sara what sara what** ((angry))
 Mona *((shrugging shoulders))*
 Dad **I don't understand**
 Mona *em ((chewing))*
 Dad **don't you like her to come with you**
 Mona **no**
 Dad **what does it mean**
 Mona **it's not so**



Sara criticizes Mona's wrong language choice.

Mona's responses are nonchalant.

She speaks Swedish with those who speak it and that includes her parents.

Sara is trying to take responsibility by developing and maintaining Mona's skills.

Mona does not object to her older sister's hierarchical positioning.

Mona disagrees with her sister's negative evaluation of her multilingual competences.

Conclusion

This reveals the complexity of their orientations to multilingualism and the multifaceted, multidirectional goals of the family as well as the larger societal linguistic landscape.

Being monolingual in the societal language is assessed negatively and although the younger sister defends her position of resistance, she still shows her preference for bilingualism.

Conclusion

•The child's refusals were multilayered:

they targeted the family's language policy, and can be seen as responsive to the wider societal ideologies (the normative preference for Swedish). Her refusals can also be linked to her being positioned in the family interactions as a language learner, who has to participate in language instruction instead of being allowed to use her easily available language resources.

Thank you for listening!