

# Language policy and multilingual practices in the family

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## Abstract

*This paper discusses on how language policy, language ideologies, parental language planning and children's role in the shaping of family language practices are associated in the multilingual practice context. The objective of this study was to explore the language policies focus on heritage language maintenance by negotiating and instantiating in parents-children interactions and contribution of children's language practices to shape the family multilingualism in the process of socialization. I have used qualitative research design to collect the data in this study. Three participants from different language background were selected. The research participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview technique to collect the data. The study concluded that family members' contribution to the shaping of family language practices and policies in daily life interactions is the most important and language ideologies play a vital role in language policy and language acquisition in the family of multilingual practice.*

**Keywords:** multilingualism, social language approach, language policy, language ideology, parents' language planning

## Introduction

Nepal is a multilingual, multicultural and multiracial country. The 2011 Census has been listed out 123 languages spoken in Nepal whereas ten years back, in Census report (2001), listed 92 languages. It shows that Nepal is linguistically diverse. Linguistic traditions, cultures and linguistic landscape have contributed to Nepal's diversity.

Multilingual practice belongs to intercultural communication for many due to the speed spreading of globalization (Canagarajah, 2013). Maintaining familial languages are also concerned issue in the context of increasing numbers of families. When people migrate from one place to another place or from one country to another country (because of marriage, job etc.) access to the heritage language in immigration contexts can be limited and problem can be created in using another language so the children become passive at home and at school in relation to speaking bilinguals or dominant in the societal language. In such situation, maintaining familial languages are important regarding to family language practice.

This study comprises the insights gained from family language policy studies (Fogle, 2013; King et al., 2008; Spolsky, 2004; 2012), language socialization studies (Goodwin, 1996; Ochs, 1996) in the field of interactional sociolinguistics and multilingual practice. The present paper explores the language socialization processes and language policies in the family.

Multilingualism and language maintenance practices are realized with school, contribute to language maintenance (Paugh, 2005) or language shift. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of family bilingualism, language policies, socialization, children's participation, language ideologies and interactions among family members.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to explore the role of family language practices and children in the shaping of family language policy. Language practice makes an interactional site for language learning and the development of bi/multilingualism. Language practices happen among family members, including parent-child multiparty and sibling interaction in daily life activities. Combining approaches to family language policy and language socialization approach are related in family interaction (Wei, 2012). The research questions are as follows:

1. How do language policy makers and language planners give equal priority and values to other languages in the family?
2. How do children contribute to shape multilanguage practices in the family?

### **Theoretical Framework**

As Vygotsky (1962), states social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development and language socialization approach (Ochs, 1996) is used as a theoretical framework that views family language policies are socially constructed by including explicit and implicit beliefs and norms that influence mundane language practices (Shohamy, 2006) in the family interaction. In accordance with socialization paradigm (Duranti, Ochs & Schieffelin (2012), children's engagement in the process of language practices are socialized to acquire the social values, norms and expectations are linked with different linguistic codes. Socialization is not a top-down process of intergenerational transmission of knowledge. It is dynamic and dialectic (Cekaite, 2012; Duranti et al., 2012; Goodwin, 2006). The family members: parents, children, siblings use shared, linguistic and embodied, negotiated dynamic, heterogeneous, linguistic and social identities and social relations (De Fina, 2012; Ochs, 1996). Language acquisition, social and cultural socialization are interrelated and they begin the moment someone enters a social community (Ochs, 1996, p. 407). Language socialization is the process through which children and novices are socialized through language to use language appropriately and meaningfully (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Language socialization as an approach (Bucholtz & Hall, 2008; Lanza, 1997/2004) that becomes meaningful to explore how children are immersed and participated in bilingual families in immigration contexts.

Language socialization is perceived as an intergenerational language transmission in the setting of family environment which is a complex, multi-directional, and nuanced process (Fishman, 1991). In immigration contexts, language maintenance or loss can start in the context of family interactions (Fishman, 1970; Lanza, 1997/2004; Li Wei, 2012, p. 1). Immigrant family members have a collection of lived experiences of multiple languages, discourses, social

domains, geographical spaces and they bring those together into the everyday life of the family (Canagarajah, 2008; Pietikainen, 2010, p. 82). Families thereby provide a unique intergenerational context for the study of heritage language maintenance or shift (De Fina, 2012; Li Wei, 2012, p. 1). In the field of minority language maintenance and loss regards the family as the driving force in “children’s language socialization within the context of both minority and majority languages” (Schwartz, 2010, p. 173). The present interest in intergenerational communication, and language decisions, behavior and maintenance in immigrant families falls within the scope of research on family (Tannenbaum, 2012).

This present study identifies and explores multiple factors: language policy, children’s role in shaping family language practice and language ideologies and language planning that affect family multilingual practice development.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a phenomenological research design, which ‘describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon’ (Creswell, 2007, p.57) with a focus ‘on the participants’ perceptions of the event or situation’ (Williams, 2007, p.69). So this research is based on qualitative in nature in that it attempts to explore information of guardians’ views about how multilingual practices take place in the family when the family members migrate from one language background to another language background culturally and geographically within the same country.

The participant of the study consisted of one female and two male participants from different places of Nepal. First participant is Sangita Tamang Neupane, aged 30 years old, from Goldhunga, Kathmandu. She is a teacher of Nepali subject in Dongden Devi Secondary School, Rubee Valley Municipality -2 Tipling, Dhading. She is a Nepali language speaker first now she speaks both Nepali and Tamang language in the family. Second participant is Norsang Tamang, aged 32 years old, from Tipling, Dhading. He teaches English subject in Dongden Devi Secondary School, Rubee Valley Municipality -2 Tipling, Dhading. He speaks Tamang language and Nepali language in the family. And third participant is Shiva Kumar Rai, aged 55 years old, from Dhobighat, Lalitpur. He is the Director of Nepali National Language Preservation Institute. He speaks Rai language, Limbu language, Nepali and English language in the family.

The information collection instrument consisted of two parts, background interview and open-ended questions asked orally. The background interview interrogated about their name, gender and age. Open-ended interview mainly included research questions of the study. The participants were asked to express their experiences and views regarding multilingual practices in the families. To conclude, the research was conducted qualitatively as the semi-structured interview technique was used to gather information from the participant’s point of views.

The study was employed a two-step procedure: information collection and information analysis. In information collection, the participant was asked to express their experiences. All the

information was collected by the researcher. In information analysis, the information obtained from the participant was coded, interpreted and analyzed. The irrelevant statements were excluded in the limits of the research question interrogating the background of the participants. Finally, information was discussed and conclusion was drawn.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Language Policy in the Family**

Language policy involves the intersection of language ideologies, management and language practice (Shohamy, 2006). Language policy creates an environment of language management and language use daily. To quote the participant (1):

When I came in the family of Tamang language background from Nepali language background after my marriage, there was not any opportunity to speak in Nepali language because my mother in law and father in law would speak only Tamang language in the family. I was obliged to learn Tamang language for daily life activities in the family. It was so difficult situation for me in the days of very beginning of my entering in the family of Tamang language spoken. There was not any policy about speaking Nepali language in my husband's family. Me and my husband made a policy about using Nepali language. I used to speak Nepali language with my husband but I used to speak Tamang language with my mother-in law and father-in law, and with neighbors. Now me, my husband and my small daughter speak three languages (Tamang, Nepali and English). We speak much Tamang language in our family but sometimes we try to speak in English also. Speaking three languages in our family are allowed.

From above mentioned expression, we can understand that there should be provision of language policy, language management and language practice in the family. Language policy should be made from the 'bottom-up' level not only 'top-bottom' level. Priority or equality should be given to all languages in the family or in the society.

Language policy works for investigating about language practices in the context of language ideologies and management efforts (Bonacina, 2010; 2012; Shohamy, 2006, p. xv;). To understand the interaction between micro and macro social domains and the way they influence each other, 'bottom-up' forces need to be studied to the same extent as 'top-down' forces (Spolsky, 2012, p. 3).

### **Children's Role in Shaping Family Language Practices**

Children are viewed as active members of communities (Corsaro, 2005; Goodwin, 1990). Children can play a vital role to give a good shape of family language practices in their family. They become active when they use multilanguage in the family and society. To quote the participant (2):

My family members speak Tamang language in such activities (e.g., singing, storytelling, cooking, drinking, sleeping etc.). Sometimes our children learn new Tamang songs from

electronic gadgets. They try to imitate Tamang language speech when they heard from others. Not only that sometimes they articulate Tamang language news. They are so interested to sing our cultural songs. They sing Nepali child songs, folk songs and as well as English pop songs. In this way, multilingual practices happen in my family.

Above mentioned expressions make a clear concept on children's role to shape and to make alive multilingual practices in the family of indigenous language group. By analyzing children's activities in different domains of language use, children are active social agents to give a good shape of multilanguage in the family and society.

Children have been considered as objects of socialization into the languages and cultural members of the community (Luykx, 2005, p. 1407). Language socialization studies have considered that the children are viewed as agents who act in the processes of their own socialization and who socialize their parents and other members into particular language practices (Duranti, Ochs & Schieffelin, 2012; Fogle & King, 2013; Gafaranga, 2010; Kyratzis, 2004; Luykx, 2005). Multiple languages have been used to negotiate access to do activities (Cromdal, 2001; 2004). In this regard, children's role is important in the shaping of family language practices and family language socialization through their interactions (Canagarajah, 2008; Fogle & King, 2013; Luykx, 2003). Without the presence of children's role in the shaping of multilingual practices in the family can be the less meaningful in the context of multilingual flows in the society.

### **Language Ideologies and Parents' Language Planning in the Family**

Giving children proficiency in the language spoken in their homes (L1) as well as the language spoken by the larger community can benefit individuals and society by increasing cognitive skills, humanistic understanding, achievement, economic benefits, linguistic ability, social skills and political cooperation between groups (Crystal, 2011, as cited in ACDP, 2014). To quote the participant (3):

Now we speak Rai language, Nepali and sometimes English language in my family. We husband and wife mostly speak our mother tongue (Rai language) in the family. When we migrated from Solukhumbhu to Kathmandu. We had to speak Nepali language to communicate with other Nepali language speaker. We learned Nepali language and practiced it in our family. We taught our Rai language to our children at first then we taught them Nepali language by translating Rai to Nepali. But when we sent our children to school, they learned English as well because of English language influence at school. We husband and wife planned to speak three languages in our small family. Though it was challenging, we taught our children Rai language to Nepali and Nepali to English by translating. When our Rai people come in our home, we use our Rai language but when our neighbor people come in our home, we use Nepali and then when my foreigner friends come in our home, we speak in English. See, this is our situation to communicate with different people. Anyway, our children show interest and curiosity to speak our mother tongue. We speak the more our language in the family. Our children feel comfortable in

the family and they can express their feelings, ideas, knowledge and experience in their home language. friends in their language. They share their knowledge in their home language with parents in the family.

This expression clarifies that the children are habituated to learn mother tongue to grasp the knowledge when their parents speak their mother tongue. When they speak three languages with different people, they feel more comfortable. This view is best supported by schema theory developed by Bartlett as this theory describes how knowledge is acquired, processed and organized. Schemata organize knowledge stored in the long-term memory.

An important part of the study on multilingual practices in the family highlighted the importance of language ideologies and their impact on parental language planning/language management efforts. Parents' experiences of migration and language learning have shown to promote children's bilingualism (Caldas, 2012; Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; King &Fogle, 2006; Piller, 2001). They believe that the children can acquire similar multilingual skills (Kirsch, 2012, p. 108). Parental language ideologies are also influenced by professional advice and advice from family members (King et. al., 2008, p. 913). Multilingual practices are beneficial for maintaining the cultural background and promoting economic opportunities (King &Fogle, 2006, p. 700). Language management in families is also motivated by parents' expectations about their children's language and literacy development. Children's language acquisition and societal language practice immigration contexts (Schwartz &Moin, 2012). When people move from one country to another country, language acquisition takes place unconsciously and language learning happens consciously.

### **Conclusion**

From the above result, different ethnic language group family has been using their own mother tongue on different occasion and multi-language practices have been found with different speakers in accordance with the context. Three participants from different language backgrounds shared their own lived experiences on the language policy and practice, multi-language planning and implementation in the family. I found that an importance of multi-language practice in minority language group family also has been given equal priority and place to other languages in terms of language usage and communication for multipurpose. Minority-language parents may be willing to maintain their heritage language in the family (King &Fogle, 2006, p. 696) and development of children's bilingualism in the family (Kirsch, 2012). Multilingual practice in the family is the best way of developing children's bi/multilingualism.

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### **Appendix: 1 (Questions for participant 1)**

1. How did you face the challenges when you entered in the Tamang language background family from Nepali language background family?

2. How did you learn Tamang language in the family?
3. How many languages do your family members speak in the family?
4. Do you have language policy and practices in your family now?

**Appendix: 2 (Questions for participant 2)**

1. In which activities does your family speak Tamang language? Why?
2. How do your children help to shape the language practices in your family?
3. How did your children learn to speak Nepali and English language?
4. Why do your family members like to speak multilanguage in the family now?

**Appendix: 2 (Questions for participant 2)**

1. How did your family members learn Nepali language after you migrated from Solukhumbu to Lalitpur?
2. What were the challenges and how did you face the challenges in terms of learning Nepali and English language in the family?
3. Were your children interested to speak Rai Language after you sent them in English medium school?
4. How do you plan multilanguage practice in your family?
5. How do you practice multilanguage in your family? Is there any strategies to maintain languages in your family?

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