Family language policy and transnationalism: Resistance and transformation

Organizers: Kendall A. King & Elizabeth Lanza
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Colloquium Abstract:

Family language policy (FLP) bridges studies of child language acquisition and early second language learning and bilingualism on the one hand, with the field of language policy on the other. Specifically, FLP examines language policy in relation to language use and language choice within the home among family members. FLP thus addresses child language learning and use as a function of parental ideologies, decision-making and strategies concerning languages and literacies, as well as the broader social and cultural context of family life.

Current research in FLP is marked by three important trends, all of which are evident in this invited colloquium. The first of these is intentional inclusion of a broader, more diverse range of family types, languages, and social contexts. While early FLP research tended to document two-parent, middle-class homes in which children were acquiring more than one European language, current work turns an eye to how these processes play out within minority language and/or non-traditional (e.g., adoptive, single-parent) families in transnational or diasporic contexts. Second, current research is characterized by increased emphasis on the family as a dynamic system, including the importance of child agency and identity choices, both enacted through language. This work documents the ways in which children achieve agency through resistance, participation, and negotiation. The third recent shift in the field of FLP is the greater emphasis on trilingualism or multilingualism, with a growing number of studies examining how families manage multiple languages. Current research in FLP critically analyzes the ways in which transnational and multilingual families create and transform local language policies and practices in their day-to-day interactions.

This colloquium takes up each of these trends through close examination of discourse data from Mexican, Spanish-Cuban, Arabic, Chinese, and Kazak families around the world. This invited colloquium draws attention to the ways in which children negotiate and resist family language policy; the mechanisms through which language ideologies impact language practices; and the outcomes for children and their families.
**Participants:**

Zhu Hua, Fatma Said & Li Wei  
*Birkbeck College, University of London*

Sarah Gallo  
*The Ohio State University*

Nancy Hornberger  
*University of Pennsylvania*

Mónica Vidal  
*University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa*

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**Kendall A. King** is Professor of Second Languages and Cultures Education and at the University of Minnesota. Her research addresses ideological, interactional and policy perspectives on second language learning and bilingualism, with particular attention to educational and sociolinguistic practices among Indigenous populations and Spanish speakers. Her work has appeared in *Applied Linguistics*, *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *Discourse Studies*, and *Modern Language Journal*. She is editor of the international journal *Language Policy* (Springer). King has held academic positions at New York University, Georgetown University, and the Center for Research on Bilingualism at Stockholm University.

**Elizabeth Lanza** is Professor of Linguistics at the Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, and Director of the Center on Multilingualism in Society across the Lifespan, University of Oslo, Norway. Her research focuses on multilingualism; she has published on language socialization of bilingual children, identity in migrant narratives, language ideology, linguistic landscape, language policy, and research methodology. Her work has appeared in various journals and edited volumes. She is on the Editorial Board of the journals *International Journal of Bilingualism*, *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, *Linguistic Landscape*, and *Multilingual Margins*, and the book series *IMPACT: Studies in Language and Society.*
I. “No, no Maama! Say “Shaatir ya oulede Shatir”! (Say clever boy O my little boy clever!)”: Children’s agency and creativity in language use and socialisation

Zhu Hua, Fatma Said, & Li Wei  
*Birkbeck College, University of London*

**Abstract:** In transnational and multilingual families, the learning and use of, as well as socialisation through, the so-called ‘home, community or minority’ languages is often embedded in everyday conversations during joint activities such as mealtimes. One aspect that is receiving increasing attention from researchers is children’s agency in language learning, use and socialisation. In this paper, we use the interactional data of mealtimes in a multilingual Arabic- and English-speaking family to examine how children mobilise their multiple (developing) linguistic repertories creatively to achieve their own interactional goals such as appeasing, resisting and negotiating with the socialization practices of their parents. Such language practices reflect children’s awareness of language ideologies (often contradictory and competing), and at the same time, challenge and transform family language policies and ideologies advocated by their parents despite the asymmetry in power relations and linguistic repertories between themselves and their parents.

II. Immigration policy as language policy: Mexican families’ decision-making in search of biliteracy for their children

Sarah Gallo  
*The Ohio State University*

Nancy Hornberger  
*University of Pennsylvania*

**Abstract:** In this paper we draw upon ethnography of Language Policy and Planning [LPP] to examine the complexities of undocumented families’ decisions regarding their children’s educational opportunities in the face of immigration policies and parental deportations. This includes both family language acquisition planning as families prepare for the possibilities of transnational schooling in Mexico as well as decisions regarding family migration. We highlight how limited opportunities for biliteracy development in U.S. schools shape families’ decisions, such as enduring family separations rather than choosing for their children to attend Mexican schools for which they are not prepared with the academic Spanish resources required for educational success. Methods for the larger ethnographic study included regular participant observation, video recording, and playback sessions in seven Mexican immigrant families’ homes, students’ classrooms, and the local community. In this paper we focus on the case of 8-year-old Princess following her father’s deportation to examine how her family engaged in family LPP within their routine interactions. Our findings reveal the unintended language education consequences of immigration policy as well as the complex ways that families---in the face of potential separation or repatriation---prioritize the importance of biliteracy development to prepare their children for schooling embedded with monoglossic ideologies in both the US and Mexico. We argue that educational policy and classroom practices centered on additive bilingualism and biliteracy development are needed to better prepare children---especially those from undocumented families within a context of unprecedented deportations---for educational success on both sides of the border.
III. Intergenerational interaction through heritage languages: A comparative study of Spanish and Mandarin Chinese

Mónica Vidal
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa

Agnes Weiyun He
State University of New York-Stony Brook University

Abstract: Taking a qualitative sociolinguistic approach to the discursive construction of family, we explore how heritage language (HL) speakers and their (mostly) monolingual grandparents make sense together. We analyze extracts from two sets of naturally-occurring conversational data—a composite, prototypical speaker of Chinese as a HL (He, 2006, 2010, 2011), and meal-time conversations of a Spanish grandfather with his multisited granddaughters (Vidal, 2014)—to gain a better understanding of the newer discursive demands in multisited/diasporic families as a result of global mobility.

Drawing on Goodwin’s (2006) concept of interactive footing, we look at dynamic identity and power relations. The data reveal that the younger generations know more Mandarin and Spanish than their grandparents know English. In making meaning together, they complement each other. Grandparents are more lenient in what is acceptable and discursively demonstrate an accepted understanding that the grandchildren they love communicate differently than the previous generations: in the Chinese family, it is the lack of understanding between the generations that ironically afforded spaces for both parties to be more creative and adaptive in language use whereas in the Spanish family, it is the jocular and humorous frames that facilitated intergenerational communication. There is a mutual adaptation across generations, and a wider range of linguistic and interactional resources used to make family ‘work’.

Our analysis provides further documentation that intergenerational members of a HL family shape each other’s language. Our analysis shows how they make space for creativity and flexibility in the sometimes-difficult communication between grandchildren and their grandparents.
IV. Reviving a native language: Kazakh as a school language

Juldyz Smagulov
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**Abstract:** In urban areas of Kazakhstan revival of mother tongue has manifested itself in enrolling Russian-speaking children in Kazakh-medium schools and kindergartens. This paper focuses on the ways parents interact with children learning Kazakh. Analysis of recurrent features of talk organization between adults and children reveals that in local ideology there seems to be “imagined locatability” (Silverstein 1998: 420) of Kazakh as institutional school talk: speaking in Kazakh is systematically constructed as a ‘pedagogic event’. By framing Kazakh as an object of teaching and learning, by stepping into the persona of a language teacher and assigning the children the role of learners the adults unfailingly evoke an authorizing realm of school. The high value of Kazakh as a school talk is also produced by its strict compartmentalization from everyday mixed variety – the ‘low’ form. By separating high value institutional talk from everyday vernacular speakers gain means of disassociating the language with lower status, rural background and backwardness. In this way, creating discursive dominance of Kazakh, even if only temporary, could be characterized as a way to legitimize the contestant ideology of “Kazakhization”. The case validates the view that a dominant ideology characterized by high degree of taken-for-grantedness is not shielded from contestation (Briggs 1998).