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**RESEARCH PAPER****Family Language Policy in Multilingual Families in Lahore: An Application of Spolsky's Model****<sup>1</sup>Rabia Aamir Sheikh\* and <sup>2</sup>Dr. Arshad Ali Khan**

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of the article is to investigate family language policy (FLP) within the multilingual context of Lahore, Pakistan. This article highlights the FLPs of these families while considering their language practices and ideologies by applying the language policy model presented by Bernard Spolsky. This article draws on the qualitative method. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve parents. Findings from this article suggest that parents constantly make decisions to choose and speak certain languages depending on the situation they are in, who they are communicating with, and where they are communicating. Additionally, to maintain their home and heritage language, they make efforts to use them with their family and the elder members of the family, respectively. However, they subconsciously give more priority to the home language and L2 as opposed to the heritage language. It is recommended that future studies explore the impact of these family language choices on children's long-term bilingual development and cultural identity

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**KEYWORDS** Family Language Policy, Heritage Language, Multilingualism, Inherited Languages, Language Maintenance

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**Introduction**

Bilingualism, or the ability to speak and comprehend multiple languages, has been shown to have numerous cognitive and social benefits (Bialystok, 2001). However, acquiring bilingualism is not a simple process and depends on various factors such as the age of language exposure, language input and output, and language attitudes (Genesee, 1989). One factor that has received little attention in the research on bilingualism is the language policy adopted by families with bilingual children. Language policy refers to the explicit and implicit rules and norms that govern language use within a given community (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). In the context of bilingual families, language policy can include decisions on which language(s) to use with children, how to allocate language use within the family, and how to maintain and pass on the minority language (Wei, 2014).

Globalization and super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007) have resulted in the increase of transnationalism as well as bi and multilingualism (King & Lanza, 2019; Zhu & Li, 2016). One of the key issues faced by bi- and multilingual families is determining which language to use (Hirsch & Lee, 2018). Due to these increasing concerns, Family Language Policy (FLP) as a relatively new research area has received significant attention from scholars and social scientists. It focuses on the way family members think about the languages they use in their daily lives. At the same time, it also focuses on the decisions they have to make in

regards to the languages they are exposed to in order to decide which one to keep and which one to let go (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2019). Family Language Policy primarily refers to explicit and overt, and implicit and covert language planning by family members in regard to the choices they make related to the language and literacy practices in the settings of their homes and in communication that takes place between their family members (Curdt-Christiansen 2009; King, Fogle & Logan-Terry 2008; Spolsky 2012). The study of family language policy (FLP) is becoming more and more important since it connects, influences, and advances other research areas such as language policy in education, child language acquisition, and language socialization. Family is considered to be the primary contributing factor in the maintenance and transmission of HL since it plays a major influence on socialization (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015). A multilingual family can also be considered a "community of practice" (Lanza 2007, p. 47).

Research has suggested that the language spoken within a family is a crucial factor in children's bilingual language development (Genesee, 1989). However, in the context of Pakistan, particularly, Lahore, families adopt multiple languages that result in the multilingual development of children in a multilingual setting of the country. By taking a closer look at the language policies of families living in the city of Lahore and analyzing the language development outcomes, this study aims to understand the relationship between family language policy and bilingual language development.

In the previous studies on bilingualism, the influence of family language policy on children's bilingual language development has not gotten much attention. Although the importance of family language usage in children's multilingual language development has long been recognized (Genesee, 1989), little is known about the precise language strategies that families adopt and how these affect the language development of their offspring. Examining the literature on family language policy and its connection to children's multilingual language development is the goal of this review. Selecting the language or languages to use with children is one area of family language policy that has been researched. Since there is just one language spoken in the home, choosing a language is simple in monolingual families. However, in bilingual families, the decision on which language(s) to use with children can be more complex. Some parents choose to use one language exclusively with their children, while others opt for a balanced approach, using both languages with their children in varying proportions (Wei, 2014).

### **Literature Review**

People from Pakistan have quite a rich linguistic background. According to a survey, around 80 languages are spoken in Pakistan. Urdu has the status of the national and one of the two official languages, the other being English. Punjabi is spoken by 39.2% of the population, whereas, Pushto is spoken by 16.1%. The percentage of Saraiki speakers is 13.7%, whereas, Urdu is spoken by 10.6% of the Pakistani population (Danielle, 2023).

The rapid increase in globalization and super-diversity has further led to transnationalism along with bi- and multilingualism (King & Lanza 2019; Zhu & Li 2016). One of the primary problems bi- and multilingual families face on a daily basis is deciding which languages to acquire, preserve, and use (Hirsch & Lee 2018). In light of these modifications, Family Language Policy (FLP) is a relatively new research area that has drawn a lot of interest because it focuses on how family members choose which languages to keep and which ones to give up, as well as how they make sense of the multiple languages they use in their daily lives (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen 2019). Therefore, exploring the concept of FLP in the context of multilingual families where children are

exposed to multiple languages from early stages of life is crucial in their development and policy making.

The study of family language policy (FLP) is becoming more and more important since it connects, influences, and advances other research areas such as language policy in education, child language acquisition, and language socialization. According to King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry (2008), FLP is the term used to describe parents' explicit and/or implicit language planning for language use among family members. Spolsky (2004) states that language practices, language management or planning, and language ideology are the three fundamental parts of FLP, similar to language policy. Research in this multidisciplinary field may concentrate on one or more FLP components, their interactions, and the family-external and/or family-internal factors that influence FLP are important for children's mental and bilingual development, language use, academic achievement, and, eventually, the preservation of the minority/heritage language(s).

Moreover, according to Melo-Pfeifer (2015), family is the main socialization factor and is typically seen to be the main factor in the maintenance and transmission of heritage language (HL). FLP is a multidisciplinary research that considers both external and internal aspects (Karpava 2022; Spolsky 2019; Hollebeke et al. 2020; King and Fogle 2013). The affective domain; the role of child agency and communication with siblings and relatives; parental expectations, attitudes, and efforts for HL maintenance and transmission; language management strategies in the family, and their implicit and explicit language choices are some of the specific internal factors. The external factors include education, family socioeconomic status, social network, communication with educators and experts, quality and quantity of input provided to the HL and SL outside of the home, and partnerships with mainstream and community schools.

The emerging field of family language policy (FLP) developed as an extension of language policy in sociolinguistics in the early 2000s. It has combined theoretical frameworks from language policy, language socialization, and child language acquisition to study overt and explicit planning related to language use in the home.

Various scholar have given their own definitions of FLP. According to Larasati, et al., (2018) A family's language policy is a guideline for selecting the language that members of the family will speak. It is nearly identical to other communities, but because it is the smallest, it may be examined more thoroughly than others. Whether consciously or unconsciously, many families have established their own language policies. They have decided on the standard language to be spoken within the family and have chosen to focus mostly on their descendants.

Family language policies (FLPs) investigate how family members organize their language use and literacy practices both explicitly and implicitly when they are at home (Curdt-Christiansen 2009, 2018; King et al. 2008).

Spolsky gives a language policy framework that entails a holistic view of language use and management for any community or society. Language policy does not have a single, accepted definition or methodology. On the other hand, Bernard Spolsky's (2004) theory of language policy allows for a greater range of applications. However, he defines language policy as "all the language practices, beliefs, and management decisions of a community or polity". Generally, language policies are associated with the state's decisions or the decision of policy makers, however, Spolsky removes this gap and argues that it is practiced by each and every individual in the state and every community or group of people may have their own language beliefs, practices, and management

Spolsky (2004) recognizes the complexities of language policy by putting on its dynamic nature. He states that in order to understand it, an individual must first consider the wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic factors that come along with it. He explains both language and language policy and suggests that they both exist within highly complex, interacting, and dynamic contexts. According to him, these contexts continue to change while also leaving an impact on one another.

Furthermore, he points out that changing any part of language context can have a correlated effect on other parts. In addition to this, Spolsky also highlights the important role of non-linguistic factors that shape language policy and practices. According to him, these factors are political, demographic, social, religious, cultural, psychological, and bureaucratic. He believes that when an individual or a group tries to influence the language practices and beliefs of others, they are often influenced by these non-linguistic factors. Hence, this intervention may result in a change that may or may not be intended.

One of the most noteworthy elements presented by Bernard Spolsky (2004) are the three components; language practices, language beliefs and ideologies, and language management. According to him, Language policy addresses not just designated languages and dialects but also linguistic segments, encompassing attempts to limit unacceptable language and promote acceptable language. In this regard, language practices can be explained as the natural, regular, or typical linguistic practices that have been adopted by the members of targeted speech community across different sociolinguistic domains.

Furthermore, Spolsky's (2004) second component of language beliefs refers to the agreed-upon values within a speech community regarding the various languages and dialects that interact with the community, as well as the methods in which they are employed. These languages and dialects may be spoken inside the community or they may be spoken outside of it. A speech community's power dynamics between different languages and varieties might be reflected in beliefs that influence the desire to learn a particular language or variety. Language beliefs are different than language practices in the sense that they are associated with the ideologies attached to the linguistic practices.

Language management, on the other hand, signifies the explicit efforts made by individuals, groups, or institutions in order to have an effect on language use. This may or may not include formal policies that have been made by the state or educational systems. In addition to this, it also includes the informal efforts made by families or communities with the goal of promoting or discouraging the use of a particular language(s).

The concept of Family Language Policy (FLP) is complex and encompasses the relationship between language management, language ideology, and language behaviors. Comprehending the interplay between these elements is crucial to understanding the dynamics of language use and maintenance in multilingual families.

Three elements or components influence any kind of language policy (Spolsky 2004; 2009). Spolsky distinguishes these as language management, language practices, and language ideologies or beliefs. According to him, language ideologies are socially constructed, value-laden beliefs influenced by the economic, political, and functional utility attached to a particular language, whereas, language practices are the apparent behavior of a speech community with respect to language use and choice.

From this point of view, it is evident that the relationship between language ideologies and language practices within particular social settings is dialectical in that members of a speech community also hold common views about what constitutes proper

language use, occasionally forming into an overall ideology that places significance on different facets of the language varieties used in it. These ideas are derived from and have an impact on behaviors (Spolsky 2004).

It is clear from the foregoing that language ideologies have the capacity to affect linguistic practices. Family language beliefs are defined as the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them (Irvine, 2000). These language ideologies underpin any language policy. Put differently, language ideology refers to the implicit convictions and presumptions regarding the social utility of a certain language in a particular society, reflecting patterns and norms derived from social language and culture (Schiffman, 2006) and intimately associated with the enforcement of language laws (Freeman, 2004). Language practice places an emphasis on how language is really used for various purposes and in various settings.

The term "language management" describes actions used to impede or modify language usage, such as giving kids access to resources for language acquisition, escorting kids on field trips, and so on. Spolsky (2004) notes, however, that while language ideologies have the ability to impact practice and, in turn, be impacted by it, they do not, by themselves, form practice. Parental language practices range greatly, from strict one-parent-one-language (OPOL) methods to more adaptable tactics that take into account the linguistic demands and preferences of the family (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004).

In multilingual homes, the OPOL method—in which each parent speaks to the child in a separate language consistently—is frequently employed to guarantee that the child has a balanced exposure to both languages (Döpke, 1992). However, flexible bilingual approaches, in which parents transition between languages according to the situation and their child's need for communication, can also be successful in encouraging bilingualism (Gafaranga, 2010).

## **Material and Methods**

The paper employs the qualitative method. This type of methodology is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, interactions, and behavior. Additionally, the qualitative method generates non-numerical data which shows the subjective opinions and experiences of the participants (Pathak et al., 2013). Moreover, the tool of semi-structured was used, whereby, the interviews were conducted with twelve parents living in Lahore which included both immigrants (from rural areas) and permanent residents.

Every word from the interviews was recorded verbatim. The researcher employed inductive coding by taking unprocessed data and drawing concepts, themes, and models from their interpretations (Thomas, 2006). Moreover, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used for the analysis of the data.

The aim of the research was to investigate family language policy (FLP) within the multilingual context of Lahore, Pakistan. By applying Spolsky's model of FLP, the researcher aimed to analyze the factors that influence the language dynamics that take place within the households of Lahore. In addition to this, the research also sought to understand how families in this particular city navigate through the rich linguistic landscape while balancing the various factors that are attached to language use. These factors entail social status, education aspirations, and cultural values.

## **Results and Methods**

The findings suggested that the languages choices and practices among the families living in Lahore are influenced by different factors. On one hand, a highly deliberate approach is used in the selection and use of language, and the responses demonstrate a combination of practical necessities and cultural heritage preservation. Using different languages in different contexts according to situational needs is one of the many language practices and policies that most parents use. In order to balance all the necessary languages, they continue to choose between English, their mother tongue, and their home language (HL). It aligns with the work presented by Andritsou & Chatzidimou (2022) that argues that FLP has a dynamic, complex, rather than unidirectional, linear impact on children's bilingual skills. It appears that language usage and practices have a more direct influence on children's language use and bilingual skills, even though parents' linguistic ideology may be the driving force behind FLP.

Moreover, the research also stated that language choices in multilingual families are also driven by emotional and cultural connections. This notion is supported by Spolsky (2009). Furthermore, the deliberate and strategic approach of parents to make their children exposed to multiple languages found in the analysis of the interviews aligns with the work of King et al (2006) who also argue that parents of multilingual children frequently use language strategically to help their children become bilingual or multilingual. These behaviors are a reflection of an unspoken family language strategy that aims to provide kids with the language skills they need for social and cultural integration.

Families in Lahore often adopt a context-driven language policy, where the use of language changes with the situation and the participants. Such an approach is considered a practical and need-based approach for families within multilingual communication. Moreover, such notion also aligns with the study conducted by De Houwer (2009) in which the use of language at home is mostly driven by emotional. Furthermore, the findings regarding children contextually appropriate and functional use of language is also supported by Curdt-Christiansen (2013).

A few parents also pointed out that there is a lack of prescriptive language policy at home, whereby, the children are free to select any language they feel the most comfortable in and allow it for them to develop naturally (Spolsky, 2009). This helps them in navigating their multilingual environment while also helping them develop their language competence.

Some type of code switching among multilingual families take place based on the interlocutors. Parents pointed out that their children switch to another language (heritage language) while communicating with the elderly of the family. This type of practice is also encouraged by the parents. It also helps them in navigating the multilingual landscape of the household in which the parents may speak Urdu and English with children by due to the joint family system found in the culture of Pakistan. This practice is also found in the study conducted by Hidayaturrohman (2019).

One of the language policies adopted by families living in the multilingual society of Lahore is the prioritization of a language. However, this is predominantly done by the children as they give preference to a certain language due to reasons such as educational requirements or to keep up with the modern world, as reported by their parents. The findings revealed a complex interplay between cultural factors and individual choices in determining how children from multilingual families in Lahore utilize language. These passages also discuss the children's tastes and the people who have influenced them. Some

choose their languages based on the individuals they speak with, while others are affected by their schools, friends, and the urge to project a certain image.

In addition to this, another policy that emerged from the findings was that the parents choose to switch codes depending on the settings, context, and the participants. The respondents reported that they have observed themselves changing codes at different times of the day. They mostly find themselves speaking in their common home language (i.e., Urdu) when they are having a meal together. This constant switch also allows them to expose their children to all these languages.

The findings brought forward the concept of intergenerational language transmission in which the parents made a distinct difference between perceived home language and heritage language. While doing so, they employ various strategies to maintain both without imposing them on their children. Because of the shift in their home language from their mother tongue to Urdu, these respondents are conscious of using both very strategically. They make efforts to keep their heritage language alive and their connection with their roots intact by using that language at home and frequently with parents and/or elder members of the family, while also recognizing that Urdu is the primary home language due to its dominance in the society.

However, it is also worth noting here that the analysis of the interviews and the participants' responses suggested that although these parents are of the view that they are making attempts to keep the inherited language alive, the reality shows that by giving autonomy to their children to choose the language that deemed right for them, they are also not entirely preserving it and giving more priority to other languages spoken at home, i.e., Urdu and English.

Furthermore, these parents also make efforts to balance multiple languages so that their children's linguistic competence can develop smoothly and without any barriers to their cognition. Andritsou et al. (2022) support this notion by stating that receptive bilingualism, which suggests a propensity for language shift but can also be seen as a form of language maintenance, is often the outcome of parents' efforts to establish the heteroglossia spaces or circumstances necessary for childhood bilingualism to develop. In addition to this, Gafaranga (2010) argues that language shift and language maintenance are two sides of the same coin and that both processes are involved in the bilingual phenomena.

## **Conclusion**

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews suggested that the families living in Lahore tend to select and utilize a certain language depending on their emotional connection to it. This covers their native tongue and cultural background. It is important to note that most of them view their ancestry and native tongues as distinct entities. These families may speak a distinct ancestral language, but they have adopted Urdu as their home language as a result of socializing in society and working in the city.

Additionally, another intriguing result that came out from the analysis of the family language policy was that these parents often find themselves allowing their children to prioritize a certain language. In a way, they give them the authority to choose the language for themselves. As a result, these children choose English due to the future foals and career opportunities that come with as well as to integrate well into society and to achieve a certain status. By doing so, these parents make English a part of their family language

policy. They also sometimes use English with their children and this further allows them to become more confident and comfortable in speaking English language.

Furthermore, another policy that emerged from the analysis was frequent code-switching. The parents choose which codes to use based on the participants, the situation, and the settings. According to the responders, they have seen themselves switching codes throughout the day. When they are eating together, they are more likely to converse in their shared native tongue, Urdu. They use English while they are watching leisure content and return to it when they are talking to their kids about education. When they speak to their parents, nevertheless, they primarily find themselves using their native tongue. It also allows them to expose their children to all these languages.

The findings also revealed that these parents mostly consider Urdu their home language – coupled with their heritage/inherited language. This conscious decision has been made because of these parents living in the city of Lahore for a considerable amount of time.

However, they do employ certain strategies to stay connected with their cultural identity. These strategies involve meeting their relatives and using their heritage language with them. They also prefer for their children to communicate in their heritage language with their relatives, however, they do not impose this ideology on their children. Hence, this shows that although they make the efforts to keep the heritage/inherited language alive, yet they subconsciously give more importance to home language and L2 (English) while communicating with their children.

Based upon these findings, for future research, the author suggests to diversify the methodology and incorporating observation method in order to examine how the children of Lahori parents interact with certain languages. In addition to this, it is also suggested that instead of taking the interviews of each parent, the interviews of both parents (father and mother) should be taken in order to draw a contrastive analysis of how they view their family language policy and the strategies they both employ in their domain to maintain a certain language or prioritize a particular language.



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