

# Child Agency and Language Policy in Transnational Families

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Study of family language policy unites research in child language acquisition and language policy to better understand how parents' language decisions, practices and beliefs influence child outcomes (King, Fogle & Logan-Terry, 2008). Thus far, this work has focused on how family language policy shapes children's language competencies, formal school success (e.g., Snow, 1990), and the future status of minority languages (e.g., Fishman, 1991), with less attention to children's active roles in shaping parents' ideologies and practices (cf. Fogle, 2009; Luykx, 2003). Addressing this gap, this paper examines how child agency and language use patterns influence parental language behaviors. We draw from three studies of transnational families (Russian adoptive families and Spanish-English bilingual homes), to describe four aspects of child-parent discourse: (a) children's metalinguistic comments, (b) children's use of resistance strategies, (c) parental responses to children's growing linguistic competence, and (d) enactments of family-external ideologies of race and language.

## Introduction

Family language policy has been defined as explicit and overt planning in relation to language use within the home among family members (King, Fogle & Logan-Terry, 2008). This growing area of research (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Luykx, 2005) has attempted to integrate theory and data from the fields of language policy and child language acquisition to gain insights into family language ideologies (how family members think about language), language practices (what they do with language), and language management (what they try to do with language) (Spolsky, 2004). Family language policy is an important area of investigation as these decisions set the frame for child-caretaker interactions and child language development (De Houwer, 1999). For instance, collectively, these family-based decisions and practices determine whether a minority language is transmitted across generations and hence maintained or lost (Fishman, 1991); these practices

also contribute to both the reproduction and transformation of cultural values and norms (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002). Yet these policies and practices are not static or unidirectional. As this paper illustrates, while family language policies initially might be explicit and overt (e.g., initial decisions about which language parents will use with the child), there are often implicit modifications and negotiations over time. Further, in many homes, family language learning and language use patterns are the subject of little-to-no overt parental planning; and as well documented, shift or drift towards broader societal language is common in such cases (Gafaranga, 2010; Pan, 1995).

Although monolingual families often have language policies (e.g., regarding pragmatic use or politeness [Blum-Kulka, 1997; Spolsky, 2004]), much of the research on family language policy has focused on bi- and multilingual families in an effort to better understand how to promote heritage language maintenance in the home. These studies suggest that a range of factors, including parental consistency, child age, and societal context and support, might determine the success of any particular policy in promoting child bilingualism (De Houwer, 2009; Döpke, 1998; Lanza, 1997/2004). While no specific bilingual family language policy (e.g., One-Parent-One-Language, or “hot-house”/minority language immersion) routinely results in active knowledge of two languages by the child, research suggests that lack of attention to language policy in the home leads to shift towards the majority language (Döpke, 1998; Pan, 1995). In other words, family language policy might be necessary, but not sufficient for children’s bilingual development (Kasuya, 1998; Kirsch, 2012). Concomitantly, there is growing recognition of additional processes at work, as well as the need to examine how these dynamics play out amongst a diverse range of family types. As detailed below, recent work in family language policy is marked by three trends, representing both substantial advances and ongoing challenges.

First, a growing body of work examines the critical role of children in shaping parental language use. While early language socialization research tended to emphasize caretakers’ roles in socializing children *to* and *through* language to culture-specific norms (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002), more recent work has focused on family socialization as a collaborative achievement (Goodwin, 2006) and the role of children as active participants in socializing their parents to particular language practices (e.g., Luykx, 2003, 2005). Tuominen (1999), for instance, found that parental policies were often affected by school-age children’s attitudes and practices, with children in multilingual families “socializing their parents instead of being socialized by them” (p. 73). Luykx, in turn, concluded from her study of language socialization in Spanish-Aymara Andean households that language socialization is better viewed not “as a one-way process” but as a “dynamic network of mutual family influences” (2003, p. 40). And most recently,

Garfaranga (2010) documented how language shift is “talked into being” within French-Rwandan Kinyarwanda families in Belgium via children’s medium requests.

This line of work highlights the role of children’s agency in shaping the implementation and ongoing adjustment of family language policy. Agency—or in simple terms, the “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112)—arises out of the sociocultural context in which it is observed. Ahearn notes that individuals vary and adapt the way they conceive of their own and others’ actions, attributing agency to different entities (e.g., individuals, fate, deities) over time or place. For instance, researchers have found that White, middle-class parents in the U.S. tend to encourage young children’s individual agency through use of accommodation strategies that “lower” their own speech to the child’s level and simultaneously “raise” or expand the child’s speech (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Zentella, 2005). However, as well established in the literature, such patterns are not universal (Goodwin, 1997); in many contexts, children are not treated as conversational partners and their utterances are not taken to be communicative (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Much of the work in this area has focused on the language development of and interactional strategies with very young, often pre-verbal children. As a result, the longer-term consequences and negotiations of particular family language policies with older children have been largely overlooked. To begin to fill this gap, the data drawn together here illustrate the ways in which children of different ages in transnational families take on agentive roles in shaping family language policy within everyday conversations.

Within transnational families, child agency is particularly complex and salient. Luykx (2005) argues that traditional notions of directionality in parent-to-child socialization are reversed within many transnational families. Within these transnational homes, and within broader contexts of language shift and migration, one often “finds speakers [children] with greater access to certain linguistic resources, and other speakers [parents] with less access to those same resources, thus reversing the differential distribution of linguistic capital and often times traditional roles of parent and child” (p. 1408). Yet while the work of Luykx and others has pointed to the important role of children in shaping family language policy within transnational families, few studies have attempted to identify how this is accomplished through close analysis of everyday conversations.

A second area of family language policy work attempts to untangle the interplay between micro (here meaning family-internal) and macro (family-external) forces (Canagarajah, 2008). As the family unit is “porous, open to influences and interests from other broader social forces and institutions” (Canagarajah, 2008, p. 171), a central focus of current work examines how broadly circulating language ideologies shape decision-making and language use patterns (De Houwer, 1999; King, 2000). Language ideology, taken here to be the cultural systems “of ideas

about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine, 1989, p. 255), embodies both collective perceptions and cultural hegemonies (Gal, 1998). A crucial question for researchers of family language policy is how and through what mechanisms these ideologies and their attendant discourses shape family language practices. For example, broadly circulating ideologies and discourses of racial difference (Reyes & Lo, 2008) are often intertwined with family beliefs about linguistic difference, language use and competence, and can impact decisions about *which* language as well as about *how* language should be used within the family sphere in important ways.

Often, family language policy studies have focused on parental ideologies and strategies, suggesting that parental beliefs are important factors in maintaining a minority language at home. As argued in previous work (De Houwer, 1999; King & Fogle, 2006; King, Fogle & Logan-Terry, 2008), parental language ideologies influence the interactional strategies that they use with their children, which in turn influence children’s outcomes. However, as De Houwer and others have noted (e.g., Harkness & Super, 1995), this formulation is overly simplistic as children’s outcomes and behaviors potentially impact both parental language ideologies and practices. Furthermore, broader language ideologies, including those linking language and race, or language and national identity, shape not only parental practices but also those of children (Canagarajah, 2008; Hua, 2008; Kasanga, 2008).

Third, family language policy research has also been called to account for how these dynamics play out amongst diverse and transnational families. Past work in the field has been critiqued for focusing on a problematically narrow range of family types, typically middle-class English-speaking parents with an additive (sometimes characterized as elitist) orientation to bilingualism (Döpke, 1998). As the lives of a growing number of individuals cannot be understood by looking only at experiences and events within national boundaries (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1003), transnational research highlights “the systems or relationships that span two or more nations, including sustained and meaningful flows of people, money, labor, goods, information, advice, care, and love” (Sánchez, 2007, p. 493). While past work on transnationalism has tended to examine how (im)migrant groups maintain cohesion and construct lives across and within two or more nation-states, the data here analyze how family language policy is formed and functions within transnational families. Our data come from three transnational contexts where parents and children have different experiences with and alignments toward transnational flows. Related to this, these families have differing perspectives on the importance of bilingualism within their local context. Indeed, while all the children were in a sense emergent bilinguals, parents’ language policy in some cases promoted monolingualism.

To summarize, current work in family language policy is concerned with (a) how child agency impacts parental language policy decisions, (b) how family external and family internal ideological and discursive practices interact, and (c) how these processes intersect with child-rearing in transnational families. Contributing to this ongoing work, this paper draws from three studies to examine how child language use patterns influence parental language choices and behaviors in the home. Our intent is to bring together varied data from a range of family types to outline here specific ways that children shape, negotiate and resist their parents' monolingual and bilingual language policy and planning efforts.

### **The Families and Studies**

Data presented here are drawn from three studies, each briefly overviewed below (see Table 1). All studies collected family-based interactional data in the home over at least six months. Each study was informed by a language socialization approach (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), and included detailed analysis of 20+ hours of audiotape per study as well as ethnographically oriented interviews and observations. All families were transnational, with parents, caretakers, or children rooted in at least two national contexts, and with deep personal or practical connections to communities of practice and flows of information across national borders.

Table 1.  
Overview of Studies

	Study A	Study B	Study C
Participants	3 international adoptive families (English-speaking parents with Russian-speaking children)	2 English-Spanish bilingual families (Native-English-speaking mothers used Spanish as second language with children)	1 Ecuadorian immigrant family (Spanish-monolingual parents used Spanish with their emergent bilingual daughters)
Gender and age of children [by family]	[Family 1] boy (10); boy (8) [Family 2] boy (6); girl (4) [Family 3] girl (16); girl (15)	[Family 1] boy (2) [Family 2] boy (2)	[Family 1] girl (1); girl (12); girl (17)

Age of arrival [by family]	[1] boy (8); boy (7) [2] boy (5); girl (3) [3] girl (16); girl (15)	[1] born in U.S. [2] born in U.S.	[1] born in U.S.; born in U.S.; (15)
Data	Self-recorded family interactions; interviews	Self-recorded family interactions; interviews	Interviews; participant observations; self-recorded family interactions
Study duration	8 months	11 months	14 months
Reference	(Fogle, 2012; 2009; 2008)	King & Logan-Terry (2008)	King (2013)

Study A was a collective case study of three international adoptive families (Fogle, 2012; 2009; 2008). All three families consisted of English-speaking parents who had adopted at least one child over the age of five from a Russian-speaking region. The first family was made up of a single father and two boys (ages 8 and 10 at study inception) adopted from Ukraine about one year prior to the start of the data collection. The second family was a two-parent home with a daughter and son (ages 4 and 6 at study inception) adopted from Russia also roughly one year prior to data collection. The third family was comprised of two parents and six adoptees between the ages of nine and 16, all adopted from Russia over a period of three years. The data collection in the third family began immediately after the arrival of the fifth and sixth children, two girls aged 15 and 16.

In addition to family make-up and ages of the children, the three families of Study A differed significantly. The single father in Family One had originally spoken with the two boys only in Russian, which the father had learned in university courses to prepare for the adoption. By the start of the data collection, the family had shifted to using mostly English. The children in Family One attended a public charter school. The parents in Family Two did not speak Russian, and the father homeschooled their oldest son. The younger daughter attended a part-time preschool. Family Three, which was made up of six adoptees, had begun to speak Russian again after the adoption of the two teenage girls and was the only study family to use Russian frequently in everyday conversations.

At regular intervals over eight months, each adoptive family self-recorded naturally occurring family interactions, mealtimes and literacy events. Families returned a combined total of about 25 hours of interactional data. In addition, parents in all three families and the older children in Family Three met for regular audio-recorded interviews with the researcher. All data were examined for inter-

actional patterns and routines that were related to socialization processes in the home environment.

Study B was a longitudinal case study of two families attempting to promote Spanish-English bilingualism for their young children (King & Logan-Terry, 2008). For mothers of both families, the goal was for children to become fluent and roughly balanced English-Spanish bilinguals. In each family, native-English-speaking mothers residing in the U.S. attempted to use their second language (Spanish) with their child exclusively; fulltime nannies used their first language (Spanish or Portuguese) with the child, and fathers used their first language (English). At the start of the study, both children were 2;0. Both were boys and the only children within their immediate families.

For each of the two families, data collection included (a) qualitative interviews and written reflections by each of the caretakers collected monthly; (b) monthly audio recordings from age 2;0 to 2;11 that consisted of mother-child play sessions, nanny-child play sessions, father-child play sessions, and family dinner sessions, each approximately 20 minutes; (c) a standardized parent report form for describing language and communication skills in infants and young children (MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories: Words and Sentences in Spanish and English) at age 2;1 and 2;7; and (d) a monthly log of home language use patterns. Analysis for the present paper focuses on audio recordings of mother-child and nanny-child play sessions. Caretaker-child interactions were analyzed qualitatively to investigate how caretakers and children negotiated language choice and the families' language policies.

Study C was a longitudinal case study of one transnational Ecuadorian family residing in the U.S. (King, 2013). Data were collected over 14 months through weekly home visits by the researcher which included participant-observation; informal interviews with family members; and family-generated audio-recordings of home conversations. While the two youngest girls were born in the U.S., the oldest daughter spent most of her life in Ecuador and joined her family in the U.S. at the age of 15. The parents' goal was for all children to be Spanish-English bilinguals. Although Spanish was the main language of the home, the two younger girls were described as English-dominant. Ethnographically informed discourse analysis of family interactions and interviews examined how each of the three daughters, aged 1, 12, and 17, was positioned and positioned herself discursively as a language learner and user.

### **Child Agency and Influence: Four Mechanisms**

Below we discuss interactional data from these different family contexts with the aim of illustrating some of the varied mechanisms through which children

influence parental decision-making and language use in the home. We focus on child agency in shaping family discourse via four interactional mechanisms: (a) metalinguistic comments about family language rules; (b) child use of interactional strategies that negotiate or resist parental practices; (c) parental response to children's growing linguistic competence; and (d) child enactment of family-external ideologies of race and language.

### **Children's metalinguistic talk about language rules and practices**

Metapragmatic and metalinguistic comments are part of family conversations across a range of different cultures and languages (Blum-Kulka, 1997; De Geer, Tulvliste, Mizera & Tryggvason, 2002; Ely, Berko Gleason, MacGibbon & Zaretsky, 2001). However, studies of metalinguistic talk in families typically have focused on how parents engage their children in talk about language or comment on children's language behavior (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1997) with far less attention to the ways that children themselves initiate or participate in this type of talk. Yet as illustrated here, these metalinguistic contributions can influence family language policy. The effect of children's talk about talk on family language policy in interaction is evident in Excerpt 1, taken from a conversation in the second (monolingual, adoptive) family from Study A, during which Anna experimented with using taboo language or talking about taboo words, likely learned at daycare.

In this conversation about food, Arkadiy used the word "nasty" (line 57), which caused Kevin to chuckle. Perhaps encouraged by the laughter, Anna then used a stronger suggestion: that the food could taste like a "bathroom word." Although Anna did not use the taboo term itself, she referenced it, and this caused Kevin to comment on her language in line 66, "that is not a pleasant thing to talk about." Arkadiy (who was not attending preschool and perhaps had less exposure to this type of child language) then chimed in that Anna often used "bathroom words." The children's contributions here pushed Kevin to make more explicit rules about language use and to threaten punishment (i.e., taking away a chip in the family incentive system) for the use of taboo language. In this example, parents' language rules became more explicit in direct response to children's metalinguistic talk.

#### **Excerpt 1 (Study A; Family 2; June 13, 2006)**

- 57 Arkadiy It would be nasty.  
 58 [Yeh]?  
 59 Kevin ((chuckling)) [Nasty]. I guess it would be - it would taste nasty,  
 60 it would indeed.  
 61 Arkadiy Maybe not.  
 62 Anna [It taste - it could taste like] a bathroom word.  
 63 Arkadiy [Someday when I get older I'll try].  
 64 No:[!].  
 65 Kevin Anna.

66                    That's not pleasant thing to talk about.  
67        Anna        I know but, it - it could.  
68        Arkadiy    xxx  
69        Kevin        xxx time [?].  
70                    Start workin'.  
71        Arkadiy    But Anna says always one of the bathroom words,  
72                    when we play games usually.  
73        Kevin        Well,  
74                    she knows she's not supposed to.  
75                    If she does  
76                    tell me,  
77                    I'll take away a chip.  
78        Arkadiy    Ok!  
79        Kevin        Language is very important Anna.  
80        Anna        I know.  
81        Kevin        And you should not use bad language.  
82        Anna        Mhm.  
83                    Next time I will not.  
84        Arkadiy    xxx now and[!] later.  
85                    Yeh papa?  
86        Kevin        Pretty much.  
87                    Pretty much indeed.

*(Transcription conventions in Appendix)*

The excerpt above is from a monolingual, transnational adoptive family context. While Arkadiy still attended Russian Saturday school, the children had shifted to English after several months with their new family. Although family members spoke the same language, this example highlights the parents' perceived need to socialize the children into pragmatic norms that would meet the expectations of those around them. Kevin and Meredith felt that their children's status as adoptees and second language learners made it more difficult for them than for non-adopted children to understand what was linguistically appropriate. The children's contributions to family conversations (or to imagined conversations), then, provided examples to which the parents could respond and make this socialization more explicit through establishing language rules.

In bilingual transnational families, where there is often uneven access to linguistic resources across members, metalinguistic comments can serve a very different function: as instantiated resistance to family language policies. And as evident in Study C, these metalinguistic comments can also serve a strategic function in the negotiation of sibling relationships. In this family, the middle sister (Debbie) was frequently held up as a model of success of English language learning to her older sister (Diana). Over time, this evolved into a source of tension with each girl's role and their relationship defined through language competency. Diana, the oldest sister and late arriver to the U.S., was fluent in Spanish but seen as an unsuccessful English language learner; Debbie, in turn, was born in the U.S., and although at

times perceived as awkward in Spanish she was academically and linguistically proficient in English. Gloria, the mother, was insistent that Diana practice English with Debbie, and often exasperated that Diana refused to learn from Debbie. (For instance, she commented multiple times to Diana and the researcher: “She’s already been here for more than two years. She should speak well” and “She should speak English in the house.”) Diana complained that as the older sister she did not want to be corrected or tutored by Debbie, and in turn, Diana teased Debbie for her less than native-sounding Spanish. Aspects of this dynamic are evident in Excerpt 2, in which Debbie, Diana and the researcher were discussing the possibility of returning to Ecuador. Debbie is excited by the prospect of celebrating baby Daniela’s first birthday with her extended family in Ecuador.

**Excerpt 2 (Study C; August 6, 2009: Italics indicate Spanish; original dialogue first, followed by English translation)**

- 01 Debbie Celebrate it over there with grandmothers, cousins, aunts, uncles. And  
 02 I’m taking extra money to buy things for me over there. ((in Ecuador))  
 03 Diana @  
 04 Debbie and umm things to buy for my grandma, like food.  
 05 Diana but you know how man # she have only xxx in the bank.  
 06 Debbie Six hundred.  
 07 Kendall You have six hundred dollars?  
 08 Debbie Yeah # and thirty-six cents.  
 09 Kendall Wow, that’s a lot of money! How did you save that much money?!  
 10 Debbie Since I was a little girl.  
 11 Kendall Anytime they gave you money to save it?  
 12 Debbie I find in my house, in the vending machines over there. ((gestures towards  
 13 the park and community center across the street)) You know like in the  
 14 ground,  
 15 Kendall aha.  
 16 Diana No[!] she find it all in the house when my dad pour it in the xxx!  
 17 Kendall @  
 18 Debbie No!  
 19 Diana yeah. *Si cuan[do*  
 20 Debbie *[Tú ahorita eso[!], pero cuando era chiquita no[!], tú no*  
 21 *sab[es!]*  
 22 Diana *[Me parece que tu [xxx.*  
 23 Debbie [You don’t know!  
 24 Diana *Tenías un poc[o*  
 25 Debbie [English! @
- 18 Debbie No!  
 19 Diana yeah. Yes, wh[en  
 20 Debbie [you, now this[!], but when I was a little girl no[!], you don’t  
 21 kn[ow!  
 22 Diana [It seems to me [xxx.

- 23       Debbie                               [You don't know!  
24       Diana       You had a little b[*i*t.  
25       Debbie                               [English! @

In Excerpt 2, we see how language choice, both implicitly and explicitly, becomes a way of negotiating footing (Goffman, 1981). Debbie was proud to report that she saved six hundred dollars by collecting small change over the years. In her telling, she emphasized that she scavenged resourcefully around the neighborhood for coins (lines 12-14). Diana contradicted Debbie, claiming that she only had picked up her father's loose pocket change around the house (line 16). Debbie rejected this, and Diana reasserted her claim, this time in Spanish (line 19). The playful exchange in English turned more serious as Diana's use of Spanish evoked her big sister, authoritative role and Debbie seemed to feel her veracity and character were challenged. In Goffman's terms (1981), her "posture" or "projected self" was at stake. Debbie attempted to undermine Diana's claim to authority in line 20-21, by talking privately to her and pointing to the fact that when Diana was young, she didn't know what was happening (because she was in Ecuador not living with Debbie and the rest of the family). Debbie was animated and agitated in this turn, evident in her rate of speech and strength of voice. Diana seemed to attempt to de-escalate the exchange by being less assertive, starting her next turn with *me parece que* ("it seems to me") in line 22. Debbie interrupted her in English (despite Diana's use of Spanish in her previous turn), stating emphatically, "You don't know." When Diana again tried to prove her point in Spanish that not all of the money was found in vending machines, Debbie cut her off and triumphantly closed the topic with the assertion that English should be used (line 25).

Excerpt 2 illustrates how language competencies and the ideologically informed expectations surrounding these competencies are used strategically in the negotiation of footing by siblings. This example also suggests how parental language policies (in this case, promoting English) are resisted and flouted in sibling interactions. The conversation is shaded by the maternal expectation (outlined above) that Diana should know English by now and that English should be used between the girls. Language choice is used to strengthen each sister's position and assert dominance. Diana attempted to make her points in Spanish, in part because this was her stronger language, but probably also because it put Debbie on weaker ground. Debbie used Spanish to attempt to silence Diana by reminding her of her family status as a later-comer to the U.S. (lines 20-21). When this strategy failed, Debbie then used English to state strongly, "You don't know." And when this failed, Debbie made language choice rules explicit. Thus, Debbie capitalized on the expectation that Diana should use English and that Debbie was the "expert" English speaker to silence Diana and to disallow her alternative telling of where the money came from.

In both the English monolingual adoptive family of Study A and the bilingual family of Study C, we see that children's metalinguistic talk (i.e., using taboo language and making comments about language choice) plays a role in negotiating both explicit and implicit family language policies. In the monolingual family from Study A, children's comments led parents to more explicitly state their policies about language use, suggesting that language policies develop in and through interactions between parents and children. In Study C, the children's comments about language use illustrate the negotiation of family language policy, but also how these negotiations entail strategic comparison and challenges of siblings' language choices and competences.

### **Child resistance to family language policy**

Children's use of interactional strategies such as elicitation of certain types of talk, negotiation, and resistance, over time, impact family language policies (Lanza, 1997/2004). In Study A, the first family had a set mealtime routine in which the father prompted each family member to tell about one bad thing and one good thing that happened that day. The two adopted boys, Sasha (age 8) and Dima (age 10), found ways to resist and eventually transform this routine. This tell-about-the-day routine was part of the family's language policy as it was explicitly initiated and controlled by the father (a single parent and psychotherapist) to promote "civil discourse" at dinnertime and to provide the children opportunities to express their feelings. Yet despite his clear rationale and explicit policy, John was socialized out of the routine by his children's resistance strategies (Fogle, 2012).

Dima typically responded to his father's prompts for bad or good things by saying "nothing" as seen in Excerpt 3, line 81. In the first month of data collection (December-January), John reacted to this response by offering a specific "bad thing" for Dima. In line 86 below, for example, John suggested an appropriate response, "What about homework?".

#### **Excerpt 3 (Study A; Family 1; December 7, 2005)**

- |    |      |                                      |
|----|------|--------------------------------------|
| 80 | John | Now what's your bad thing for today? |
| 81 | Dima | Nothin'.                             |
| 82 | John | Nothing bad today?                   |
| 83 | Dima | Mm-mm.                               |
| 84 | John | All day long?                        |
| 85 | Dima | Hm-mm.                               |
| 86 | John | What about homework?                 |
| 87 | Dima | Hm-mm.                               |
| 88 | John | That wasn't bad?                     |
| 89 |      | So why were you:,                    |
| 90 |      | Screamin' and hollerin'?             |
| 91 | Dima | I don't know.                        |

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Here Dima produced three “non-responses” to John’s prompts, in the form of “nothin”, “mm-mm”, and “Hm-mm” (lines 81, 83, 85). John then suggested an appropriate answer for Dima in the form of “homework” (line 86), as well more specific prompts for details explaining Dima’s “screamin’ and hollerin’” (line 90). This short excerpt includes six turns by Dima, all of which were minimum responses resisting the routine.

Over time, Dima continued to resist this family language policy; however, he also learned to exploit the routine to make complaints about school, his teachers, and even his father, John, as seen in Excerpt 4, five months later.

**Excerpt 4 (Study A; Family 1; May, 2006)**

- 109 John How ‘bout you Dima?  
110 Dima That you were xxx - that I was in the Pre-K class too long.  
111 John You were in the Pre-K class too long?  
112 Dima Yeh.  
113 I mean, I had, uh you kept me waiting.  
114 John I kept you waiting?  
115 Dima Mhm.  
116 John Oh, goodness.  
117 Dima Plus there’s nothing to do.  
118 John Mhm.  
119 Sasha <Me too> [?].  
120 John So the bad thing was that you had to be there longer than you wanted to be?  
121 Dima Yeh.  
122 John Mhm.  
123 John Was that part of why you’re mad?  
124 Dima Mhm.

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Here Dima responded to his father’s prompt in the routine, “how ‘bout you Dima” (line 109), by saying that he had to wait after school too long for his father. This is a direct complaint about his father’s actions and was expanded into an explanation of why Dima was angry that evening, “Was that part of why you’re mad?”. However, this charge by Dima subverted the goals of the routine as it opens the conversation up to controversy between father and son. Ochs and Taylor (1996) note that children who are prompted to talk about the day often resist this activity because it exposes their actions and thoughts to parental critique. This excerpt provides evidence that Dima had mastered the talk-about-the-day routine and used



57 Yeh, nobody likes it.

58 ? I like it.

59 Melanie No, you do not.

(Reprinted from Fogle, L.W. (2012). *Second language socialization and learner agency: Adoptive family talk*. Multilingual Matters. With permission from Multilingual Matters.)

In this excerpt, Melanie, who at this point had an explicit policy of speaking mostly English with the family newcomers and had instituted “English dinners”, responded to Lesya and Lena’s Russian only in English (though in earlier recordings she had accommodated to their Russian and used Russian in conversation with them). Here, Melanie used several strategies to negotiate the conversation away from Russian: she responded directly in English in line 44 (“Ok. I’ll get you something...”); in line 50, she avoided speaking Russian by recruiting another child in English to answer the question, “what doesn’t she love?”; and in line 54, she asked a clarification request in response to Lesya’s Russian explanation. While these strategies signal a communication problem with language choice in the interaction (Auer, 1984), the two girls did not switch to English (except for Lena’s repetition of the word “medicine” in line 46). The divergence in language choice and negotiation of family language policy in this episode are connected to both Melanie’s attitudes toward Russian use as a source of conflict amongst the siblings and to Lesya and Lena’s desires to maintain Russian and their Russian identities (Fogle, 2012).

These findings with teenage language learners correspond to other data illustrating how much younger children resist their parents’ language policies (Lanza, 1997/2004). In Study C, for example, toddler children were found to often resist parental and caregiver attempts to engage them in Spanish.

**Excerpt 6 (Study C; September 7, 2003: Italics indicate Spanish; original dialogue first, followed by English translation)**

01 Mother A *Qué quieres?*

02 *Trenes o carros?*

03 *Trenes o carros?*

04 Child A Trains. Trains.

05 Mother A Trains, okay. Trains, okay.

01 Mother A What do you want?

02 Trains or cars?

03 Trains or cars?

04 Child A Trains. Trains.

05 Mother A Trains, okay. Trains, okay.

In this excerpt, we see how the mother started with an open-ended question (line 1) in Spanish. After the child (here, 21 months of age) did not respond, the

mother moved to a closed, either-or question (lines 2 and 3). When the child finally responded (line 4) in English, the mother confirmed (“okay”) and continued in English. The type of code-switching is similar to what Zentella (1997) described as “follow-the-leader”. However, in this case (and in contrast to the New York Puerto Rican children who followed the language choice of the adult), the parent follows the language choice of the child (see also, Lanza, 1997/2004). This example reminds us of how even very young children can challenge parental practices in routine interactions and over time potentially impact family language policy in significant ways.

### **Children’s growing linguistic competence**

Children’s competence in their parents’ languages also affects the ways in which parents interact with them as well as the decisions parents make about language management in the family. In Study A, as the transnational adoptees’ English language competence developed, the parents’ interactional strategies also changed. The two children (Arkadiy and Anna) often interrupted their parents during family conversations and literacy events (i.e., book-reading and homeschool lessons) to ask questions about word meanings or labels of things (see Fogle, 2012). Such questions have been found to be important resources for young first language learning children in interaction with their parents (e.g., Heath, 1982; Ninio & Bruner, 1976) and are related to parental language usage (Heath, 1982; Hart & Risley, 1995). Monolingual first language learning children’s usage of such questions decline with age (Smith, 1933), but in these data Arkadiy and Anna are frequent questioners of their parents although aged six and four. Further, this is despite the fact that Meredith, the mother, stated in interviews that she had an informal policy of not stopping the flow of book reading to answer questions.

In the monolingual English-speaking family from Study A discussed above, for example, the influence of the children’s developing English language competence was particularly evident in book-reading sessions between mother and son. While middle-class Anglo parents have been found to ask questions during book reading activities (Melzi & Caspe, 2005), Meredith asked no “What is X?” questions during either of the two recorded book-reading sessions (the first of which was one hour long). Nevertheless, through interaction with her children, Meredith did adapt her answering strategies over time. As evident below, Arkadiy guided all of the interactions with his mother in the reading; he introduced language-related episodes or talk about word meanings known to help in early literacy and language development (Snow, 1993). In the early book-reading session (Excerpts 7 & 8 below), Meredith’s responses to these questions involved long definitions with hesitations and false starts as in these two examples:

**Excerpt 7 (Study A; Family 2; December 14, 2005)**

- 16 Arkadiy What is lavender?  
17 Mother ((clearing throat)) Mm.  
18 Arkadiy xxx  
19 Mother U:h, lavender i:s an herb, it shows some right here, and it smells  
very nice.

**Excerpt 8 (Study A; Family 2; December 14,2005)**

- 85 Arkadiy What is crawl?  
86 Mother ((clearing throat)) You know how babies, walk on the - they don't # know  
87 How to walk yet, and so they pull themselves on the floor, crawling.

Six months later, when Arkadiy was seven, Meredith's responses to these questions were much quicker, usually consisting of one or two synonyms.

**Excerpt 9 (Study A; Family 2; May 30, 2006)**

- 210 Mother Anushka's voyage.  
211 Arkadiy What does that mean?  
212 Mother Trip.  
213 Journey.

**Excerpt 10 (Study A; Family 2; May 30, 2006)**

- 293 Arkadiy What is gigantic?  
294 Mother Huge.  
295 Bigger than huge.

Here the parental language practices shifted over just a few months in response to children's growing linguistic competence. In all four examples Arkadiy, the oldest son, elicited these language-related episodes with a wh-question that targeted a vocabulary item. In Excerpts 7-8, Meredith responded to these elicitations with longer turns, hesitation and false starts as she considered how to define the words. In contrast, in Excerpts 9-10, her definitions were much shorter consisting primarily of synonyms, suggesting that she perceived the children to have larger vocabularies to draw from and that she had become more adept at responding to these questions about word meanings. Additionally, in the later transcript, Meredith seemed to anticipate questions about unknown words and provided more definitions without child prompting.

Although these excerpts do not tell us much about the relationship between children's language competence and *explicit* family language policies, data from families such as this do point to ways in which parents change decisions about language choice and language practices based on their perceptions of children's

competence. Melanie, the adoptive mother of the teenagers in Study A (Family 3), suggested that as her children became better users of English, she tried to use more English with them. As she explained below, the negotiation of the family language was related to both parental language ideologies (i.e., the mother's belief that English would promote family unity) and the children's competence in the target language (English).

Melanie: I don't speak as much of it [Russian]... I am trying not to, actually...I try not to. Paul [the father] still does, but I think they understand so much English, I know Valya does as well...speaking Russian to them [the teenagers], but I am trying to speak English because I think it's going to help them over time...I mean, if we are stuck for words, usually it's a word I don't know in Russian anyway...But sometimes they will try to reword it in Russian, but it's not — their English is better than my Russian.

Melanie's quote illustrates how family members' language competence and individual language ideologies interacted in the negotiation of language choice. As Melanie perceived Lena and Lesya's competence in English to increase as a result of their time spent in the new family and instruction at school, she began to use more English with them in interaction.

### **Family-external ideologies of race and language**

Older children are known to introduce language learned in other environments into the home (Canagarajah, 2008; Shin, 2005; Wong Fillmore, 2000). The transnational children studied here bring more than language learned at school or in peer groups into interactions with their family members; they also bring cultural and linguistic norms, including discourses and ideologies about race, place, and identity. Family conversations are prime sites for the voicing and negotiation of these discourses. The example below illustrates just one of the ways in which family-external sibling ideologies about language, ethnicity and nationality shape family language practices. In the transnational Ecuadorian family of Study C, we see how Daniela (the baby) was described as "white-y" in part due to perceived skin color differences; this racial difference was linked to her purported English language competence with implications for family language policy. In the excerpt below, the family was discussing neighborhood children who the mother minded a few hours weekly. The researcher (King) asked if they were Mexican. Debbie responded playfully that the mom was a "white-y", which initiated a light-hearted conversation about racial identity.

**Excerpt 11 (Study C; August 29, 2009: Italics indicate Spanish; original dialogue first, followed by English translation)**

- 01 Kendall *Es Mexicana?*  
02 Debbie *Ella es güerita!*  
03 Diana *si?*  
04 @  
05 Debbie *Y le dijeron donde nació tu mama, y dice aquí. Aquí? Digo, porque parece*  
06 *de otro lugar.*  
07 #  
08 Kendall *Y tú? Tú naciste acá.*  
09 Diana *Sí, pero ella no es güerita.*  
10 Debbie *Soy latina-americana!*  
11 @  
12 Kendall *Y Daniela?*  
13 Debbie *Ella si es güerita!*  
14 @  
15 Kendall *Por qué Daniela es güerita?*  
16 Debbie *No está no está quemada por el sol.*  
17 Kendall *No es qué?*  
18 Debbie *No esta quemada por el sol y tiene mucho más de inglés que de español*  
19 Kendall @  
20 Diana *Le dices güerita-*  
21 Debbie *Está blanca. No está quemada por el sol.*
- 01 Kendall Is [she] Mexican? ((Talking about the mother of Debbie's friend))  
02 Debbie She is white-y!  
03 Diana yes?  
04 @  
05 Debbie and they told her where her mom was born and she says here. Here? I  
06 say, because she looks like from another place.  
07 #  
08 Kendall And you? You were born here.  
09 Diana Yes, but she is not white-y.  
10 Debbie I am Latin American!  
11 @  
12 Kendall and Daniela?  
13 Debbie She is really white-y!  
14 @  
15 Kendall Why is Daniela white-y?  
16 Debbie She is not sunburned.  
17 Kendall She is not what?  
18 Debbie She is not sunburned and she has more English than Spanish.  
19 Kendall @  
20 Diana You call her white-y.  
21 Debbie She is white. She is not sunburned.

The girls believed that Daniela had strong English language preferences and competencies despite of the fact that the vast majority of the language she heard around her and directed to her was in Spanish. Daniela's national and racial identity within the family as "American" and as "white" framed how her language competencies, preferences and speech were interpreted. For instance, the girls believed Daniela preferred English-language cartoons and storybooks; thus, these tended to be chosen for her. Further, Daniela's unclear speech or babbling was interpreted as English, not Spanish. This framing of Daniela as an English monolingual "American" is significant not only because it shapes how her infant language is interpreted, but influences her future language competencies and subverts the broader family language policy of promoting Spanish-English bilingualism. In this family, the preverbal child, Daniela, became an agent of language shift in the family based on broader ideological notions about race, nationality, and language competence. Her communicative intentions were interpreted by family members through the lens of broadly circulating language ideologies; in this way, ideologies of a wider community influenced family language practices and shaped the implementation of family language policy in this home.

### **Conclusions**

As noted at the outset of the paper, prior work in the field of family language policy has focused on parental language ideologies, practices and management in understanding child outcomes in relation to formal school success and minority language maintenance. Here we suggest that more attention should be placed on the role of children, and in particular that of older children in shaping family language policies. This is particularly true within transnational families, where family members with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds come together and the negotiation of such differences plays a large part in establishing new family roles and relationships. Using data drawn from three studies of very different family contexts, we have illustrated some of the ways that children of varied ages and backgrounds impact both parental explicit policy-making as well as the implicit strategies parents employ in communicating with their children. In all of the families considered here, negotiation of cultural norms, language practices, and language policies was part of everyday interactions. We do not intend to suggest the processes outlined here are exhaustive; rather, we argue that to advance our understanding of family language policy, practices, and child outcomes, greater attention is needed to the critical role of children in shaping the formation and implementation of these policies. To this end, family language policy is best understood as emerging in interactions between and among caretakers and children, as a process which involves both "top-down"

(e.g., explicit parent-directed decisions about which language or which routine) and “bottom-up” (e.g., child resistance and negotiation of those decisions) phenomena.

The data here from both monolingual and bilingual transnational families highlight processes through which children in a wide variety of familial contexts establish agency in everyday interactions. The transnational context in which all of these families are situated makes these processes particularly salient. Here, as in other transnational families, members hold divergent amounts and kinds of social, cultural and linguistic capital. The family — originally conceived of as one of five primary “socializing agents” (along with education, religion, peers, and the media) — merits reconsideration. As suggested here, the family is not only a site of cultural reproduction, but also a milieu of cultural transformation and change (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002). In these data we have focused on four particularly salient, interrelated processes or mechanisms: (a) metalinguistic comments about family language rules, (b) child use of interactional strategies that negotiate or resist parental practices, (c) parental response to children’s growing linguistic competence, and (d) child enactment of family-external ideologies of race and language. Across each of these processes, we have seen how children act as powerful agents in shaping the family language environment.

Understanding family language policies has important implications for understanding not only children’s own language development, but also their school success and, more broadly, the maintenance of minority languages in a globalizing society. The findings highlighted here suggest ways in which parents and children with different language learning histories establish intersubjectivity in interactions that yield opportunities for learning and construction of varied identities. They also show how older children (here, primarily adolescent girls) shape language choice in the family sphere and find ways to resist the use of the majority language (i.e., English) in their new U.S.-based homes. These of course are very specific cases, and the long-term maintenance of Russian and Spanish in these families is by no means secure, especially in light of the well-documented pace of English language shift (Nettle & Romaine, 2000; Nicoladis & Grabis, 2002; Rumbaut, Massey & Bean, 2006). However, the processes presented here suggest that older children’s agency is an important part of creating both explicit and implicit family language policies. Perhaps more importantly, these data point to the varied and significant ways in which family language policy, like all types of language policy, and indeed like all family relationships, is a work in progress.

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**Appendix: Transcription Conventions (Adapted from Macwhinney [2000] and Tannen, Kendall & Gordon [2007])**

+^	quick uptake by speaker
-	truncated word, or adjustment within intonation unit as when speaker retraces or false start
[ ]	words in brackets overlap with another speaker
#	pause of two seconds or less
:	an elongated sound
xxx	unintelligible word or words
[?]	best guess at word or words in angle brackets
[!]	word is stressed
@	laughter
((words))	double parentheses enclose transcriber's comments
?	relatively strong rising intonation (interrogative)
!	strong intonation (exclamatory)
.	falling, final intonation
,	continuing intonation

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

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