

Family Language Policy of the Middle-class in Wuhan

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Abstract

This study draws on family language policy (FLP) research to examine five groups of Chinese middle-class parents' ideological beliefs, practices, and management efforts related to their children's language development, including Putonghua, English, and Wuhan dialect. Based on data analysis of the semi-structured interviews, the study revealed that the participants considered Putonghua the most important language, with English the second and Wuhan dialect the last. Moreover, they showed strong, weak, and varying degrees of agency in children's language development of Putonghua, Wuhan dialect, and English. Additionally, the implementation of middle-class parental agency was influenced by factors at the macro, meso, and micro levels. Implications and limitations are discussed.

Key-words: Family Language Policy; Parental Agency; Putonghua; English; Wuhan Dialect.

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I. Introduction

In the 1980s, Cooper first proposed that language policy can be applied not only at the macro level but also at the micro level (Cooper, 1989). Spolsky (2004) then proposed the smallest unit of social groups: family, school, religious organizations, local government, workplace, supranational groups, and national organizations when defining the scope of language policy, among which, family plays a critical role in influencing the language practices of younger generations (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018). As a newly emerged domain of language policy research, family language policy and planning (FLPP) serves as a bridge between research on early language development and second language acquisition as well as macro-level language policy research (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013).

The studies on FLP are considered research examining how languages are learned, used, managed, and negotiated between family members (King, Fogle, & Logan-TerryKing, 2008). Researchers have been interested in the role of parental agency in the implementation of FLP and related affecting factors of parental agency practices at different levels, specifically, how families navigate different linguistic resources at home, and how social, economic, and ideological powers impact family language ideology, practice, and management (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018; Shen, Wang, & Gao, 2020; Wan & Gao, 2021; Wang, 2019; Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2017; Zhang & Tsung, 2019; Zheng & Mei, 2020). While family language policy has received increasing attention in the West over the past decades because of intensified transnational movement, fewer studies have examined FLPP in the context of China (Curdt-Christiansen & Gao, 2020). It is therefore important to conduct some nativization studies on FLPP in China.

Putonghua, also called Mandarin, has been chosen as the standard common language, widely promulgated by the central government, particularly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This top-down language promotion not only provided effective governance and boosted socioeconomic development, but also promoted national unity as well as establishing a centralized educational system in New China (Zhang, 2013). At present, Putonghua has gained significantly wider use in both public/formal and private/informal domains.

In response to the globalization of English, China's Ministry of Education issued a document entitled The Ministry of Education Guidelines for Vigorously Promoting the Teaching of English in Primary Schools on January 18, 2001, which mandated that students start to learn English as a compulsory subject in the third grade, marking the birth of a new foreign language policy in China (Hu, 2007).

In recent years, having realized the importance of the preservation of dialects and ethnic minority languages, especially endangered languages, language policymakers promulgated state language policy that minority children were required to learn their ethnic language as L1, Putonghua as L2, and English as L3 in the educational system.

However, inconsistency between broader national language policy and specific family language policy is inevitable. Although Putonghua, English, and dialects are all promoted in the national language policy and planning (LPP), in practice, priority is attached differently in different families or areas of China, which can be

manifested in terms of the allocation of linguistic resources, engagement in language activities and creation of language environment, etc. To this end, the present study aims to investigate the phenomenon and substance of family language policy of the middle-class in Wuhan based on the frameworks of Spolsky (2004) and Curdt-Christiansen (2009). This stratum of families can best reflect changes of family language use in the context of population migration and upward social mobility in contemporary China (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2017). By exploring the FLP in relation to children's language development of middle-class families, it is possible to cast light on the current situation of sociocultural life in contemporary Chinese society.

II. Literature Review

1. Theoretical framework of Family Language Policy and Planning

Language policy and planning (LPP) indicates the deliberate and intentional aspect of language planning (top-down), as well as the implicit and unintentional aspect of language policy (bottom-up) (Hornberger, 2006; Johnson, 2013). From this perspective, LPP is initiated and enacted by different agencies from different domains, such as nation, education, workplace, family, and media (Curdt-Christiansen & Gao, 2020). Spolsky (2012) pointed out that each domain had its language policies, and each domain influenced and was influenced by all the other domains.

Family is seen as one of the crucial domains that have an impact on what language people choose to use at home. Family language policy and planning (FLPP) has been defined as explicit/overt and implicit/covert language planning in relation to language and literacy practices within home domains and among family members (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; Spolsky, 2012).

Research on FLPP often draws upon Spolsky's (2004, p 4) model of language policy, which consists of three interrelated components: language ideology (what family members think about language), language practices (what they do with language), and language management (the efforts they make to maintain or develop language). The concept of ideology, also known as language belief, is the attitude and perception of the respondent to a particular language. It is an important factor in determining family language policy and each family language policy is established in the understanding of the value, power, and use of different languages. Language practice refers to the regular and predictable actual language use for different purposes in different environments. The difference between actual language use and language beliefs is that the former concerns "what people actually do" and the latter is "what people think it should be done". Family practice includes not only daily life communication between family members but also long-term language use patterns of family members. Language management is a specific behavior of changing or influencing language practice through various language interventions, which is a planning or management method. Compared with language ideology, the behavior of management is more visible, which means managers (parents) tend to adopt certain tangible measures in order to encourage children to learn or use a certain language or dialect.

Language ideology is the basis of language practices and speech management, on the contrary, a large number of practices and iterative management will influence people's language beliefs. King (2000) stressed the importance of language ideology by stating that it mediated language use into social activities and was the driving force of language policy. It can be seen that these three dimensions of language policy are interrelated, forming a solid triangular relationship.

Based on the framework proposed by Spolsky (2004), Curdt-Christiansen (2009) put forward a framework of FLPP in the research of the family language policy of Chinese immigrant families in Quebec, which offered a detailed explanation of the complex relationship between ideology, interventions, and language practices within an FLP (see Figure 1).

She generated four main factors at the macro level that shaped language policy decisions, namely, political context, socio-cultural context, economic context, and sociolinguistic environments. Political factors concern individuals' equal rights and opportunities for education, civil activities, and political decisions. Social factors are about the access to social mobility that a particular language provides. There is differentiated status and value among different languages in a society (Hymes, 1992). English, for instance, as a lingua franca, provides access to positions of high social prestige, especially in many developing countries. Cultural factors refer to the symbolic values associated with particular languages. Economic factors indicate the economic/instrumental forces that a particular language evokes or vice versa. A sociolinguistic environment involves the number, the kinds, and the communicative values of each language both inside and outside the community being studied.

Among micro-level predictors for FLPP, parental expectations are often considered the most important factor. Parental expectations refer to the goal that parents set up for their children's language development. It was documented that parents' intervention in their children's bi/multilingual development within family domains was significant (Zhao & Richard, 2012). Reflected in home literacy practices, parental expectations are often influenced by parents' educational background, their aspiration for children's language, and their perceived values of different languages (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009).

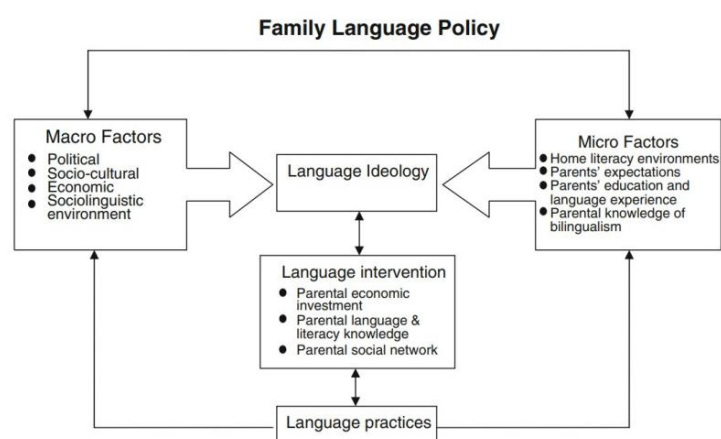


Figure 1:FLPP Model (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009)

2. Parental agency practices and their affecting factors in Chinese FLPP

In order to understand LPP, it is important to focus on who makes the decisions, how they are made, and what the affecting factors are. The question of “who” concerns individual agencies in the manipulation of LPP. Individual agencies in LPP include a wide variety of categories of individuals, and the impact they have on LPP occurs at different levels, with differing amounts of vigor, producing different types of outcomes (productive or receptive). Zhao and Richard (2012) categorized the individual’s role in prestige language promotion into three discrete groups: people with expertise, people with influence, and people with power.

As important decision-makers in the family, parental agency is often considered as a determining factor in the implementation of bilingual or multilingual policies in the family domain (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018). According to Curdt-Christiansen and Wang (2018), parental agency referred to the capacity of parents to make decisions about what measures should be implemented to promote or discourage the use and practice of particular languages based on their understanding of the functions and perceived values of the languages. Moreover, they pointed out that the capacity to act was influenced by different sociocultural factors.

Researchers have conducted a series of studies to investigate parental practices and their affecting factors among various families in China at the macro, meso, and micro level.

With regard to factors from the macro level, Curdt-Christiansen and Wang (2018) and Wang and Curdt-Christiansen (2017) probed into parental agency practices among urban middle-class families in China. They found out that parents displayed varied levels of agency toward Putonghua, English, and fangyan based on their different instrumental values. Moreover, their parental agency was demonstrated through the provision of linguistic resources and literacy support to facilitate children’s bilingual development in English and Putonghua while limiting the development of their home dialect. Wang and Curdt-Christiansen (2020) further revealed parental agency as a “medium translator” in intergeneration communication between grandparents and their children”, which implicitly led to the discontinuity of fangyan at home.

Zhang and Tsung (2019) investigated how government bilingual educational policy influenced family language practices among Tibetan families. The results suggested that there were conflicts between top-down government language policies and bottom-up family language practices. The parental agency practices in these families were demonstrated through their maintenance of Tibetan at home and their opposition to government language policy which tried to shift from TMI (Tibetan as the medium of instruction) to CMI (Chinese as the medium of instruction) at school. Different findings were revealed in Wang’s (2019) study. She unveiled the influence of the national policy to promote Putonghua in Guizhou where Miao families lived to the local parental language practices. Influenced by the national policy, parents conducted family interaction mainly in Putonghua instead of their mother tongue.

Ethnic culture was another macro-level factor that affected parental agency practices as Sui and Li (2019) demonstrated in their study. They found out that among Salar ethnic minority families in Qinghai, the parents considered their mother tongue, Salar, as a significant carrier of their ethnic culture and a crucial tool to construct their cultural identity. This belief was manifested in their intentional language practices with their children, for example, the parents only used Salar at home so as to create a pro-Salar environment, got their children exposed to the Salar-based media, and engaged their children in activities characterized by Salar culture.

With regard to factors from the meso level, Zheng and Mei (2020) focused on the affordance and constraints for families to access particular types of social and learning experiences. They explored the different

ways in which families from two distinct socioeconomic status (SES) communities in Shanghai facilitate their children's Chinese and English development. The results showed that despite the similar aspirations that parents hold for their children's language education, families with lower SES were financially prohibited to invest in children's language learning practice. Factor at meso level was also uncovered by Wan and Gao (2021), as Higgins (2018) included schools, workplaces, institutions and communities at the meso level. They carried out a longitudinal study on a group of middle-class families in China who sent their children to study in international schools. The findings suggested that international school education promoted the parents to cultivate children's English learning and provided access to the learning of Spanish.

With regard to factors from the micro level, inconsistency between parental agency practices and ideologies was revealed by Zhang and Shao (2018) and Shen, et al. (2020). Among families in Jining, Shandong province, English was considered the most important language, with Putonghua the second and northern Chinese dialect the last from the perspective of language ideology and management. However, in language practice, family interaction was carried out mainly in fangyan, which was against their ideology of supporting Putonghua use within the home domain (Zhang & Shao, 2018). The situation was reversed in the research conducted by Shen, et al. (2020) on the ethnic Miao families in Guizhou. While parents believed the Miao language was the ethnic identity marker and provided an emotional bond and a sense of sociocultural belonging, they nonetheless encouraged younger generations to use Putonghua or the regionalect.

Further information on the affecting factors was provided by Curdt-Christiansen (2009). She observed that Chinese parents tend to place a great deal of emphasis on education as the pathway to upward mobility, resulting in deliberate efforts in family language planning to comply with educational demands.

Similar to the previous research, Yang and Curdt-Christiansen (2020) discussed factors that affected parental agency in rural migrant families with low SES. A language shift from their fangyan to Putonghua in everyday communication between children and other family members was reported. They pointed out that the language shift in these families was a deliberate choice to avoid issues of "othering".

3. Research gaps

China is undergoing unprecedentedly great changes in all aspects. The complex social backgrounds directly resulted in the inhomogeneity of language policy at different levels. The existing research on FLP was mainly conducted in the West, but FLPP in the context of China was underexplored. It is therefore a necessity to pay close attention to the FLP in China.

In addition, the foregoing literature review has revealed that most of the previous studies conducted in the context of China have looked into the FLP of (im)migrant and ethnic families, scant research, except for Wang and Curdt-Christiansen (2017), has solely focused on the situation of urban middle-class families, leaving a research gap to fill. The present research aims to bridge this gap by examining the role of parental agency in children's language planning and development in middle-class families in Wuhan.

Our questions of interest are as follows:

- (1) What are the parents' language ideologies regarding their children's language development in middle-class families in Wuhan?
- (2) What specific language management and practices do middle-class parents take in their children's language development?
- (3) What are the factors that influence parental agency of middle-class families in Wuhan?

III. Methodology

1. Research site

The presented study was conducted in Wuhan, a city the author has stayed for more than six years and is quite familiar with. Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province in central China, is the center of transportation, economy, and trade from the south to the north of China. With a resident population of over 10 million, it consists of seven downtown districts (i.e., Jiangan District, Jianghan District, Qiaokou District, Hanyang District, Wuchang District, Qingshan District, and Hongshan District) and six newly developed districts (i.e., Huangpi District, Xinzhou District, Jiangxia District, Hannan District, Caidian District, and Dongxihu District). Although some indigenous Wuhan residents speak Wuhan dialect in informal settings, the Chinese variety spoken in the downtown areas of Wuhan, the main language used in public, especially in study and work settings, is still Mandarin.



Figure 2: Administrative District Map of Wuhan

2. Participants

Five middle-class families in Wuhan who met the following criteria were invited to participate in the study: (1) had only one child; (2) the children’s education level has reached Grade Six or over; (3) the children were born and grew up in Wuhan; (4) one of the parents in the family could speak at least two languages (i.e., Putonghua, English, or Wuhan dialect).

Table 1 presented the basic information about the 22 family members. Among the five middle-class families, Family No. 3 and No. 4 were indigenous Wuhan residents while the rest three were migrant families. All the parents and grandparents of indigenous Wuhan families could speak Wuhan dialect. The parents from family No. 2 grew up in Hanchuan and Henan. They went to Wuhan for college and then settled here. More than 20-year living experience taught them to speak Wuhan dialect. The mother of Andy from family No. 1 was an indigenous Wuhan resident but the rest family members were brought up in Xuzhou.

All the grandparents were born before the Economic Reform and open up in 1978 and all the children were born after 2010. Table 1 indicated that all the grandparents could speak at least one dialect and most of them, except for Jack’s grandparents, were not well-educated and could only speak their hometown dialects. It should be noted that the structure of these families was dominated by nuclear families. Grandparents from Family No. 1 and Family No. 4 did not live with their grandchild. Grandparents from Family No. 3 and Family No. 5 took care of their granddaughters from birth until the age of seven and five.

All the ten parents recruited in the study received higher education and earned at least a bachelor’s degree. They were the breadwinner of their family.

Furthermore, the five children grew up in Wuhan and only Andy and Bianca would go to their parents’ hometowns for the Spring Festival. They could speak Putonghua and English. Jack could also speak Wuhan dialect and Bianca could speak Tianmen dialect.

All participants were not informed of the research objectives in advance. After the experiment, they would receive a gift as a reward for their benevolent help. Their private information was closely protected.

Table 1: Family Profiles

Code	Family members	Age	Occupation	Educational background	Hometown	Language(s) you can speak
No. 1	Grandfather	64	Cook	Primary	Jiangsu	Xuzhou dialect
	Grandmother	64	At home	Primary	Jiangsu	Xuzhou dialect
	Father	38	Manager	Master	Jiangsu	Putonghua; English; Xuzhou dialect
	Mother	37	Clerk	Bachelor	Hubei	Putonghua; Wuhan dialect
	Andy	13	Student	Grade 7	Hubei	Putonghua; English

	Father	40	Doctor	Bachelor	Hubei	Putonghua; English; Wuhan dialect; Hanchuan dialect
No. 2	Mother	41	Doctor	Bachelor	Henan	Putonghua; English; Wuhan dialect; Henan dialect
	Lucy	12	Student	Grade 6	Hubei	Putonghua; English
No. 3	Grandfather	83	Teacher	Junior high	Hubei	Putonghua; Wuhan dialect
	Father	58	Clerk	Bachelor	Hubei	Putonghua; Wuhan dialect
	Mother	57	Teacher	Bachelor	Fujian	Putonghua; Wuhan dialect; Tongcheng dialect
	Dolores	13	Student	Grade 7	Hubei	Putonghua; English
No. 4	Grandfather	70	Professor	Master	Hubei	Putonghua; English; Russian; Wuhan dialect
	Grandmother	67	English Teacher	Bachelor	Hubei	Putonghua; English; Wuhan dialect
	Father	39	Government official	Bachelor	Hubei	Putonghua; English; Wuhan dialect; Xiaogan dialect
	Mother	37	Government official	Master	Hubei	Putonghua; English; Wuhan dialect
No. 5	Jack	15	Student	Grade 9	Hubei	Putonghua; English; Wuhan dialect
	Grandfather	66	Peasant	Primary	Hubei	Tianmen dialect
	Grandmother	66	At home	Primary	Hubei	Tianmen dialect
	Father	45	Lawyer	Bachelor	Hubei	Putonghua; English; Tianmen dialect
	Mother	44	Accountant	Bachelor	Hubei	Putonghua
	Bianca	14	Student	Grade 8	Hubei	Putonghua; English; Tianmen dialect

3. Research instrument

Semi-structured interviews contain an initial set of designated questions, while additional questions, called probes, can be formulated ‘on-line’, based upon the interviewees’ responses, which can be judged on both the content and the depth of the responses (Tyson, 1991).

This study employed semi-structured interviews with the expectation to find evidence that may answer the three research questions. It was composed of 25 items in four dimensions: 11 for family profile, 2 for language ideology, 7 for language practice, and 5 for language management,

4. Data collection and analysis

Conducted from October 1, 2024, to December 3, 2024, the qualitative study included five semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted 30-60 minutes and invited the parents and their children to answer the 25 questions together. Due to the inconvenience caused by long distance between the participants and the author, all the interviews were accomplished through Tencent Meeting, with screen-recording and note-taking during the interview. In addition, the sound recording was replayed later to refine and reorganize notes.

The details of the data were analyzed manually, through which the language ideology, management, and practice of parents in children’s language development and relevant factors influencing the implementation of parental agency were successfully observed and defined.

I. Results and Discussion

1. Parental language ideologies about children's language development

As the only standard common language in China, Putonghua has been widely employed at home and abroad. It is the language of instruction in all schools nationwide, the working language of government at all levels, and the language used in social media platforms such as radio and television. The results of the five interviews indicated that the ten parents recognized the importance of Putonghua in China. They attached the highest priority over the development of children's language abilities in Putonghua in the family language policy and planning. The value of Putonghua was generally manifested in three aspects: (1) the most extensively used communication tool; (2) the only recognized standard language in the education system (p.s. ethnic minority areas were excluded); (3) the most inclusive symbol of children's cultural identity.

According to Andy's mother,

"Putonghua is the most widely used language in China. Wherever you go, you can speak Putonghua to communicate with others, regardless of where they come from. But you cannot go across the country with a dialect. Her father and I can speak Xuzhou dialect and Wuhan dialect respectively, but we don't require her to speak or deliberately teach her how to speak in a rush."

Andy's mother suggested that the acquisition of Putonghua could guarantee greater communication possibilities and broader mobility prospects. Thus, the improvement of language abilities in Putonghua was of the most importance in children's language planning and development.

The importance of Putonghua in children's language development was also reflected in terms of the role it played in education. Lucy's father recalled,

"Neither my wife nor I am from Wuhan. We came to Wuhan for further education and naturally settled down when we graduated. We began to learn Wuhan dialect because of a teacher in college. He often spoke Wuhan dialect or sometimes heavily accented or non-standard Putonghua when giving a lesson. We couldn't understand at all at first. So, we had no choice but to learn Wuhan dialect. Firstly listened, then tried to speak. ... Of course, we also thought the tone of Wuhan dialect was interesting. However, this kind of situation won't happen again when she (Lucy) goes to school in any case. All the teachers can speak Putonghua fluently with no strange accents. Therefore, mastering the basic four language skills of Putonghua, that is, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, is the first thing she needs to do. Putonghua is the primary tool of communication in education."

In addition, Bianca's father elaborated on the inclusive nature of Putonghua from the perspective of cultural identity.

"None of us are indigenous Wuhan residents. We built a new family in Wuhan because of the work. Bianca's mother and I grew up in Tianmen. We can speak Tianmen dialect and we feel from the bottom of our hearts that we are from Tianmen rather than Wuhan, although we have lived here for more than 20 years. But Bianca is different. She was born and brought up in Wuhan, a city where most of her social network was formed. She only goes to Tianmen with us during the Spring Festival. For her, it is just a place where her grandparents have lived. Whenever she introduces herself to others, she says she is from Wuhan. Due to the reasons that there is no one in the family who can speak Wuhan dialect and few opportunities are provided for her to be exposed to the Wuhan dialect environment in and outside the school, we prefer to choose Putonghua rather than Tianmen dialect or Wuhan dialect as the symbol of her cultural identity."

According to the explanation of Bianca's father, we can see that when there is no need and condition for a migrant family to speak a host-city dialect (i.e., Wuhan dialect in this study), Putonghua is the safest choice for their children to develop a new cultural identity. In this sense, the function and areas of use of Putonghua were expanded gradually from the official, formal, and public domains to the domestic, private, and unofficial domains that were originally dominated by dialects (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2017).

Documented research has demonstrated that family language policy decisions were profoundly mediated by the mainstream language policies and practices promoted around the whole society (Shen, et al., 2020). Compared with Putonghua which was acquired naturally by the Chinese, English was a foreign language in China rather than a second language that was typically an official or socially dominant language needed for education, employment, and other basic purposes. Although the government has mandated that English was a compulsory subject for primary students from Grade Three, it was not widely used in the learners' immediate social context and was just studied as a curricular requirement in school with no immediate or necessary practical application. Nevertheless, the influence of English as a lingua franca was booming steadily in international communication. Educators and policymakers in China have advocated improving individual

language ability so as to further enhance national language capacity (Li, 2021). The new youth of Chinese shouldered the ambitious aspiration for better telling Chinese stories in English and building cultural confidence.

Furthermore, in addition to the national foreign language policy, parental language beliefs were also greatly affected by their expectation for their children's academic success. They believed that languages, especially foreign languages, for example, English, could bring rich educational resources and opportunities to their children (Chen, 2020). The parents in this study acknowledged the powerful instrumental value of English in university entrance, future careers, and global pop culture, which was consistent with Zheng and Mei's research (2020). To this end, they placed the development of English abilities right after the acquisition of Putonghua, especially when the children could speak Putonghua fluently.

Jack's parents who worked in government departments commented that *"higher authority leadership have constantly emphasized the need to improve English proficiency of party members and cadres of the new generation. We should respond to the call of policy by cultivating our children's English ability from an early age."* On this basis of the work experience of Dolores's father, an HR in a private company, *"English is widely used in daily affairs. Also, interviewees with a high level of English expertise are more likely to be employed."* Lucy's mother further expressed the wish of sending her child to study abroad.

"The competition is getting fiercer and fiercer nowadays in China. If she (Lucy) cannot go to a great university at home, we consider sending her abroad for further education. English is a stepping-stone to the top foreign universities. If she goes to a domestic university, she can also broaden her horizons by learning English well."

Most of the parents in this study perceived the value of dialect as the lowest in comparison to Putonghua and English in terms of their symbolic and instrumental values. The parents' neglect of Wuhan dialect could be attributed to two reasons: (1) limitations of the scope of application; (2) an inutility to future academic success.

Lucy's father pointed out that there were even many regional varieties of Wuhan dialect among the 13 districts in Wuhan and they were not entirely mutually intelligible.

"We (Lucy's parents) remembered the day when we thought we have mastered Wuhan dialect but only found out that we just mastered one variety of it. We went to Hannan District for a spring outing. My wife wanted to communicate with the shopkeeper in Wuhan dialect but only understood a small part of his utterances."

A similar standpoint was held by Andy's mother. *"I can speak Wuhan dialect. But when I traveled around China I used Putonghua to communicate rather than Wuhan dialect. If you speak Wuhan dialect I bet most of them cannot understand what you have said."*

Bianca's father further illustrated from the perspective of academic success. *"Wuhan dialect is not a part of academic requirement. She can enter a great university if she does well in the compulsory subjects, regardless of whether she can speak Wuhan dialect or not."*

Although family members from No. 4 were all indigenous Wuhan residents and even Jack could speak Wuhan dialect fluently, his parents still believed that the acquisition of Putonghua and English was more important than Wuhan dialect in terms of their practical values.

In sum, the parents' opinion of language as an instrumental tool caused the current situation of emphasizing the development in Putonghua and English rather than dialect in family language policy and planning, which would, in turn, bring about the regression of Wuhan dialect in the long run.

2. Parental language management and practices of children's language development

Language management and practice are the results of the externalization of language ideology in FLPP (Spolsky, 2004). Parental agency is displayed through their efforts in encouraging or discouraging language learning at home. In this part, parental agency would be discussed from two aspects, namely, the creation of language learning environment, and the provision of language resources and engagement in linguistic activities.

2.1 Creation of language learning environment. Parents from the five families all showed strong agency in creating a Putonghua learning environment, but displayed a lack of agency in providing an environment for Wuhan dialect, except for Jack's parents. In addition, their agency in the provision of an English learning environment was varied.

To ensure the smooth development of Putonghua, four of the five families have used Putonghua as the only language for daily parents-children interaction since the birth of the children. They hoped to *"make sure that the most important language is learned first. Only when she can speak Putonghua fluently will we respond in Wuhan dialect, if she is interested in it."*

As the locals in Wuhan, Dolores's parents seldom spoke Wuhan dialect to their daughter. They attributed such a choice to the lack of environment.

“There are fewer young people communicating in Wuhan dialect nowadays. When we go out, almost all the service providers speak Putonghua. As one of the pivots connecting north and south, west and east, Wuhan attracts a large number of people from all over the country to work and settle down every year. Speaking Putonghua in public places is a deliberate choice to avoid issues of ‘othering’.”

Jack’s parents, also Wuhan locals, were the only exception among the five middle-class families when answering the question “What language(s) do you use when talking with your children and why do you make such a choice?” Jack’s mother said,

“We use both Putonghua and Wuhan dialect at home, but mostly Wuhan dialect when he was small. Our family has been living in Wuhan for generations and none of us cannot speak Wuhan dialect. It represents the local cultures that should be protected, inherited, and passed on. There are many opportunities for him to learn Putonghua but little for Wuhan dialect. We want to create such an environment for him to learn Wuhan dialect at home.”

Furthermore, the author has noted that parental agency in managing language environment affected the language transmission between grandparents and the child at home. As evidenced by the interviews, when grandparents spoke Putonghua with an accent, the child naturally spoke Putonghua in response. The pro-Putonghua environment created by parents helped the child naturally acquire Putonghua within the home domain.

With regard to the creation of dialect learning environment, in general, the five groups of families somehow used dialect in daily life, especially the grandparents. Due to the reasons that most of the grandparents were not well educated and spent most of the time in their hometowns, they could only speak their hometown dialects. Even if they could understand Putonghua now, they rarely used it in daily communication with the younger generation. As the only child who could speak her father’s hometown dialect (i.e., Tianmen dialect in this study), the parental agency was challenged by the grandparents in Bianca’s family. Because of the parents’ heavy work pressure, Bianca’s grandparents came to Wuhan to look after their granddaughter from her birth until the age of seven. Her father narrated,

“They are very close with each other and she (Bianca) is willing to speak Tianmen dialect when talking with her grandparents. We have insistently required our parents to speak Putonghua when she was small in consideration of further development in Putonghua and English. But they never listened. They don’t know how to speak and don’t want to try to speak Putonghua.”

By this token, although children were exposed to the learning environment for Wuhan dialect to varying degrees, most parents neither encouraged nor opposed the learning of it in view of the large external environment which advocated the learning of Putonghua.

With regard to the creation of an English learning environment, parents from the five families showed varying degrees of agency due to three reasons: (1) parents’ personal experiences; (2) parents’ English proficiency; (3) the nature of their jobs.

As revealed in the interview, Family No. 3 and Family No. 4 displayed the weakest and strongest parental agency in creating an English learning environment at home. Both Dolores’s parents could not speak English so they never communicate in English at home. Jack’s mother proved the effectiveness of natural teaching through her own experiences.

“My mother is an English teacher and she taught me English since I was a little child. My English has always been much better than my peers in school. I know there is a critical period in children’s second language development so we intentionally teach him some basic English expressions and guide him to respond in English when he was a baby. He never went to any tutoring center but he could communicate in English fluently and appropriately when he was three.”

However, parental agency practices in creating a native-like English learning environment were not found among other families.

Lucy’s mother expressed worries about possibly non-standard pronunciation, which might hinder her acquisition of a native-like accent. Thus, they never intentionally communicated with Lucy in English but only answered questions concerning grammar and vocabulary in Chinese. Andy’s father and Bianca’s parents were good at English but busy with their work. They believed “English learning should be systematic and continuous” and they should “leave it to the professionals to do what the professionals do”. Additionally, Andy’s father thought it was strange and embarrassing to interact in English at home because “her mother cannot speak it.” Therefore, they did not provide enough opportunities for the children to practice English within the home domain.

2.2 Provision of language resources and engagement in linguistic activities. Parents from the five middle-class families provided varied resources for children to learn Putonghua and English. No resources of Wuhan dialect were found during the research process.

The provision of language resources mainly included asking for tutoring, attending extracurricular tutorials, buying or borrowing books, or intending to have children watch or listen to television or radio programs about a language and its variants.

The results showed that all parents provided language books and TV programs in Putonghua for children. For instance, Lucy's parents provided books such as self-protection of girls, and spelling story books to get the child more accustomed to school life before she went to kindergarten. Parents from Family No. 4 offered science comic books and adventure books to their son based on his interest when he was small. *Aesop's Fables and Anderson Fairy Tales* were provided by Bianca's parents.

While parents were actively arranging Putonghua learning activities, their parental agency was also challenged by their children. For example, Dolores's mother revealed in the interview that her niece's good performance in Chinese promoted her to arrange the same newspaper reading for her daughter at home, but her daughter resisted it.

In terms of the provision of learning resources in English, there was a sharp difference in methods and effectiveness. Jack's parents taught their son by exposing him to extensive reading and listening. They bought or borrowed a large number of English books, led him to watch English cartoons, and required him to listen to English radio such as BBC or VOA. These methods have proved to be very effective according to his mother's description. The rest four families sent their children to attend online/offline extracurricular tutorials or hired college students majoring in English as tutors, but the progress the children make varied differently. For example, Dolores's and Andy's parents bought online courses on ABC-mouse, VIP-KID, and Xueersi, which were popular online English learning platforms in China. Dolores's English grades greatly improved after one year of the tutorial when she was in Grade Four but the effect on Andy was not obvious. In addition, Lucy's parents took her to travel around English-speaking countries every year and encouraged her to participate in international exchange summer camps. They believed the best way to learn a foreign language was to immerse in the native environment. Now Lucy's spoken English was very good as expected. According to the description of Bianca's mother, their daughter was "very talented in and enthusiastic about English learning." They therefore sent her to Wuhan Foreign Languages School and would send her to study abroad if she wished.

No resources on Wuhan dialect were identified in the research progress. Although Jack's parents intentionally spoke Wuhan dialect when he was a little child, they took no visible efforts in the financial investments of the provision of Wuhan dialect learning resources.

In sum, parents from the five middle-class families implemented varying degrees of agency in children's language development in terms of the creation of language learning environment and the provision of language resources and engagement in linguistic activities, with Putonghua and English ranking ahead of Wuhan dialect. Specifically, parental agency in English learning was displayed differently within different families in the matter of degrees, methods, and effectiveness. Most families except for Family No. 4 did not create favorable conditions for children to learn Wuhan dialect.

II. Conclusion

This study unveiled the role of and factors influencing the implementation of middle-class parental agency in children's language development (i.e., Putonghua, English, and Wuhan dialect) from three aspects: language ideology, language management, and language practice. Three major research findings were summarized from the results of the semi-structured interviews.

Firstly, in language ideology, parents from middle-class families in Wuhan considered Putonghua the most important language, with English the second and Wuhan dialect the last.

Secondly, parent agency management and practices could be categorized into two aspects: (1) the creation of language learning environment; (2) the provision of language resources and engagement in linguistic activities. Specifically, middle-class parents in Wuhan showed strong agency in the development of children's language abilities in Putonghua and weak agency in the development of children's language abilities in Wuhan dialect. The parental agency in the development of children's language abilities in English varied differently in terms of methods and effectiveness.

Thirdly, there were many factors influencing the implementation of parental agency in family language policy and planning at different levels, such as national language policy, the symbolic and instrumental value of a language, parents' educational ideas, parents' language proficiency, and parents' available time and energy. These factors were ranked differently in specific middle-class families. On the whole, the influence of the macro-social environment was greater than national language policies, and the capital value of language was more essential than the cultural value of language.

The results of the present study suggest implications and shed light on future research. Theoretically, this research unveiled the possible factors at different levels that affect the implementation of parental agency in FLPP and further confirmed the applicability of Curdt-Christiansen's model (2009). Pedagogically, it contributes to the field of FLPP by approaching parental agency in the middle-class families of Wuhan as a determining factor, which inspired language teachers to encourage parents to formulate proper FLP for the improvement of children's language abilities. More middle-class families from other districts should also be included in future research projects in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture. Moreover, as evidenced by the results, grandparents have provided learning opportunities of dialects for their grandchild in family language practices even though the grandchildren sometimes refused to take such opportunities. Therefore, further research should find out what kind of role grandparents play in FLPP. In addition, the results indicated that parental agency practices have sometimes been challenged by the children due to their growing language competence and changing language learning attitude. As their linguistic knowledge continues to grow, they can play a crucial role in shaping not only parental agency practices but also FLPP as a whole. Thus, child agency should also be considered so as to broaden the inquiry of FLPP research, especially when children start to develop their language preferences.

The findings of this paper are subject to several limitations. The study's findings are limited in their generalizability due to the flaw that the size of the samples is not large enough and only five middle-class families were recruited for the study. Thus, the conclusions drawn from the qualitative analysis may not be generalizable to the whole middle-class families in Wuhan. The corpus should be enlarged in size to provide a more impartial presentation of the family language policy of middle-class families in future studies. Additionally, since this study of FLP was conducted from the perspective of parents and many grandparents were not willing to get involved in the interviews, thus the details about the interaction between the grandparents and the children were retailed by the parents rather than the grandparents themselves, which, to a certain extent, led to some suspicion of subjectivity. Further research can improve research design by employing both qualitative and quantitative methods and inviting the grandparents to take part in the research.

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