

# Family Language Policy: the Maintenance of Latvian as a Heritage Language in the Diaspora

Sanita MARTENA

Rezekne Academy of Technologies

sanita.martena@rta.lv

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**Abstract.** This article explores the concept of family language policy in relation to child agency and parents' discourse strategies in the context of the Latvian diaspora. Research is based on four interviews with parents from three countries: the United Kingdom, Norway and Greece. Respondents were recruited through Saturday/Sunday schools in the diaspora, addressing Latvian speakers who work there or whose children attend these schools. Both parents of all four families analysed in this study use Latvian at home. Data were collected using the Zoom platform during spring 2023 and are part of a larger study about family language policies in the diaspora. Currently, data are also gathered using methods such as audio recordings of interactions between parents and children and online classroom observations in Latvian (Saturday) schools. The main research questions for this article are: which language ideologies underlie language practices (language choices) at home involving parents and children, and which parental discourse strategies are used in families with regard to the multilingual language practices of their children.

**Keywords:** diaspora, family language policy, parental discourse strategies, language maintenance, Latvian

## Šeimų kalbų politika: latvių kalbos kaip paveldėtosios išlaikymas diasporoje

**Santrauka.** Straipsnyje analizuojama dabartinės Latvijos diasporos šeimų kalbų politika. Siekiama nustatyti, kokios kalbinės ideologijos lemia kalbines praktikas namie, tėvų ir vaikų kalbų pasirinkimus, kokias diskurso strategijas taiko tėvai augindami dvikalbius vaikus. Naudota giluminių interviu su keturiomis latvėmis motinomis medžiaga, rinkta 2023 m. sausio–kovo mėnesiais. Informantės gyvena Jungtinėje Karalystėje (dvi šeimos), Norvegijoje (viena šeima) ir Graikijoje (viena šeima). Straipsnis yra platesnio tiriamojo projekto „Letonika“ (2022–2024) dalis. Duomenų analizė rodo, kad paveldėtosios kalbos perdavimo vaikams sėkmė labai priklauso nuo tėvų įsitikinimo, kiek jie gali veikti kalbinį vaikų elgesį, taip pat nuo vaikų noro bendradarbiauti. Be to, daug lemia konkrečios tėvų taikomos pokalbių strategijos bendraujant su vaikais, t. y. kiek tame pačiame pokalbyje laikomasi vieno kodo, kiek sugebama į tai krypti vaikus. Analizė atskleidė, kad vaikų kalbinė raida,

konkrečiau – kalbiniai jų sutrikimai gali turėti labai neigiamą poveikį kalbinėms tėvų praktikoms, perkeisti kalbines jų nuostatas, mažinti tėvų įsitikinimą, kad jie gali aktyviai prisidėti prie savo vaikų dvikalbystės su paveldėtąja kalba. Skirtingos tėvų ir vaikų kalbinės praktikos (pvz., vienos ar kitos kalbos pasirinkimas arba kodų kaita bendraujant), vyraujančios šeimose kasdienybėje, formuoja ir plečia jų kalbų politiką. Šie sudėtingi įsitikinimų, kalbų vadybos, komunikacijos modeliai ir jų sampynos reikalauja daugiau ir išsamesnio mokslinio dėmesio. Drauge paskirų šeimų kalbų politika siejasi ir yra veikiama vietos bendruomenės praktikų (pvz., mokykloje, darbe), turimų ir išreiškiamų nuostatų, taip pat nacionalinio socialinio diskurso bei šalies kalbų politikos. Kadangi kiekviena šeima yra savita sudėtinga sistema, svarbus ir individualus dėmesys kiekvienam atvejui.

**Raktažodžiai:** diaspora, šeimų kalbų politika, tėvų taikomos diskurso strategijos, kalbos išlaikymas, latvių kalba

## 1. Introduction

The general aim of this article is to explore family language policies and parental strategies for the maintenance of Latvian among families in the diaspora. In line with theory on family language policies and parental discourse strategies, the main research questions are: which language ideologies underlie the language practices and choices at home between parents and their children, and which parental discourse strategies are used in families with regard to the language practices of their children.

The data for this paper have been collected between January and March 2023 using qualitative approaches: in-depth interviews and narratives from families outside Latvia, as well as observations of child-parent or child-peers/teachers' interactions during Saturday schools for learning Latvian as a heritage language. This research is a sub-project of the Latvian State Research program "Letonika" (2022–2024) on Latvian language skills, use and acquisition among children and youth in diaspora.

For this paper, I have chosen data from in-depth interviews with four families who live in the United Kingdom, Greece and Norway. Respondents were chosen by their profiles of teaching Latvian in the diaspora as an afterschool activity, and their social role as parents; all respondents are mothers who teach Latvian as their hobby, without having a formal education as a language teacher.

The paper consists of three main parts. The first part introduces the theoretical framework by giving an overview of main topics such as migration and family language policy, including the concept of child agency and parental discourse

strategies in bilingual/multilingual situations at home. Part two provides insight into the profiles of the informants, and into data collection and processing. Part three provides the data analysis within the frame of family language policies (language ideologies, management and practices), with regard to parental strategies in communication with their (mostly bilingual or multilingual) children and challenges in maintaining Latvian. The part on data analysis also suggests issues for further discussion.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Global processes of politically and economically motivated short- and long-term migration transform societies at the macro level, and families at the micro level. They create new everyday routines, habits, social structures, and needs. With regard to language, they influence language repertoires of individuals and communities, their practices and beliefs about languages. In this sense, significant concepts for understanding and interpreting research data for this paper include migration and family language policy, but also child agency and the discourse strategies that parents apply when influencing the language practices of their children (e.g., switching between languages or language mixing). As Spolsky (2009: 16) found, “it is common for parents and caretakers to take for granted their authority to manage their children’s language.” This happens in monolingual families and families without any migration background, but is even more prominent in families who live in environments where the external sociolinguistic situation differs from the language situation at home.

The geographical contexts analysed by family language policy researchers so far cover many different areas, but include a few studies on Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia (e.g., Schwartz, Verschik 2013; Siiner, Koreinik, Brown 2017; Lazdiņa, Marten 2021; Martena 2021; Hilbig 2022) and on the Baltic diaspora, e.g. Lithuanian in the US (Jakaitė-Bulbukienė 2015), in Sweden (Bissinger 2021) or in other countries (Ramonienė 2019; Ramonienė, Ramonaitė 2021).

### **2.1. Migration and language maintenance**

Contemporary migration has been rising with every year since the 1960s, although human migration and mobility can be described as an age-old phenomenon touching almost every society around the world. Individuals and families who emigrated from the Baltic states since the 1990s, but even more so since 2004 (the year of joining the EU) and 2007 (joining the Schengen zone), were often so-called

“economic migrants.” About 154,000 Latvian nationals have emigrated from Latvia since 2000 (Kaša, Mieriņa 2019), with the biggest Latvian diaspora found in the United Kingdom (~ 67,000 or 44%), Germany (~13%), Ireland (~10%), and Norway (~5%) (ibid). Their motivation to maintain their mother tongue and the titular language of their country of origin was usually much less connected with the symbolic value of the independence of their country, as had been the case among, for instance, Baltic refugees during World War II, but was more influenced by practical and economic motivations. As mentioned by Ramonienė and Ramonaitė (2021: 1042), “Lithuanians of the post-Soviet emigration wave tend to support a less strict family language policy at home regarding their heritage language maintenance than political emigrants who left Lithuania at the end of WWII.”

In the light of statistics, it is important to remember that migration is connected with individual life trajectories. These are not only based on rational choices, but also on beliefs, values, and emotions which have a strong impact on these decisions. Therefore, emotional influences on interaction between family members, including children’s perspectives, in making decisions regarding language practices, are issues which are important for deeper investigation. Parents’ desires to maintain their heritage language are often conflicted in situations involving the emotions that children, for instance, bring home from school or other social settings. The need to solve everyday issues can exceed the strength of consciously or unconsciously created family language policies, and language choices are often determined by specific contexts. As Spolsky (2009: 9) emphasized, a focus on language issues “is not autonomous, but rather the reflex of the social, political, economic, religious, ideological, emotional context in which human life goes on”; language differences “account for only tiny part of prejudice, injustice and suffering.”

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the crucial factor in language maintenance is natural intergenerational transmission of the language – and many immigrant parents make a strong effort to continue to speak their heritage language with their children. At the same time, there are also families that “help the children adapt more quickly to the new linguistic environment by speaking an inadequate and limited foreign version of the new language in the home” (Spolsky 2009: 18). The family, particular in the diaspora, is the place where language choices reflect the language attitudes and beliefs of the family members (which can differ, in particular between generations). Decisions taken within a family have a significant impact on the transgenerational transmission of the heritage language.

## 2.2. Family language policy (FLP)

Research with a spotlight on multilingual families and family language policies has intensified in recent years (e.g., Lanza, Lomeu Gomes 2020; Wright, Higgins 2022). Family language policy has been defined as “explicit and overt as well as implicit and covert language planning by family members in relation to language choice and literacy practices within home domains and among family members” (Curdt-Christiansen 2018). It includes aspects of various fields of linguistics, sociology, and education.

As Curdt-Christiansen notes, FLP has within the discipline of sociolinguistics often been framed along Spolsky’s theory of language policy. It “consists of three interrelated components: language ideology – how family members perceive particular languages; language practices – de facto language use, what people actually do with language; and language management – what efforts they make to maintain language” (Curdt-Christiansen 2018: 2). Fundamental for all of these parts are choices: how do families (in total and their individual members) negotiate which varieties and variants are assigned certain values, which variants are considered adequate, and which are chosen or unchosen in specific situations. Language management – or language policy in the narrower sense – takes place when family members actively intervene into these choices of practices and values.

The most significant of all three components (language use, ideology, and practice) for FLP are language beliefs (ideologies). They influence parents’ choices of a particular policy (or management activities) at home and thereby have a strong impact on language use (practices). In the context of a diaspora and their multilingual situations within and outside their homes, language ideologies have been understood as “parents’ (positive or negative) beliefs about multilingualism and translanguaging” (Horner, Weber 2018: 196). De Houwer (1999: 83) conceptualises parents’ perception and understanding of how they can influence the language use of their children as *impact belief*, which can vary in strength: “The stronger the impact belief the more explicit management efforts are undertaken” (Bissinger 2021: 27). Parents with a high impact belief “make conscious efforts to control their childrens’ language choices” (Horner, Weber 2018: 197). For achieving this, they use particular strategies, e.g., the Minimal Grasp Strategy (see below).

Other recent studies emphasize the bridge between home, family and school or broader social contexts, e.g., between parental beliefs and attitudes, ideologies by teachers, or national language policies (King, Wright Fogle 2017). In particular, once children have started to attend (pre)schools or generally spend more time outside the home, “the external influence starts to dominate and determines a cluster

of attitudes as well as language practices” (Spolsky 2009: 20). Spolsky distinguishes the power of parents to manage the language of their children when the home domain is closed (i.e. children spend time at home with their parents who have a bigger impact on language practices) from situations when the home is opened to the outside (when children have the impact of peers or school). In the latter case, “the family becomes the site of language conflict that reflects conflicts in the outside society, with children often rejecting their parents’ language” (Spolsky 2009: 22).

### 2.2.1. *Child agency*

An important aspect in FLP is child agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 963) define agency as “a temporally embedded process of social engagement” considering social interactions and institutional structures. “Temporally embedded” means that individuals’ past experiences, future orientations, and current practices inform their agency. Since agency is understood as a form of social engagement, it is important to take notice how children show agentic behaviour, i.e. how they see and influence language use and learning processes, and what impact that has on their family language practices.

There is increasing interest lately in family language practices as bottom-up language policy, including the agency of children (Lanza, Lexander 2019; Lanza, Lomeu Gomes 2020). In this context, there are a few studies investigating young children’s bilingual agency in relation to language policies at schools. Further support for the children’s abilities to influence settings comes from Fogle (2012) in the United States, who examined agency in the home context. Fogle reported how children expressed their agency through different means of resistance (cf. also Spolsky as mentioned above) and negotiation, thereby also influencing family language practices (Schwartz, Kirsch, Mortini 2020).

Bissinger (2021: 30), when writing about the Lithuanian diaspora in Sweden, while also providing examples from diverse geographical and language contexts, points to the agency of children and at their capacity “to become language managers within the family.” Children can actively show their position by reacting verbally or non-verbally to parents’ demands or comments regarding language use, but they can also provide suggestions or start discussions on language practices or management implemented by their parents. Children can also demonstrate their language attitudes and preferences by, e.g., refusing to speak in a specific language. Hilbig’s 2022 study analyses a bilingual Lithuanian-German family and reports a high level of dynamics in the use of both languages within the family. She found that the resistance of the child to speak German or Lithuanian did not mean that child had not

understood what was said. Such language behaviour rather reflects individual preferences to communicate in another language. In this, Hilbig emphasizes the role of receptive skills, claiming that “receptive bilingualism can be viewed as a valuable asset worth maintaining rather than a lost cause” (Hilbig 2022: 144). She also stresses that children “have a very significant role to play in the family language policy and can steer its course opting for receptive bilingualism or even monolingualism” (ibid). The sociolinguistic environment of the home can thereby be characterized as a domain controlled by all family members, through implicit and explicit language management.

### *2.2.2. Parents’ use of discourse strategies*

Language choice at home, as mentioned above, is influenced not only by decisions taken inside the home, but also by the sociolinguistic ecology “outside the home and by the parents’ beliefs about the best strategy” (Spolsky 2009: 18).

Parental practices in bi- or multilingual families, e.g., the use of the heritage language or switching to other languages, have an impact on the language practices of the children. In a broader sense, this also determines the maintenance or loss of the heritage language. Already in the 1990s, Lanza described in her studies about language use in American-Norwegian families in Norway (1997) how parents react to children’s language mixing, when they use two languages during communication with their parents. Lanza developed a pattern for describing parental reactions through distinguishing five strategies which can be seen as a continuum from the most monolingual to the most multilingual discourse strategy. These strategies are: Minimal Grasp Strategy, Expressed Guess Strategy, Adult Repetition, Move on Strategy and Language Switching.

Current work by De Houwer and Nakamura (2021) describes all five strategies in detail when analysing data from diverse language and geographical contexts; the description of the parental strategies further in the text is based on their work. The Minimal Grasp Strategy (MGS) is seen in situations when parents speak one language (e.g. Latvian) and receive responses by their children in another language (e.g. Norwegian) – and ask the children for clarification, encouraging them to repeat the utterance in the language spoken by the parents (i.e. Latvian). The Expressed Guess Strategy (EGS) can be observed in situations when the parent asks a question in order to get a response from the child in his/her language, translating what he/she thought the child intended to say (e.g. “Did you want to say ...?”). Both MGS and EGS explicitly try to encourage the children to speak the same language as their parents.

The third strategy, Adult Repetition (AR), can be seen when the parents repeat in their language what the child has said in another language, but without expecting the child to repeat, although it can happen that the child does it him/herself. The Move on Strategy (MOS) is more on the bilingual end of the scale: it is used when the parents do not react to or comment on the language used by the child and do not try to change the language, but just continue to talk in their own language. The last and most bilingual discourse strategy is called Language Switching (LS) which can be observed when the parents switch to the language used by the child or switch to another language during one speech act.

Lanza's model "helps explain why not all young, bilingually raised children speak two languages" (De Houwer, Nakamura 2021: 33). In the context of this paper focusing on the sociolinguistic environment of the diaspora, it is also a good tool to analyse and understand better why some children raised in monolingual families in the diaspora keep and use the heritage language more, while others assimilate more to the sociolinguistic contexts of the new country of living. A significant aspect of the research on these parental strategies is finally that, in many cases, the approaches are described by the parents but not observed by researchers. Therefore, it should be taken into account that the data are based on parents' reported strategies in the private family domain.

### **3. The profile of the informants and the methodology used**

Research on individual cases (families) for this paper is based on biographical approaches and methods, such as interviews or narrative interviews. Biographical approaches are significant for exploring individual life trajectories, linguistic practices, and hidden power relations embedded in every-day practices and beliefs, which are all crucial concepts in studying FLP. Many biographical approaches have been developed in German-speaking academic cycles, "which has benefited from a strong tradition in phenomenological thought" (Busch 2017: 47). In addition, research on biographies helps to understand how both individual and societal spheres are structured and interlink with each other.

The data collection took place through online interviews using the Zoom platform and doing video recordings. This article is based on interviews with four families of Latvian origin who live in the diaspora (two in the United Kingdom, one in Greece and one in Norway). The length of every interview is between 35 and 55 minutes. All respondents are mothers who also teach Latvian to other children or youth of the Latvian diaspora once or twice per month.



In all four families, both parents consider themselves to be ethnic Latvians who speak Latvian with each other (except respondent A whose husband died a few years ago). All families have children who were born already in the diaspora (see Table). In two families, there are also older children who came to the new living place with experiences from preschools or schools in Latvia with Latvian as a medium of instruction (respondents A and B from the UK). They grew up in the UK acquiring English (*they speak English perfectly, without an accent*, participant B) but have also maintained Latvian. Those children do not have (as informants report) any difficulties communicating with their grandparents or other relatives in Latvia (*grandmother does not speak English, she lives in Latvia, and then by phone speak Latvian, the big kids perfectly*, participant B).

**Table.** Profile of the respondents and their families

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Family language between parents</b>	<b>New place of residence</b>	<b>Years of living outside Latvia</b>	<b>Children (age in years) Born in...</b>	<b>Education; occupation of the participant</b>
A	Widow (husband was Latvian)	UK	14	1. Daughter (28) Born in Latvia 2. Daughter (7) Born in UK	Higher business education; self-employed
B	Latvian	UK	12	1. Son (24) Born in Latvia 2. Daughter (19) Born in Latvia 3. Daughter (8) Born in UK	Professional education; self-employed
C	Latvian	Norway	11	Twins (11) Born in Norway	Higher, special education; teacher
D	Latvian	Greece	More than 10	1. Daughter (14) Born in Latvia 2. Daughter (5) Since birth live in Greece	Higher, technical education; European Commission

The situation regarding the younger children (respondents A, B and D) and the teenagers (respondents C and D) with regard to the use of Latvian is very diverse, even among the data set of only four families (see more in chapter 3).

The interviews consist of four parts: the first includes questions about languages used in the family (who speaks which language with whom, where and when, implicit and explicit family language policies, virtual communication with family and friends in Latvia). The second part covers the role of Latvian and languages outside the family (with neighbours, friends, socialization in local communities). The third part addresses language practices in Latvia during family visits and meetings with the respondents' families, grandparents and friends, and the role of languages in communication in different contexts. The last part includes questions about the respondents' perspectives and attitudes toward languages (e.g. on the role of Latvian and other languages, on individual language development and changes in use, on how they notice languages, and on changes in attitudes towards their mother tongue and languages in the diaspora). In this paper, I discuss only data from the first part of the interviews (i.e. on language use, ideologies and management within the family domain).

All data were collected between January and March 2023. Audio texts from video recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analysed using qualitative research methodologies: coding and indexing text in relation to the key concepts, grouping the most important codes, and creating categories (*migration, language ideologies, management and practices at home, child agency, and parental discourse strategies*).

#### 4. Main findings

Respondents of all four families reported that their home language is mostly Latvian. Two of the families (in Oslo and Athens, participants C and D) are similar regarding their strategies of how to address their children, and their expectations of which language they should interact with the parents in. The parents' pro-Latvian ideology is driven by their perception that they would provide the best linguistic input to their children in their native language. In Excerpt 1, participant C explains that her native language was the obvious choice for communication with the children; therefore, she stayed at home with her twins during their first years with the aim that they acquire Latvian as a first language.

Excerpt 1: *Until two and a half years I was with them at home, and it was a conscious decision because I wanted them to... this first language which they learn, that it is*

*Latvian. And use it. We consciously also very often went to Latvia, almost all holidays, because I saw how big progress it gives for that... language development. When they started to attend kindergarden, they didn't know Norwegian at all. I also adhere to that principle, that Norwegian is not my native language and I can teach it to them during speaking only wrong.*

In Excerpt 1, the informant stresses that she can give the best input to her children only in the language which is her native language. This belief has resulted in a conscious management decision – not to send the children to a Norwegian kindergarten before they have started to speak, wishing that the children first speak Latvian. During the first years of school she noticed that the Latvian of both daughters *became stable*, that she does not have to *sustain that language so much anymore*, that her twins can easily switch from one language to another (i.e. Latvian and Norwegian), and that their vocabulary is large enough in both languages.

A similar approach is reflected in the interview with participant D (Excerpt 2) whose monolingual ideology is also based on her attitude to Latvian as her native language:

*Excerpt 2: I myself always speak Latvian with the children. Whether they understand it or not, I don't analyze so much, they must understand because it is the language of their mother.*

In the cases of participants C and D, it can be observed that the power of the parents to manage the language of their children gradually decreases when the children cross the border of the *family territory*, and when the home domain is not *closed* anymore (cf. Spolsky 2009 as quoted above). When the children attend (pre) schools, they socialize and communicate in the societal language or in the language of the school (which can be different as in the case of participant D, whose children attend a school with English as the medium of instruction in Athens). The children also take languages of other societal contexts to their families, starting at first to communicate in those languages (Norwegian, English, Greek) among siblings, and later also with their parents. In such situations, the parents report that they react in very different ways. Even in one family, the parental reactions vary (see Excerpt 3), depending on the particular communicative situations:

*Excerpt 3: but we sometimes about... what has happened at school we can discuss in Norwegian because I see that it is easier for them to express... It is not that there are not enough words. I see that they could tell about it also in Latvian but to remember this event which happened in this language, for them it is easier to tell. Yes, this is this nuance, the only one case when we principally speak Norwegian.*

Contexts when the mothers accept that their children speak with them in the societal language are mostly connected with the well-being of their children, e.g. when they tell their parents about conflict situations at school or when something has gone wrong and the children are in a sensitive and emotional mood. Under such circumstances, the language ideology to demand to speak Latvian becomes less relevant; the parents' priority is to grasp what has happened and to be understood when speaking to their children. As participant A admits, even if she strongly wishes to comment on and explain the situation in Latvian, she can not do it because her daughter *will not understand half of it*.

Both participants (A and B) in the United Kingdom have, in contrast to the two other informants, from an early age communicated with their youngest daughters in two languages – in Latvian and English as the societal language. Participant B has taken her daughter to a *baby group* (in English) until age four. Her decision differs from the management strategy consciously taken by participant C, in spite of being in similar situations (see Excerpt 1). As participant B emphasizes, it is compulsory for children in the UK *to attend school from age four*. Her decision is based on the belief that the child would not be successful at school if she stayed at home and spoke only Latvian.

The narrative of participant A reflects different arguments for ceasing to speak Latvian with her daughter at home when she was four years old (see Excerpt 4). Her ideology is not based on bi- or multilingualism as in the case of participant B; her story reflects a lack of knowledge of the parents who have come across a language disorder of their children:

*Excerpt 4: She did not speak. At all. Until she was about four years old. In the kindergarten we were told not to worry, that's what happens when there are several languages. Because she also watched cartoons in Russian. She also watched something in English. Of course, in kindergarten in English, at home in Latvian. But I started a bit somehow to worry, that [sighs] there is no progress. And I looked there, wondered that maybe the child needs to switch to one language, that maybe it's difficult for her. Because I know that there are those children who can understand two languages, their brain works, but they cannot react in two languages. That they maybe need, that they have some identification with one language that they can speak at least, right? We opted for English, even though we're both not English. Just so that she integrates better in that kindergarten, school.*

Here, participant A explains her doubts about the multilingual environment at home. She considers the receptive skills of her daughter to listen to and understand three languages (Latvian, Russian, English) to be a potential reason for blocking

her productive skills and output not even in one language. She mentions that *there are those children who can understand two languages but they cannot react in two languages* (see Excerpt 4). It is not clear from where she has such a belief. However, now, three years after making that decision (the daughter is currently seven years old) the informant is not happy with her daughter's progressing attrition of Latvian (*I try to speak Latvian and then at some point she starts to answer me in English*).

The age of four years was also mentioned by participant C as critical in language development. The respondent spoke in Latvian with her twins at home, and Norwegian entered the language repertoire of the children only after starting to attend kindergarten (see Excerpt 1). In contrast to participant A, however, she did not believe that a bilingual environment would be an obstacle for the language development of her child, and she therefore continued to use Latvian at home. Her decision is probably based on her own background in education (see Table), but also, as she tells, on external impact, the advice *from good, knowledgeable teachers* (see Excerpt 5):

*Excerpt 5: And then around four years old, one of my girls started stuttering so much that she couldn't complete any sentences. Then, of course, I got scared, insanity, madness and that. But luckily, I had very good, knowledgeable teachers, they said that it was only because of two languages and ... so ... and we didn't change anything, we just waited and let her express herself. Then after about three, four months, [it became] less and less and then she stopped stuttering completely. But I was afraid, and I know that many [parents] are not supported by teachers, but they say to move to just one language and that's it. Give such wrong recommendations.*

Still, Excerpt 5 reveals the uncertainty of the informant: Without external support, i.e. the advice of teachers whose convictions were based on multilingual ideologies, the mother would probably decide in favour of one language (Norwegian) – as in the case a participant A (Excerpt 4).

All four interviews reflect that the children are not only passive in their reactions to the language management at home, but also show their capacity to behave as language managers. In most cases, the mothers report that the children promote and sometimes even establish the use of the majority language in the family (English or Norwegian, but not in the Greek case). In particular, the youngest children who are born outside Latvia communicate with their older sisters or brothers in the majority language. The children sometimes also address their parents in the societal, not the family language. The parents' reactions differ (as revealed in the interviews) not only from family to family, but even within the families, depending on the communicative situation (see in more detail below).

As discussed in the theoretical part, agency is a form of social engagement. The interview data show that the children engage in commenting on their homes' language management and practices. This includes taking the role of their parents, when they behave as "language police" and correct the native language of parents in a playful way (*the teenager also corrects me when I pronounce Latvian a bit wrong*, participant D). At the same time, the children also reflect the parental behaviour regarding language policy at home (see Excerpt 6, participant C), when they criticize their parents when they come home and don't switch from the societal to the family language (the interview shows that this is done in an ironic way).

Excerpt 6: *when coming home from work I'm kind speaking of Norwegian, and they [shows the girls' indignation]: Mom, why are you speaking Norwegian [laughs]. And, and, yes, like that we look after each other.*

The children's agency is also informed by their past experiences before moving to the new living place. When telling about the behaviour of the older daughter after moving from school in Latvia to the new school in the UK, participant B emphasizes (Excerpt 7) the fear of the seven-year-old child to move to an unfamiliar language environment:

Excerpt 7: *The daughter was so scared that she just crawled under the table and didn't speak, didn't talk to anyone. At school. And just kicked the teacher.*

In the story told in Excerpt 7, the girl shows agentic behaviour. She refuses to be socially engaged and protests in the language which she is able to use in this situation – body language. Her mother explains in the interview that her daughter did not accept the school and the new living place at all in the beginning, and that she first declined to speak English.

In total, the interview data reveal that four of the theoretical strategy types explained above are used with regard to the children's switching from the family language to languages spoken outside home. This applies even in the data set of families which could be characterized as monolingual families in the sense that both parents have one common language of communication (Latvian).

The Minimal Grasp Strategy (MGS) is used by participant C: both parents speak Latvian and encourage their twin daughters to do so also. The informant tells that she does not accept situations when the children speak Norwegian or sometimes even English (mother: *they find it funny, to speak English*). The only exceptions are when the children have had a conflict or similar problems at school, and

when it is important for the parents to let the children tell about it in any language (see Excerpt 3). MGS is used very consciously when Participant C explicitly expresses her strategy and her linguistic behaviour in situations when the daughters address her in a language other than Latvian: *well, if you speak with me in Norwegian I will not answer you.*

Data from the interview with participant B reflect a language management strategy that can be considered as Adult Repetition (AR). When the youngest daughter comes home from school *she simply speaks English*. The informant explains that she tries to react to it by saying *stop, stop, stop, speak slowly and in Latvian*, and she often repeats in Latvian what the child has said. In most cases, however, this does not work, and also with her older siblings the youngest daughter communicates in English.

The strategies used by the other two families are more bilingual. Participant D's behaviour can be explained with the Move on Strategy (MOS) – as in the case when she tells that the youngest daughter (5 years) is at school most of the time where she communicates with her friends in English or Greek. When coming home, she speaks Latvian with her parents, but uses also words from other languages (Participant D: *this is her thoughts, flow*). The informant does not say explicitly that she or her husband comment on the language in which the child has given the response, it seems more that they do not try to change the languages used by their children.

The Language Switching (LS) is applied when parents switch to the language used by the child or another language during one speech act, as in Excerpt 8 when informant A says *we have this mixing* (in Latvian: *mums tāds mič mač ir*):

Excerpt 8: *Well, in reality, we often use two languages. I start [to say] something to her in Latvian, then she answers something in English, I also in English. Then I understand again [points to her head] I have to switch to Latvian. So that's it in short [laughs].*

As other examples from all four interviews, Excerpt 8 reflects that people accommodate their language ideologies, beliefs and attitudes to the sociolinguistic contexts that have an impact on their new home spaces. The examples also demonstrate that these ideologies are not static but dynamic and mobile. As can be seen in Excerpt 4, the parents believe in the important role of English, which could give their children an advantage in the future (*we opted for English (...), just so that she integrates better in that kindergarten, school*).

## 5. Conclusions and further discussion

Maintaining one's home (heritage) language in communication with one's children when living in the diaspora is challenging for parents and becomes increasingly difficult with every child. The youngest children incorporate languages spoken outside the home in their language repertoires, including when speaking with older siblings or by listening to them. Parents, but also teachers and other professionals such as speech therapists, can perceive bi- or multilingualism as a threat for the language progress of children; often they do not see it as a value and an enrichment. As revealed in the interviews on which this article is based, the children's language development, and in particular language or speech disorders, can inversely affect parents' language practices and consequently reshape their language attitudes and impact beliefs.

The examples given show that the extent to which parents are able to foster or hinder the bilingualism of their children also depends on the children themselves. The ability to maintain the heritage language and to raise one's children as bilingual speakers seems to depend on a combination of the parents' impact belief and their children's willingness to go along with it. In addition, a lot also depends on discourse strategies used in communication with one's children – whether families keep more monolingual habits (Minimal Grasp Strategy) or move towards bilingual directions (Move On or Language Switching Strategies).

Diverse linguistic practices by parents and children (e.g., the choice of one or another language or switching between languages) which are used in family life during everyday interactions, form and expand a family's language policy. These complex patterns of beliefs, management, and communication deserve to be explored in more detail. At the same time, these policies interrelate with language practices and beliefs in the local community, at school and at work, and with national societal discourses and policies. Still, each family is unique and complex in its own way and deserves individual attention.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that this study has been based on interview data with only four diaspora families in which all parents are speakers of Latvian. Also, it is important to remember that the respondents are teachers of Latvian (without official education in this field) involved in Saturday/Sunday school activities. Therefore, it is possible that the parents have presented themselves during the interviews in a way which they consider to be "favourable". Their stories of languages used at home may therefore not be an accurate account of their actual home language practices. The tendencies revealed in the interviews therefore would need to be explored through other research methods, and based on a higher number of informants.



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