



Research Study

Linguistic Trajectories and Family Language Policy: Return Migrant Families in Mexico

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ABSTRACT. The political and economic situation of the United States and Mexico has contributed to new waves of transnational families whose lived experiences in both countries have created a complex family language reality. Our study analyzes the family language policies of three transnational families within the context of Mexican–US immigration and return migration. Following the arc of each family member’s repertoire development, we examine the relationship between family language policy and individual linguistic repertoires. The present study used linguistic autobiographies and semi-structured interviews to gather perceptions of family language policy and repertoire development. Our findings highlight the role of transnational children’s experiences in shaping and reconfiguring family language policy. They show how each child’s linguistic trajectory contributes to the dynamism of family language policy in both the home and host countries. These cases illustrate that an individual’s linguistic repertoire is a subjective and changing construction of the individual and a result of one’s life experiences. The family language policy is a complex and dynamic construct subject to the experiences of each member of the family.

RÉSUMÉ. La situation politique et économique des États-Unis et du Mexique a contribué aux nouvelles vagues de familles transnationales qui retournent à leur lieu d’origine, dont les expériences dans les deux pays ont créé une réalité complexe de langage familial. Notre étude analyse la politique linguistique de trois familles transnationales dans le contexte de l’immigration et le retour Mexique–États-Unis. En suivant l’arc du développement du répertoire de chaque membre de la famille, nous avons examiné la relation entre la politique linguistique familiale et le développement des répertoires linguistiques individuels. La présente étude a utilisé des autobiographies linguistiques et des entretiens semi-structurés pour recueillir les perceptions sur la politique linguistique familiale et le développement du répertoire linguistique. Nos résultats soulignent le rôle des enfants transnationales dans la configuration et la reconfiguration de la politique linguistique familiale. Également, nos résultats montrent que la trajectoire linguistique de chaque enfant contribue au dynamisme de la politique linguistique familiale, autant du pays d’origine que dans le pays d’accueil, et, en plus, tout comme chaque répertoire serait une construction subjective et changeante de l’individu ainsi que le résultat de ses expériences, la politique linguistique familiale est également une construction complexe et dynamique qui tient des expériences de chaque membre de la famille.



Keywords: *transnational families, family language policy, linguistic trajectory, linguistic repertoire.*

INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years, the dynamic of Mexican–American immigration has highlighted a growing demographic in Mexico: families with lived experiences in both countries, usually identified as *return migrant* families. Return migration describes migrants “going home” to their country of origin, a phenomenon that is common in migration situations, but that is now happening on a greater scale, especially between the United States and Mexico (Mar-Molinero, 2018). The children in these families can be broadly grouped into two categories: those who were born in Mexico, and those who were born in the United States (Zuñiga & Giorguli, 2019). Recent research has examined these children’s experiences in the U.S. school system (Valdes, 2020) and their integration or reintegration into the Mexican context (Kleyn, 2017; Zuñiga & Giorguli, 2019; Zuñiga & Hamman, 2019). Although we studied these children as a starting point in previous work (Herrera Ruano et al., 2021), in this paper we expand our focus to the families.

Our study analyzes the complex family language policies of three transnational families within the context of Mexican U.S. immigration and return migration. To begin, we understand that the dynamics of immigration have changed as a consequence of new social, technological, and political developments over the last forty years (Blommaert, 2010; Arnaut, 2016). Before these changes, immigration was described as a well-regulated phenomenon where migrants’ profiles were usually well defined and predictable (Blommaert, 2013), but now there is radical diversification in migrants’ trajectories and profiles (Arnaut et al., 2016). The term *super-diversity* (Vertovec, 2007) has been coined to describe this diversification of migrant experiences, and it implies a need to reevaluate assumptions about the patterns of mobility, communication, and social networking, as well as consider the effects of information and communication technologies in immigration studies. In light of this, we have reconsidered concepts like *family* and *language* in our analysis of the intersection of linguistic trajectories and family language policy (Blommaert & Backus, 2013; Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020). For the transnational families in our study, the diversity of experiences within the family creates complexity. Within the same family, some siblings may be born in Mexico, and others born in



the United States; a family may leave some members behind when it crosses borders, or some family members may travel back and forth. In addition, we look at how repertoires develop and change over the course of transnational experience. For the parents in our case studies, the transnational experience means they acquire English resources as adults and often do not reach the same level of competence as their children. For the children, the transnational experience may mean that some claim Spanish as their mother tongue while their siblings claim English, or that some children acquire early literacy skills in both languages while their siblings do not develop literacy skills in their mother tongue (English or Spanish) until late in the developmental trajectory.

In recognition of this complexity and dynamism, our study analyzes the role of family language policy in the construction of the linguistic trajectories and the individual linguistic repertoires found in three transnational return migrant Mexican families. We explore how their experiences in both the host and home countries have influenced each person's linguistic trajectory and individual linguistic repertoire, and how each family member's experiences have shaped the family language policy.

Family Language Policy in Transnational Families

Family Language Policy (FLP) unites child language acquisition studies and language policy studies to answer questions related to families' language practices, beliefs and management, such as how multilingualism develops within the family unit (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009). Research in FLP often follows Spolsky's (2003, 2009) model of language policy, which outlines three main components: language practice, language ideology, and language management. We follow Curdt-Christiansen and Huang's (2020) model, which extends Spolsky's triad to include directionality and influence pathways for the internal and external factors that affect FLP, such as economic and educational factors, family culture, identity, and parental impact beliefs.

Recently, researchers have called for new FLP research to address gaps in the field. In his review of FLP, Lomeu Gomes (2018) argues for a critical approach that expands the scope of FLP studies in terms of frameworks, research methods, diversity of languages, geographical locations, and family configurations. Hirsch and Lee (2018) also argue for an expansion of the FLP framework to include the temporal



aspect of transnational families—when they moved and how much time they stayed in the home and host countries—and the (im)permanence of transnational moves. We recognize the need for new methods that capture a longitudinal view of FLP, because the temporal aspects affect locations, family configurations, and the external (social, educational, cultural, economic, and sociolinguistic) and internal (emotions, identity, family culture, parental impact belief, and child agency) factors proposed by Curdt-Christiansen and Huang's (2020) model.

In her treatment of FLP, Lanza (2007) explains how the family language environment influences bilingual language acquisition when one of the family languages does not have community support. The lack of community support for a minority language intensifies the role of the family in language acquisition and language policy. As transnational families move to the host country and back again, the languages that are supported—or not—by the community also change. For transnational families who have returned to the home country, the FLP must react in accordance to each move.

FLP is also more complex for transnational families because, as Hua and Wei (2016) note, transnational experiences and bilingualism often mean different things to different generations of the same family. They argue that “more attention needs to be paid to the diverse experiences of the individuals and to the strategies they use to deal with the challenges of multilingualism, rather than the overall patterns of language maintenance and language shift” (Hua & Wei, 2016, p. 1). Taking a longitudinal approach to describe the diversity of experiences and the changing dynamic of the individual's strategies allows us to gain insight into how transnational moves affect the development and maintenance of language.

Linguistic Repertoires and Trajectories

Given the variety of individual experiences within the family, the shifting community language support, and the changes in school language policies when transnational families relocate, family members often acquire a diverse set of semiotic resources from numerous languages and language varieties that provide them with a unique set of competencies. These resources are acquired at specific moments over the course of their lives and are used in various spaces. These semiotic resources, available to be used in interactional spaces, represent the individual's linguistic repertoire at any given point in time.



The term *linguistic repertoire* was initially conceived in interactional terms by Gumperz (1964), who defined it as the way a community of people communicate with each other. In her review of the concept's development, Busch (2015) highlights how Gumperz tended to "locate the linguistic repertoire in the linguistic community rather than in the speaking subject" (Busch, 2015, p. 345). She goes on to note that, more recently, many researchers have moved the concept "beyond the realm of the speech community" (Busch, 2015, p. 345) to locate the repertoire in the speaker or in localized spaces (see Blommaert & Backus, 2013; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2014; Rymes, 2014). Given the impact of super-diversity and new technologies, Gumperz's conception that the repertoire is a construction of the speech community must be reexamined. Following Blommaert and Backus (2013), we see the repertoire from a biographical or individual perspective, in the sense that the repertoire is a subjective and changing construction of the speaker and their life experiences. Thus, a linguistic trajectory is a sort of biographical map of the acquisition, development, and use of these resources as the repertoire develops and changes over time (Blommaert & Backus, 2013).

How a child acquires the linguistic resources that constitute the repertoire is, of course, one of the central questions of FLP and child language acquisition. Following our view that a repertoire is variable and a direct result of life experiences, we focus on the trajectory over the course of lived experience in order to see how individuals believe their repertoires were acquired and have developed, as well as how they believe their competencies have changed.

Research Questions

Our main objective for this paper is to analyze linguistic trajectories in order to determine the relationship between linguistic repertoires and the transnational family language policy for three return migrant Mexican families. Our research is therefore guided by the following questions:

1. What is the arc of each family member's repertoire, and what linguistic milestones mark its development?
2. What is the role of FLP in individual family members' linguistic trajectories and the development of linguistic repertoires?
3. How do each family member's experiences reconfigure and shape the FLP?



METHODOLOGY

The data presented here come from three transnational families with children who grew up in two national contexts, Mexico, and the United States. We call them *return migrant families* to highlight their experiences as immigrants who left Mexico to live and work in the United States, but who ultimately returned to their “home” country. In Family 1, the parents went to the United States when their oldest child was about one year old, and their second child was born there. Family 2 went to the United States when the mother’s youngest child was about two years old and the two older children were in elementary school. In Family 3, the parents went to the United States, and their children were born there. Parts of each of these families returned to Mexico between 2008 and 2010.

When we started our research in 2016 for a previous phase of this study, we identified three undergraduate students with transnational experience in the university program where we work. All three students began their formal education in the United States and entered the Mexican educational system when they were around 12 years old. We conducted the interviews once in Spanish and then again with another researcher in English, believing that this might uncover additional themes related to their language experiences. For a previous publication, following Blommaert and Backus (2013), we used what emerged from the data to co-construct a timeline visually representing each student’s perception of their linguistic trajectory and varying competencies over the course of their lives (Herrera Ruano et al., 2021).

For this study, we have expanded our focus to the families of all three of these students. The core family members for all three families are the mothers and children; other family members were not consistently living with the children over the course of the transnational experience. Our data collection consisted of oral linguistic autobiographies (Pavlenko, 2007) and semi-structured interviews where each family member reported their linguistic histories and educational experiences in both countries. For the students, we used the interviews from the first phase of our research mentioned above and conducted new interviews with siblings and mothers or parents specifically for this phase of the research. For Family 1, interviews were carried out with the mother and two children; for Family 2, interviews were with the mother and youngest child; for Family 3, the interviews were done with the mother, father, and both children. We first asked each member of the family to tell us their life story. We then continued with an interview focused



on language acquisition and use, as well as adaptation to the U.S. and Mexican contexts. We did not follow a formalized list of questions; instead, each interview varied according to the individual's experience. All interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy by research assistants.

We used thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine the biographies and interviews and identify themes related to each individual's perceptions of their experiences in the United States and Mexico; this included how individual experiences shape the arc of each family member's repertoire, including linguistic milestones, language competencies, and language ideologies, as well as the role of macro and micro factors in individual language development. The themes that emerged included language interventions, emotions, identity, parental impact beliefs, child agency, and language practices. We used these themes to construct the narratives presented below. These narratives form the basis for the subsequent discussion regarding linguistic trajectories and FLP. To maintain privacy, we have used pseudonyms for all family members.

FINDINGS: THREE TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

Family 1: Carol's Family

Carol's mother, Emma, grew up speaking Spanish in Nayarit, Mexico and is the oldest in a family of four. She started learning English when she enrolled in nursing school at age 17, but the classes were basic, and she only learned a few words. She got married at 19, left nursing school just before graduation, and had her first child, Carol, a year later. Before Carol's first birthday, Emma and her husband, Marcos, decided to go to the United States to work but planned to return before Carol started school. Once they had crossed the border, the family went to live with Marcos's sister in California. Marcos found a job quickly, but Emma decided to study English first at a community school with a daycare for Carol.

From the moment they arrived in the US, Carol's linguistic environment changed. Her parents spoke Spanish to her, but she was surrounded by English. Emma says she taught Carol to write her name and some words in Spanish because she wanted Carol to be connected to her roots and her Mexican origins. The family ended up staying in the United States longer than they had planned; Carol soon started school, and her sister, Liz, was born in the United States. Carol learned to read and



write in English at school. Her parents continued using Spanish with her and her sister, but Carol always used English with them, with her sister, with her cousins, at school, and with her friends. Carol's sister, Liz, considers English her first language. Liz says she always understood Spanish, but when she started to speak, it was in English. Emma wanted to teach Liz to write in Spanish, like she had taught Carol, but she was working by then and no longer had time. Liz developed receptive Spanish skills, but she never tried to speak it, saying she never needed to.

Carol's family moved three times, always living with other relatives from Mexico. They also usually had family visiting. Interaction was always in both languages at home. When they moved to Las Vegas, Emma decided to get a job as a waitress, confident with what she had learned in English. They were happy living in the United States and thought they would stay forever, but Marcos decided to go back to Mexico. Emma and her children stayed in the United States without him for almost a year before moving back to reunite the family.

When the family returned to Mexico, Carol was ten years old, and Liz was six. Emma was worried that moving back would be difficult for her children, especially at school. The children were excited to return to Mexico, but as Emma suspected, it was a difficult process for her children. Carol says she suffered a lot at school. She understood Spanish, but it was difficult for her to speak it, and she had never learned to read and write in anything other than English. The teachers ignored her, and her classmates bullied her, so she started to get her parents' help to focus more on learning Spanish and no longer used only English. One day, however, she was talking to her cousin in English on the phone and noticed it was hard for her. She realized she did not want to forget her English. She started reading and watching more videos in English and made sure her younger sister did as well. For Liz, on the other hand, adapting to her new school in Mexico was not so difficult. Emma thinks this was because she was just starting elementary school when they came back, so although Liz only spoke English, she got used to speaking Spanish and easily learned to read and write in Spanish too.

Six years later, Emma and Marcos divorced, and Emma and her children went to live with her parents. They are in frequent contact with their relatives who live in the United States, and they speak English when those relatives come to visit. Carol and Liz usually share books in English and watch TV in English together. They say they use some phrases in English, but they never communicate with each other completely in English anymore. Carol says she has improved her English at the



university, because her major includes English classes that have helped her to develop reading and writing skills in English. The family considers their experience in the United States of great value, because they have experienced other cultures and gained language resources. They believe they have more opportunities because of their experience with English and Spanish, and are eager to learn more languages.

Family 2: Irelda's Family

Irelda's mother, Maria, grew up with several older siblings in a monolingual Spanish-speaking household in a farming community in Nayarit. The family valued education, making it a priority even when school represented financial hardship. Maria studied to become a nurse but dropped out shortly before finishing her degree when she became pregnant with her first child. When her husband passed away, she was still young, and her sons were two and six. Due to the financial strain of being a single mother in a small town with little economic opportunity, Maria decided to go to the United States, as many others from her town had done before her. She left her young children with family and crossed the border without thinking twice about the possible linguistic challenges she would face.

Maria spoke no English on this first trip over the border and mainly moved in Spanish-speaking circles, where the need for English was minimal. She met Irelda's father soon after crossing the border and became pregnant, although she returned to Mexico to have Irelda and reunite with her other two children. Back in Mexico, Maria maintained monolingual language practices and management. Both of her older children were in school and developing language resources in Spanish, so Irelda began acquiring language in a monolingual Spanish family environment.

When Irelda was just a year old, her father returned to Mexico and, after a few months, they all left for the United States together. Once again, Maria found a cultural and linguistic support system in the local Mexican community and reports that although she began to learn some English, it was not a priority for her. She knew the move would be hard on the older children, but she also expected they would learn English on their own as they integrated into school. There were no bilingual programs at the schools they attended. The first year was difficult for her boys, who would come home from school upset and wanting to go back to Mexico. The first year, both boys were made to start a grade behind because of their lack of English. The boys' acquisition was largely dependent on school; the family could not



afford extra English classes, and Maria's own knowledge of English was minimal. Still, she was confident that the boys would soon catch up with their peers. After a year, she says that they were speaking English between themselves at home.

Irelda's experience was different from that of her brothers. When she began school, her linguistic experiences already included both languages. Her home environment had provided opportunities to develop English resources from her brothers and from the wider sociolinguistic environment that the family was now exposed to, which for Irelda included going to the Boys and Girls Club. Once she started school, she had ample opportunity to continue developing a variety of resources in English.

Over the course of their time in the U.S., the family composition changed after Maria's relationship with Irelda's father ended. The family began moving more often, sharing homes with other friends, relatives, and partners. Maria reports that the boys, especially the middle child, began to reject Spanish. She tried to maintain the boys' Spanish literacy development, but was unsuccessful. She says her middle child told her he did not need Spanish because he never thought he would return to Mexico. Irelda was more open, and Maria taught her basic literacy in Spanish using an elementary textbook an aunt had provided. Maria herself began to take classes in English and acquire more competencies in public interactions at her children's schools and her job. She spoke Spanish with her children, although she could now understand when her children used English at home. She was proud that her children were speaking English.

During the economic crisis of 2008, Maria decided to return to Mexico with her family. The process of reintegration to the Mexican context was extremely difficult for the children. Educational institutions and teachers were not always receptive to students with transnational experiences. Irelda's brother had to repeat two years of high school that he had already done in the United States because he spoke no Spanish at all upon return, and Irelda was rejected by the first school where she tried to register because her paperwork was from the United States.

Both Maria and Irelda report that once back in Mexico, it was Maria's middle child who had the hardest time adapting. In response, the family consciously reduced their use of English in order to support his development in Spanish. Maria reports that she gradually stopped using English, and that only her children used it in the home. She supported their use of English and defended her children when relatives



and friends commented that the children should not speak English in public because they were in Mexico now.

Irelda reports that until she started college, the only people she used English with were her brothers, although she also used it for watching movies and listening to music. She reports that in middle school she used mostly the vernacular Spanish of her parents' hometown and only began to gain more literacy resources in Spanish in high school. At first, she had difficulty understanding concepts and expressing herself in Spanish even though she could speak, read, and write a little. In high school she was exempted from English classes because she was perceived by her English teachers to speak English already. Once she started college and faced a higher level of linguistic expectation, she began to feel that her competencies were underdeveloped in both languages; however, she also had the opportunity to develop them in an educational context. Now she works as an English teacher; she uses English all day and feels like it is affecting her Spanish.

Family 3: David's Family

David's mother, Micaela, grew up in Nayarit with her six siblings in a Spanish-speaking household that encouraged all the children to pursue higher education. Micaela decided to study nursing, and after graduation, she moved to Tijuana for work. She later moved back to Nayarit and met David's father, Jacob. Before meeting Micaela, Jacob crossed the border for the first time, inspired by a friend's stories of living in the United States. That first visit only lasted three months, but soon after, he decided he wanted to live in the United States. He says he did not need to learn English in California at first, but when he moved to Arizona three years later, he decided he should learn. Since then, he has mainly lived in Arizona, although he comes back to visit Mexico often.

Jacob met Micaela while visiting family in Mexico and asked her to go to the United States with him. Micaela accepted, but felt sad living in the United States and went back to Mexico after two months. Only a month after returning to Mexico, she realized she was pregnant. She decided to rejoin Jacob, and David was born in Arizona in 1999. During her second stay in the United States, Micaela took some English classes, but quit after a year and a half because she did not have time. She acquired mostly receptive resources in English; she reports that she can communicate basic needs, but she cannot maintain a conversation. In the United



States, Micaela spoke Spanish to her children at home, but English was the community language everyone used outside the home. The family kept in touch with their extended Mexican family in Spanish.

Micaela taught both her children basic literacy skills in Spanish, but they did not acquire Spanish literacy skills at school while in Arizona. David acquired his literacy skills in English at school in the United States. His mother reported that he had a special education designation for part of his early educational experience in the United States but does not remember what it was for specifically. When his mother decided to return to Mexico, David was fluent in English, and he brought his movies, CDs, and games to Mexico. David says he thought his Spanish was good until he came to Mexico. He realized his vocabulary was limited, and he could not understand his classmates when they used certain expressions. The Spanish he had learned at home was not what he heard in Mexico. His classmates made fun of him because of how he spoke, and the teacher did not help him either, so he moved to another school. In the new school, he received help from his teacher and classmates, and his resources in Spanish improved. David's family helped him at home, and he says his cousins helped him with Spanish pronunciation.

In 2004, David's brother, Oziel, was also born in Arizona. Oziel was just starting to learn English in kindergarten when the family returned to Mexico. His Spanish quickly developed as he finished kindergarten in Mexico, and throughout elementary school, Oziel used mainly Spanish. He almost never used English except when watching cartoons, and he refused to communicate with David in English. Recently, however, he returned to the United States to live with his father and is in high school developing English resources again.

David did not return to Arizona with his brother; he decided to stay with his mother in Mexico and finish university, where he is continuing to develop both English and Spanish resources. He wants to go back to the United States when he graduates. Although David and Oziel use both Spanish and English, Jacob always insisted they speak one or the other depending on where and with whom they were speaking, saying that this was more respectful.



DISCUSSION

One Family, Different Linguistic Trajectories

The transnational experience does not produce homogenous linguistic outcomes. The narratives for each of the three families above demonstrate that although each family member has transnational experiences, they each have their own unique trajectory. As in a complex system, each trajectory affects the trajectories of the other members, and the arc of each family member's repertoire influences FLP.

In Family 1, the oldest child was an infant in the preverbal stages of acquisition when the family went to live in the United States. She began to develop productive and receptive skills in Spanish and English while there. When she started school in the United States, she acquired literacy resources and further developed her productive and receptive skills in English. She continued developing mostly receptive skills in Spanish. Her younger sister was born in the United States. She developed receptive skills in Spanish because of her parents and receptive and productive skills in English with her sister. The younger sister was just beginning to develop literacy in English when the family came back to Mexico. When they returned, the parents realized they needed to help both their children acquire productive skills in Spanish. The older daughter struggled with literacy in Spanish for a while and shifted her attention from English. The younger daughter was reported by her mother to slip easily into Spanish and quickly develop productive skills, too. The older sister decided to maintain her English skills and help her younger sister in doing so as well.

In Family 2, the oldest child had developed literacy skills and a wide range of oral skills in Spanish before leaving Mexico. The middle child was just beginning to develop literacy skills. The youngest child was an infant in the preverbal stages of acquisition before leaving. Upon arrival in the United States, these trajectories diverged. The two older children transferred most productive and receptive practices to English, and their Spanish resource development paused at different stages. From an early age, the youngest child developed productive and receptive skills in both languages, but predominantly in English because of her siblings. By the time they returned to Mexico, the oldest child easily slipped back into Spanish and quickly regained a wide range of pragmatic skills, but the middle child no longer claimed any productive skills and had minimal receptive skills in Spanish. The youngest child



struggled with literacy in Spanish at first and later in English when she started university. The middle child's lack of Spanish upon return to Mexico brought about a policy of increased use of Spanish in the home, and his younger sister consciously tried to use English less with her sibling to support his successful integration outside the home.

In Family 3, the older child was born in the United States and developed Spanish at home and English at school. His younger brother was also born in the United States and developed skills in Spanish and English at home thanks to his brother. The younger child was just starting his education and beginning to develop literacy in English when the family came back to Mexico. The mother returned to using only Spanish, while the father stayed in the United States and continued to use both. The older child struggled to develop Spanish literacy skills at first and needed support to do so. He also consciously looked for strategies to maintain his resources in English. His younger brother easily slipped into Spanish and quickly developed productive skills in Spanish. In Mexico, he refused to use English with his brother, perhaps due to his father's beliefs about speaking one language or the other, depending on where they were, as a sign of respect. Now that the younger sibling is back in the United States, he has started to develop his resources in English again. The older child continues developing resources in English and Spanish and hopes to go back to the United States someday.

These three families' trajectories demonstrate that the development of individual linguistic repertoires is complex and dynamic, with language policy being continuously reconfigured through their transnational trajectories. Time and space were instrumental in determining the language resources each family member acquired. As they moved through the space of Mexico and the United States at different points in their trajectories, they acquired a variety of linguistic resources, resulting in unique repertoires that influenced the family language policy.

Parental Impact Beliefs

For these transnational families, the narratives showed little belief in parental responsibility for interventions related to home country language development while in the host country and vice versa. These weak parental impact beliefs (de Houwer, 1999) could be seen in how parents did not make premeditated efforts to prepare for their life in the United States from a language perspective, neither for themselves



nor for their children and in how, once there, parental support for both home and host country language was restricted to basic home literacy. Explicit interventions were limited—perhaps due to financial constraints, the educational policies of the states where they lived, the age of the children, and the children’s expectations about returning to Mexico. Additionally, we detected that some parents saw language development as the purview of the schools, not the home, or as a natural process that did not require supported intervention. Other studies have found that parents were conflicted about not providing support for their children in heritage language acquisition while in the host country (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020, p. 180). However, we did not find that these parents’ emotions were negatively affected in this way, perhaps because the participants in our study had returned to their home country. If the families had stayed in the United States, they may have had regret and emotion related to support for heritage language acquisition. We also did not find negative parental emotions around not providing support for continued English acquisition once in Mexico, although there were clearly negative emotions from the children’s perspectives.

Child Agency

The narratives showed that from the children’s perspectives, motivations for learning and maintaining languages were tied to a sense of belonging (Hua & Wei, 2016). Older children may not have maintained Spanish while in the host country because they had established a sense of belonging and therefore did not perceive a need for the home country language any longer. While the parents were perhaps aware that their lives would continue to inhabit both worlds and that return was possible, the older children did not think about the possibility of returning. Consequently, upon return, the older children had to reconstruct a sense of belonging from a new standpoint, concerning their repertoire.

For all the children, there were many perspectives motivating repertoire development depending on which category they belonged to. If they were born in Mexico and arrived in the United States as small children, the challenge of developing new language resources was immediate but eventually met. For the younger children or those that were born in the United States, the host country language was taken on as a mother tongue. All children maintained the home country language, but to different extents. Upon return, the parents were able to



easily slide back into a comfortable language position, while the children faced additional challenges in the construction and consolidation of their repertoire.

Linguistic Milestones and Trajectories

The narratives show how family language policy is determined by each member's linguistic milestones and trajectory. These milestones are moments of agency that influence interactional family language practices and the repertoire development of other family members. From the perspective of the trajectory, the dynamic role of the middle child in Family 2 is evident: He is integral in creating a sibling language practice of using English while in the United States, but is also chiefly responsible for shifting that same sibling practice toward Spanish upon return. The older siblings in both Families 1 and 2 channeled their own fears about losing English skills into promoting its use with younger siblings. We can see how the linguistic environment in the home responds to the cultural environment in both the host and home country.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study responded to calls to analyze the "diverse experiences of the individuals and the strategies they use to deal with the challenges of multilingualism" (Hua & Wei, 2016, p. 1), by examining the relationship between transnational linguistic trajectories and family language policy for three families in the Mexico-United States return migrant context. Our findings show that just as each repertoire is a subjective and changing construction of the individual and a result of one's life experiences, the FLP is a complex and dynamic construct subject to the experiences of each member of the family. Language policy in the three families was continuously reconfigured through their transnational trajectories in response to a variety of factors and cultural environments. Children played a greater role in FLP because of weak parental impact beliefs. Viewing FLP from the perspective of return migration also allowed us to consider how the FLP in the host country affects the FLP in the home country. Although for our study we used each family member's present-day perceptions of their past experiences, additional research could take a more longitudinal and ethnographic approach to documenting the relationship over time. We would like to see how these children's transnational experiences influence future decisions about language, belonging, and family as they become adults and perhaps begin their own families.



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