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To cite this article: Khadij Gharibi & Seyed Hadi Mirvahedi (2021): 'You are Iranian even if you were born on the moon': family language policies of the Iranian diaspora in the UK, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, DOI: [10.1080/01434632.2021.1935974](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1935974)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1935974>



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Published online: 08 Jun 2021.



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'You are Iranian even if you were born on the moon': family language policies of the Iranian diaspora in the UK

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ABSTRACT

With a focus on an under-studied group of immigrants in the UK, this paper examines Iranian families' language ideologies and practices at home in relation to Persian acquisition and maintenance for their children. Working within a family language policy (FLP) framework (King, K. A., Fogle, L., & Logan-Terry, A. 2008. Family language policy. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 2(5), 907–922.), we draw on sociolinguistic data from semi-structured interviews with eighteen mothers to understand how parental beliefs, their everyday language practices and the attempts they make to maintain, improve, or alter their language use will lead to their children's heritage language acquisition and maintenance. The results of the study suggest that the success in heritage language development and maintenance boils down to parental pro heritage language ideologies and their everyday small-scale practices. It was also found that the interrelationship between language and cultural values and a successful FLP was further reinforced by the parents' migration trajectory and proficiency in English as the societal language. This research also showed that the large size of this diaspora in the UK (particularly in London), their close-knit social network, availability of heritage language weekend schools and the possibility of frequent visits to the home country create a conducive situation for the Iranian diaspora to raise their children bilingually.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 January 2021
Accepted 21 May 2021

KEYWORDS

Heritage language acquisition and maintenance; family language policy; Iranian diaspora

Introduction

The simultaneous and sudden surge of different waves of migrants into Europe since the 1960s, and the recent refugee influx since 2015, along with intra-EU mobility has made Europe ethno-linguistically and culturally *superdiverse* (Crul 2016; Scholten 2018). The United Kingdom is certainly no exception, and London alone projects an image of 'the world in one city' (Vertovec 2007). This rich multilingualism is attested by 2020 statistics issued by the Department of Education showing that one in three pupils in the UK primary schools (33.9%) are of minority ethnic origins and one in five of them (21.3%) have been exposed to languages other than English as their first language in the home (Department of Education 2019). What such bilingualism for those children and their families mean is that they have to juggle the public and private sphere of social life and the accompanying requirements of each. That is, on the one hand, they need to gain social acceptance by obtaining the mainstream language and culture and successfully participating in the educational

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and political system and the labor markets, and on the other hand, they may want to maintain their heritage language that is important to their national/ethnic identity or keeping in touch with the family members in the household or the home country.

With a focus on an under-studied group of migrants in the UK, this paper examines Iranian families' language ideologies and practices at home in relation to Persian acquisition and maintenance for their children. Working within a family language policy (FLP) framework (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry 2008), we draw on sociolinguistic data from semi-structured interviews with mothers to understand how parental beliefs about the heritage language, their everyday language practices and the attempts they make to maintain, improve, or alter their language use will lead to the heritage language proficiency of their children.

Family language policy

Family language policy (FLP) emerged as an offshoot of the field of language policy in the early 2000s to examine explicit and overt planning and decision-making with respect to language use at home (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry 2008; Luykx 2003). FLP is based on the idea that, similar to the macro-level domains and institutions, the micro-level household has also its own policies; thus, a similar tripartite model of language policy, i.e. *language ideologies, language practices, and language management* (Spolsky 2004, 2009), can be applied to understand family members' roles in deciding and shaping the family's verbal repertoire (Lanza and Vold Lexander 2019). 'Contact zones' (Pratt 1991), such as in migratory contexts where the host country's language and culture clash with those of migrant families, has been, in particular, the focus of FLP research, because the framework allows us to address important questions with respect to the degree of space and value which languages get within the family domain (Haque 2019; Macalister and Mirvahedi 2017). Since family remains to be the main primary space and constituent of the maintenance of heritage language, culture, and identity, FLP research can shed light on not only parents' 'explicit' (Shohamy 2006) and 'overt' (Schiffman 1996) decisions in relation to language use and learning at home, but also on their 'covert,' 'implicit,' and 'invisible' ideologies that shape their everyday language socialization (Curdt-Christiansen 2009, 2018).

Studies, for instance, have found that while parents may explicitly express positive attitudes towards using, learning and maintaining the heritage language at home, they may promote another language, usually the dominant societal language, by socializing their children into and through that language at home (Mirvahedi and Jafari 2021; Yu 2010). This body of research has shown that parents' 'practiced language policies' (Bonacina-Pugh 2012) may either differ from their expressed ideologies and decisions, or they are contested, e.g. by children, in daily interactions at home, suggesting that FLP is often 'unarticulated, fluid and negotiated moment by moment' (King and Fogle 2017). This happens due to the fact that the private and public spheres of social life and the accompanying requirements of each, i.e. orientations towards intimacy and family-bound affection, and orientations towards trajectories of success and mobility, respectively, intersect and compete at home (Canagarajah 2008; Curdt-Christiansen 2013; Mirvahedi 2020; Mirvahedi and Macalister 2017; Tannenbaum 2012).

Within the context of this study, the UK FLP studies have illuminated such challenges that parents encounter in shaping the children's heritage language proficiency and identity alongside English. Research on Chinese, Italian and Pakistani Urdu-speaking families in the UK, for instance, shows that despite the families' willingness to enrich their children's proficiency and literacy skills in the heritage languages, not all the parents have managed to provide adequate input for the development of their children's proficiency. This indicates how sociocultural and socio-political realities and the concomitant difficulties and constraints can prevent families from developing proficiency and literacy in the heritage language (Curdt-Christiansen and La Morgia 2018). Wilson (2020) similarly sheds light on the complexity of language ideologies at home arguing that child heritage language speakers may develop conflicting attitudes to languages and bilingualism at home. Her research on five French-English transnational children in Britain shows that while heritage speakers

have generally positive attitudes towards bilingualism, their views about their parents' language practices and management may differ substantially, adopting a more translanguaging practice rather than sticking to using only the home language in the family.

FLP researchers have also provided insights on how families draw on the affordances outside the home to achieve their linguistic goals for their children. Schwartz, Moin, and Leikin (2011) argue that parents' language-related strategies in achieving children's bilingual development can also be external (i.e. actions performed to support children's bilingual development outside the home). While the internal strategies include language socialization at home (e.g. Lanza 2007a), parents may reach outside the home to find support for their children's language acquisition such as choosing to live in a particular neighborhood or enrolling their children in a certain school. This suggests that research examining language socialization patterns of families and ideologies guiding them can unravel a 'cross-scalar complexity,' which is 'a stratified and polycentric language-ideological construction enveloping multiple resources and scripts for their deployment across scales' (Blommaert 2019, 3). FLP scholarship can thus no longer offer a comprehensive account of what is going on in the family if it neglects the affordances and constraints of a language ecology in which families find themselves (Mirvahedi 2020).

Against this backdrop, we aim to apply family language policy to understand what Iranian families living in the UK believe and do about the development and maintenance of Persian language and Iranian culture and identity alongside English in the family, striving to shed light on the dynamicity and complexity of FLP in the diaspora. Moreover, we explore what affordances the parents draw on, and what challenges they encounter on the way to foster bilingualism in their children.

This study

Although there are many Iranian immigrants living around the world, making Persian a dispersed language, this diaspora has been understudied in terms of heritage language acquisition and maintenance particularly in Europe. While the United States houses over 1,500,000 Iranians as the leading destination for emigrants from this country (Connor 2018), Iranians have formed substantial transnational populations in Europe mainly in Germany (around 153,000 people), England (86,000), Sweden (63,000), the Netherlands (37,500), and France (15,000) (Honari, Bezouw, and Namazie 2017).

The majority of immigrants in the Iranian diaspora left the home country in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 which is marked as the first mass emigration of Iranians from their homeland. The post-revolution wave of immigrants included political refugees or exiles, Iranians who left the homeland because of religious or cultural reasons (such as Baha'is, Jews, Christians, Armenians and Assyrians) and educated Iranians, who settled mainly in the United States and Europe (Bozorgmehr 1995; Chaichian 2012). The second wave of emigration from Iran was caused primarily by the Iran-Iraq war which lasted for eight years and forced many Iranians out of the country. During this period (1980-1988), many professionals, academics, left-wing party members, women escaping religious restrictions and gender-based discrimination, and men trying to escape the military service, left the country (Chaichian 2012, p. 23). The most recent wave of emigration from Iran occurred in the aftermath of the presidential election in 2009, after which there was an increase in the number of skilled and educated Iranian emigrants as well as refugees and asylum seekers (Chaichian 2012), 'driven by young Iranians' sense of a future deferred' (Sreberny and Gholami 2019, 211), or those who were mostly economically motivated to leave the country (Mirvahedi 2019).

In regard to the size of this diaspora within Britain, figures are poor, since 'Iranian' is not offered as an ethnic category on official surveys by the UK government in the Census or large-scale surveys (Sreberny and Gholami 2019). However, the Census data based on the country of birth reveal that the number of Iranian immigrants in the UK has been increasing from 28,617 in 1981-32,262 in 1991, and to 84,735 in 2011 (Census Data). In general, Iranian immigrants in the UK stand out

for their various forms of capital, since the majority of them are highly educated and professionally successful in medicine, engineering, law and business among their favored fields (see Sreberny and Gholami 2016).

Although Iranians seemingly try to integrate successfully into the British society, many have feared losing their sense of ethnic/national identity and have made great efforts in maintaining Iranian cultural forms and the Persian language. This led to a growing number of Persian educational and socio-cultural venues (such as Persian language schools, cultural celebrations, Persian restaurants, poetry readings, contemporary and classical Persian music concerts) developed since the 80s (Spellman 2002). Despite the fact that Britain hosts one of the highest numbers of Iranian immigrants in Europe, there have not been any studies to uncover how they invest in the heritage language acquisition and maintenance for their children, a gap in the FLP literature which our study aims to fill.

Methodology

Participants

In this study, we focused on 18 mothers aged 33–49 years old. The reason for focusing on mothers only is that they function as the main caregivers and primary sources of heritage language input in the family. Furthermore, gender has been found to influence language ideologies and practices in some households in Iranian families with mothers often promoting the standard official language at home (see Mirvahedi and Jafari 2021). The participants were all born in Iran and left the home country during their adulthood (except one who emigrated at the age of 10). These mothers have been living in the United Kingdom between 9–35 years (mean: 14.8), while their husbands' length of residence in the UK was longer on average (ranged from 8–41 years; mean: 22.4 years). Despite living in the UK for over a decade on average, these mothers had monolingual-like proficiency in Persian. Eight of the mothers were housewives at the time of the study, while ten of them were working full time or part time in English speaking environments, except one who was working as a teacher in a Persian weekend school in London. Their children were 25 heritage speakers (14 girls and 11 boys) aged 6–14 years old, sixteen of whom had siblings and seven of them were the only children of their families. Twenty one of these heritage speakers were born in the UK, two of them were born in the United States and one was born in Iran but immigrated to the UK at the age of three. The families mainly resided in London except three who were recruited from Essex county.

It should be highlighted that the current study is a part of a larger project on psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics of heritage language bilingualism. Therefore, the heritage speakers should have had some levels of productive knowledge in Persian to be able to participate in the psycholinguistic experiments. The current study is drawn upon the sociolinguistic investigation of the large project. In addition, the families who were recruited mainly reside in London, where they have large social network from the home country as well as heritage language schools available.

Instruments

The data in this study mainly come from semi-structured interviews with the mothers with respect to their language ideologies, language practices and management. Parents were interviewed based on a questionnaire grounded in the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic literature on heritage language acquisition and maintenance. This questionnaire, which was developed and updated throughout conducting multiple projects on the Iranian diaspora (see Gharibi 2016; Gharibi and Seals 2020), included five sections. In addition to eliciting personal information such as parents' ages, length of residence, children's ages, and whether the family had lived in another country before moving to the UK, the main section of the questionnaire was designed to reveal parental beliefs on Persian acquisition and maintenance for their children.

Family language use was investigated in the next sections. There were questions to explore the children's language use in situations where they had the opportunity to develop and maintain their productive and receptive abilities in the heritage language in addition to the home context. Furthermore, there were questions about the frequency of the families' visits to Iran as well as how often they had visitors from their Persian-speaking friends and relatives. Family language use and maintenance efforts were investigated in the last section. The parents were asked how they encourage their children to develop Persian, and how their children react to their efforts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the families' homes or places of their choosing. All interviews were carried out in Persian, with participants being comfortable to code-switch between languages, as they wanted. All parents reported feeling more comfortable speaking in Persian than in English.

Thematic analysis as a qualitative method was then applied to the data for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes), i.e. 'something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun and Clarke 2006, 82). Themes were identified in two coding stages, namely initial and focused coding (Charmaz 2006). During initial coding, we studied 'fragments of data words, lines, segments, and incidents-closely for their analytic import'. While engaging in focused coding, we selected what appeared to be the most useful initial codes and tested them against extensive data. Throughout the process, as suggested by Charmaz (2006), we compared 'data with data and then data with codes' (42).

Findings

Linguistic ideologies

Parental language ideologies are a central component of family language policy. Many variables that relate to 'linguistic culture – the sum total of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, myths, religious strictures, and all the other cultural 'baggage' that speakers bring to their dealings with language from their culture' (Schiffman 2006, p. 112) form the language ideology component of FLP. The analysis of the interview data revealed that it was extremely important for the majority of parents that their children would learn and maintain their heritage language. Even those parents whose children had comparatively lower levels of Persian proficiency reported their strong beliefs on heritage language development for their children. Examining the mothers' language ideologies in this study revealed that the acquisition and maintenance of Persian was of paramount importance for three main reasons. The mothers saw Persian as a tool to instill and cultivate their Iranian cultural identity in their children, to keep in touch with the homeland, and keep the family together.

(a) Iranian identity matters

In migratory contexts, as people move across the borders and lose some of the support system in terms of culture, language and history, their sense of 'who they are' is contested and negotiated, and new identities are then constructed, a process in which language practices play a significant role (see Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Barkhuizen 2013; Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur 2018). New identities are then constructed, and old ones are contested and negotiated. One recurring theme that emerged from the interviews shows that for the majority of mothers the acquisition and maintenance of Persian is strongly linked to 'who they are' as Iranians. However, some of the participants reported that such identification with the Iranian identity was contested by their children. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from Narges with strong beliefs on heritage language development, explaining how she discusses with her daughter Raha why she needs to develop good conversational proficiency as well as literacy skills in Persian.

نرگس : من بهش می‌گم زبان مادریه. ما ایرانی هستیم. اون می‌گه من انگلیسی‌م چون این‌جا به دن‌یا اومدم. می‌گم تو کره ماه هم به دن‌یا اومده باشی، باز ایرانی هستی... می‌دونن وقتی زیاد انگلیسی حرف می‌زنن تو خون، از

فرهنگ ایران جدا می‌شن. بعد خود به خود چیزای خارجیه رو یاد می‌گیرن. [...] من فکر می‌کنم زبان یه جورای کم‌کم می‌کنه که بچه رو نگاه داری.

Narges: I would tell her it's our mother tongue, we are Iranian. She says she is English because she was born here. I would say 'you are Iranian even if you were born on the moon!' ... You know, when they frequently speak English at home, they would drift away from the Iranian culture, then automatically learn the foreigners' stuff [from the British culture] [...] I think it [Persian] helps you keep the child.

Narges is a 49 year-old mother, who has lived in the UK for 17 years and has a nine-year-old daughter, Raha, with a very good proficiency and communicative skills in Persian. The mother's conflict with her daughter regarding how national identity is defined illuminates important points regarding the acquisition and maintenance of Persian across generations. While the mother's definition of national identity is strongly linked to Persian as the heritage language which entails its acquisition and maintenance, her daughter's definition of national identity is based on her own place of birth. Thus, the daughter views herself as 'English', whereas the mother believes that their national identity is not 'negotiable' (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004); even if she had been born 'on the moon' she would have been still considered 'Iranian,' implying and claiming a more patrimonial line of linguistic and cultural transmission. What further contributes to the mother's strong belief with respect to the maintenance of Persian is her concern that the lack of proficiency in Persian might equal her daughter's separation from the Iranian culture. Viewing English speakers as 'foreigners,' the mother necessitates knowing Persian as it would help her to 'keep the child'. In other words, Persian and how the family should be held together has a 'core value' for Narges, the rejection of which would carry with it the threat of exclusion from the group (Smolicz 1981, 75). These patterns of language maintenance and identification with Iranian national and cultural identity are in line with studies on Iranian migrants in other parts of the world, such as in the US (e.g. Hoffman 1989; Modarresi 2001), and New Zealand (Gharibi and Seals 2020).

(b) Imagining a future life in the home country

Future aspirations have been shown to affect parental language ideologies and practices in migratory contexts (Hua and Wei 2016). Whether parents imagine their future life in the host country or aspire to return to their home country in the future could inform the family's language beliefs and practices. Such similar aspirations were repeated by just less than half of the participating parents in this study (8 out of 18 parents) who highlighted the possibility of moving back to Iran as one of the main reasons for their tendency to have their children develop not only high conversational fluency but also high levels of Persian literacy.

فاطمه: من دوست دارم فارسی یاد بگیرن، آخه زبان مادری شونه. باید بلد باشن. آدم نمیدونه، شاید یه روزم برگشتیم ایران. باید بتونن جایگاهی داشته باشن. تحصیل کنن، کاری انجام بدن.

Fatemeh: I would like them to learn Persian, since it is their mother tongue. They should know it. You never know, maybe we will go back to Iran one day. They should be able to have a position, do their studies and find a job [there].

Fatemeh is a 47-year-old mother with two daughters, Alma and Aila, 12 and 9 years old, who have developed a very good and good proficiency in Persian, respectively. Although Fatemeh has lived in the UK for over 17 years¹, she still imagines a future life for her family in a community (Anderson 1983) in which Persian is the dominant societal language, which necessitates its acquisition by their children so that they can continue their studies and find employment in that environment. What is worth mentioning here is the fact that such a strong desire to return home, and thus invest in Persian, seems to have its roots in the parents' migration trajectory and social status in the UK. Some of these participants' husbands were Iranian refugees who sought asylum in the UK before their marriage. The majority of these mothers immigrated to the UK after their marriage. Also, they did not have high levels of English proficiency, and commonly interact with a large social

network from the home country in the UK, illustrating how language ideologies and practices in the family could be affected by the parents' past experiences and future aspirations (Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza 2018).

(c) Persian for expressing family-bound affection

Tannenbaum (2012) argues that the FLP scholarship seldom acknowledges how language practices in the family are affected by emotional issues and psychological dimensions, such as close interactions, attraction, aversion, love, hate, dependency, alienation, closeness, which are part of the very essence of family life. This entails considering FLP as 'a form of coping or defense mechanism' (Tannenbaum 2012, 57) which could contribute to the family's well-being (De Houwer 2015, 2017). It is in this light that Leili's feeling of regret and her desire for her children's proficiency in Persian can be understood.

لیلی: فارسی زبان احساساتمه. شاید اون نتونه منو درک کنه. من هر چقدر هم انگلیسی بلد باشم، نتونم بفهممش. بچه من بره با یکی دیگه درد دل کنه. ۱۰۰٪ افسوس میخورم. زبان مادریمه. میخوام که بتونه با خانوادم ارتباط داشته باشه. پدر و مادر من انگلیسی بلد نیستن.

Leili: Persian is the language of my feelings. Perhaps, she would not be able to understand me. However well I knew English, I might not be able to understand her. She might go share her feelings with someone else. I would regret it 100%. It is my mother tongue. I want her to be able to communicate with my family. My parents do not know English.

Labeling Persian as her mother tongue and the language of her feelings, Leili, who has been living in London for eleven years expresses her regrets in the case of Persian loss for her 10-year-old daughter, Ava, with a very good proficiency level in Persian. Associated with her feeling of remorse is also Leili's concern that even if she gains mastery over English, she might not be able to connect to and understand her daughter, which may push her daughter to share her feelings with someone else outside the family. This concern is not only about her relation between her daughter and herself but also about the grandparent generation in Iran who do not know English. This clearly shows that Persian lies in this parent's 'affective repertoires' that is used as a linguistic means for expressing emotions, and thus establishing intimacy and we-ness in the family (Pavlenko 2004, 183). This suggests that the emotion-related maintenance of the mother tongue in migratory/minority contexts and its role in bringing the family together and contributing to its emotional well-being (Chen, Kennedy, and Zhou 2012; De Houwer 2015, 2017) is a fertile field of research which could shed light on the complexities of language maintenance processes.

Language practices and management

(a) Pro-heritage language policy at home

Fishman (2001) argues that a way to maintain languages in language-contact situations is the functional compartmentalization of languages. That is, if families adopt certain strategies and policies that can lead to the predominant use of the heritage languages in the private spheres of life, and keep the societal dominant language for running errands in the public sphere, the cross-generational maintenance of heritage languages would be highly likely. Given the proficiency level of the children and their parents' reported language management and practices, we found that some families in fact have tried to bring about such a diglossic situation by sticking to a Persian-only policy at home.

نرگس: ما از وقتی رفت مدرسه اصرار داشتیم فارسی حرف بزنه. ولش کنی خود به خود انگلیسی حرف میزنه. ما خیلی محکم بودیم، بهش گفتیم پاتو از در میذارى تو خونه فارسی حرف میزنى.

Narges: we have been insisting on speaking Persian since she has gone to school. If you leave it to her, she would automatically speak English. We were very strict and told her she should speak Persian as soon as she steps into the home.

فاطمه: بدون تشویق خودشون فارسی حرف میزنن. عادت شده براشون.

مریم : من خودم بعضی وقتها انگلیسی با درسا حرف میزنم، ناراحت میشه میگه با من فارسی حرف بزن. انگار واسش عجیبه که من باهاش انگلیسی حرف بزنم. حتی جلو معلمش که یه چیزی انگلیسی میگم، اون فارسی به من جواب میده .

فاطمه : آره، هنوز بچه‌های من پیش نیومده که بگن فارسی حرف نزن باهامون، خودشون دوست دارن .

Fatemeh: They would speak Persian without being encouraged to do so. It has become a habit for them.

Maryam: I sometimes speak in English with Dorsa, but she becomes upset and says 'speak Persian with me' as if it's strange to her that I would speak English with her. Even when I speak in English to her when we are with her teacher, she answers back in Persian.

Fatemeh: Yes, my kids have never told me not to speak in Persian with them. They themselves love it [speaking Persian].

Narges, whose strong beliefs with respect to maintaining the Iranian cultural identity for her daughter was discussed above, explains their strict language management and practices at home. They have been aware of the influence of school and children's peers on their language use, hence believe that 'if you leave it to her [their children] she would automatically speak English' at home, a fact that has been documented in many studies (e.g. see Gyogi 2015; Pauwels 2016; Van Mensel 2016). Although parental language ideologies and practices may not readily and directly translate into a desired outcome (Smith-Christmas 2016), Narges's daughter's very good proficiency in Persian suggests that their family language policy has paid off in terms of raising her bilingually (Schwartz and Verschik 2013).

Fatemeh and Maryam, also discussed the impact of applying such a policy on their children. As illustrated in their comments, the heritage language-only practice is perhaps because the children become accustomed to Persian at home. Maryam, a 35-year-old mother who immigrated to London 11 years ago after her marriage², was a close relative of Fatemeh (who was introduced above) and had two daughters. Accounts provided by Maryam and Fatemeh, whose children fall on the better end of the heritage language proficiency continuum (of all heritage speakers in this study) show how as a result of 'face-to-face, small-scale social life' (Fishman 1991, 4) in Persian, their children have developed the habit of speaking Persian in the family. What is important to note here is that these mothers had a noticeably low communicative competence in English, which coupled with their positive beliefs in passing on the heritage language to their children, enforced the default language of their homes to be Persian. Although we do not have clear evidence for this, Maryam's daughter's resistance against her speaking English in public could be understood by considering the fact that heritage speakers have been found to sometimes feel embarrassed of their parents' lower levels of proficiency in the societally dominant language, particularly their non-native like accents (c.f. Sevinç 2016; 2020). While Maryam considers Dorsa's reaction to her speaking English a sign of her Persian-only practice, in fact this may be rooted in her daughter's feeling uncomfortable because of her mother's accented English conversing with her teacher.

(b) Resistance against language shift

Another common language policy and management mentioned by the mothers was 'minimal grasp strategy' through which the 'adult indicates no comprehension of the child's language choice' (Lanza 2007b, 56). In the following snippet, Sima with very strong beliefs on heritage language acquisition explains how she reacts when her daughter, eleven-year-old Asal with good proficiency in Persian, uses English to speak to her.

سینما : یه وقتایی هر چی انگلیسی حرف می زنه، من جوابشو نمیدم یا میگم من نمیفهمم چی میگه. میگه من دارم بهت کمک می کنم انگلیسیت خوب بشه. میگم نمیخواد بهم کمک کنی، من خودم میرم کالج .

Sima: Sometimes, however she insists on speaking in English to me, I would not answer or would say "I don't understand what you're saying". She says, "I am helping you improve in English.". I would say "I don't want your help; I would go to college myself."

Sima, who has lived in the UK for 11 years, here describes how she resists her daughter's use of English at home. Drawing on the minimal grasp strategy in interaction with her daughter, Sima

refuses to answer back in English to Asal's English utterances by sometimes saying, 'I don't know'. What is important here is the discrepancy between Asal's and her mother's proficiency levels in English, which brings about conflicting practices at home. While the daughter ostensibly uses English to help with her mother's English, the mother refuses to accept her offer of help in the interest of the maintenance of Persian, by justifying that she would take English classes in the college. This suggests as the children grow up in the host country and begin to realize the capital associated with different languages in the society (Bourdieu 1991), the dynamics of language use at home may change.

(c) The role of siblings in language development

Research has shown that different siblings may experience different language contexts and outcomes, with firstborn children having more opportunities to engage in heritage language practices with parents and more likely to speak the heritage language at home (King and Mackey 2007). However, the dynamics of having more than one child in a family can be seen to influence the family language policies and language ecology by allowing the siblings' choice and use of the societal language as their main language, both in conversations with each other and in conversations with their parents (Kheirkhah and Cekaite 2018, 269). In the present study, the role of siblings has been frequently highlighted by the mothers in the heritage language practices in the home context. While the mothers frequently highlighted the older children's English practices with their younger siblings as one of the main reasons for their lower proficiency in Persian, there were a few cases that the good proficiency of the older siblings had a positive impact on the siblings' language practices at home. This is not only because older siblings may provide more input (and potentially different input from parents), but also because as an additional interlocutor, they offer younger siblings the opportunity to use the heritage language (Tsinivits and Unsworth 2021, 16).

پریسا: من همون حدی که اصرار داشتم تارا فارسی حرف بزنه، برای یارا هم داشتم، ولی نمیدونم چرا خودش بیشتر گرایش پیدا کرد به انگلیسی حرف زدن. حتی کوچیکتر که بودن، یارا که انگلیسی حرف میزد، تارا بهش میگفت "یارا، فارسی حرف بزن، ما ایرانی هستیم."

Parisa: I insisted on Yara's Persian speaking as I did for Tara, but I don't know why she (Yara) has tended to speak English. Even when they were younger, when Yara spoke English, Tara told her "Speak Persian Yara, we are Iranians."

Parisa, who has been living in London for 17 years, has two daughters with the older one, Tara, significantly more proficient in the heritage language than the younger daughter, Yara. During the interview, Parisa explains that she and her husband always speak Persian with the children at home. She also wonders while they have applied the same Persian-only strategy for both of her daughters, why Yara has not improved in Persian as her older sister. This family also has a dog which has interestingly been trained in Persian, proving the Persian-only policy of the home. Parisa explained that even when she asked Tara to speak in English with the dog, she refused to do so. Consequently, the dog only reacts when they speak in Persian to him. They also reported that the sisters speak in Persian when they have their parents around, whereas they usually communicate in English when they are in their room. This evidence shows that even if the parents set the heritage language as the default language of the home, this may not suffice for heritage language development in families with more than one child which results in exercising of a stronger child agency (e.g. see Smith-Christmas 2020).

(d) Child agency in FLP

Family language policy scholarship has shown that children play an important role in affecting the dynamics of language use in the family (e.g. Caldas 2012; Fogle and King 2013; Kheirkhah 2016; Mirvahedi and Cavallaro 2020; Mirvahedi 2021). Although the mothers we interviewed talked about their strategies and policies to maintain and/or resist language shift in the family, they pointed out how sometimes their children influenced the dynamics of familial interactions in Persian. We found that this took place both in parent-child and child-child (siblings') interactions.

پگاه : غزال وقتی خودش فارسی حرف میزنه، جواب رو هم میخواد فارسی بشنوه ولی اگه انگلیسی حرف بزنه، شوهرم هم انگلیسی جوابش میده .

خدیج : پس کسی که مکالمه رو شروع می کنه تعیین می کنه چه زبانی صحبت بشه؟

پگاه : بله، البته جوری نیست که فارسی که صحبت کنه تا آخرش فارسی صحبت کنه. یا وقتی انگلیسی صحبت کنه، بستگی به من داره. وقتی من هنگ می کنم، انگلیسی نمیتونم جوابشو بدم فارسی جواب میدم .

Pegah: Ghazal would like to hear Persian when she speaks in Persian. However, if she speaks in English, my husband answers in English as well.

Khadij: So, who starts the conversations does determine which language to speak?

Pegah: Yes, but it's not like when she speaks in Persian, she would finish in Persian, or when she speaks in English, it depends on me. When I go blank and cannot reply in English, I would answer in Persian.

Pegah who is 49 and has been living in London for seventeen years sheds light on the dynamics of language use in their family. What is obvious is that they have not had strict pro-heritage language policy at home allowing their 9.5-year-old daughter, Ghazal, to play a significant part in the choice of the language in family interactions. As the mother reports, both Pegah and her husband align themselves with Ghazal's language choice at home. Although we do not have evidence for how much of the family interactions are in English and Persian, Ghazal's below average proficiency in Persian suggests that her dominant language, thus her first choice in communication, is English, to which the father responds back in English, whereas the mother's responses in English continues until she goes blank due to her own lower proficiency in English.

Child agency was also found to be a very important factor in developing heritage language literacy. Considering the availability of heritage language schools in the UK (mainly in London), the majority of Iranian immigrants have the freedom to send their children to Persian weekend schools. This is different from the host countries such as New Zealand (Gharibi and Seals 2020) where there is little institutional support available, and thus the responsibility for heritage language literacy teaching falls on parents' shoulders. In regard to the Iranians in the UK, sending children to Persian weekend schools may lead to their Persian literacy development. However, this might be hindered when children actively resist their parents' practices (Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2018).

(e) Drawing on home-external factors

Schwartz, Moin, and Leikin (2011) argue that in addition to, i.e. language socialization at home (e.g. Lanza 2007a), the parents' language-related strategies external to the home could also contribute to the children's bilingual development. Parents may reach outside the home to find support for their children's language acquisition such as choosing to live in a particular neighborhood or enrolling their children in a certain school. The mothers interviewed reported similar external strategies, in particular regular visits to Iran, and keeping in touch with other Iranians in the UK.

پگاه : از وقتی سه سالش بود، من هر سال میبرمش ایران به خاطر همین زبان، قبلا اکسنتش خیلی بالا بود، اکسنت انگلیسی داشت. الان خیلی راحتتر فارسی حرف میزنه .

Pegah: Since she was three years old, I have been taking her to Iran because of language development. She used to have a strong English accent, but now she speaks Persian much more comfortably.

ناجی : ما آمریکا خیلی دوست ایرانی نداشتیم، ولی الان که اینجا هستیم، دوست ایرانی زیاد داریم و باهاشون رفت و آمد می کنیم بچه ها با پدربزرگ و مادر بزرگشون فقط فارسی حرف میزنن، چون اونا انگلیسی نمیدونن .

Naji: We did not have many Iranian friends in the States, but now we have many Iranian friends and we socialize with them. The kids speak only in Persian with their grandpa and grandma, because they do not know English.

The 49-year-old Pegah who was introduced above, discusses here how she has taken her only child, Ghazal, to Iran once a year since she was three. Stressing on the issue of accent, she mentions that due to their regular visit to Iran, Ghazal had been able to get rid of her strong English accent when speaking Persian. As a result, now she speaks Persian much more comfortably as this mother

states. Similarly, Naji, a single mother of two sons Arad (11 years old) and Hiran (8 years old) who both had developed poor levels of Persian, talks of their social networks in the UK, and how they have helped their children to develop bilingualism in English and Persian. The mother, who moved to London from the United States with her family, compares her social network in these two host countries and the impact it had on her children's heritage language use. Although the United States is home to a large Iranian diaspora, Naji and her family were not able to engage in the Iranian community. However, they seem to be happy with the situation they are in currently in the UK. Naji believes that children's Persian proficiency has been improved because of their regular visits to other Iranians' homes as well as their children's regular contact with their grandparents.

Discussion

The study investigated the understudied Iranian diaspora in the UK, dealing with the interrelationship between families' language beliefs, practices, and efforts concerning Persian acquisition and maintenance for their children. The analysis of the mothers' interviews suggested that the families' success in bringing about bilingualism in Persian and English was rooted in a number of reasons related to the parents' ideologies and diligent efforts as well as the home-external affordances available in the UK. We found that, by and large, the parents who held pro-Persian and Iranian identity ideologies and socialized children into and through Persian from early ages, were aware of the detrimental and beneficial impact of home-external factors on FLP and drew upon affordances that living in the UK provided.

The pro-Persian ideology and thus its transmission to the next generation was found to be due to a strong link that parents perceived to exist between the language and Iranian identity. Like other Iranian diaspora communities (e.g. Gharibi and Seals 2020), the ability to communicate in Persian at home, and cultural values such as how family is conceptualized and children should behave were found to be core values to Iranian families who arrived in the UK over the past two decades. These values contributed to shaping the parents' (mainly the mothers') strong pro-heritage language ideologies. These families saw Persian as a significant marker of Iranian identity that will help them to maintain their cultural identity despite living outside the country. This seemed to be one of the main reasons for the majority of the Iranian families in this study to invest in their children's Persian acquisition and maintenance through adopting a family language policy in favour of the heritage language rather than taking a *laissez-faire* approach.

The interrelationship between language and cultural values and identity and a successful FLP was further reinforced by the parents' migration trajectory, their social status in the host country, and proficiency in English as the societal language. The interviews revealed that the participating families, particularly those with a refugee background, would consider moving back to the home country in the future. Seeing the home country as their imagined community (Anderson 1983) in the future, some of the parents reportedly tried hard in helping their children develop a good knowledge of Persian, so that they would be able to use it as a capital in the home country in the future. Motivated by such aspirations, some parents sent their children to weekend heritage language schools in the hope of their children developing Persian literacy to be able to study at the universities in the home country or find employment there. Moreover, having migrated to the UK after their marriage, the majority of the participating mothers in this study had lower levels of English proficiency, and commonly interacted with a social network of Iranians. This linguistic repertoire of the mothers left them no choice but to predominantly use Persian at home and within their social networks. The mothers' lack of English proficiency on the one hand, and the large size of the Iranian diaspora in London and their close-knit social network on the other, helped families to provide their children with more opportunities for heritage language exposure and interaction. While this frequent use of Persian in the home may not be always considered the reflection of an explicit pro-heritage language policy, but the parents' lack of high proficiency in the societal

language, this contributed to fostering bilingualism in heritage language speakers from early ages (see De Houwer 2017).

Although language socialization at early ages of heritage speakers was found to be a major influence on heritage language acquisition, this study showed that the dynamics of language practices at home are far more complex. As heritage speakers start schooling and becoming socialized into the societal language and culture, they develop their own view of bilingualism, and identity in the host country (see also Wilson 2020), undermining parental efforts in heritage language maintenance. As some of the parents' accounts revealed, their children's ideologies with respect to who they are conflicted with their own resulting in the children's increasing emphasis on English. Therefore, the children were shown to, at times, try to convince the parents to use English at home to improve their proficiency. Child agency was also found to play a critical role in heritage language literacy acquisition, where the majority of the participating families have access to heritage language weekend schools and have the tendency to send their children to the Persian schools. However, the continuity of this practice (i.e. going to Persian weekend schools) seemed to be impacted by the children's willingness and interest in such classes.

Finally, the mothers' interviews have also shown that the families compensate for any inadequate exposure to the Persian language and Iranian culture in the UK by frequently traveling back to Iran. Unlike the Iranian immigrants in farther countries like New Zealand (see Gharibi and Seals 2020), the geographical proximity between Iran and the UK and the possibility of more frequent trips to Iran makes it possible for parents to take this strategy to promote Persian acquisition and maintenance for their children. This suggests that understanding family language policy entails taking an approach which considers not only the dynamics of language practices at home informed by certain language ideologies, but also how families draw on sociolinguistic, socio-political, and geographical realities to achieve their goals (Mirvahedi 2020).

With the children growing up and stepping into the society in which a societal language (in this case English) is predominately used, however, there is no doubt that the parental language ideologies and practices and their impact on their children's heritage language acquisition are challenged. Despite challenges, our analysis of parental language practices and management suggests that heritage language development primarily relies on language socialization in the home context throughout early childhood.

Notes

1. Fatemeh's husband moved to London 19 years ago as a refugee.
2. Maryam's husband moved to London 18 years ago as a refugee.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This project was funded by the British Academy. Gharibi, K. (2018–2020). 'Issues of Attrition and Transmission in Heritage Language Development'. Newton International Fellowship. British Academy, UK.

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Appendix

	Mothers	Age	Length of Residence	Education	Mothers' Occupation	Father's Occupation	Children	Age	Place of Birth
1	Mother	44	13	MA	Teacher	Lecturer	Boy	13	Iran
2	Mother	41	17	PhD	Lecturer	Construction	Girl	8.7	UK
3	Mother	43	15	BA	Persian Teacher	Engineer	Girl	9.2	UK
							Boy	12.4	UK
4	Mother	45	16	MA	Housewife	Real estate investor	Girl	6.4	UK
							Boy	10.4	UK
5	Mother	39	10	BA	Housewife	Taxi driver	Boy	7	UK
6	Narges	41	11	Associate's degree	Sales staff	Taxi driver	Girl	11.3	UK
7	Naji	45	35	GP	Property business	MBA Engineer	Arad	11	US
							Hirad	8	US
8	Parisa	42	17	Associate's degree	Housewife	Audiologist	Yara	12.6	UK
							Tara	14	UK
9	Mother	35	9	BSc	Housewife	Builder	Boy	5.2	UK
							Girl	3	UK
10	Mother	37	12	Diploma	Student	Carpenter	Girl	10.4	UK
							Boy	9.6	UK
11	Leili	33	11	Diploma	Housewife	Truck Driver	Ava	10	UK
							Girl	2	UK
12	Maryam	35	11	BA	Teaching assistant	Butcher	Girl	9.8	UK
							Girl	4	UK
13	Fatemeh	47	17	Diploma	Housewife	Butcher	Alma	12	UK
							Aila	9	UK
14	Mother	40	14	BA	Housewife	Taxi driver	Girl	10.7	UK
15	Sima	42	11	BA	Hairdresser	Chef	Asal	9.5	UK
16	Pegah	49	17	BA	Housewife	PhD student	Ghazal	9	UK
17	Mother	43	15	BS	Teacher	Businessman	Boy	9	UK
18	Mother	37	16	Diploma	Housewife	staff	Boy	8	UK
							Boy	16	UK