



# Pride, prejudice and pragmatism: family language policies in the UK

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## Abstract

In this study, we examine how mobility and on-going changes in sociocultural contexts impact family language policy (FLP) in the UK. Using a questionnaire and involving 470 transnational families across the UK, our study provides a descriptive analysis of different family language practices in England and establishes how attitudes influence the different types of FLP in these families. Complementing the descriptive analysis, we use interview data to understand the driving forces behind the different types of language practices and language management activities, and explore how ideological constructs of ‘pride’, ‘prejudice’ and ‘pragmatism’ are directly related to negative or positive attitudes towards the development of children’s heritage language. The findings indicate that migration trajectories, social values, raciolinguistic policing in schools, and linguistic loyalty have shaped family decisions about what languages to keep and what languages to let go. Our paper responds to the linguistic and demographic changes in British society, and makes an important contribution to our knowledge about multilingual development of children in transnational families. Critically, this study shows that FLPs alone cannot save the minority languages; institutionally sanctioned language practices and ideologies have to make a move from limiting the use of these languages in educational contexts to legitimising them as what they are: linguistic resources and languages of pride.

**Keywords** Family language policy · Language pride · Language prejudice · Language pragmatism · Language ideology · Language practices

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## Introduction

爷爷: 爷爷好想你们, 爷爷想见到你们。爷爷觉得瑞  
瑞的中文说的比原来有很大进步。

妈妈: 是吗?

爷爷: 是, 比原来好, 而且爷爷觉得是个飞跃!

Grand: Grandpa (referring to himself) misses  
you very much (to children), wants to see  
you. Grandpa thinks that Rui's Chinese has  
improved so much.

Mom: Really?

Grand: Yes really, it's much better than  
before. Grandpa thinks there is a leap!  
(FaceTime interactions between members of  
the Zhang family in China and the UK)

**Mrs K** 今天说, 我和**Sherry**不可以在学校讲中文, 因  
为别人听不懂我们说什么。 **But it was after class**, 她  
真的很**rude**。

**Mrs K** said to us today that I can't speak  
Chinese with **Sherry**, because others don't  
understand what we say. **But it** (speaking  
Chinese) **was after class**, she is really **rude**.  
(Rachel, 14 years old, conversation with the  
researcher)

因为太忙了, 真的是有心无力呀, 真的是, 有心无力,  
因为两个孩子, 学校留了好多作业, 所以放在中文上  
的时间真的是很少了。

Because of our busy life, we have the aspira-  
tion but not the energy. Seriously, (we) have  
the heart and will but not the strength. We  
have two children, there are so much home-  
work from their schools, so there is really  
little time left for Chinese.

(Interview with Mrs Chen, a Chinese mother)

These short excerpts capture the experiences of pride, frustrations, and struggles that many migrant and transnational families encounter when dealing with everyday life involving minority and heritage language (HL) in diasporic contexts. In the Zhang family, we see the sense of pride strongly expressed by the grandparent and mother. In Rachel's remarks, we hear her anger over Mrs K's 'othering' demand and her school's endorsement of monolingual practices through language policing (Cushing, 2019, 2023). And in Mrs Chen's account, we feel her sense of powerlessness, her frustrations and struggle with the unequal access to minority language education in the public educational system.

These emotional comments and remarks remind us that raising multilingual children and developing minority/HLs are matters that reach far beyond the family domain, because families are always "nested in a wide range of socio-historical, political, cultural and linguistic environments" (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018, p. 423). As a result, the desired family language practices are conditioned by the sociopolitical environment, filled with linguistic prejudice and hierarchy, that may (and does often) compel minority language shift. Although family language policy (FLP) research has grown rapidly in recent years, we continue to grapple with questions about why a large number of minority children become monolinguals despite growing up in a multilingual environment, and what normative concepts about migrant languages and families reflect and reenact institutional power and thus allow marginalisation and educational inequality to continue to prevail.

In this paper, we explore how transnational families in the UK find *pride* in their children's ability to use multiple languages, and how their experiences of raising multilingual children are set back by implicit 'institutional policy' and societal discourses against minority languages, as well as hidden hurdles in public educational systems that create language hierarchies and prevent multilingual development. By

focusing on the ideological constructs of ‘*pride*’, ‘*prejudice*’ and ‘*pragmatism*’ (see discussion in Sect. 2), we explore how different language practices are established and what language management activities are implemented in transnational families.

## Pride, prejudice, pragmatism, and family language policy

The field of family language policy (FLP) has gained much recognition in recent years. Much of current FLP research draws on Spolsky’s (2009) triadic model of language policy, which consists of three interrelated components: language ideology, language practice, and language management. While language practice and language management can be overlapping, the former emphasises language use through socialisation and the latter focuses on deliberate efforts.

When examining language ideologies, researchers often find that parents and children attach great symbolic importance to home/heritage languages in relation to the development of an ethnolinguistic identity, emotional engagement, and cultural practices (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Tseng, 2020). The feeling of ‘*pride*’ is often associated with symbolic values such as “individuals’ identity, loyalty or feeling of belonging to an ethnic community” (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2021, p. 48). Duchêne and Heller (2012) coined the term “language as pride” to describe how language is legitimised and used as a means for identity work. They argued that language use and practices in the process of legitimisation can invoke ‘a sense of belonging’, thus mobilising ‘feelings of pride’. Research into FLP within transnational and migration contexts has repeatedly reported that HL maintenance is conflated with cultural and ethnic identity (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Li Wei, 2016; Little, 2017). Cultural inheritance and a sense of belonging are frequently framed as a *pride* in the socialisation discourse of diasporic communities and immigrant families. Curdt-Christiansen’s (2009) study of Chinese immigrant families in Quebec showed that parents equated the HL competence with a pride in ‘Chineseness’. This perception of *pride* as reflected in HL competence, a recurring theme in FLP studies, is echoed by many parents of first-generation migrants (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Little, 2017; He, 2023). Regarding language ideology in FLP, parents see it as their responsibility to socialise their children into the membership of a HL culture and community, thus fostering connections and communications with families and their imagined ‘homeland’. Such a *pride*-based cultural and language socialisation often become a driving force for parents to keep up with “cultural loyalty and linguistic continuity” (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013, p. 1).

A *pride*-based ideology, however, is not problem-free because ‘*prejudice*’ tends to occur when differences are exhibited in language, race, culture and values. *Prejudice* is often rooted in raciolinguistic ideologies or intolerance of migration and minority languages (Rosa & Flores, 2017; Cushing, 2021). Curdt-Christiansen and Huang (2021), in their study of Chinese communities in the UK, found that experiences of racist violence and xenophobic rant often accompanied migration. Earlier Chinese migrants in small businesses (caterers, restaurant owners) were often the target of ‘othering’ and racism because of their limited and non-standard English. Similar results have been found in studies of other racialised populations in the US,

Canada and many other immigration countries (e.g., Alim, 2016; Rosa, 2019; Rosa and Flores, 2017, 2021).

As a result, *prejudice* is produced in the process of ‘othering’ and framed by language use and practices that lead to social stratification and inequality. *Prejudice* and othering can “create a deep sense of marginalisation and exclusion, and take away the sense of ‘*pride*’” from migrant families (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2021, p. 60). As illustrated in Rachel’s conversation with the researchers in the beginning of the paper, xenophobia is conveyed through ‘official language policing’ to control and regulate language practices in schools. Unpacking educational policies against non-standard English language in the UK, Cushing (2019, p. 443) found that “language policing is a pervasive practice that policy arbiters engage in across all levels”, that is, micro (teachers), meso (school management), and macro (MoE curricular policy). While Cushing’s study focuses on the varieties of English in UK schools, the implications of such language policing extend to languages other than English, as shown in the case of Rachel. Thus, the roots of persistent racial inequality are reproduced through raciolinguistic ideologies in education (Alim et al., 2016; Cushing, 2023).

When confronted by raciolinguistic ideologies and prejudicial discourses as well as language policing in schools, parents and children may choose a ‘*pragmatic*’ solution by giving in to public educational demands and giving up their HL despite their *pride* in and emotional and cultural attachment to the language. *Pragmatism* concerns the ways in which families deal with the challenge of HL development and try to make it fit the practical circumstances. Such pragmatic attitude has resulted in contradiction and inconsistency between a ‘pro-minority’ ideology, expressed by the parents, and an ‘anti-minority’ language implementation/practice in reality, as shown in many FLP studies (e.g., Bohnacker, 2022; Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Curdt-Christiansen and LaMorgia, 2018; Dekeyser and Stevens, 2019; Huang & Liao, 2023).

Bohnacker (2022), for example, explored FLP in 105 Turkish families with children 4–7 years old in Sweden. Using a questionnaire that included language practices and home language literacy activities, the study found that while parents held strong pro-Turkish maintenance ideologies, they tended to make limited maintenance efforts. Irrespective of the parents’ educational background and country of birth, the study reported that “hardly any families had arranged for alternative private tuition in Turkish” (p. 871). Curdt-Christiansen and LaMorgia’s (2018) study of Chinese, Italian and Urdu-speaking communities in the UK showed similar results regarding language management efforts in the families. While parents from the Chinese and Urdu-speaking communities showed positive attitudes towards their respective HLLs and believed that HL development plays an important role in cultural practices for ethnic identity and the emotional relationship between generations, they provided insufficient linguistic measures and literacy practices for developing their children’s HLLs. Similarly, Dekeyser and Stevens (2019) examined 300 Moroccan children’s language proficiency level in HL and Dutch (the official language) from an FLP perspective. Their study showed that children’s proficiency level in HL was related to their parents’ management efforts but not to their attitudes towards HL, despite the parents’ pro-HLL ideology. These above-mentioned studies and many other relevant studies (e.g. Kang, 2015; Hollebeke et al., 2022) all point out that the inconsistency between pro-HLL ideology and insufficient HLL management efforts is related to lim-

ited HL support and resources found in public educational systems and community facilities. The limited support and resources may not directly suggest that there is a relationship between *prejudice* against minority languages and HL provision, but leaving HL education to the parents and ethnic communities as their responsibility is an indication of social inequality and a denial of inclusive education.

A consequence of the limited public support of HL education has led many parents to make pragmatic decisions and let go of their HLs (Bohnacker, 2022; Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Li et al., *in press*). A recent study by Huang and Liao (2023) reports that the many challenges met by Chinese interlingual families in Australia lead to inconsistent parental attitudes towards supporting Chinese HL maintenance. The status of the Chinese language in Australia and the children's afterschool activities in English have made the parents reluctant to provide consistent support of HL learning. Curdt-Christiansen and LaMorgia's (2018) study in the UK highlighted similar challenges. The parents' frustration demonstrates not only the competing forces between public educational demands and HL development, but also the struggle in the language status between English (dominant language) and HL (the dominated language). 'Having homework to do every day' has pushed HL to the periphery and helped build a linguistic hierarchy that has created power relations by making many migrant parents and children accept 'othering' and *prejudice* as normalised practices.

The normalised acceptance of 'othering' by minority families is an acute illustration that families do not live in a vacuum but constantly interact with broader socio-political contexts in which linguistic hierarchy prevails. This reminds us that FLP is inevitably shaped by political and societal ideologies (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016, 2018). Cushing's (2019, 2021, 2023) studies of UK's educational policies and school language practices point out that racist ideologies about language are pervasive, not only in the lives of minority families but also in schools and society at large. He argues that hostility towards and *prejudice* against people based on their languages is a form of language oppression that "can intimidate people into modifying their use of language or abandoning it completely" (Cushing, 2023, p. 996).

Such language-based 'othering' requires us to move beyond what is happening within the family domain to look at what is happening in schools and the wider society. In what follows, we present how notions of *pride*, *prejudice* and *pragmatism* as ideological constructs are intertwined to form the mechanisms, the Family Language Policies, through which social inequalities are reproduced.

## The study

This study is part of a large research project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), that explores how mobility and on-going changes in sociocultural contexts impact family language policy in the UK (2017–2020). As the second large-scale, nationwide project, undertaken 30 years after Alladina and Edwards' (1991) project on multilingualism in the British Isles, our project focuses on a multi-level (nation, community and family) investigation of family language policies in the UK. In this paper, we report data collected from the survey at the national level. In order to enrich our discussion of the ideological constructs of *pride*,

*prejudice* and *pragmatism*, we substantiate it with interview data from three Chinese and two Polish families.

## Questionnaire

The team developed the questionnaire by drawing on existing research and theories related to FLP. To ensure content validity of the questionnaire, two workshops were conducted, both with experienced colleagues and researchers who were involved in raising multilingual children. Using Spolsky's triadic model, language ideology, practices, and management, as a foundation, an initial draft was constructed based on comments and suggestions received, and then piloted with more than 30 families to ascertain that the questions were clear and would be interpreted as intended. Further revisions were made after the first pilot. The revised survey was piloted again with another small group of families, and the questions were further refined. The finalised multilingual (Chinese, Polish, Somali and English) survey consists of five sections: (1) demographic information (12 items); (2) language ideology (14 items); (3) language use for different activities (seven items); (4) language practices after first child (seven items); (5) language management (nine items). In the language ideology section, statements were given on a 5-rating scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree). The other sections were all multiple-choice questions where answers were selected from a dropdown menu.

The questionnaires were then distributed in printed and online forms. The printed versions were distributed in HL schools, at cultural events, in ethnic community supermarkets, and in community centres in different cities. The online survey was uploaded to SurveyMonkey and 问卷星 (Chinese survey platform) and sent to our social networks and schools. We received a total of 512 responses. After data cleaning, 470 were suitable for the study. See Table 1 for participants' educational level and length of residence in the UK.

## Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in parallel with the survey. We selected families from the Chinese and Polish communities because of their distinctive socio-political contexts of migration, demographic characters, and linguistic/cultural practices. Five families were involved, three from the Chinese community and two from

**Table 1** Survey participants' profile

Age	%	Length	%	Education	%		
Below 24	0.89	<1 year	3.1	No formal education	0.29		
25–34	24.70	1–5	16.4	Primary	0.29		
35–44	44.05	5–10	24.5	Secondary	1.18		
45–54	20.83	10–20	48.4	High school	6.76		
55–64	7.44	20–30	5.0	Vocation/college	5.00		
65 and above	2.08	>30	1.9	BA	22.94		
				UK born	0.6	MA	41.18
						PhD	21.47
						Other	0.88

the Polish, representing different family types in the two communities with regard to family size, educational level of grandparents and parents, and the different language experiences of the family members. The involvement of these families was not intended to reach generalisability, but to enrich and compliment the survey data.

As members of the involved communities, we see ourselves not as ‘researchers’ to collect facts and information from the families; rather we view them as co-researchers with whom we built a mutual trust and make sense of their accounts through shared knowledge as migrant parents with shared migration experiences (Talmy, 2011). Data collection, thus, is socially constructed through negotiations in Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) and Polish. We present the families’ views to instantiate how FLPs are established, negotiated and changed based on the families’ perceptions of the different languages in their life. Table 2 illustrates the profiles of the families.

Interviews were conducted three times as part of the ethnographic research design of the project, either face-to-face in the home or through a social media platform when requested by the families. The overall interview structure was designed as a follow-up to mirror the questionnaire. But as we engaged with the families through socially constructed negotiations, they provided much elaborate knowledge and engaged with us in in-depth discussion about their language practices and experiences. Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 min. The interviews were transcribed in Chinese or Polish first and then translated into English by the researchers and the research assistants (all fluent bilinguals).

**Table 2** Participating family profiles

Family	Child/age	Country of birth	Family members	Adult educational level	Language(s) at home*2
ChiA*1 Frequent com. with grandparents	Jie (girl) 12	China	Grandpa	High school	Putonghua
	Mei (boy) 8	England	Mother	MA	Putonghua, English
			Father	MA	Putonghua, English,
ChiB	Ban (boy) 10	China	Mother	BA	Sichuan, Putonghua, English,
	Bin (boy) 7	England	Father	MA	Cantonese, Putonghua, English
ChiC			Grandma	BA	Putonghua
	Chong (girl) 9	England	Grandma	High school	Putonghua
	Chua (boy) 7		Mother	BA	Putonghua, English
PolA			Father	BA	Putonghua, English
	Penny (girl) 20	Poland	Mother	Middle school	Polish, some English
	Krisztina (girl) 18	Poland	Father	Middle school	Polish, English
PolB	Stan (boy) 2	England	Mother (single mother)	MA	Polish, English

\*1: ChiA stands for Chinese family A; PolA stands for Polish family A

\*2: Home languages are listed in the order of dominance and frequency of use

## Data analysis

The questionnaire data were analysed descriptively, based on the three components of language policy – language practice, language ideology, and language management. When coding the data, we used the constructs of ‘pride’, ‘prejudice’ and ‘pragmatism’ (PPP) to code their different ideologies, and underline patterns of practices, and management measures. For example, the statement, “*It is disadvantageous for a child if only the non-English home language(s) are used at home*”, is coded as prejudice. The interview data were then analysed through the lens of PPP when understanding participants’ perceptions of their language and migration experiences, and FLPs. For reliability, two researchers, independent of each other, coded the data and then compared and discussed their results to reach consensus and attain accuracy of the findings (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

## Findings

The findings of the study are organised according to the three components of the language policy concept - language ideology, language practice, and language management. Throughout the discussion of the findings, we present the way in which PPP are reflected in language ideologies and interact with practices and management by triangulating the survey and interview data.

### ***Pride, prejudice and pragmatism in self-reported pro-multilingual ideology***

Within the study of FLP, language ideology has been recognised as the driving force for the establishment of different types of FLPs (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; King et al., 2008). As beliefs about prestige, privilege, and discrimination inform language ideologies (Tseng, 2020), we illustrate how these different beliefs about language prestige and language privilege are implicitly instantiated through a variety of statements made in both the survey and interview data.

As shown in Table 3, most families reported a strong pro-multilingual ideology and agreed that speaking more than one language had a positive impact on their children’s cognition, academic performance, and further development. **Pride** is illustrated in statements 7–10, 12 and 14, **prejudice** is reflected in statements 1–6, and **pragmatism** is shown in statements 11 and 13. In general, there is a strong belief against **prejudice** as indicated in the high percentage of agreement with statements 1–6. For example, more than 80% of participants disagree (40.7%) or strongly disagree (40.2%) with statement 2 that “Speaking the non-English home language(s) may play a negative role in a child’s ability to master English”. Statement 1 (It is disadvantageous for a child if only the non-English home language(s) are used at home) received a relatively low percentage of disagreement (69.4%), but statements 3 (Speaking two or more languages confuses a child) and 4 (It is important to speak mostly English with a child from a young age when living in the UK) both received more than 76% disagreements. While these statements indicate that transnational migrant families are aware of the benefits of bilingualism/multilingualism, they



**Table 3** Language Ideology

	Items	code	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	It is disadvantageous for a child if only the non-English home language(s) are used at home.	Prejudice	6.7	9.2	14.7	35.8	33.6
2	Speaking the non-English home language(s) may play a negative role in a child's ability to master English.	Prejudice	1.6	5.8	11.8	40.7	40.2
3	Speaking two or more languages confuses a child.	Prejudice	0.5	5.8	15.2	33.9	44.6
4	It is important to speak mostly English with a child from a young age when living in the UK.	Prejudice	1.8	7.9	13.6	39.1	37.5
5	Learning non-English home language(s) is a private matter that should be done only at home.	Prejudice	2.0	8.6	13.7	46.9	28.9
6	It is unacceptable for people living in the UK to speak languages other than English	Prejudice	2.8	7.2	11.1	36.7	42.2
7	Generally, I feel comfortable using my non-English home languages in public	Pride	20.3	51.1	18.2	9.2	1.3
8	More governmental support is needed for maintaining home languages for minority groups in Britain	Pride	18.9	30.2	38.3	9.2	3.4
9	A child's sense of belonging can only be maintained if she/he understands the language of the culture.	Pride	<b>21.8</b>	<b>34.1</b>	17.6	19.7	6.8
10	It is beneficial for a child to attend a community /heritage language / complementary school to learn the non-English home language(s).	Pride	21.9	45.8	25.3	4.7	2.2
11	Being bi/multilingual is beneficial for the future of a child's career.	Pragmatism	59.2	33.9	5.0	0.3	1.6
12	Reading and writing in two or more languages at home is essential for a bi/multilingual child.	Pride	39.8	40.7	10.3	5.8	3.3

**Table 3** (continued)

Items	code	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
13 A child's ability to read and write in two or more languages plays a positive role in his/her academic development.	Pragmatism	54	36.5	6.7	1.4	1.4
14 I am happy that many people speak other languages than English in Britain	Pride	44.1	39.9	12.9	1.6	1.6

reflect largely the cognitive benefits and debunk language confusion and academic disadvantages. Statements 5–6 elicit similar responses from the participants as they disagree or strongly disagree that home language learning is a private matter and that speaking other languages is unacceptable in the UK.

With regard to their beliefs about the relationship between home language maintenance and identity in terms of *pride* (e.g., statement 9: A child's sense of belonging can only be maintained if she/he understands the language of the culture), we see also positive responses with 21.8% strongly agreeing and 34.1% agreeing. Comparing to the *prejudice* statements 2 and 3, and the *pride* statements 12 and 14 on the benefits of bilingualism, the percentage of positive responses is lower. This may indicate that ethnic and cultural identity in the form of *pride* is not as essential as other aspects of raising bilingual children. The *pragmatic* concerns, such as children's academic development and future career, overtake the sentiment of *pride* in maintaining the home language.

We paid particular attention to *prejudice* statement 1 (It is disadvantageous for a child if only the non-English home language(s) are used at home), *pride* statements 7 (Generally, I feel comfortable using my non-English home languages in public) and 14 (I am happy that many people speak other languages than English in Britain) to explore whether *prejudice* is implicitly reflected in their responses to language *pride*. It was interesting to note that responses showed some inconsistency in distribution patterns: while 35.8% disagree and 33.6% strongly disagree with statement 1, indicating that these participants do not believe such *prejudice* that using home-language can be disadvantageous for their children, only 20.3% of respondents strongly agree with the *pride* statement that they feel comfortable when using the home-language in public. The same pattern is repeated between statement 7 and 14 in which over 80% of respondents are happy that many people speak other languages in Britain but only 20.3% (strongly agree) feel comfortable using their home-language in public. This phenomenon has been discussed extensively in our interviews with participating families. In the Polish community, speaking Polish in public seems to be a matter that is consciously monitored by the participants. For example, in family PoLA, Penny and Krisztina reflected on their experiences:

K: I have Polish friends and when we meet up, we speak Polish. In the beginning, we didn't speak loud or anything but there were those stares from people. And later

then automatically we speak quieter but there was no situation in which somebody actually scolded us, like “go back to your country”, told us this directly. It’s more of a feeling... there’s such a discomfort.

- P: I also have such a feeling. It’s not that I’m embarrassed that I’m from Poland. When we are at the bus stop or in a shop, it’s obvious we will speak Polish, it’s easier in Polish so we lower our voice as much as possible because I don’t want these stares or somebody telling me ‘Speak English’. I prefer to lower my voice or not to speak and wait until we are on our own (not) to be confronted with such stares.

The discussion between the Krisztina and Penny underscores the invisible sense of ‘fear’ from the public ‘othering’. They both emphasised the “stares from people” and the “feeling of discomfort” when speaking Polish in public. Although they had never experienced overt racist violence as described in other studies (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2021; Cushing, 2023), their social and linguistic reactions - “to lower my voice or not to speak and wait until we are on our own” - revealed a deep-sense of *prejudice* from the UK society where speaking languages other than English (LotE) may be seen as deficient and unacceptable in public and educational domains. Speaking LotE in a largely monolingual society like England may give away one’s migrant status, social position and economic status. This echoes with a plethora of sociolinguistic studies demonstrating that language attitudes towards and *prejudice* against certain language speakers and races can create differences and generate marginalisation that leads to social practices of denigration and exclusion (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen, 2020; Cushing, 2021).

Penny also pointed out another critical issue in the dichotomy of *pride* and *prejudice*. She clearly felt the pride of being Polish as indicated by “I’m (not) embarrassed that I’m from Poland”. This covert *pride*, however, tends to be challenged in the public space. Her mother, Mrs A, highlighted the unspoken fear of speaking Polish:

Mrs A: But sometimes I speak with P. I ask something. Somebody is coming and she whispers ‘silence’ and I have to stop talking to her.

- R: But that’s because if anyone comes in, mostly English, I don’t want them to stare at us because we speak Polish. So I say ‘silence’ to wait it out and then we can talk later. And the second thing is for this person not to feel uncomfortable.

Again, the fear of ‘stares’ resurfaced. Acting upon this ‘fear’, Penny didn’t lower her voice with her mother, instead she ‘silenced’ her mother in order to avoid ‘overt’ *prejudice* from the “mostly English”. Family PoLA’s experience was not a single case, Ms PoLB had a similar linguistic reaction when speaking to her son, Stan, in public.

Mrs B: I almost always speak Polish to Stan. After all, it is my emotional language. But I can’t help speaking English to him in public. I think it is an automatic reaction.

R: Why?

Ms B: When I was a student, I used to work at McDonald’s. People can be quite rude when they hear that I have a Polish accent...I think I automatically react to

situations where I don't want people to judge me. If I speak Polish, people know I am from Poland, and that I am an immigrant. But if I speak English, not everyone can identify my accent.

If Penny and Krisztina's sense of fear came from 'unfriendly' stares, Ms B's came directly from her working life experience as a migrant person. Her experiences shaped her ways of dealing with *prejudice*, namely to change/modify her language use in public (Cushing, 2023). While this shift in language use may seem inconsequential, it sends an implicit signal to children indicating that not all languages have a "recognised legitimacy" (Block, 2018, p. 574). In this regard, *prejudice* through 'othering' has planted a seed for language shift. Similar comments are found in dialogues with the Chinese families as illustrated in the opening excerpt from Rachel. Due to space limitations, we have restricted our analysis of Chinese families to data concerning language practices and management.

When examining the descriptive results, we found that there is an inconsistency between *prejudice* statement 5 (Learning non-English home language(s) is a private matter that should be done only at home) and *pride* statement 8 (More governmental support is needed for maintaining home languages for minority groups in Britain). Responses to the former showed 75.8% disagreement (46.9% disagree and 28.9% strongly disagree). But to the latter, less than 50% positive responses were given with 18.9% strongly agree and 30.2% agree. This inconsistency may suggest that maintaining the home language may be less attainable for minority groups from a *pragmatic* perspective as it needs public funds to develop different minority language programmes. Cunningham (2020) reported that even teachers with a minority background in UK public schools believed that the development of HL is a private matter and that the responsibility remains with families.

The inconsistency could also suggest that although most parents believed that learning the home language was not a private matter, they nevertheless believed that some minority languages should not be supported at the cost of public funds. This again shows that not all languages and language-speakers are perceived as equals, not even by the minority-language speakers themselves (see Cushing et al., 2021), and that language *prejudice* is found in every corner of our society. The tensions and ambiguities arising from the coexistence of different languages, practices and ideologies suggest that linguistic hierarchies invoke power relations in multilingual societies.

### Language ideology and self-reported language practices

Similar to many sociolinguistic studies (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen and LaMorgia, 2018), our findings also indicate perceptible patterns of language change from parent to child generation, as indicated in Table 4.

As Table 4 shows, language shift from home-language to English not only took place among siblings, but also between parent and child. While parents used only 11.5% of mainly English when speaking to children, they use 54.5% of English and 23.5% of mixed language during homework sessions. The other noticeable change was in writing activities in which 38.8% reported using mainly English. While these

**Table 4** Home language use for different activities

Type of activity	NA	Mixed use of English and home language(s)	Mainly non-English home language(s) (>75%)	Mainly English (>75%)
Help with your child's school homework	14.8	23.5	7.1	54.5
You to child speaking	0.6	45.0	42.9	11.5
Child to you speaking	1.7	26.0	44.8	27.5
You to child writing	13.5	19.6	28.1	38.8
Child to you writing	15.3	13.5	16.7	54.4
Child to siblings speaking	31.1	11.0	17.0	40.9
Child to siblings writing	38.9	7.9	7.1	46.1

**Table 5** Your language practices after your first child was born

Language behavior	NA	No	Yes
My own language practices changed	5.7	48.6	45.6
My mixed use of language(s) increased	3.9	45.9	50.2
I started to use different languages with different people at home	5.7	63.4	30.8
<b>I started to use more English</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>57.1</b>	<b>36.6</b>
I started to use more my non-English home language(s)	5.8	67.7	26.5
<b>After my child started nursery or primary school, my own use of English increased</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>54.7</b>	<b>39.3</b>
After my child started nursery or primary school, my own use of non-English home language(s) increased	5.4	72.5	22.1

changes may indicate a *pragmatic* act, namely parents' unconscious language decision in their attempts to align their language practices with that of the school, they also indicated the institutional constraints on providing support and facilities to develop and maintain home languages (Curdt-Christiansen & LaMorgia, 2018). In connection with *prejudice* statement 5 (Learning non-English home language(s) is a private matter that should be done only at home) and the *pride* statement 8 (More governmental support is needed for maintaining home languages for minority groups in Britain), the linguistic practices revealed a non-spoken but taken-for-granted language '*prejudice*' through an institutionalised practice where minority languages are given little legitimate recognition.

When further exploring parents' language practices after their child's birth, we found revealing results demonstrating their unconscious accommodation to societal language practices resulting from a coerced monolingual ideology and invisible *prejudice*. Table 5 presents self-reported data about the parents' language practices after their first child was born.

The descriptive data indicated that about half of the parents changed their language practices after their first child was born. A higher proportion of them started to use English more than their non-English home language (36.6% vs. 26.5%; 39.3% vs. 22.1%). The changes were consistent with the language use between parents and children in Table 4. These descriptive analyses indicate that the increasing number of parents using more English with their children might be due to concerns about their children's English language development and also due to pressure from the public educational system, in which a primarily monolingual-rooted ideology in education prevails (Curd-Christiansen, 2016; Cushing, 2019, 2021). These concerns not only changed their FLPs, affecting next generation's language attitudes, but also 'forced' them to give in to the invisible *prejudice* reflected in the lack of educational support for minority languages, and choose a *pragmatic* solution, as illustrated by the case of ChiA:

We became very worried about Meimei's communication skills at the nursery. Especially when the teacher said that Meimei hardly spoke at all. But she was very bubbly at home, always talking non-stop. We were so concerned. (To us) this was clearly a language issue. That's why we decided to change our home language into English. Then later on, English was used more and more, then Meimei's Chinese became less developed. Now she speaks Chinese like a foreigner.

(Interview with Mrs A, ChiA)

Mrs A recalled and reflected on the critical moment of decision-making when changing her FLP. Before Meimei was sent to a nursery, the family language was predominantly Chinese. But Meimei's uncommunicative behaviour in the nursery had worried the ChiA's parents as they believed that their speaking Chinese was the problem. Such worries appear to be widespread, as existing literature suggests that many parents worry about their children's mainstream language development in the host country (Curd-Christiansen, 2020; Song, 2019). While many immigrant parents, like Mrs A, have to deal with the social realities of public educational demands (Spolsky, 2012), the desire to maintain family language practices becomes an ad hoc *pragmatic* choice. The on-going linguistic competition between minority and dominant languages has involuntarily forced many parents to make a *pragmatic* decision to discontinue home language learning, as was the case in the Chen's at the beginning of the paper. The sentiment is also shared by other families, such as the ChiB's.

R: In addition to speaking to children in Chinese, are there any other activities that you would use to engage them in learning, like watching Chinese entertaining programmes, reading books, singing or doing Chinese related activities?

Mr B: We did some in the beginning, but then less and less because we are too busy. Really, we are too busy, we have the heart, but not the energy. As you know the school also give them loads of homework, so the time left for Chinese becomes less and less. Once school is done, everyone is, the kids are, tired. We really don't want to do much. So the only way we keep up their Chinese is to speak. It is hard to spend time reading a book, practise writing, too difficult.

Mrs B: (We) just don't have any energy for it, too tired to do much, really, that's how it is.

Mr and Mrs B shared their frustration about time constraints for developing their sons' Chinese. While keeping up with schoolwork was prioritised because of the educational demands, such prioritised decisions may overtly and covertly 'coerce' parents to promote English and *pragmatically* let go of Chinese. Subsequently, the negotiation between educational reality and linguistic continuity has resulted in their compromise for their children's Chinese language development.

### Language ideologies, and language management

Taking into consideration the different economic resources and language facilities that families may have, we provided a variety of actions that parents may take as measures for managing and developing their home language(s). Table 6 shows the preferred choices of actions taken by parents.

It is evident from the table that parents were aware of how important it is to provide children with opportunities/exposure to the non-English home language. All the top choices, such as organizing frequent visits to home country (74.8%) and maintaining virtual contact with family members (62.4%) are, however, temporary and periodic activities. These infrequent experiences can be further restricted by travel bans (Covid-19) and may become a financial burden on the family. Although maintaining virtual contact with family members is an important way to expose children to their heritage language, these contacts have limited socialisation effects and tend to provide inconsistent language experiences, as expressed by participating families:

Real conversation (chat) is impossible. The kids can say things like good day, goodbye, then nothing serious. Sometimes, they can say 'have you eaten?' (typical Chinese language exchange, meaning 'how are you?')  
(Interview with ChiA)

**Table 6** Actions you take for your child's language development (%)

Variety of Actions	%
Organise frequent visits for my child to stay with relatives in my home country for home-language learning	74.8
Maintain virtual contacts with family members overseas through mobile devices	60.6
Register my child for summer camp to learn our non-English home language(s)	38.1
Sign up my child for non-English home language tuition	36.2
Involve my child's grandparents in child-caring	33.9
Hire a bi/multilingual nanny/child-carer who speaks at least one of your non-English	11.8
Hire a bi/multilingual nanny/child-carer	9.2
Register my child for summer camp to learn English	8.4
I learn my partner's language	7.1

Like chatting with families over the weekend, we speak Chinese with grandparents. But they (children) can only speak a little, with grandpa and grandma, they speak a little, not very much.

(Interview with Mrs B)

My kids basically have little communication with my families in China. When they do, they just say two sentences, ‘grandma, how are you?’, that’s it, very simple greetings.

(Interview with Mrs C)

These reflections from the parents pointed out the limitations of virtual contacts as a measure of language management and socialisation. Although studies of Chinese families have reported that grandparents are often closely involved in childrearing (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen and Iwaniec, 2023), our data indicate that distance could be an issue for intimate communication, especially in case of infrequent use of Chinese at home.

Both the survey data and the interview data provided evidence to illustrate that *pragmatic* measures, taken when the school language is given priority, can lead to the loss of the home language. More importantly, the loss of the home language becomes the plight of both parents and grandparents, who may be in the process of losing close contact and emotional connection with children who speak less and less their home language (He, 2023; Pavlenko, 2004). Our interview data showed the emotional reactions to this plight from some parents:

In fact, **my root** is there (in China), just like earlier when I mentioned the communications with families. I feel so guilty that my children can’t communicate with my mother, no frequent and deeper communication. But **deep in my heart**, I want it to happen so much, so much. When the older one was little, before she turned two, I spoke Chinese all the time. But then later it seemed that I had **no choice** anymore...it’s because there were so many problems and issues that you have to deal with in life...when everything falls down upon you, you **just don’t have any choice**. You **don’t have a choice** to speak English then Chinese, and back and forth. What I want to say is that we have **our roots** there, although we don’t speak Chinese (to the kids). But in **our heart** and culturally, we are Chinese. As a mother, I want to reconnect to **the root**, but how should I do it? We have **little means** to ...

(Interview with Mrs C)

This emotional confession captured the exact dilemma of the ambiguities inflicted by the invisible ‘non-inclusive’ language education curriculum. The deep pain and guilt felt by Mrs C underline the processes whereby *prejudice* against minority languages, promoted by public education, has been internalised as natural and normal, and that failing to provide heritage language education becomes a purely parental fault. The repeated use of “our roots”, “in our heart” and “no choice” by Mrs C illustrated her battle against *prejudice* resulting in the loss to *pragmatism*. Despite her desire to reconnect to her roots or “our roots”, her attempts to keep up with the *pride* by speak-



ing Chinese to her children and get her children to communicate with their family in China were fruitless.

## Discussion

In this study, we explored the FLPs of transnational families in the UK through the ideological constructs of *pride*, *prejudice* and *pragmatism* (PPP). By challenging the educational policies and institutional structures that undermine the minority/home language development, our study illustrates how these policies and structures naturalise and normalise the practice of linguistic *prejudice* in families as reflected in their language ideologies, practices and management. Our study provides illustrative evidence through sociolinguistic survey and interviews to demonstrate how lived experiences of ‘othering’ and *pride* are contradicting each other, forcing family language policy to give in to *pragmatic* measures that perpetuate linguistic racism through implicit, covert and overt raciolinguistic ideologies (Kroskrity, 2021). In what follows, we present a summary of our findings and discuss three critical aspects in the studies of FLP.

### Linguistic *prejudice* ideology and FLP

Firstly, the findings in our survey indicate that the majority of families did not overtly subscribe to a *prejudice* ideology, as evidenced by their self-reported pro-multilingual beliefs. Although a large number of parents felt strongly about maintaining and developing their home languages, indicating *pride*, they tended to view such *pride* as not essential. Our interview data show strong evidence that *pride* and *prejudice* are two ideological constructs that contradict each other. *Pride*, for example, in the form of ethnic identity and the use of the home language in public can often be challenged by ‘racist stares’ and xenophobic school policing, as experienced by Polish families and Chinese individuals. The hostile comment from the teacher (overt) and the self-controlled ‘silence’ and ‘lower voice’ from migrants (covert) are complex linguistic behaviours mediated by raciolinguistic ideologies. For Mrs K, Rachel’s conversation with her friend in Chinese was viewed as a “violation of normative and homogenous linguistic codes” (Cushing, 2023, p. 906) in UK schools and therefore had to be stopped. For the PoLA’s, ‘silence’ and ‘lower voice’ were the ‘self-inflicted’ regimentation in support of a *prejudice* ideology that sanctions “language oppression” in the UK society (ibid.). Both acts are products of raciolinguistic policing which demonstrates how perceptions of minority languages can become central to the construction of social problems, thus contributing in a profound way to the shaping of FLP.

### Tensions between *pride*, *prejudice*, *pragmatism* and language practices

Our findings of language practices indicate a clear pattern of language shift in the families (e.g., 54.5% use English and 23.5% use a mixed language during homework sessions). This language shift is a direct result of covert and overt *prejudices* which these families have encountered either in schools, in public domains or elsewhere. As such, some families have formed conflicting practices and management strategies,

where what they view as a *pride* and what they do in reality are contradictory. Such contradictions are not new to the field of language policy as reported in multiple studies (e.g., King, 2000; Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). The current study sheds new light on the reality of the lived experiences of minoritised individuals, families and communities, in which linguistic *prejudice* is foregrounded in relation to FLP. Where there is linguistic *prejudice*, there is inequality; and inequality will always place “new demands on racialised populations to modify their behaviours” linguistically and culturally (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 639), as illustrated by the language practice shift in the Chinese families. The findings indicate that FLP can serve as a critical site for understanding and contributing to the reproduction of social inequality and raciolinguistic practices, which leads us to the discussion of normalised perceptions of home language development as a private matter in FLP.

### Normalised language ideology, home language and pragmatic FLP

The findings about language management indicate that the majority of families chose to organise frequent visits to their home country (74.8%) and maintain virtual contact with family members (62.4%). Only 36% of parents reported sending their children to HL schools. In relation to self-reported beliefs that they consider it beneficial for children to attend HL schools, the results are contradictory.

This contradiction requires us to refocus on FLP to unravel the normalised perception of home language learning as a private matter. On the one hand, parents believed that learning HL was beneficial and viewed attending a HL school as a *pride*. On the other hand, they had little time and few resources to engage their children in HL learning. Although close to 50% of the participants believed that government support was needed for HL development, the interviewed participants largely believed that HL learning was not part of the education agenda. In the public educational system in the UK, HL remains largely invisible, either because of raciolinguistic policing or as a consequence of an institutionally sanctioned curriculum (Curdt-Christiansen, 2020; Cushing, 2019) which has led to a normalised ideology that HL education is the responsibility of the parents and the ethnic communities (Cunningham, 2020). Such normalised beliefs have invoked emotional distress and a sense of guilt in parents when they conceded to *pragmatism* and opted for giving up HL. For many parents, this is a logic solution when they face the choice between meeting the public educational demands (doing well in school) or keeping up with language loyalty. The institutional pressure for doing well in British schools has forced families to either provide more space for English or give up HL totally. It is not surprising to see that institutional pressure can turn FLP into a mechanism that “supports the raciolinguistic status quo” (Rosa & Flores, 2017, P. 642).

### Conclusion

Lanza (2020, p. 80) argues that families can provide a space in which “we can choose the language or languages we want to speak, express the ideologies or attitudes we have concerning different languages, and construct the identity(ies) we wish to con-

struct through our own language choices.” Families are, however, not a safe haven. We have witnessed language changes, language death, and language loss in families and communities, but we have yet to unveil the roots of persistent racial inequality in our society and school system. Although our study is situated in the UK, FLP issues similar to those found in the UK can be found in many other parts of the world. Our study thus indicates that FLPs alone cannot save the minority languages. We call for more research to explore how institutionally sanctioned language practices and raciolinguistic ideologies are shaping (and shaped by) FLP in super-diverse societies like the UK. We also call for more studies on home-school collaboration to understand how legitimising the home language in school contexts can provide children with opportunities to develop their multiliteracy knowledge, and to build their confidence in themselves and their *pride* as multilinguals.

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## Declarations

**competing interesting** There is no competing interesting that are directly or indirectly related to the work submitted for publication.

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