IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society

Reading between languages

How multilingual families practise, shape, and negotiate home literacies

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Shira Salomon Lider

Declaration

I, Shira Salomon Lider, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis explores how multilingual families in London practise, shape, and negotiate home literacies, focusing on the ways in which multilingual literacies are used to navigate socio-cultural contexts and identities. Adopting a literacy-as-social-practice perspective and drawing on sociolinguistic and ethnographic approaches, the study investigated three families from Polish, Bangladeshi, and Hasidic Jewish backgrounds. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with mothers and children, alongside documentation of home literacy environments and reflective fieldnotes.

The study found that maternal strategies, external literacy spaces such as religious and community organisation, and children's own agency all interacted to shape multilingual literacy practices and socio-cultural identities. Migration histories emerged as a powerful lens for understanding how families prioritised languages and literacies, framed long-term goals, organised their literacy environments, and positioned themselves in relation to wider society. Together, the findings challenge prevailing portrayals of home multilingual literacies as always fluid, hybrid, or informal by showing that multilingual literacy practices are often deliberately structured, hierarchically organised, and shaped by distinct cultural, religious, and educational values. By focusing on family-based multilingual literacy practices, this thesis offers insight into how multilingual literacies are sustained, differentiated, and transmitted across time, space, and generations.

By offering new theoretical insights and a comparative cross-case analysis, this thesis contributes to studies of literacy, sociolinguistics, and multilingualism by offering a more context-sensitive and layered understanding of how multilingual literacies are practised, negotiated, experienced, valued, and maintained by different family members in contemporary multilingual family contexts. The findings have implications for researchers, educators, and policymakers seeking to support multilingual children and students by recognising their literacy experiences across languages, acknowledging the cultural and social frameworks that shape them, and fostering a sense of belonging across home, educational and societal contexts.

Impact statement

This study contributes new theoretical and empirical insights to the fields of literacy, sociolinguistics, and multilingualism by foregrounding how multilingual literacy practices are shaped by cultural, religious and educational frameworks within the family. Through in-depth ethnographic case studies of three culturally and linguistically diverse families in London, the research challenges dominant assumptions that portray home literacies as fluid, hybrid, or informal. Instead, it shows how multilingual literacies are often deliberately structured, hierarchically organised, and embedded in wider socio-cultural frameworks. In doing so, the study brings into focus the often-overlooked dimensions of intentionality, continuity, and intergenerational transmission in multilingual literacy practices.

A key contribution of the study lies in its use of migration history as an analytic lens for understanding how families make decisions about which languages to prioritise, how to organise their literacy environments, and what kinds of futures they imagine for their children. This approach offers a way to connect present-day literacy practices with past and future trajectories, showing how families' positioning in relation to wider society, their countries of origin, and their local communities shapes how multilingual literacies are valued, practised, and transmitted. The research thus provides a framework for interpreting multilingual literacies not just as a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon, but as a social one.

The findings have relevance beyond academia. For educators, they offer a reminder that children's literacy experiences do not begin and end with school. Many children navigate multiple literacy systems at home, shaped by different norms, expectations, and purposes. Recognising these experiences – even when they do not align with dominant school-based models – is crucial for fostering meaningful engagement and supporting diverse learners. For policymakers and educational leaders, the study highlights the importance of attending to the ways in which multilingual children draw on literacy practices across domains. Rather than viewing multilingualism as a challenge to be managed, the study calls for more responsive approaches that take seriously the knowledge, skills, and commitments already present within families and communities.

Community organisations and practitioners working with migrant and multilingual families may also find the insights useful for understanding how home literacies are embedded in broader religious and cultural frameworks. By documenting how families use multilingual literacies to maintain connections to religion, community, and heritage – as well as to navigate life in a multilingual and often monolingual-oriented society – the study draws attention to the balancing acts many families and children perform.

Overall, this research invites a rethinking of what counts as literacy, who defines it, and how it is sustained in multilingual contexts. It argues for more context-sensitive understandings of literacy that attend to how families structure, negotiate, and sustain multilingual literacy practices across time, space, and generations. In doing so, it contributes to wider efforts to support multilingual children not only academically, but also in ways that respect and respond to the linguistic and cultural realities of their everyday lives.

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Chapter 1   Introduction

Research context and focus

In the context of London's rich linguistic landscape, this thesis investigates the multilingual literacy practices of three culturally and linguistically diverse families living in London. Situated within a literacy-as-social-practice framework (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1984; Heath, 1983) and informed by sociolinguistic and ethnographic approaches, it explores how family members engage with multilingual literacies to navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities. Drawing on in-depth case studies of Polish, Bangladeshi, and Hasidic Jewish families, the study examines how multilingual literacy practices are shaped by migration histories – encompassing the families' social, spatial, and temporal dimensions.

London is one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse cities in the world, where more than 300 languages are spoken (London Assembly, 2006). According to recent census data (ONS, 2021), more than four in ten London residents were born outside the UK, making it an important site for examining the everyday realities of multilingual family life. While multilingualism is often celebrated in policy and educational discourse as a resource, much of the everyday multilingual literacy experiences that occur within families remain hidden from view – especially in households where literacy practices extend beyond English and do not fit within dominant monolingual and school-based paradigms (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Kenner, 2004; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

The sample in this study comprised three families from distinct cultural and religious backgrounds – Polish, Bangladeshi, and Hasidic – selected through purposive, convenience and snowball sampling to represent different linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds within London's broader multilingual landscape. Using an ethnographic case study design, I combined weekly semi-structured interviews with mothers and their children across the three families over four weeks, alongside a documentation of the home literacy environments and resources, and my own fieldnotes and real-time reflections as data collection progressed. In each family, the mother and two children participated in the study: one child in primary school and another in secondary school. The decision to include families using different home languages (Polish, Bengali and Quranic Arabic, Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew) rather

than focusing on a single linguistic group was a deliberate methodological choice. It allowed for a comparative understanding of how multilingual literacies are practised across diverse contexts and subsequently led to the emergence of migration history as a key analytic lens and organising principle in the study.

In the Polish family, the participants were Nadia (mother), Gabriela (age 8), and Simon (age 16). The family also included a father and a middle son, who did not participate. Polish and English were the main languages of the home, and the family maintained active ties to Poland and the Polish diaspora in London.

In the Bangladeshi family, the participants were Noor (mother), Aadya (age 11), and Mahia (age 13). The household also included a father and a younger son. English, Bengali (spoken), and Quranic Arabic (for religious reading) were present in the home.

In the Hasidic family, the participants were Pessi (mother), Miriam (age 11), and Devorah (age 15). The household included a father and seven other children of varying ages. Yiddish, English, and liturgical Hebrew were all used, with literacy practices heavily structured by gendered roles and community structures and expectations.

The families were not selected to be representative of their broader communities but rather to enable deep, contextualised insight into how multilingual literacies are shaped and negotiated within homes shaped by distinct cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Importantly, the study does not frame families as uniform or harmonious units. Instead, it approaches the family as a dynamic site shaped by the intersecting influences of maternal decision-making and curation of the home literacy environment, external literacy structures and institutions, and children's own navigational strategies. Literacy practices within each household are not simply handed down, but are co-constructed and negotiated over time, shaped by both structural and familial conditions and individual agency.

By examining multilingual literacy practices in these three households, the study aims to contribute to current debates in literacy studies, sociolinguistics, and multilingualism. It challenges dominant portrayals of home literacy as informal, hybrid, or fluid by showing how literacy is also structured and hierarchically organised within multilingual families. By examining these literacies not only within

the home but also in relation to external literacy spaces – such as complementary education, religious institutions, and digital networks – the study offers a more context-sensitive and layered account of how multilingual literacies are practised, experienced, and sustained across contemporary multilingual families.

From personal interest to research enquiry

This thesis began with a curiosity about how families read across languages, and what literacy means in multilingual homes. My interest in multilingual literacies grew gradually and was shaped by personal, academic, and professional experiences over time. As a child, I was always intrigued by how my bilingual friends navigated multiple languages. I remember asking them how it felt to speak more than one language, and watching with fascination as their younger siblings acquired different languages at home. Over the years, I also worked as a tutor and remedial teacher with many multilingual children, an experience that further deepened my interest in how language and literacy are experienced across children who read and write in multiple languages. This curiosity developed into a deeper academic interest during my university studies in psychology, education, and literacy, and specifically in my Master's dissertation, which focused on English and liturgical Hebrew literacy practices in a Hasidic Jewish primary school in London. In that study, I found that some students derived pleasure and pride from their ability to decode prayers in a language they did not fully understand, prompting me to wonder whether the concept of 'reading for pleasure' might look very different across multilingual contexts, perhaps not always associated with comprehension.

When I began this PhD project, I set out to explore how multilingual families understand and engage in 'reading for pleasure' across different home languages. However, during my first case study with the Polish family, I quickly realised that reading for pleasure was not a central activity in their household. Despite multilingual literacy practices being present, they were mainly functional – for religious purposes, schoolwork, or staying connected with community spaces. My original focus, therefore, did not resonate with participants' lived experiences. In line with my qualitative and ethnographic approach, I adapted the research focus to explore a wider range of reading practices, not just those tied to the definition of 'reading for pleasure' as it is conventionally understood. This change of focus was reinforced through my subsequent case studies with the Bangladeshi and Hasidic families,

where reading for pleasure also appeared only occasionally and emerged as just one part of a broader set of structured, culturally-embedded literacy practices. Throughout, I sought to remain open to what participants chose to share – and to let their experiences shape the research design, in line with the qualitative and ethnographic orientation of the study. Notably, once the research lens was widened, instances of affective and enjoyable reading did surface – though they did not always align with conventional definitions of reading for pleasure.

This pivot enabled me to gather much richer data, including forms of reading that were affective, ritualised, or socially and culturally meaningful in ways that went beyond the idea of reading for pleasure. This shift in research also helped illuminate a broader and more significant theme: the role of migration histories in shaping multilingual literacy practices.

Migration histories as an analytic lens

One of the most significant conceptual shifts in this study came through the recognition of *migration history* as a key analytic lens and organising principle. Although the thesis was always situated within a literacy-as-social-practice framework, I had not initially anticipated the extent to which literacy practices would be intertwined with the families' past and ongoing experiences of migration. These histories influenced not only which languages and literacies were maintained, but also how they were practised, valued, and hierarchised in everyday life. Migration history became a conceptual thread running through the study, shaping how I interpreted differences in literacy practices within and across families.

In this thesis, I use the term *migration history* to refer to the past, present, and future of a family's experience in relation to migration – including when and why they or previous generations migrated, how they are currently positioning themselves in relation to wider society, their connections to community and diasporic networks, and their imagined futures in the country. By using this term, I do not only refer to the timing or reason for migration, but also to families' ongoing positioning in relation to their community, their country of origin (where applicable) and the wider English-speaking society. This includes whether they envision remaining in the United Kingdom, maintaining communal and transnational ties, or returning 'home'; whether

they engage openly or selectively with mainstream institutions and society; and how they perceive their roles – and their children's roles – within society.

This lens informs how multilingual literacies are positioned within the family: as a means of prioritising certain languages and practices, structuring literacy environments, engaging with external institutions and resources, demarcating boundaries, preserving language and culture, and shaping family members' socio-cultural identities. Recognising these factors allowed me to move beyond simple binaries of language maintenance and shift, and instead to offer a more layered account of how multilingual literacies are taken up, sustained, and negotiated in everyday family life.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured around eight chapters, including this introduction.

Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the relevant literature, tracing key debates and frameworks in literacy studies, sociolinguistics, and multilingualism. It begins by situating the study within the literacy-as-social-practice tradition, then explores the role of literacy within multilingual families, highlighting concepts such as language socialisation, family language policy, and identity. The chapter also reviews how migration, globalisation, and institutional structures shape the contexts in which multilingual literacy practices are embedded.

Chapter 3 outlines the study's methodological approach. It discusses the ethnographic orientation and multiple case study design that I adopted, followed by a detailed account of sampling strategies, participant selection, and the rationale for including families from different linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. The chapter also explains how the research focus evolved from an initial interest in 'reading for pleasure' to a broader exploration of multilingual literacy practices. It concludes with an overview of the data collection process, analytic strategies, and trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapters 4 to 6 present the findings across the three case studies. Chapter 4 focuses on the Polish family, offering both a cross-family and individual analysis of their multilingual literacy practices in Polish and English. Chapter 5 presents the findings from the Bangladeshi family, using the family as the unit of analysis and

exploring their literacy engagement in English, Quranic Arabic, and Bengali. Chapter 6 examines the Hasidic family, combining family-wide and individual perspectives to explore their multilingual literacy practices in Yiddish, English, and liturgical Hebrew, where gendered roles in relation to multilingual literacies also emerged.

Chapter 7 provides a cross-case discussion of the findings. It identifies key themes that emerged across the three families, including the role of mothers in curating literacy environments, the influence of external literacy spaces, children's navigational strategies, and the hierarchical organisation of multilingual literacies. It also reflects on how migration histories functioned as an organising principle for understanding the diverse trajectories and practices observed.

Finally, chapter 8 concludes the thesis by synthesising the main findings in light of the research questions, discussing the study's theoretical and empirical contributions, and identifying directions for future research.

Chapter 2   Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies relevant to the present study. Grounded in a social practice perspective, this review aims to offer insights into the way literacy is embedded within diverse cultural, linguistic, and social contexts, with emphasis on multilingual and family contexts. The chapter begins by exploring literacy as a contextual and socially situated practice, setting the foundation for understanding how literacy practices are shaped by a combination of social and cultural factors, and vary across settings and communities. Following this, the second section examines multilingual literacies within family and community contexts, outlining key terms and reviewing foundational studies that inform this area of research. The third section shifts to sociolinguistic perspectives, examining the impacts of migration, globalisation, and multilingualism on families, and providing key definitions and discussions related to language socialisation, maintenance, and shift. The fourth section focuses on the emerging field of family language policy, exploring how families negotiate language ideology, practices, and management within multilingual contexts. Finally, the fifth section investigates identity and how various literacy domains – including mainstream and complementary education, digital media, and religion – shape identity and multilingual literacy practices within families.

Section 1: Understanding literacy as a contextual and socially situated practice

Conceptualising literacy in family and social contexts

Rather than viewing literacy merely as a skill, in this thesis, I refer to literacy as a socially situated process of meaning-making that involves navigating the cultural norms, values, and expectations embedded in social relationships and institutional discourses (Street, 1984). Indeed, literacy extends far beyond the ability to read and write, representing a complex set of social practices deeply embedded in cultural and societal contexts (Gee, 1987). Stavans and Lindgren (2021) define literacy as the capacity to create and comprehend text, shaped by various factors, including tools, technologies, cognitive processes, and contextual influences. As such, literacy encompasses a broad spectrum of practices that vary across different settings,

reflecting the diverse experiences and social environments that individuals encounter. The present study builds on the premise that literacy practices are inherently diverse and context-dependent, and this perspective sets the foundation for exploring the various, context-specific ways through which multilingual families navigate and construct literacy.

One key context within which literacy is negotiated is the family. Family literacy practices – the shared activities and literacy events that take place within the home – are crucial to both literacy development and socialisation (Hall, Levy & Preece, 2018; Levy & Harrison, 2025). These practices are far from uniform, as they are shaped by each family's cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. For example, shared reading routines, such as reading bedtime stories, may serve a number of purposes, including an attempt to foster a love of reading and to establish family routines (Hall et al., 2018). Levy and Harrison (2025) also emphasise the relational dimensions of shared reading, showing how reading together can function as an emotionally meaningful family practice. The literature shows that family literacy is not merely an extension of school-based literacy practices; rather, it involves unique, context-specific practices that may not align with formal literacy learning in schools (Hall et al., 2018; Levy, 2011). The present study builds on this understanding by examining how literacy practices are situated within the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of multilingual families, exploring the ways in which family members navigate their social and cultural worlds using multilingual literacy practices, as well as what those literacy practices look like.

A key element within literacy in general, and family literacy in particular, is reading for pleasure (RfP). Engaged readers – those who read for pleasure – choose to read voluntarily, finding intrinsic value and enjoyment in the activity (Ellis & Coddington, 2013). The RfP literature has emphasised the importance of autonomy, motivation, affective engagement, and social context in shaping children's reading practices (Cremin, 2020; Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell & Safford, 2014; McGeown, Duncan, Griffiths & Stothard, 2015). Cremin (2020), for example, highlights cognitive, social, and emotional benefits associated with voluntary reading. Additionally, research on informal and self-directed literacy practices – whether framed as reading for pleasure or as everyday literacies outside school – has illustrated the importance of children's agency in shaping their literacy identities (Cremin et al., 2014; Moss,

2000). These studies suggest that children's motivations, interests, and social contexts significantly influence how they engage with texts, often independently of adult expectations. Encouraging parental enthusiasm for reading, as Clavel and Mediavilla (2020) suggest, can have positive intergenerational impacts on children's reading abilities, demonstrating the importance of nurturing a family culture that values and enjoys reading. In the present study, I consider how reading for pleasure features within family routines, but place greater emphasis on children's literacy decisions, preferences, and forms of agency, particularly as these unfold across different languages and cultural contexts within multilingual households.

By highlighting the contextual nature of literacy, the significance of family reading practices, and the practice of reading for pleasure relating to children's reading agency and choices, these themes lay the groundwork for a deeper exploration of how literacy is practised and experienced in multilingual families. Next, I introduce the theoretical framework of this study: literacy as a social practice. This framework enables an examination of how literacy is embedded in everyday interactions and is shaped by social and cultural contexts, providing a deeper understanding of the literacy experiences of multilingual families and how they navigate their lives using multiple languages and literacies.

Theoretical framework: Literacy as a social practice

Literacy-as-social-practice perspectives perceive reading and writing as practices shaped by social contexts, including socio-cultural norms, values, beliefs and histories. These perspectives came to the forefront of literacy research through several studies that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, including the work of Heath (1983), Street (1984, 1995), and Barton and Hamilton (1998). This body of work has suggested an alternative view to the (then) dominant approach to literacy, which tended to view reading and writing as a decontextualised finite set of mental and cognitive skills. In his influential book *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Street (1984) offers a distinction between two approaches to literacy. Firstly, he speaks of the (then) dominant *autonomous model of literacy*, which suggests that the acquisition and practice of literacy are similar everywhere, detached from their social context. Secondly, he introduces the *ideological model of literacy*, which argues that reading and writing are culturally-embedded communicative practices that are developed in

particular social contexts, and involve the learning of local cultural models of behaviour and identity. The latter approach has since become increasingly influential, leading to the emergence of a large body of work often referred to as the New Literacy Studies, exploring literacy from different angles and in different settings whilst situated in a social context (e.g., Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 2000; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

Like various other literacy-as-social-practice studies, the present study adopts an ethnographic perspective. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how multilingual families navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities through their multilingual literacy practices. The adoption of an ethnographic approach in the present study has several implications which are discussed in the Methodology chapter; however, the aspect I wish to refer to here is the seeking of insider (emic) knowledge about individuals' perceptions, understandings and interpretations of the patterns of everyday life (Green & Bloome, 2004). From a social practice perspective, literacy is conceptualised differently across contexts, and it is largely defined by the perceptions of individuals comprising a social context (Baynham, 1995). Thus, ethnographic perspectives are key for gaining an in-depth understanding of participants' conceptualisations and perceptions of literacy, and how they are shaped by their socio-cultural context.

The present study examines not only how multilingual families engage with their home languages and literacies, but also how their literacy practices are affected by their wider socio-cultural contexts. Because individuals within and across multilingual families develop differences in their reading practices, choices, and opportunities, an ethnographic approach helps uncover the social, generational, spatial, and temporal factors that shape these variations. Given that scholars like Barton and Hamilton (1998) employed ethnographic methods to understand what people do with literacy in their everyday lives and how they conceptualise it, the present study aims to use a similar approach to reveal the diverse ways in which multilingual families' literacy practices are constructed and negotiated in their daily lives, across different contexts and generations.

Literacy events and literacy practices

The study of literacy as a social practice involves both the exploration of what people *do* with literacy, and how people *conceptualise and think* about literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). These two elements correspond to two concepts that have become integral in this field of study, termed *literacy events* and *literacy practices*.

Literacy events are described as 'occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies' (Heath, 1982, p.50). Hamilton (2000) contends that literacy events involve four visible elements: participants, settings, artefacts and activities. From a research perspective, a literacy event can be regarded as a 'bounded moment in time where the role literacy plays in the immediate social interactions between participants becomes available for study' (Moss, 2007, p.40).

Through ongoing participation in a range of literacy events, individuals form behavioural, social, and cultural conceptualisations that give meaning to the uses of reading and writing, termed *literacy practices* (Street, 1984). In this sense, literacy events are just 'the tip of the iceberg' (Hamilton, 2000, p.18): while the study of a single literacy event reveals participants' interactions at a specific moment in time, each event taps into participants' histories, drawing on their past experiences and constructions of literacy, thus shaping, and possibly transforming, their future encounters with texts (Moss, 2021). Thus, literacy practices involve not just what people *do* with literacy, but also how they *conceptualise and think* about it (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995).

From a research perspective, the study of literacy practices represents an analytic move from the specific to the general, making associations between literacy events and revealing common conceptualisations of literacy among communities (Moss, 2007; Street, 1984). Literacy practices cannot simply be observed, since they involve many 'invisible' factors, such as knowledge, feelings, and values, and represent constantly changing contexts (Hamilton, 2000). Thus, they must be inferred from literacy events and self-reports. To gain a comprehensive understanding of multilingual families' literacy experiences, this study aims to uncover both the 'visible' and 'invisible' factors constructing those practices.

The concept of literacy domains

Scholars operating within the literacy-as-social-practice perspectives argue that literacies are associated with different life domains (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995). These are sometimes termed *domains of literacy*, defined as 'the main settings and contexts where people use literacy' (Baynham, 1995, p.39). Not all literacy domains are considered equal in power; certain powerful institutions, like the education system, tend to support dominant literacy practices in dominant languages, while other practices that exist in people's everyday lives may be marginalised (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). This is often the case for multilingual families, whose social and linguistic distance from the mainstream context may mean their home literacy practices are deemed less worthy of attention in the dominant discourses about literacy (Hatoss, 2020; Nordstrom; 2020; Yagmur, 2020).

The distribution of different types of literacy across domains is not clear-cut, as boundaries often blur, with movement and overlap occurring between domains (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Thus, the home can incorporate a range of literacy practices from various external domains, like the workplace, cultural or religious community, and school (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). In line with this perspective, this study investigates how family members navigate their reading across these interconnected life domains. While interviews were conducted (virtually) in participants' homes, offering rich insights into the literacy practices within this domain, the study also explores how family members' multilingual literacy practices extend across and blend with other domains – such as school, religious institutions, complementary education and social groups – ultimately converging in the home context.

Literacy resources and the home literacy environment

The range of resources available to people across domains provides them with opportunities for literacy activities (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Moss (2007) argues that literacy research must involve an examination of the full range of texts that are present in a particular context, to discover which texts are salient for participants and how they are used.

Literacy-as-social-practice studies have defined literacy resources, or texts, in various and broad ways over time. The New London Group (1996) first introduced

the concept of *multiliteracies*, broadening the definition of literacy to include a variety of communication modes beyond traditional print, such as digital, visual, and multimodal texts. This framework reflects the idea that literacy involves navigating diverse semiotic systems in a globalised and increasingly technological world. Following this, scholars like Kress (1997, 2009), Jewitt (2005) and Van Leeuwen (2005) developed the concept of *multimodality*, which emphasises that meaning-making occurs through multiple modes – such as image, gesture, sound, and spatial design – alongside written and spoken language. Scholars like Pahl and Rowsell (2013) and Bezemer and Kress (2016) further explored how individuals use multimodal resources in literacy practices, including objects, photographs, and digital artefacts, often shaped by cultural and linguistic diversity. This shift in perspective has led to a broader understanding of literacy as a multimodal practice, integrating various forms of representation.

In this thesis, my use of the term *literacy resources* refers specifically to resources that involve written language. While *multiliteracies* and *multimodality* recognise the importance of diverse forms of communication, my research emphasises the role of written texts in shaping individuals' literacy experiences across languages and domains. By narrowing the definition to written language, I aimed to explore how reading practices and written texts, in particular, serve as key tools through which multilingual families navigate their social and cultural worlds and identities, and transmit cultural values and beliefs.

In the present study, I considered the exploration of the literacy resources available to my participants in their homes, namely their *home literacy environment*, as a key part of understanding their multilingual literacy practices. The term *home literacy environment* (HLE) generally refers to the availability of literacy resources in the home and the literacy activities undertaken by family members. HLE is thought to predict children's literacy and language development (e.g., De Bondt, Willenberg & Bus, 2020; Puglisi, Hulme, Hamilton & Snowling, 2017; Swain & Cara, 2019), and studies in this field often aver that an investigation of the HLE of children from a low social economic status (e.g., Luo et al., 2021) or with reading and writing difficulties (e.g., Hamilton, Hayiou-Thomas, Hulme & Snowling, 2016) can enhance their educational prospects. While a well-established term, HLE has not been used often in literacy-as-social-practice research, perhaps due to its association with deficit

perspectives on literacy learning. Additionally, while the HLE of young bilingual children has been explored (e.g., Bitetti & Hammer, 2016; Farver, Xu, Lonigan & Eppe, 2013), less attention has been given to the role of HLE in the home literacy practices of older multilingual children whose literacy skills are already established.

Thus, the present study explores the HLE of multilingual children, who attend primary and secondary schools in London. Rather than an investigation of the impact of HLE on educational achievement, I have taken a step back and explored multilingual families' HLE to gain a better understanding of their reading practices in different languages. To achieve this, I explored what reading resources were available in their homes, what languages they encoded and how they were organised. Furthermore, I investigated how, for what purposes and under what circumstances different family members use the reading resources available to them. This focus on the reading resources available to participants offers insights into how multilingual families navigate their reading practices across their linguistic repertoire, as well as how these practices vary among individuals within and across families.

Next, I review pioneering studies that take on literacy-as-social-practice perspectives, which have informed the present study in the ways detailed below.

Pioneering studies of literacy practices

Heath (1983) and Barton and Hamilton (1998) conducted key studies in the field of literacy as social practice, laying the groundwork for understanding literacy in everyday life across different social and cultural contexts.

In her landmark ethnographic study described in her book *Ways with Words*, Heath (1983) examined how young children learnt language and literacy in two neighbouring working-class communities in south-eastern United States. For a decade, Heath embedded herself in the two communities, and followed young children from their first years at home and in the community and into school. She observed their interactions and literacy events with their family members and teachers, and provided detailed descriptions of what happened as children learnt to use language and formed their beliefs and values about its use, thus becoming accepted members of their communities. Heath found the patterns of language and literacy use to be very different between the two communities, and distinct from the dominant practices observed in the neighbouring middle-class town and schools.

She concluded that different communities hold different views and conventions regarding reading and writing, and significantly expanded the scope of what might be considered a literacy event, by exploring the daily communicative practices – which often involved instances of reading and writing – among non-mainstream communities.

Another key study was conducted by Barton and Hamilton (1998) in the 1990s. Using ethnographic data collection methods, they set out to explore what the people of Lancaster, a town in northwest England, did with literacy, including the social activities, the thoughts and meanings behind these activities, and the texts and resources used within such activities. They examined both the cultural traditions upon which the literacy practices were based, and the constant change that was shaping people's literacy practices. Barton and Hamilton found a great diversity of everyday literacy practices in the participants' homes: some were for pleasure, and some were tied in with more mundane daily activities. In addition to the home literacy activities, they found that external domains, like the local library and church, were significant in involving residents in literacy activities. Barton and Hamilton's work significantly expanded the notion of literacy practices. Their findings revealed the richness and complexity of the literacy practices of people's everyday lives, enhancing the understanding that people read and write across different domains and in different ways to make sense of their daily lives.

While Heath's (1983) and Barton and Hamilton's (1998) work has been hugely influential in literacy-as-social-practice research, the communities they studied were largely monolingual, and their participants were either young children or adults. This left a significant gap, which research conducted later, exploring the literacy learning and practices of multilingual individuals and communities, has addressed.

Section 2: Multilingual literacies in the family and community
Key terms and terminologies in multilingual literacy research

Multilingual literacy practices have gained increasing scholarly attention since the early 2000s, with a growing number of publications each year focusing on this topic – a trend that continues to this day. This observation is based on an extensive search I conducted through the UCL library's search engine and the multidisciplinary database SCOPUS, using keywords such as 'multilingual literacies,' 'literacy AND

multilingualism,' 'literacy AND bilingualism,' and 'multilingual reading practices.' Many studies attribute this rise to the rapid changes brought about by migration, globalisation, and digital technologies, which have driven the further exploration of this field (e.g, Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Little, 2020; Stornaiuolo, Smith & Phillips, 2017).

Understanding how multilingual literacy practices are woven into family life and broader social structures is becoming increasingly essential as multilingualism becomes a more common reality for families around the world. Over the past decades, the conceptualisation of literacy itself has shifted significantly, with early foundational work expanding the traditional monolingual and autonomous view of literacy. In the 1980s, Street (1984), among other scholars, introduced the term *multiple literacies* to challenge the notion of a single, standardised form of literacy. This view helped draw attention to the diverse ways literacy is learnt, valued, and used in different communities. However, Street (2000) later cautioned that the notion of *multiple literacies* was at risk of being interpreted in overly simplistic terms – implying that each literacy corresponded neatly to a single language or cultural group. Such interpretations, he argued, reintroduced the very reification the term had originally sought to dismantle. Instead, he emphasised the need to attend to the social practices through which literacies are constructed, contested, and made meaningful in specific settings. In a related but distinct line of thinking, the *multiliteracies* framework developed by the New London Group (1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) expanded the scope of literacy to account for the growing importance of digital, visual, and multimodal forms of communication in globalised and technologically mediated contexts.

Developed later, *Pluriliteracies*, introduced by Garcia, Bartlett, and Kleifgen (2007), emphasises the fluid and evolving nature of literacy in multilingual settings, where language use is flexible, context-specific, and creatively integrated across linguistic systems to meet communicative needs. This concept aligns with Hornberger's (1990, 2003) *continua of biliteracy model*, which challenges the notion of rigid language boundaries and advocates for a more flexible understanding of literacy, acknowledging how bilingual and multilingual individuals blend their languages in various settings. Building on these ideas, Canagarajah's (2013) notion of *translingual literacy* further challenges the compartmentalisation of languages into separate, fixed

entities. Instead, it highlights how multilingual individuals seamlessly blend elements from different languages in reading and writing practices, viewing literacy as a flexible, adaptive process that crosses linguistic and cultural norms. These perspectives underscore the importance of understanding literacy in multilingual communities as dynamic, interconnected, and adaptable.

Discussing migration and transnationalism, Warriner (2007) introduces the concept of *transnational literacies*, focusing on how language learning and identity are influenced by the intersection of global**,** transnational, and local processes. Warriner describes these literacies as encompassing written and multimodal forms of communication, where semiotic resources are used to sustain, transform, or maintain transnational relations and identities. This perspective illuminates how literacy practices are shaped by the broader global and local processes affecting multilingual individuals' language use and identity formation. The term *transnational* itself, along with its implications for language and literacy use among multilingual families, is explored in more detail in the next section.

Building on these perspectives, the concept of *multilingual multiliteracies* (Morita-Mullaney, Li & Renn, 2019; Morita-Mullaney, 2021) was introduced, which expands the understanding of literacy in emergent multilingual families. This concept goes beyond traditional views of literacy as a standardised, school-based activity by demonstrating how these families negotiate literacy practices across multiple languages, media, and social contexts. *Multilingual multiliteracies* include not only reading and writing but also digital media, oral traditions, and other forms of communication that are deeply embedded in the cultural and social dynamics of multilingual communities. This perspective aligns with the view of literacy as a social practice and challenges educators to rethink how literacy is defined and supported in multilingual contexts, encouraging the integration of diverse literacy practices in educational strategies.

The above terminologies highlight the increasing complexity of literacy studies as scholars have shifted from traditional, monolingual perspectives to a deeper understanding of how literacy operates in multilingual contexts. While the concept of *multiliteracies* did acknowledge that literacy can be practised across multiple languages, the main focus was on the different modes of communication – digital,

visual, and multimodal – within a single language. However, as literacy studies evolved, attention turned more explicitly toward how individuals in multilingual environments navigate multiple languages with varying degrees of expertise, blending linguistic resources flexibly rather than isolating them.

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to use the term *multilingual literacies* to simplify the discussion while acknowledging that literacy practices across languages can take very different forms depending on the social, cultural, and familial context. This usage aligns with the framing found in Martin-Jones and Jones (2000), who brought together scholarship exploring how literacy is enacted across languages within specific social and cultural contexts. Building on this body of work, I draw more specifically on Hornberger's (1990) definition of *biliteracy/multiliteracy* as 'any and all instances in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in or around written material' (p. 213). I also draw on Warriner's (2009) understanding of *multilingual literacies* as instances of social practice that are shaped by specific local contexts, while also influenced by broader social, cultural, political, and ideological factors. By *multilingual literacies*, I refer specifically to the everyday literacies and languages that family members use, both in English and in their home languages – those which anchor their cultural and linguistic identities. This term allows me to focus on the specific literacy practices within multilingual families, without overcomplicating the framework with highly nuanced distinctions, making it a practical choice for examining the daily realities of language and literacy use in the family context.

To further contextualise these concepts and terminologies, I now turn the discussion to examine foundational studies that have applied and expanded on these ideas, demonstrating their impact on real-world multilingual literacy practices.

Foundational studies in multilingual literacy practices

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, increased attention was given to the study of multilingual literacies, reflecting the changing linguistic landscapes shaped by migration and globalisation. Researchers began to explore how individuals navigate and blend multiple languages in their literacy practices, and found that languages do not operate distinctly in multilingual people's lives, but rather are syncretised and transformed to create new forms of communication (e.g, Blackledge & Creese, 2010;

Gregory, Long & Volk, 2004; Kenner, 2004; Little, 2020; Stornaiuolo et al., 2017; Warriner, Griego & Rajapakse, 2012).

A pivotal moment in the study of multilingual literacies came with the publication of *Multilingual Literacies* (Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000), an edited volume that gathered ethnographic research on language and literacy practices across multilingual contexts. This work broadened the scope of earlier studies on literacy as a social practice by incorporating multilingual perspectives, thus laying the groundwork for much of the research that would follow. In this collection, Martin-Jones and Jones address how literacy practices are not isolated to single languages but exist in multilingual environments where individuals routinely engage with multiple literacies across different contexts.

The volume includes a mix of conceptual work (e.g., Barton, 2000; Street, 2000), as well as detailed ethnographic studies exploring how multilingualism and literacy intersect in everyday life (e.g., Blackledge, 2000; Gregory & Williams, 2000a; Ran, 2000; Sneddon, 2000). For instance, Blackledge (2000) explored power dynamics around literacy and language, focusing on the experiences of Bangladeshi women in Birmingham, who faced challenges in accessing English literacy while being expected to support their children's learning in English. Additionally, Ran (2000) examined the literacy experiences of Chinese children learning to read and write at home, demonstrating how their multilingual literacy practices were shaped by both home and school environments. Furthermore, Sneddon's (2000) chapter on the Gujarati Muslim community in London explored how families used a mixture of English, Gujarati, and Arabic for different purposes. She noted that literacy in English was often associated with academic and formal purposes, Arabic with religious practices, and Gujarati with family communication, demonstrating how literacy practices shift according to context and purpose.

Together, these studies provided an extension to the work conducted in literacy-as-social-practice research up to that point in time (Street & Lefstein, 2007), and laid a conceptual foundation for later research, positioning multilingual literacies as a flexible, context-dependent practice deeply influenced by social and cultural factors. This shift from viewing literacy as a singular, standardised process in a single language to one that accounts for the fluidity and complexity of multilingual

environments has had a lasting impact on how scholars now understand literacy in diverse communities (Warriner et al., 2012). Indeed, this collection of studies constitutes the biggest inspiration for the present study.

Published in the same year, *City Literacies* by Gregory and Williams (2000b) further expanded the field's understanding of multilingual literacy practices by offering an intergenerational study of the literacy practices of residents in two East London neighbourhoods. This study was groundbreaking in its longitudinal approach, tracing the significant population changes the area experienced over the 20th century. Consequently, it captured a wealth of literacy experiences across different languages and cultures, from the pre-war period when a large Jewish community lived there to the later presence of a significant Bangladeshi population nearly half a century later. Gregory and Williams used ethnographic methods, including interviews with over fifty participants of various ages who shared their literacy learning experiences across different settings and contexts, like their homes, schools, clubs and religious organisations. This way, Gregory and Williams revealed the large scope of literacy experiences of their participants, from 'unofficial' multilingual literacies in their homes and communities, to the more 'official' structured world of school. The 'unofficial' literacies that they found included storytelling, religious reading, and informal writing, all of which were central to family and community life but had often been overlooked in traditional literacy research. Gregory and Williams argue that these 'unofficial' literacies were integral to children's learning experiences and played a key role in shaping their multilingual identities. Furthermore, they contend that despite the participants' socio-cultural contexts that may have led to their perception as possibly 'deprived of literacy,' their access to and syncretism of various languages and learning styles was, in fact, a strength that enhanced their learning experiences.

Gregory and Williams's focus on the reading practices of communities that were culturally and linguistically distinct from mainstream society, particularly their examination of temporal and generational aspects, has significantly informed the present study. However, a key distinction between their research and the present study is the emphasis placed on participants' literacy development. While Gregory and Williams concentrated on the literacy *learning experiences* of their participants, this study shifts the focus towards examining the *reading practices* of multilingual family members, mostly after they have already acquired their literacy skills. By

doing so, in the present study, I aimed to explore how *established* reading practices evolve within multilingual families, which is often overlooked in studies that primarily focus on the process of literacy development. This approach provides deeper insights into the ongoing engagement with multilingual literacy practices in everyday life.

Building on the foundational work of Gregory and Williams, the edited volume *Many Pathways to Literacy* (Gregory et al., 2004) explored the role of multilingualism in literacy development by focusing on the concept of *literacy mediators* within families. The volume assembles studies that examined how different family members – parents, siblings, and grandparents – facilitated children's literacy development in multilingual homes. This volume has made significant contributions by emphasising the role of older siblings in supporting their younger counterparts' literacy learning, particularly in families where the home language differed from the dominant language of the society. One of the key findings was the concept of *syncretic literacy* – the idea that children actively synthesise different literacy practices from home, school, and community, creating new forms of literacy that reflect their complex linguistic environments. In the studies of migrant families presented in the volume, children often acted as translators and interpreters. Gregory and her colleagues argue that this syncretism is a strength rather than a deficit, challenging traditional views that saw multilingualism as an obstacle to literacy development. This work has been instrumental in shifting the focus away from the formal teaching of literacy in schools and towards the informal, everyday practices that occur within families and communities. It has also highlighted the agency of children in shaping their own literacy development, a theme that would become increasingly prominent in later family language policy and literacy research, as discussed later in the chapter. This concept of children's agency in navigating multilingual settings resonates with the broader focus of this thesis, where multilingual literacy practices are examined within the family context.

Kenner's (2000, 2004, 2005) contributions to multilingual literacy research are also central to this discussion, particularly her exploration of the benefits of growing up biliterate, and how young bilingual children navigate their literacy development in both home and educational settings. In her book *Becoming Biliterate: Young Children Learning Different Writing Systems* (2004), Kenner investigates the benefits

of biliteracy, stressing that bilingual children's ability to access different languages and cultures enhances their communication skills and cognitive development. She proposes strategies for educators to build on ethnographic research to better understand the home literacy contexts of their students, and advocates for recognising community language schools as valuable resources that complement mainstream education by providing linguistic, cultural, and cognitive enrichment. Her concept of *literacy ecosystems* (Kenner, 2005) also contributes to this discussion, illustrating how bilingual families work as interconnected systems to support literacy in more than one language, with children playing active roles in navigating these ecosystems. Across her body of work, Kenner has consistently highlighted the potential benefits of biliteracy, advocating for systemic change to better support bilingual children's development in both school and community contexts (Kenner, 2000, 2004, 2005). Her studies serve as a foundation for understanding how multilingual literacies function within educational systems that often prioritise monolingualism, and they provide a framework for integrating home languages into formal education to enrich children's linguistic and cultural experiences.

Stein and Slonimsky (2006) made another significant contribution to the field of multilingual literacies through their ethnographic study in South Africa, which offered a fresh perspective on literacy practices within multilingual households. By integrating the literacy-as-social-practice framework with the concept of language socialisation (explored further in the next section), they examined how literacy was practised in three culturally and linguistically diverse families. Emphasising the active role of children in literacy socialisation, Stein and Slonimsky demonstrate how children and adults co-constructed meaning through shared literacy events. Through interviews and observations, they show how adults guided young children in adopting 'good reading practices' based on cultural norms and social interactions. Notably, the study highlights the role of multimodal literacy practices, including gestures, storytelling, and digital media, broadening the definition of literacy beyond the written word. This approach resonates with the concept of *multiliteracies* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996), emphasising that literacy involves more than linguistic skills; it includes diverse communicative practices and tools. Overall, Stein and Slonimsky's findings emphasise that literacy practices are deeply

influenced by cultural and social dynamics within families, showcasing the crucial role that family and community play in shaping multilingual literacy experiences.

While Stein and Slonimsky's work is relevant to the present study in their examination of literacy socialisation in multiliterate homes, their methodology and focus were considerably different. While they relied on observations of shared literacy events and focused on family interactions and behaviours, the present study differs in that it sought family members' reports on their reading, which often occur when they are unaccompanied. This, again, pertains to the study of older children, who typically do not rely on adults as often to scaffold their reading for them. By conducting interviews with parents and children, I aimed to understand the ways family members navigate their social and cultural worlds through multilingual literacy practices, without the need to observe specific interactions and shared literacy events.

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the context in which multilingual families live, I next explore key themes surrounding migration, globalisation, and multilingualism from a sociolinguistic perspective, providing essential context for understanding language and literacy dynamics in multilingual families.

Section 3: Migration, multilingualism, and sociolinguistic perspectives in family contexts

Patterns of migration, globalisation and linguistic diversity

Migration and globalisation play a pivotal role in shaping the linguistic and cultural landscapes within which multilingual families navigate their daily lives. Migration across linguistic and national borders has significantly increased in recent years, marked by distinct patterns, with people frequently moving from economically disadvantaged regions to former colonial powers, from south to north, and from rural areas to urban centres (Hall, Smith & Wicaksono, 2017).

In the context of this study, two out of the three families have parents who are first-generation migrants to the United Kingdom, while their children represent the second generation, having been born in England. While these children are native to the UK, their linguistic and cultural identities are influenced by their parents' migration experiences, as well as patterns such as the families' positioning in relation to the

broader society, and the parents' intention regarding long-term settlement in the UK or a potential return to their home country. These migration histories provide an important lens through which multilingual literacy practices are analysed in this study. Therefore, understanding the patterns and implications of migration on language and literacy, provides an essential backdrop for examining how these families engage in multilingual literacy practices within their social and cultural environments.

Migration research has increasingly adopted the term *transnationalism* to highlight the interconnectedness of migrants' lives across national borders. Basch, Schiller and Blanc (1993) define *transnationalism* as the process through which immigrants create and maintain complex, multistranded social relationships that link their country of origin with their country of settlement. Obojska and Vaiouli (2023) use the term to stress how migrants' experiences are shaped by these cross-border connections.

In contemporary societies, these migratory flows have also led to what Vertovec (2007) calls *superdiversity*, a term that captures the unprecedented diversity of modern migration in terms of origin, legal status, culture, and language. Superdiversity disrupts traditional models of diversity, which often focused on homogenous groups, by recognising the fluid and overlapping identities that emerge in a globalised world (Arnaut, Blommaert, Rampton & Spotti, 2015).

The notion of *superdiversity* is closely tied to Blommaert's (2010) discussion of *globalisation*, which he describes not as creating a singular 'global village,' but rather a 'complex web of villages, towns, neighbourhoods, and settlements' (p.1) connected by material and symbolic ties in unpredictable ways. This complexity reflects the realities of superdiverse contexts, where migrants are embedded in local, national, and transnational networks, making it essential to examine how languages and identities are negotiated across different settings. Blommaert (2010) also argues that globalisation, like every other system of development, brings both opportunities and constraints. In the context of migration, globalisation prompts a consideration of how linguistic practices and identities are not confined to singular spaces but are distributed across global and local contexts.

Broader migration patterns across regions and countries are shaped not only by economic and geographic factors but also by political and social debates, particularly those related to language (Hall et al., 2017). Blackledge and Creese (2010) highlight

that discussions about migration often intersect with language policy debates, where governments face a choice between pluralistic approaches that embrace linguistic diversity and assimilationist policies that encourage migrants to adopt the dominant language and culture. These migration and globalisation trends have reshaped the linguistic landscapes of migrant families, fostering fluid and situational language practices in increasingly superdiverse, transnational settings. As a result, traditional concepts of stable bilingualism have given way to more adaptive forms of multilingualism, where language use shifts according to the social, cultural, and practical demands of each situation (Arnaut et al., 2015). To better understand how migration and globalisation shape language practices in family contexts, I next present definitions of bilingualism and multilingualism, along with their roles within the contexts of migrant families and minority languages.

Bilingualism and multilingualism

The study of migration is closely linked to research on multilingualism, particularly in contexts where migrants bring diverse linguistic repertoires with them. Traditionally, research in this field focused on bilingual language acquisition, cognition, and code-switching (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Early definitions of bilingualism, such as that presented by Spolsky (1998), identified several key features of bilingual individuals, including the way each language is acquired (mother tongue, second language, or foreign language learning) and the context in which it is used. Spolsky (1998) also introduced the concept of *domains* to explain how bilinguals use different languages in various ways across various social contexts, such as home, school, or work, often maintaining their home language in private or religious settings while adopting the new language in public or professional domains.

As research into multilingualism progressed, Heller (2007) critiqued the traditional understanding of bilingualism, which treated languages as distinct and bounded systems. Instead, she proposed a more dynamic view, suggesting that bilingualism is better understood as a set of linguistic resources shaped by social interactions, power relations, and historical conditions. In a similar manner to the shift in literacy studies led by Street's (1984) *autonomous model of literacy*, Heller (2007) highlights how language practices are deeply embedded in broader social structures, rather than being purely autonomous linguistic systems. Blommaert (2010) and Stavans

and Lindgren (2021) expand on this view, arguing that bilingualism and multilingualism are constantly adapting, especially in light of globalisation and technological advancements. This further supports the idea that multilingualism is not static but is instead shaped by ongoing social and cultural processes.

In parallel, the concept of *plurilingualism* emerged, particularly in European contexts, to describe the multilingual competence of individuals. Marshall and Moore (2013) explain that *plurilingualism* focuses on an individual's entire linguistic repertoire and their ability to move fluidly between languages, drawing on varying levels of proficiency based on context and need. This concept underscores personal agency, where individuals may engage with multiple languages even without full proficiency, reflecting an adaptable approach to language use. In contrast, *multilingualism* typically refers to the structured presence and use of multiple languages within an individual's daily life, where speakers often strive for a more balanced proficiency and regular engagement with each language (Mohanty, 2019). While *plurilingualism* is associated with leveraging partial competencies to foster communication and linguistic inclusivity, *multilingualism* tends to imply a stable and comprehensive use of different languages, often cultivated through daily practice and necessity, like in the case of the families explored in the present study.

This evolving understanding of bilingualism and multilingualism has crucial implications for the study of migrant families, where languages and literacies are constantly negotiated across different domains and shaped by migration histories, integration or assimilation patterns, and various social structures. In the present study, I use the term *multilingual* or *multilingualism* to refer to the use of two or more languages or literacies by individuals, families and communities. This includes participants who are bilingual as well as those who speak and/or read multiple languages. I base this on Mohanty's (2019) definition of *multilingualism* as the ability of individuals or communities to meet their daily communicative needs in two or more languages. By using *multilingualism* in this broad sense, I aim to capture the fluid and adaptive ways in which my participants navigate their linguistic and literate repertoires in various aspects of their daily lives, whether at home, in community settings, or in their educational environments. This approach allows me to encompass a wide range of language and literacy practices, and reflects the reality of language and literacy use in multilingual families, where different languages may

be employed for different social, cultural, and functional purposes, across different domains. At the same time, I may use the terms *bilingual* or *bilingualism* occasionally, when referring to literature that has used these specific terms.

Understanding multilingualism within migrant families requires an examination of the ways in which language practices are shaped by the families' social and cultural contexts. To further explore this, the field of *sociolinguistics* is discussed next, providing a crucial lens for examining the realities of language use in migrant families (Arnaut et al., 2015; Blommaert, 2010).

Sociolinguistics, migration, and multilingualism

The large-scale global migration and mobility the world has witnessed since the late 20th century, and the resulting rise in multilingualism, has led to an increased focus on sociolinguistic research and the role that language plays in the lives of migrants (Blommaert, 2010; Liu, Liu, Wang & Mei, 2024). The study of sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society, specifically how language use is shaped by social structures and patterns of human behaviour (Spolsky, 1998). It explores how language functions within different social contexts, highlighting the connections between linguistic practices and factors like identity, power, and migration. Spolsky (1998) notes that language is a key marker of ethnic identity, helping to establish social relations and organise thought. In multilingual contexts, the interactions between language, identity, and social context are even more complex, as individuals navigate multiple linguistic repertoires influenced by migration and evolving social settings (Blommaert, 2010).

In particular, the expansion of globalisation and migration has given rise to what Blommaert (2010) describes as *sociolinguistics of mobility*, where language is no longer seen as static or confined to specific geographical locations, but as fluid and shaped by the global movement of people and ideas. In this paradigm, language is viewed as a resource that is constantly in motion, and its use varies depending on the context, which is filled with norms and expectations unique to each space. Importantly, Blommaert (2010) explains that *sociolinguistics of mobility* examines concrete resources, such as literacy materials, digital platforms, and other tangible linguistic tools present in the environments migrants navigate. This perspective is particularly helpful for the present study, as it guides the examination of the

multilingual literacy resources available to participants in their environments, as well as how these resources were acquired and are used in navigating different social spaces.

In summary, sociolinguistics offers a framework for understanding how migration shapes multilingualism, revealing how language use reflects broader patterns of mobility, identity, and power. As migration becomes more transnational, the linguistic repertoires of migrants become more complex, leading to new forms of multilingualism. However, while sociolinguistic research often focuses on language use in public spaces and community contexts, the present study shifts the lens to the micro-level, examining multilingual literacy practices within the family unit. By exploring how individuals navigate their languages in intimate family settings, this research seeks to understand how multilingual literacies are negotiated, maintained, and transmitted in families. To dive deeper into the experiences of multilingual families, I now focus the discussion on the processes of language socialisation, maintenance, and shift as they manifest within the home environment.

Language socialisation, maintenance, and shift

A branch of sociolinguistics research, the study of l*anguage socialisation* (LS) explores both the socialisation *of* language and socialisation *through* language (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Socialisation is defined as 'the process through which a child or other novice acquires the knowledge, orientations, and practices that enable him or her to participate effectively and appropriately in the social life of a particular community' (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002, p.339). LS studies began to emerge in the 1980s, focusing on children's language learning and use in their social environments, and revealing that these processes are not universal but highly context-specific (e.g., Brice-Heath; 1988; Clancy, 1989; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984).

In the 1980s and 1990s, LS research expanded to include more complex linguistic, discursive, and cultural practices, especially in multilingual contexts (e.g., Garcia, 1985; Moore, 1999; Schecter & Bayley, 1997). Researchers have increasingly explored how second language (L2) learners navigate their identities and social positions through language use, with implications for bilingual and multilingual education (Warriner et al., 2012). Spolsky (1998) highlights one key finding in this area, showing that bilingual children learn not only to keep their two languages

distinct but also to rapidly adapt their language use depending on their conversation partner, knowing when to mix languages and when to maintain separation. This ability to navigate multiple linguistic and social worlds highlights how bilingualism enables children to become members of two or more distinct societies, reflecting broader patterns of identity construction in multilingual settings (Spolsky, 1998).

In addition to the focus on oral language, LS research has examined the processes by which multilingual children learn to read and write in two or more languages, and how their socialisation into social and cultural communities has been linked to their multilingual literacy practices. Ethnographic studies such as those by Schieffelin and Gilmore (1986), Ada (1988), Fader (2001, 2008) and Baquedano-López (2008), demonstrated how language and literacy learning are closely linked to cultural identity formation, with the social context playing a central role in these processes.

Since the early 1990s, the concepts of *language maintenance* and *language shift* further developed alongside LS research (Watson-Gegeo & Bronson, 2013). *Language maintenance* involves 'keeping a language vital within a given speech community or region' (Hall et al., 2017, p.113), while *language shift* is defined as the process by which speakers gradually replace one language with another as the dominant means of communication within their community, often due to external social and economic pressures (Potowski, 2013). This concept is particularly relevant for my study of multilingual families living in London, where the dominant use of English may threaten the continuity of their home languages and literacies.

The language dynamics discussed so far brings to light the roles that languages and literacies play within multilingual contexts, as discussed next.

Languages in multilingual contexts

In their book *Mapping Applied Linguistics: A Guide for Students and Practitioners*, Hall et al. (2017) explore the roles of languages in multilingual contexts, categorising them as either *dominant* or *minority* based on their functions and the contexts in which they are used. They define a *dominant language* as one that holds greater power or influence in a given society, often being the primary language of communication, education, and governance. In contrast, a *minority language* is used by a smaller portion of the population and may hold less institutional or social power. For example, they provide the example of the city of Leeds in the UK, where Urdu is

considered a minority language, whereas in Lahore, Pakistan, Urdu functions as the dominant language. They contend that the categorisation of languages in this way highlights the power dynamics that exist between languages within different sociolinguistic settings (Hall et al., 2017).

Heritage languages, closely related to *minority languages*, refer to the languages of minority communities that are seen as integral to their cultural heritage and identity (Hall et al., 2017). These languages are typically passed down through generations within families, but heritage speakers – who grow up exposed to the language primarily in a family setting – often do not acquire full native-speaker proficiency. This is especially true in societies where one dominant language prevails, putting heritage languages at risk of being lost, particularly by second- and third-generation speakers (Blommaert, 2010; Hall et al., 2017; Montrul, 2010; Scontras, Fuchs & Polinsky, 2015).

Migration and mobility add layers of complexity to these linguistic interactions. Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck (2005) describe how migration often leads to 'truncated' language repertoires, where individuals retain only fragments of their original language while adopting the dominant language of the host society. Various models have been proposed to explain the use of multiple languages in communication, notably *code-switching* (e.g., Moreno, Federmeier & Kutas, 2002; Myers-Scotton, 2017; Spolsky, 1998), *language crossing* (Rampton, 1995) and *translanguaging* (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcia & Li Wei, 2014). All these models share a focus on how multilingual speakers navigate and manage their linguistic repertoires in social interactions, particularly in contexts shaped by migration and mobility. They contribute to the understanding of how language use is fluid and dynamic, allowing speakers to negotiate identity, power, and belonging by shifting between, blending, or adopting languages depending on social and cultural contexts. Although the above terms, particularly translanguaging, have gained considerable traction in recent years and provide valuable insights into how speakers fluidly use their full linguistic repertoire, I have chosen not to use them in my analysis. This decision stems from the study's focus on literacy practices, especially written texts, rather than on the moment-to-moment language interactions and shifts that terms like code-switching, language crossing, and translanguaging typically capture, or the multimodal elements that translanguaging emphasises.

Despite the varied patterns of language shift, Fishman (1991) contends that successful language maintenance can still be achieved when families prioritise their heritage language and actively support its intergenerational transmission. He emphasises that the efforts of schools, churches, and communities to support a heritage language are often symbolic and insufficient on their own to prevent language shift. Without the active involvement of parents in passing the language down to their children, it becomes difficult to maintain the language across generations (Fishman, 1991). This focus on intergenerational language transmission is vital, as parents are often the earliest and most influential figures in shaping their children's language acquisition (Potowski, 2013). This is particularly relevant to the present study, as it highlights the importance of examining how family members across different generations engage in and pass down multilingual literacy practices.

While fostering a supportive environment for heritage language transmission within the family is key to sustaining multilingualism across generations, this process is not without its challenges. According to Hall et al. (2017), migrants and multilingual families face significant pressures when it comes to language use, particularly regarding the choice of maintaining a heritage or minority language versus shifting to a dominant language. Parents may make strong decisions about language use within the home, either insisting on the exclusive use of the minority language to preserve it or, conversely, prioritising the dominant language to improve their children's chances of success in the host society (Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018; Hall et al., 2017). These pressures highlight the difficult choices that migrant families face in balancing language maintenance with the demands of integration into the dominant language and culture.

While the terms *heritage* or *minority languages* often carry significant historical, ideological, or political connotations, which undoubtedly influence the language and literacy practices of the families that I studied, these factors were outside the scope of this research and were not the focus of my examination. Instead, I adopt the term *home languages and literacies* to emphasise the everyday, lived practices of language and literacy use within the family, without centring on broader historical or political dimensions (Eisenchlas & Schalley, 2020). Connaughton-Crean and Ó Duibhir (2017) define *home languages* as languages spoken in the home or community but not used as the dominant language in broader society, a definition

well-suited to this study, which explores how multilingual families in London navigate their daily lives through multilingual literacy practices across various domains.

Although the term *home languages* might suggest a restriction to the physical space of the home, Eisenchlas and Schalley (2020) argue that it should be understood more broadly as a 'point of reference' (p.35) from which speakers navigate their linguistic world. Similarly, my use of *home languages and literacies* refers to the languages and literacies practised within the family context rather than those acquired at school or encountered in public spaces. While the home serves as a central anchor, my exploration extends beyond the home to encompass all domains participants chose to share, aligning with Eisenchlas and Schalley's (2020) broader interpretation of home languages. This framing effectively captures the micro-level literacy practices central to this research.

The exploration of migration, multilingualism, and sociolinguistic perspectives has provided a foundation for understanding how multilingual families navigate their linguistic landscapes, balancing the influences of broader societal pressures with the need to maintain home languages and cultural identities. These practices are often shaped by intentional decision-making within families, particularly in relation to language use, literacy practices, and intergenerational transmission. To better understand how families actively shape their multilingual environments, the following section discusses the research field of family language policy, examining how parents' and other family members' beliefs, choices, and strategies play a central role in fostering multilingualism within the home.

Section 4: Family language policy

The emergence and development of family language policy

The discussion of language socialisation, maintenance, and shift enables researchers and practitioners to better understand the agency of families and communities in shaping children's language learning and use (Conteh & Meier, 2014). Indeed, significant attention has been paid to the role of mediators, particularly within the family, in language and literacy socialisation studies. For example, the edited volume *Many Pathways to Literacy: Young Children Learning with Siblings, Grandparents, Peers and Communities* (Gregory et al., 2004), assembles studies that highlight the crucial role of mediators like siblings,

grandparents and communities in guiding children into appropriate cultural practices and the learning of new skills. Parents, in particular, are considered to play a vital role in the language and literacy socialisation of their children (Fishman, 1991; Potowski, 2013).

In this context, the emerging field of *family language policy* (FLP) is particularly relevant. This research field has emerged as a significant driver of sociolinguistic research into language practices and policies within multilingual families, even though some of these studies may not explicitly label themselves as FLP research (Lanza & Gomes, 2020). FLP as a key area of research began to emerge in the 2000s and has seen a significant rise in recent years, likely in conjunction with the increasing globalisation, migration, and the growing prevalence of multilingualism globally, as well as the increased focus on the family unit in recent sociolinguistic enquiry (Lanza & Gomes, 2020). In this section, I review the development of FLP, its key themes, and its relevance to the present study.

The study of FLP emerged from the broader field of *language policy*, which initially focused on governmental and institutional language management and planning (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Spolsky, 2004). Spolsky (2004) was instrumental in establishing the importance of language policy at a community level, including within families. FLP draws directly from this model but focuses on the home environment, recognising the significant role families play in children's language learning and language use, making the home a critical space for language negotiation and transmission (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008; Schalley & Eisenchlas, 2020).

Early definitions of FLP emphasised the 'explicit and overt planning in relation to language use within the home' (King et al., 2008, p.907), focusing on conscious parental decisions about which languages to promote in the household. Over time, the concept has expanded to include not only explicit planning but also 'the implicit/explicit and subconscious/deliberate parental involvement and investment in providing linguistic conditions and context for language learning and literacy development' (Curdt-Christiansen, 2012, p.57). FLP thus now encompasses a broader scope, addressing both overt strategies and the more subtle, covert, and everyday interactions that shape language and literacy development within

multilingual families (Curdt-Christiansen, 2012; Schalley & Eisenchlas, 2020). Since its emergence, FLP has become central to understanding how multilingual families manage language practices, ideologies, and outcomes within an increasingly globalised and multicultural world (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020; Lanza & Gomes, 2020). More recent FLP research has evolved to increasingly recognise the active role that children play in shaping FLP through their own language preferences, a shift from earlier work that predominantly focused on parents' influence (Smith-Christmas, 2020).

Over the past decade, FLP has also broadened its scope to include literacy practices alongside spoken language use, with researchers investigating how families manage their children's literacy in both dominant and home languages (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013). This is particularly relevant with migrant families, where the need to balance home language maintenance with the acquisition of literacy skills in the dominant language of the country of residence becomes a significant challenge (Lanza & Gomes, 2020). Family language practices, therefore, include not only spoken language but also literacy-related activities such as reading and writing in both home and dominant languages.

The role of external factors in family language policy

In addition to internal family dynamics, FLP is also shaped by a range of external factors, including socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts. As Curdt-Christiansen and Huang (2020) note, the socio-political environment of a host country can significantly influence family language policies, particularly in relation to language maintenance and shift. For example, in countries where the dominant language is prioritised in educational and social institutions, families may feel pressured to abandon their home language in favour of the dominant language.

Curdt-Christiansen and La Morgia's (2018) study of Chinese, Italian, and Urdu-speaking families in Reading, England, revealed that many parents valued their children's English literacy skills more than their proficiency in the home language. This tendency was reflected in the finding that most children read in English every day, while few read regularly in their home language. Such findings emphasise the challenges that multilingual families face in maintaining their home languages, particularly in contexts where the dominant language is seen as critical for

educational and social success (Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018). Conversely, supportive policies that encourage bilingualism or multilingualism can help families maintain their home languages (Schalley & Eisenchlas, 2020).

Child agency and family language policy

As the previous sections have shown, FLP research initially centred on parental ideologies and strategies for language transmission, with a particular focus on how families navigate external pressures and support systems. However, more recent work has extended the scope of FLP by incorporating the perspectives and actions of children themselves, and focusing on the role of child agency in shaping family language practices (e.g., Boyd, Huss & Ottesjo, 2017; Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020; Fogle & King, 2013; Revis, 2016; Van Mensel, 2018). In their reviews of Family Language Policy (FLP), King (2016) and Lanza and Gomes (2020) note that children's agency has emerged as a critical dimension in understanding how home languages and literacies are maintained, transformed, or marginalised. Children may align with or resist parental goals, depending on the literacy domain, social context, or personal investment (Fogle & King, 2013; Schwartz, 2010; Smith-Christmas, 2020). This perspective acknowledges that children are not passive recipients of language input but actively contribute to the negotiation of language use within the family.

Smith-Christmas (2020) observes that child agency is particularly evident in cases where children are more proficient in the dominant language than their parents. In such situations, children may act as linguistic brokers, helping their parents navigate interactions in the dominant language while simultaneously shaping the family's language practices. For example, children might choose to speak the dominant language at home to align themselves with their peers, even if their parents prefer the home language (Smith-Christmas, 2020). This pattern complicates traditional views of language transmission, suggesting that language maintenance is a reciprocal process between parents and children rather than a unidirectional process from one generation to the next.

Overall, the recognition of child agency within FLP is crucial for understanding the fluid nature of language use in multilingual families. It also highlights the need for more in-depth research that takes into account the varying degrees of influence that

different family members have on language practices, particularly in contexts of migration and globalisation (Smith-Christmas, 2020; Lanza & Gomes, 2020).

Extending family language policy to multilingual literacy practices

The present study builds on the emerging FLP framework to explore how multilingual families in London navigate their daily lives through multilingual language and literacy use across different domains. While much of the existing FLP research has focused on language maintenance and shift, particularly in relation to spoken language, this study shifts the focus to literacy practices, particularly reading. By examining how families engage with reading in their home languages, this study contributes to a growing body of research that recognises the significance of literacy in family language practices (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018).

In line with FLP research, the present study considers the role of parents and other family members in shaping children's multilingual literacy practices. However, it departs from some earlier work by placing greater emphasis on the agency of children in negotiating language and literacy use within the family. This approach aligns with recent shifts in FLP research that recognise the active role children play in shaping family language policies. Finally, this study contributes to the broader field of FLP by exploring the intersection between language practices and literacy in multilingual families, both at home and in external literacy domains. In doing so, it provides new insights into how families navigate the challenges of language and literacy maintenance and shift in a multilingual context.

The next section builds on the discussions of literacy as a social practice, family language policy, and the broader sociolinguistic perspectives discussed earlier, focusing on how these concepts intersect with the lived experiences of multilingual families.

Section 5: Navigating identity and belonging: Anchors and domains of multilingual literacies

Scholars exploring multilingual literacies in recent decades have increasingly highlighted the importance of broader, community-based support structures in sustaining home languages and literacies (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Hatoss,

2020; Spolsky, 2003). These include complementary education (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Nordstrom, 2020), religious settings (Fader, 2016; Spolsky, 2003), and digitally mediated networks (Stavans & Lindgren, 2021; Obojska & Vaiouli, 2023), all of which introduce structured, socially embedded forms of literacy engagement that extend beyond the immediate control of parents. Unlike informal home-based practices, these external spaces are shaped by the expectations and traditions of specific social, cultural, or religious communities (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Hatoss, 2020). This final section reviews literature on how identity formation, social anchoring, and cultural practices intersect with multilingual literacies. It reviews studies that explore the influence of external factors – including mainstream schools, complementary education, digital media, and religious institutions – and considers how these intersecting domains shape the language and literacy experiences of multilingual families.

Identity formation and social anchoring in multilingual literacy contexts

As literacy practices shift across contexts and evolve over time, they play a crucial role for multilingual individuals in maintaining cultural heritage, navigating social interactions, and negotiating their sense of belonging. This foundation sets the stage for examining how multilingual literacy practices intersect with identity formation, social anchoring, and cultural negotiation within families. Recent scholarship has delved into the relationships between multilingualism, literacy practices, and identity, as well as how migrant families create stability amid the uncertainties of migration and integration. The concept of *social anchoring*, as developed by Grzymala-Kazlowska (2015), provides a valuable framework for understanding how migrants create stable reference points – or *anchors* – that help maintain psychological and social balance during significant life changes, such as relocation to a new country. Liu et al. (2024) argue that *social anchoring* enables diaspora members to maintain stable identities through various psychosocial and cultural resources, balancing the acquisition of competencies in the host culture while sustaining ties to their heritage and identity. These resources, or anchors, can be tangible, like legal documents, or social, such as ties within a community (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2015).

In the context of maintaining home languages and literacies, social anchoring is particularly relevant. For multilingual families, language and literacy practices often

function as crucial anchors that preserve cultural identity while navigating the challenges of adapting to a new society. For instance, literacy practices in a family's home language can provide continuity and stability amidst the pressures of adopting the dominant language for social and educational purposes (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2015). This framework helps explain how some families might fluidly shift between languages, adapting their literacy practices to different socio-cultural environments, while others may hold steadfastly to their home languages and literacies, seeing them as crucial to maintaining their identity.

The concept of *funds of knowledge*, developed by Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992), provides another lens to examine how language and literacy practices emerge and are passed on within multilingual families across generations. *Funds of knowledge* refer to the accumulated skills, knowledge, and cultural practices that families develop over time and pass down. These knowledge bases are invaluable resources that can be leveraged to support learning and development. Home languages and literacies, therefore, can be seen as crucial *funds of knowledge*, as they preserve cultural heritage and facilitate meaningful communication across different contexts. For example, literacy practices tied to religious observance – such as those in Yiddish-speaking Hasidic Jewish communities in New York or Dutch-speaking Amish communities in Pennsylvania – serve as cultural anchors that both reinforce home language and solidify the broader cultural identity of the community (Fishman, 2006).

Research on diaspora communities has further highlighted how language and literacy play a central role in negotiating identity. Migrants often navigate multiple linguistic and cultural worlds, where language becomes a key tool for managing their sense of belonging. Studies of diaspora communities have shown that language use can facilitate integration into the host society or act as a form of resistance, preserving ties to the culture of origin (Angouri, 2012; Harrison, 2021). This dual process of integration and preservation is central to understanding the role of language as a social anchor for multilingual families.

Building on these ideas, Duff (2015) emphasises how multilingual individuals construct their identities through interactions with multiple languages across different cultural and social contexts. She argues that identity is fluid and constantly

negotiated, especially for those navigating multilingual spaces. Expanding on this idea, Mohanty (2019) focuses on social identification, explaining that individuals categorise themselves as members of specific social groups, leading to the formation of a social identity. In multilingual settings, he contends that this process becomes more complex, as they navigate multiple languages and cultural norms. Similarly, Tseng (2020) examines how maintaining a home language serves as a marker of ethnocultural identity, demonstrating that identity is shaped by interactions within families, schools, and wider society. While the home language is critical for preserving cultural connection and group membership, external forces – such as educational systems and societal expectations – often promote language shift, leading to identity conflicts. For example, she suggests that bilingual individuals may face stigma for their perceived lack of fluency in either their home or dominant languages, complicating their ability to maintain home languages and navigate identity formation (Tseng, 2020). Together, these studies illustrate that identity formation in multilingual contexts is a complex and ongoing process, influenced by various linguistic, cultural, and societal factors.

The relationship between language and identity is further explored in studies of multilingual socialisation. Machowska-Kosciak (2021) examined how Polish migrant children in Ireland navigated their linguistic worlds, revealing that language socialisation involves both the acquisition of linguistic skills and the internalisation of cultural norms. This combined process plays a significant role in shaping bilingual identity, often creating emotional tensions when individuals switch between languages, as these shifts in language may correspond with shifts in cultural values and identity.

Research has also explored how mobility and migration impact multilingual literacies and identity formation. In their edited volume, *Literacies in the Age of Mobility: Literacy Practices of Adult and Adolescent Migrants*, Shaswar and Rosen (2022) highlight the spatial and temporal dimensions of migration, where literacy practices are shaped by the media as well as by linguistic resources that individuals use to stay connected with family members across different countries. The chapters in this volume demonstrate that multilingual individuals employ diverse literacy practices to navigate the complex social landscapes created by migration. These multilingual

literacy practices serve not only as tools for communication but also as mechanisms for negotiating identity in the face of shifting cultural connections and affiliations.

Owodally (2016) provides further insight into how children navigate their identities through multilingual and multi-faith contexts. In her study of Halimah, a young Muslim girl in Mauritius, Owodally demonstrates how compartmentalisation – the separation of language use and literacy practices according to different social environments – helps individuals maintain multiple, often conflicting, identities. Halimah's use of different languages across her Roman Catholic school, madrassah, and home reveals how literacy practices are tailored to the norms of each setting, allowing her to negotiate her identity within these overlapping cultural spaces. This selective use of language and literacy illustrates how children in multilingual families must manage competing cultural and linguistic demands, all of which influence their identity formation.

Both the *social anchoring* and *funds of knowledge* frameworks, alongside the broader scholarship on multilingual socialisation and identity, offer valuable insights into how multilingual families navigate the dual challenges of integration and preservation. Language serves as a marker of group membership, a medium for navigating social spaces, and a tool for negotiating cultural identities. Literacy practices – whether through oral traditions, digital media, or formal schooling – play a key role in how multilingual individuals construct and negotiate their identities. For families, these practices are crucial both for language use and for sustaining cultural identities amidst societal pressures that may favour language shift and integration. As such, the study of multilingual literacies must address how identity is both shaped by and shapes language and literacy practices across diverse sociocultural contexts and settings.

To further explore the anchors that shape multilingual literacy practices, I now turn to examine the roles of digital media, religious practices, and complementary schools, considering them as tools that help multilingual families establish and maintain social and cultural anchors through their literacy practices. Finally, I discuss the challenges and roles of mainstream schools in influencing home language maintenance.

The role of technology and digital media in multilingual literacy practices

Building on the concept of social anchoring, funds of knowledge and cultural identity, the rise of digital media has introduced new avenues for multilingual families to maintain and develop their literacy practices, acting as an anchor and offering tools to support language use and cultural connections.

The digital age has transformed the ways through which families access and engage with literacy. As Levy (2011) argues, books are no longer the primary medium for accessing information in the home, with children increasingly exposed to both traditional print-based texts and digital reading formats on screens. This shift is particularly relevant for multilingual individuals whose access to literacy resources in their home languages has been transformed by digital advances. Stavans and Lindgren (2021) argue that 'technology is perhaps the most important supplier of multilingual literacy' (p.275). Indeed, the role of technology and digital media in shaping multilingual literacy practices has gained significant attention in recent years, with scholars highlighting its influence on language maintenance, identity formation, and literacy development across cultural contexts. Blommaert (2010) suggests that digital technologies have allowed for new forms of language learning and maintenance, particularly within diasporic communities, by enabling frequent digital contact with countries of origin. These digital connections facilitate the maintenance of home languages and encourage the development of new literacy practices as families navigate their multilingual identities across physical and digital spaces.

Scholars such as Lam and Rosario-Ramos (2009), Kim (2016) and Little (2019, 2020) have noted that digital platforms offer multilingual children and teens new ways to interact with their home languages and literacies. The accessibility of digital media makes it possible for them to engage with content in multiple languages, foster personal connections and seek information from both their country of residence and their families' countries of origin. In this context, technology serves as a bridge between the home and broader spaces where children's home languages are actively used, contributing to the maintenance and development of multilingual literacy practices. Stavans and Lindgren (2021) further argue that technologies like messaging apps and smartphones create spaces for maintaining linguistic ties to one's cultural heritage while simultaneously adapting to dominant language environments. Similarly, Obojska and Vaiouli (2023) emphasise the importance of

digital platforms in supporting literacy development within transnational families, highlighting their role in fostering language and literacy learning across multiple modalities and environments.

As digital media increasingly becomes a primary source for literacy engagement, it is important to consider how digital resources can fill gaps in home literacy skills where physical resources may be lacking. This is especially significant for migrant families navigating language maintenance. For instance, in their study referenced earlier in the chapter, Curdt-Christiansen and La Morgia (2018) found that many migrant parents in Reading, England, prioritised their children's proficiency in English, with some viewing home language literacy as secondary to communication skills. The researchers found that many children owned very few, if any, books in their home languages; however, they emphasise that they did not explore digital resources like Kindle, tablets, or social media, highlighting the importance of examining digital resources as a means to support home multilingual literacy. The present study expands on Curdt-Christiansen and La Morgia's study by exploring, among other texts, the role of digital resources in multilingual reading practices. It is possible that multilingual families access much of their reading in their home languages using technology and digital media, due to the easy and often free access. The exploration of this mode has the potential to reveal specific multilingual reading practices that may otherwise be hidden.

While the role of digital media is not the primary focus of this study, it offers a powerful means of supporting multilingual literacy practices in home languages. By considering the influence of digital media in this context, the present study contributes to a broader understanding of how technology is transforming literacy practices, and what those practices look like, in contemporary multilingual families.

Religious practices and liturgical literacies

In addition to technology, religion emerges as a critical domain supporting multilingual literacy practices, particularly among communities where literacy is closely tied to religious and spiritual identity. Religious contexts often involve structured engagement with sacred texts, oral recitation, and devotional reading practices. Scholars have highlighted how these religious settings offer unique opportunities for language socialisation and literacy development (Baquedano-

López, 2008; Gregory, Choudhury, Ilankuberan, Kwapong, & Woodham, 2013; Lytra, Volk & Gregory, 2016; Tusting, 2015), often requiring children to navigate complex multilingual environments. In these settings, literacy is not only about decoding or understanding text but is deeply embedded in the construction of cultural and religious identities, allowing children to develop a sense of belonging across religious, cultural, and linguistic communities.

A central concept in this area is that of *liturgical literacies*, defined as forms of literacy that are rooted in ritual and devotional religious practices (Rosowsky, 2008). These literacies typically involve reading (and occasionally writing) sacred texts in languages that differ from the everyday spoken language of participants. Such practices are especially prominent in so-called 'religions of books,' such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, where the sacred texts take on both symbolic and historical significance (Wallace, 2013; Rosowsky, 2008). In these contexts, the act of reading is often perceived as spiritual or moral engagement, regardless of whether the reader understands the language (Rosowsky, 2008).

Rosowsky (2008) observes that although millions participate in liturgical literacy practices globally, these forms of literacy have received limited scholarly attention, particularly in comparison to mainstream models of literacy associated with formal education. Nonetheless, a small but growing body of research has begun to explore these practices. For instance, in his ethnographic study of a Muslim community in northern England, Rosowsky (2008) found that children often learned to recite Quranic Arabic in both mosques and home environments using similar phonics-based methods. However, comprehension was rarely prioritised; many students and teachers did not understand the texts they were reciting, a point consistently raised by educators interviewed in the study. Additionally, in a study conducted by Sneddon (2000) in London among Gujarati-speaking households, Gujarati and English were found to be maintained as the languages of informal spoken communication. However, the preferred languages of literacy were Urdu and Quranic Arabic, reflecting the participants' Muslim heritage. These were the languages in which children were learning to read and write within local community contexts, including religious instruction (Sneddon, 2000).

Religious literacy practices also intersect with broader processes of identity negotiation. Studying a Hasidic Jewish girls' school in Brooklyn, Fader (2016) illustrates how different languages – liturgical Hebrew, Yiddish, and English – are used for distinct religious and social purposes, deeply intertwined with the community's cultural and spiritual values. Hasidic girls are socialised into multiple literacies – where liturgical Hebrew is used for sacred texts, Yiddish for reinforcing cultural and gender roles, and English for secular education – each layered with specific spiritual or cultural significance. Similarly, Kenner et al. (2016) explore how religious and secular literacies are interwoven in Bangladeshi Muslim families, where intergenerational learning reinforces both school-based knowledge and religious literacy. Their study of weekly family meetings conducted in English and Arabic illustrates how families blend educational and religious goals through bilingual practices. Gregory et al. (2013), in their study of London-based multilingual faith communities further highlight how sacred texts are learnt through processes of practice, performance, and perfection. Drawing on collaborative ethnography, they show how children memorise and embody liturgical texts through song, gesture, and ritual, often in languages they do not use outside of faith settings. These religious practices are framed as 'communities of practice,' where children are apprenticed into shared repertoires of meaning that sustain both linguistic and spiritual belonging. Although situated in a monolingual context, Tusting (2015) shows how writing within a Catholic First Communion course serves as a powerful tool for constructing children's religious identities, allowing them to reframe personal experiences through the lens of Catholic teachings. Her work illustrates how faith-based literacy practices shape subjectivities and embed children within broader moral and institutional frameworks.

In sum, existing literature highlights how religious literacy practices play a significant role in the shaping of individual and collective identities. The literature highlights that religious practices and settings function as cultural and symbolic anchors that embed literacy within deeply meaningful social worlds.

The impact of complementary schools on multilingual literacies

Alongside religious institutions, complementary schools serve as vital social anchors and literacy domains that support multilingual literacy practices and reinforce cultural

identity. In many countries including the UK, minority languages are rarely part of the national curriculum, placing the responsibility for maintaining these languages on community-led efforts (Hatoss, 2020; Nordstrom; 2020; Yagmur, 2020). While families are central to maintaining home languages, community-based educational initiatives such as complementary schools, also referred to as *supplementary*, *heritage*, or *community language schools*, play a crucial role in supporting language maintenance and cultural identity for children from migrant backgrounds, usually outside of regular school hours (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). These schools are a key part of the ecosystem supporting multilingualism, offering spaces where children can engage with their home languages in structured environments, which are often absent from formal education systems (Yagmur, 2020).

The pedagogical role of complementary schools is significant. These schools fill gaps left by formal education systems, where minority languages often receive little to no support (Yagmur, 2020). Cummins (2005) points out that the lack of institutional support for heritage languages leads to a 'massive loss of language resources' (p.45), as children are given few opportunities to develop literacy in their home languages within mainstream schools. Complementary schools, by contrast, provide environments where children can become literate in their home languages, countering the monolingual tendencies of formal education systems. This is especially significant in urban, multicultural settings where young people are required to navigate multiple linguistic and cultural systems simultaneously (Blackledge & Creese, 2010).

Nordstrom (2020) adds that these community-driven initiatives are not without challenges, such as a lack of formal recognition, funding, and teacher training. She notes, however, that despite these limitations, complementary schools continue to thrive, sustained by the commitment of local communities to preserve their languages and cultures. Hatoss (2020) refers to such initiatives as *grassroots responses* to the exclusion of minority languages from formal curricula, with teachers and parents acting as key agents in language planning and literacy development. This allows complementary schools to tailor their programmes to the specific needs of their communities, providing a unique space for home language maintenance and cultural connection, often bridging the gap between the home and broader dominant language (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Hatoss, 2020).

The importance of complementary schools lies not only in their role in language transmission but also in how they foster cultural identity and social belonging. Blackledge and Creese (2010) illustrate how these schools serve as autonomous spaces where young people can negotiate their multicultural identities and linguistic repertoires. In their study of eight complementary schools across four cities in England, they observed how these institutions allowed students to claim and explore their cultural identities through language, while also negotiating societal and institutional expectations. They found that these schools are more than language-learning spaces, but are also vital for maintaining connections to cultural heritage and fostering a sense of belonging within ethnic communities.

In transnational contexts, complementary schools also leverage digital technologies to extend their reach and foster language learning across geographical boundaries. Hatoss (2020) highlights how digital platforms are used to develop heritage language resources for dispersed communities, such as the South Sudanese Dinka community in Australia. These efforts demonstrate how complementary schools and community initiatives can adapt to globalisation, offering digital spaces for literacy development and cultural connection that transcend national borders.

In sum, complementary schools play an essential role in maintaining linguistic diversity and fostering cultural identity in migrant communities. They provide a space for language and literacy practices that are often overlooked by mainstream education, offering young people opportunities to engage with their heritage languages and cultures. These schools, though frequently underfunded and unsupported by formal education systems, reflect the efforts of migrant communities to preserve their linguistic and cultural heritages for future generations. As such, they remain crucial sites for examining the intersections of language, identity, and education in multilingual contexts.

The role of mainstream schools in home language maintenance

While religious practices, complementary schools, and digital media have undeniable roles in providing social anchors that support multilingual literacy and reinforce cultural identity, the role of mainstream schools is more complex. Unlike these domains where families and individuals have greater agency, mainstream schools often present challenges for the maintenance of home languages and cultural

identity. However, with the implementation of inclusive language policies and supportive educational programmes, mainstream schools have the potential to act as anchors that foster multilingualism and cultural connection.

As noted earlier, mainstream schools in many European countries, including the UK, often prioritise the dominant language over home language maintenance, which can create challenges for multilingual families (Yagmur, 2020). This focus on the dominant language in mainstream schools can create tensions for multilingual families. On the one hand, parents recognise the importance of their children mastering the societal language for educational success and social mobility. On the other hand, they may fear that overemphasis on the dominant language will lead to the erosion of their home language (Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018).

Despite the challenges of mainstream education, schools can still play a role in supporting home language maintenance, particularly when they adopt inclusive language policies. Li (2006) argues that schools that promote multilingualism can help create a more supportive environment for students' home language maintenance. This might include offering bilingual education programmes, recognising students' linguistic repertoires as valuable assets, and providing resources for home language and literacy development. However, such initiatives are often limited in scope and availability, particularly in countries where monolingualism is still viewed as the norm (Li, 2006).

Harris et al. (2020) provide an insightful approach to bridging the gap between home and school literacy practices in their three-year, cross-cultural study in Fiji. They explored how children's multilingual literacy practices, which extended beyond formal education into everyday life, were shaped by oral traditions, storytelling, and religious literacies. These practices were rooted in the multiple languages used within families for various purposes. By working collaboratively with families, the researchers developed strategies to integrate children's home languages into formal education, advocating for culturally responsive teaching. This approach highlights the importance of recognising home languages as valuable literacy resources, thus informing the broader discourse on multilingual literacy support within mainstream educational settings.

In contexts where schools do not support home language maintenance, families must find alternative ways to foster literacy in their home languages. The present study explores how various literacy domains and tools – such as religious institutions, complementary education, digital media, and mainstream schools – act as potential social anchors that shape the multilingual literacy practices and cultural identities of family members across time and space.

Conclusion

In this literature review, I have examined key theoretical and empirical insights into multilingual literacy practices, focusing on their socially situated nature and the role of family and community contexts. Key themes included the exploration of literacy as a social practice, multilingual literacies from a social practice lens, multilingualism and sociolinguistics in the context of migration, family language policy, and the significance of social anchors and literacy domains such as digital media, religious practices, and complementary schools. These discussions provide a foundation for understanding how multilingual families navigate language use, identity, and literacy practices across various settings in their daily lives. The next chapter outlines the methodology of the present study, detailing the research design and approach I used to investigate multilingual literacy practices within and across families.

Chapter 3   Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I first explain my ethnographic research approach, and how it was informed by literacy-as-social-practice studies that used this approach to seek participants' perspectives on their literacy practices and experiences. Next, I discuss my multiple case study design, and explain how analytic generalisations can be drawn from this type of design. Then, I present this study's sampling techniques and participants, and discuss my relationships with the participants. Following this, I discuss a shift that occurred in my research focus and questions as data collection progressed, from a focus on reading for pleasure to a more general investigation of participants' multilingual literacy practices. Next, I present my data collection process, including my research tools, pilot studies, the advantages and limitations of conducting this research remotely, and the revision of some of my research tools as data collection progressed. Finally, I review my data analysis techniques, followed by a consideration of this study's trustworthiness and ethical elements.

Research approach: Adopting an ethnographic perspective

By focusing on how multilingual family members in London navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities through multilingual literacy practices – and how these practices vary in terms of literacy choices, preferences, and experiences – my research aligns with the tradition of literacy as a social practice. As reviewed in detail in the previous chapter, literacy-as-social-practice perspectives have emphasised that reading and writing are practices shaped by social contexts, including socio-cultural norms, values, beliefs, and histories. Therefore, literacy-as-social-practice studies have often drawn on a range of ethnographic perspectives (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gilmore & Wyman, 2013; Gregory & Williams, 2000b; Moss, 2007; Solsken, 1993).

Green and Bloome (2004) define ethnography as involving 'the framing, conceptualizing, conducting, interpreting, writing, and reporting associated with a broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group' (p.183). They further contend that 'the ethnographer makes extraordinary the ordinary, and makes visible the invisible patterns of ordinary life within a group' (ibid, p.187). This comprehensive approach was adopted by Shirley Brice Heath in her study reported

in *Ways with Words* (1983), where she embedded herself in the life of two neighbouring communities in south-eastern United States for one decade, and investigated the different views and conceptualisations that these communities held regarding the learning and uses of language and literacy. Brian Street, in his classic study of adult literacy education in Iran reported in *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984), conducted a comprehensive ethnography as well, where he undertook intermittent fieldwork in an Iranian village for a decade. Street found that the village people used literacy in different ways, across different settings, and for different purposes, and these were embedded in different kinds of power relations, social practices, and belief systems.

While Heath (1983) and Street (1984) conducted comprehensive ethnographies of literacy as a social practice, the majority of literacy-as-social-practice studies that followed often opted for the adoption of an *ethnographic perspective* (i.e., Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gregory & Williams, 2000b). An ethnographic perspective is a more feasible and focused approach, which Green and Bloome (2004) define as involving the seeking of insider (*emic*) knowledge about individuals' perceptions, understandings and interpretations of particular aspects and cultural practices of their everyday lives. The researcher's responsibility remains to uncover participants' meanings as shaped by their cultural contexts, while taking a more practical approach that does not require them to fully embed themselves in the setting (Robson & McCartan, 2016). An ethnographic perspective requires the researcher to study the participants in their natural settings, and while participant observation is typically the preferred research method, no other data collection method is ruled out in principle (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Thus, for example, Barton and Hamilton (1998) adopted an ethnographic perspective in their study, and used ethnographic methods like interviews and observations to investigate their participants' daily literacy practices and how these were embedded in their social and cultural contexts. Contrary to the requirements of comprehensive ethnographies, Barton and Hamilton did not live amongst the townspeople or embed themselves in the town's daily life for a lengthy period of time. An additional study that adopted a social practice approach to literacy and used an ethnographic perspective was conducted by Moss (2007), who used a range of ethnographic tools including observations, photographs and the taping of literacy events in four primary schools in England over a two-year period, to

investigate the reasons behind girls' outperformance of boys in literacy skills. Using ethnographic analysis of literacy events in the classrooms, Moss outlined how different conceptualisations of literacy were established in the same context for boys and girls, creating a hierarchy of learners and leading to attainment differences.

The adoption of an ethnographic perspective has been especially common in studies of literacy in multilingual and multicultural settings, where the everyday meanings and uses of literacy are examined with a focus on dominant and non-dominant literacies (Heath & Street, 2008). For example, Gregory and Williams (2000b), in their study which explored the literacy experiences of different generations of people living in two adjacent neighbourhoods in London in the 20th century, used ethnographic methods, including participant observations and life history interviews, with the aim of collecting emic descriptions of reading held by their participants. Their participants came from different cultural and lingual backgrounds, and it was critical for Gregory and Williams that the descriptions of reading that led their research, were shaped by their participants' own life experiences and the languages that they spoke and read. Additionally, Stein and Slonimsky (2006), adopted an ethnographic perspective as well in their research which involved the conduct of three case studies with multilingual families in Johannesburg. Using an ethnographic analysis of literacy events that they observed in the households, they aimed to capture participants' understandings and practices of literacy 'within a larger frame of meaning which makes sense to the participants themselves' (pp.119-120). In doing so, they revealed the ways in which each family understood and practised literacy in distinct ways, and how these practices were shaped by the families' cultural and social contexts, as well as the family members' daily interactions with one another and the external world.

In line with the tradition of adopting ethnographic perspectives in literacy-as-social-practice studies, and in order to understand participants' emic understanding of the ways they navigate their social and cultural worlds through multilingual reading practices, the present study adopts an ethnographic perspective. However, the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting social restrictions, which occurred during the time I conducted this research, significantly limited my ability to gain an insider's perspective and observe participants in their natural settings. While my original plan involved conducting weekly home visits to the families, where I hoped to be exposed

to the literacy resources and environments of my participants and interview them in their natural settings, I had to adapt my design and methods and conduct the study remotely instead (as described in more detail in the *data collection* section later in the chapter). This meant that some important characteristics of adopting ethnographic perspectives, particularly my physical presence in the field, were not possible; however, in accordance with the core elements of ethnographic approaches, I maintained my goal of seeking participants' conceptualisations and experiences of their multilingual literacy practices as framed by their cultural contexts, and maintained attentiveness to the participants' reflections and reports, adapting my design, research questions and tools accordingly, as described later in this chapter.

Research design

Multiple case study design

The sample in the present study included three multilingual families from distinct cultural backgrounds: Catholic Polish, Muslim Bangladeshi and Hasidic Jewish. To explore the context of each family in depth, I used a case study design, which 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context' (Yin, 2014, p.16). Case studies are bound by time and activity, and data are collected using a variety of methods over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). Indeed, a case study with each family was held over four weeks, with the goal of gaining an in-depth understanding of the family's context and practices.

Additionally, the present study embraced a qualitative, interpretivist orientation, which suggests that individuals develop subjective meanings and interpretations of their experiences, embedded in a wider social context, leading a researcher to seek a range of views and rely on the participants' understanding of the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Scotland, 2012). Thus, when designing the present study, my main concern was to capture the different perspectives of participants within each case (family) and across cases.

More specifically, this study utilised a multiple case study design (Yin, 2014), where each successive case added to the understanding of the issues in question (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Each family constituted an independent study: data collection

methods were adapted to each case, and conclusions were drawn regarding the multilingual literacy practices and experiences for the specific case in question, as explained in detail in the *data collection* section later in this chapter. The information received from each case was then considered across cases, which allowed me to compare the families, and eventually explain variations in the literacy practices across multilingual families by social, generational, spatial and temporal aspects.

Analytic generalisation

According to Yin (2014), a specific, real-life 'case' should be clearly defined, and constitute 'a concrete manifestation of the abstraction' (p.34). The 'abstraction,' in my research, is a multilingual and multiliterate family; that is, a family whose members read and communicate in more than one language at home. Therefore, I recruited three families that represent concrete manifestations of this abstract notion: each family chosen for the present study was a multilingual and multiliterate family, and their particular cultural backgrounds were selected to reflect the presence of the large Polish, Bangladeshi, and Hasidic communities in London, while also offering a meaningful diversity of perspectives and experiences.

Each family, considering its distinct cultural, social and literate context, constitutes a 'telling case' (Mitchell, 1983, 1984), whereby their analysis was used to generate more general theoretical principles underpinning the patterns of reading practices across multilingual families. Yin (2014) has termed this *analytic generalisation*, in which the case provides an opportunity 'to shed empirical light about some theoretical concepts or principles' (p.40). In studies that seek analytic generalisation, like my research, statistical generalisation is not possible nor is it the aim. Rather, the aim of this study was to go beyond the settings of the specific cases, and strive for generalisable findings and lessons learnt regarding multilingual literacy practices and experiences, that could be transferred to similar contexts of multilingual and multiliterate families. This analytic generalisation, then, is conducted on a higher conceptual level than that of the specific case, while allowing for generalisation to other concrete situations (Yin, 2014).

Rather than aiming to achieve representativeness of a 'typical' case, the purpose of this study was to capture heterogeneity within the population of multilingual families

(Maxwell, 2013), to allow for generalisation to a variety of multilingual families. Therefore, each family reflects a large but distinct multilingual population in London.

The research sample

Sampling and participants

The sampling techniques used in this research were a combination of purposive, convenience and snowball sampling. Above all, I utilised a purposive sampling technique, where the principle of selection is 'the researcher's judgement as to typicality or interest. A sample is built up which enables the researcher to satisfy their specific needs in a project' (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.281). Two key criteria were set for sampling: the family must read in additional language(s) to English at home, and must have at least one child in primary school and one child in secondary school, to allow me to identify literacy practices and reading patterns across different ages. Maxwell (2013) contends that one goal of purposive sampling is 'to adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population' (p.98); in this case, the population of interest involved multilingual families, and three distinct cultural backgrounds were selected, which represent three large multilingual populations in London. Maxwell cautions that the selection of a heterogeneous sample, rather than a sample that represents typical instances in the population, leads to fewer data about each particular case. I was aware of this risk when selecting my sampling approach; however, I decided that for the research focus and questions brought forward in my study, the advantages of sampling three families from distinct backgrounds outweigh the disadvantages, since, in this way, I gained insight into the reading experiences of a greater variety of multilingual families, and was able to create a comprehensive framework that can explain variations in the literacy practices of different types of multilingual families by social, generational, spatial and temporal aspects.

To identify three families which suited the criteria outlined above, convenience and snowball sampling techniques were used (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Firstly, with the help of friends and neighbours, I identified individuals from the three populations of interest that we were acquainted with, making it a convenience sampling. The Bangladeshi family lives in my neighbourhood, and although I had only met the father prior to the study, I contacted him and asked whether his family would agree to participate in my study. He then referred me to his wife, and following a phone

conversation, she agreed to participate in the study with her daughters, whom I had never met before. Additionally, the Hasidic family members are my friends' neighbours. To recruit them, my friends asked the Hasidic mother whether she may be interested in participating in my study, and then provided me with her contact details. The Polish family was identified through a snowball sampling technique, whereby I contacted a Polish family I was acquainted with, and the parents then identified a family in their community who met my criteria and was interested in participating. Table 3.1 presents the participants in each family, which included the mother and two children: a primary-school-aged child and a secondary-school-aged child (pseudonyms are used to protect participants' confidentiality).

	Parent	Primary-school-aged child	Secondary-school-aged child
Polish family	Nadia (mother)	Gabriela (girl) 8 years old, Year 3	Simon (boy) 16 years old, Year 11
Bangladeshi family	Noor (mother)	Aadya (girl) 11 years old, Year 6	Mahia (girl) 13 years old, Year 8
Hasidic family	Pessi (mother)	Miriam (girl) 11 years old, Year 6	Devorah (girl) 15 years old, Year 11

Table 3.1: Participants.

Although convenience sampling is often considered to be less rigorous than other sampling techniques (Robson & McCartan, 2016), Weiss (1994) argues that there are situations in which convenience sampling is the only feasible method, for example, when attempting to investigate a group that is difficult to gain access to. This was true in my case: the design that I wished to utilise in my study meant that the families in question would be asked to participate in weekly interviews, and divulge information that could oftentimes be considered sensitive or personal – for example, information about their religious practices at home. Additionally, the fact

that the families all belonged to multilingual minority communities, meant that they were more prone to suspect my intentions as an 'outsider,' and thus more reluctant to share information about themselves (Ryan, Kofman & Aaron, 2011). It is therefore likely that, if I had tried to contact families that I had no connection or mutual contacts with, it would have been extremely challenging to identify three families who would be willing to participate in this study, be interviewed weekly, and share personal information about their life and experiences. Therefore, the use of convenience sampling appeared to be the only feasible way to proceed in this case.

I initially contacted the mothers of all three families by phone during the research proposal stage, explained my research interests briefly, and sought their verbal agreement to participate in the future. One year later, the ethical approval of this research allowed me to contact the families again. Having decided to commence my study with the Polish family, I began by contacting the mother, Nadia, by phone. Following her verbal consent to participate, I met with her and her children via Zoom, explained the research in detail using the participant information sheet, and sought their consent to participate. The same process was later undertaken with the Bangladeshi family. The ethical approval process was slightly different in the third case study with the Hasidic family members, since they do not use devices like smartphones and computers in their home, and do not use the internet. Therefore, following my phone conversation with the mother after my ethical approval, I sent printed versions of the information sheets and consent forms to the family by post. After the family received and signed the documents, I reviewed the information in detail with each family member over the phone prior to beginning our weekly phone interviews.

Situated in social, spatial and temporal dimensions, the three selected families have commonalities as well as differences. Common to all families is their cultural and lingual distance from the mainstream English society and culture. They can all speak and read English; however, they have strong affiliations to additional language(s), whether spoken or read. Another key commonality is their strong religious identities: each family identifies as religious and practises a distinct religion. Therefore, I anticipated religion to have a central role in family members' reading practices and inquired about this. However, the families' migration histories differ: in the case of the Polish and Bangladeshi families it is more recent, while the Hasidic family's mother's

migration history, like many other Hasidic Jews in the UK, dates back to the period after the Second World War. The father, however, migrated from the United States. Therefore, the families' definition of a 'home country' is different: while the Polish and Bangladeshi families – particularly the parents – consider Poland and Bangladesh, respectively, as their home countries, the Hasidic family has no 'home country' to visit or reminisce about. Nevertheless, these differences do not directly translate into predictable patterns of language and literacy maintenance or shift. The Hasidic and Polish families maintain the use of Yiddish and Polish respectively as central home and community languages and literacies, though the Hasidic family members also incorporate English in everyday communication, and are fluent decoders of liturgical Hebrew as well. The Bangladeshi family uses a mix of English and Bengali, with the children generally speaking English and mainly understanding, rather than actively using, Bengali. Although they cannot read Bengali, they are fluent decoders of Quranic Arabic. A final key difference between the families pertains to the education systems that the children attend: while the Polish and Bangladeshi children attend mainstream English schools as well as learning their home languages in external settings, the Hasidic children attend private Hasidic schools that strictly maintain the speaking of Yiddish and learning of Jewish scriptures in liturgical Hebrew during the first half of the school day, and do not adhere to the English National Curriculum.

Considering the families' characteristics described above, I expected that conducting case studies with these three families would shed light on the differences and similarities in their multilingual literacy practices, and how such variations might be explained by social, spatial, and temporal factors.

My positioning as a researcher across the three families

My role as a researcher – and how I was perceived by each family – played a crucial part in shaping the data I was able to collect, the nature of our interactions, and the interpretations I ultimately drew. This positionality differed markedly across the three case studies.

With the Hasidic family, although I initially approached this family assuming I would be perceived as an outsider, I was surprised to find that I was positioned more as an insider, likely due to my Jewish background, fluency in modern Hebrew, and the presence of a mutual contact who introduced us. While I am not Hasidic and do not

share many of the specific cultural and religious practices that define their community life, I am familiar with broader Jewish traditions, religious calendars, and liturgical Hebrew. I also have limited passive familiarity with Yiddish, enough to occasionally recognise certain words, though not to converse fluently. During one interview, for instance, Miriam – the younger child I interviewed – described her morning routine and mentioned that she begins her day with '*negel vasser*' – a Yiddish term referring to the ritual washing of hands. Although I knew of the practice, I was not familiar with the Yiddish term for it – and Miriam sounded surprised that I did not know what it was. This moment, of Miriam discussing a religious ritual and its Yiddish term with me under the assumption that I would know it, was revealing of how Miriam perceived me to be an insider.

Additionally, this positioning of me as an 'insider' is likely what allowed me to gain access to this family to begin with – a Hasidic family belonging to a community that is under-represented in educational research and typically reluctant to grant access to individuals perceived as 'outsiders'. In this sense, I see my positioning as an 'insider' in this family's eyes as both a privilege and a necessity in the context of this study.

The family's perception of me as someone who 'understands the world we live in' appeared to foster openness and trust. This insider positioning enabled a level of cultural shorthand – for example, during one of the four weeks of our study, the family celebrated the Jewish festival of Purim, which commemorates the events of the Book of Esther. I did not need explanations of what Purim was, or why the children were dressing up for it, and I was able to gently prompt conversations around key literacy practices, such as the reading of the Book of Esther on this festival, which the family members had not initially mentioned because it was so ingrained in their routine.

However, I was also acutely aware of the risks of overfamiliarity. Insider status can easily lead to the assumption of shared meaning, the skipping of clarifying questions, or the unconscious reinforcement of cultural norms. To mitigate these risks, I engaged in regular supervisory conversations during the four-week period in which I worked with this family, sharing my data with my supervisors who had no cultural or religious familiarity with the Hasidic context. These discussions helped surface blind spots that I had and encouraged a more critical stance toward my interpretations. I

also made a conscious effort during interviews to ask for clarification even when I thought I understood something, particularly when Yiddish terms or highly contextual references were used.

In contrast, my relationships with the Polish and Bangladeshi families were shaped by a more explicit outsider positioning. I had no shared cultural or religious background with either family and no prior connection with them before the start of the case studies. With the Bangladeshi family, this distance was most visible: the family preferred not to appear on camera throughout our Zoom-based interviews and were cautious about sharing aspects of their home environment. With the Polish family, while I was also an outsider in terms of nationality and language, the family was more willing to engage in informal conversation, share their home environment, and show me various reading materials. Still, as an 'outsider', was not familiar with these families' traditions, languages, or religious practices, and so I made a point of asking open-ended questions in our interviews, requesting clarification or elaboration when participants referred to cultural practices I was unfamiliar with, and conducting follow-up research between interviews to better understand the references made. For example, one week, Aadya in the Bangladeshi family mentioned that the family would celebrate Eid in the coming days. Following this, I read up about Eid online and spoke to a Muslim peer about it, to ensure I had the necessary knowledge and context to ask the participants about it in the following week.

Reflecting on my positioning across all three families, each positioning, whether outsider or insider, brought distinct affordances and constraints. Insider status with the Hasidic family allowed access and a depth of cultural understanding that might not have been available to a non-Jewish researcher, but it also required deliberate reflexivity to avoid assuming greater familiarity with their ways of doing things than I actually had. Outsider status with the Bangladeshi and Polish families created more distance but also prompted more explicit articulation of practices, beliefs, and values, and I am aware that I may have missed key understandings that an insider would have. Throughout the research process, I remained attentive to how my identity shaped the questions I asked, the data that was shared, and the interpretations I made. This reflexive awareness formed a core part of my analytical process and allowed me to hold the complexities of positionality as both a methodological challenge and an interpretive resource.

A shift in the research focus and questions

From reading for pleasure to 'ethnographing' multilingual literacy practices

As discussed above, a key characteristic of the adoption of an ethnographic perspective, is that the central focus of the research, and the research questions, emerge and evolve as the researcher's involvement in the setting continues (Robson & McCartan, 2016). In line with the ethnographic perspective I adopted, this was an approach that I utilised in my research, and indeed, its focus and research questions changed considerably as my data collection progressed. Originally, a main focus of the research was the practice of 'reading for pleasure' in multilingual homes: I assumed that in each family, 'reading for pleasure' would be conceptualised and practised differently, depending on the language(s) read and the family's specific cultural context. However, when I conducted the first case study with the Polish family, they did not refer to 'reading for pleasure.' Although the family members all read in English and Polish, they mainly recalled reading for practical purposes. For example, the excerpt below is from my interview with the mother, Nadia, following a question that I asked about her children's reading habits (N=Nadia, I=Interviewer):

> N: … really, they, they don't want to read.
>
> I: In English or in Polish, or both?
>
> N: Both {laughs}.
>
> I: Is it all the kids? They all don't really want to read?
>
> N: Yes {laughs}.

When talking about her own reading, Nadia said that she 'sometimes' reads books in Polish, but it is not something that she does often. When I asked whether her husband reads, she was quite determined: 'No, no, no, no {shakes her head and laughs}.'

Nadia's determination that her family members do not read for pleasure was reflected in my interviews with her children. Her son, Simon, reported to only read for school purposes, and when I asked him about his 'day-to-day' reading, he replied: 'I mean, I don't really read day-to-day.' Similarly, Simon's younger sister, Gabriela, said that she finds reading 'boring,' and does not read in her free time. The main reading

events that she reported participating in, were during 'reading time' at school. The only exception was a recurring reading event occurring every night at bedtime, when Gabriela reads the Bible or other resources with her mother in Polish.

The above findings, all from the first two weeks of interviews with the Polish family members, contrasted with my assumptions and expectations, and made me reflect on my original research focus on the practice of 'reading for pleasure.' Reflecting on the participants' answers made it clear that they did not use the term 'reading' or 'reading for pleasure' to describe what they did, and any subsequent questions I asked that aimed to unearth 'reading for pleasure' practices were mostly refused or yielded very little information. In line with the ethnographic approach that I adopted, I realised that it was crucial to acknowledge participants' perspectives and experiences and adapt accordingly (Lichterman, 2017; Robson & McCartan, 2016). Thus, I decided to shift the research focus from 'reading for pleasure' to any form of reading that multilingual family members engage in, whether for enjoyment or any other purpose. I adjusted my interview questions for the participants accordingly, and in the second half of the case study with the Polish family members, I asked them about any reading that they engaged in, mentioning shopping lists and the church as potential examples. These questions yielded elaborate answers from the participants, including the mention of a Polish Scouts group where poetry reading took place, and a church newsletter advertised on Facebook. These answers revealed how and where multilingual reading fitted in participants' lives, despite it not necessarily being 'reading for pleasure.'

In retrospect, it is likely that the family members' initial dismissals of reading for pleasure reflected a particular interpretation of the concept – one aligned with traditional notions of solitary, text-based literary enjoyment. This may have stemmed from their own understandings of reading, or from their assumptions about what I, as the researcher, was referring to when asking about reading practices. Once I broadened the scope of inquiry to include all forms of reading – including functional, religious, and relational events – participants began to describe a wider range of literacy engagements, some of which contained elements of enjoyment, emotional resonance, or meaning-making.

This shift from reading for pleasure to the 'ethnographing' of more general literacy practices in multilingual families, proved to be an appropriate decision for the ensuing case studies. In the Bangladeshi family, reading for pleasure was not reported to occur often, and in the Hasidic family it occurred more often but was still not a dominant activity among the family members that I interviewed. The study's expanded focus and revised research questions therefore enabled the collection of rich information about daily multilingual literacy practices, which might have remained overlooked had I not been attentive to the participants' reports, and adhered strictly to the original focus on reading for pleasure. Additionally, following the first two case studies and in preparation for my final case study with the Hasidic family, I decided to significantly adapt my interview questions, which invited answers that were more detailed, elaborate and compelling, as described in more detail in the *data collection* section below.

Research questions

In line with the ethnographic perspective I adopted, I refined my research questions as my research progressed, to reflect the participants' reports and move away from the initial focus on 'reading for pleasure.' The final research questions which informed this research are:

1. How do multilingual family members in London use multilingual literacies to navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities?

2. In what ways do reading practices, choices, preferences, and experiences vary among individuals within and across multilingual families?
3. How do social, spatial, temporal and generational factors shape and explain the diverse literacy practices of multilingual families?

Throughout this thesis, I use the term *multilingual literacy practices* to refer to the broad range of ways in which family members engage with texts across languages, encompassing both reading and writing. In the literature review, I used 'multilingual literacy practices' to encompass reading and writing activities, aligning with established terminology in the field. During data collection, however, my focus was on reading practices and materials, as reflected in the second research question. Although participants occasionally discussed writing activities during interviews, the main interest remained in reading, which shaped the design of the research tools

and analysis. The first and third research questions refer more broadly to *multilingual literacy practices* to capture the wider social and temporal dynamics that shape engagement with multilingual texts. Using this terminology in this way enables the study to hold onto the broader conceptual framing of literacy while staying grounded in the specific practices explored with participants.

Data collection

Research timeline and the Covid-19 context

The fieldwork for this study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, which significantly shaped the data collection process. The research took place in three phases across three case studies, beginning in April 2021 and concluding in March 2022. Each phase coincided with a different stage of the UK's pandemic response.

At the time of the first case study, with the Polish family in April-May 2021, schools had reopened in March following the third national lockdown, and England was moving through the phased easing of restrictions. Social distancing and public health measures were still in place, and indoor gatherings remained limited for much of this period. The Bangladeshi family case study, conducted in July-August 2021, took place during a period of relative relaxation of restrictions, yet caution remained widespread, and schools were on summer break. By the time of the third case study, with the Hasidic family in February-March 2022, most legal restrictions had been lifted.

Due to these constraints and university regulations, all data collection was conducted remotely. Interviews with the Polish and Bangladeshi families were held via Zoom, while interviews with the Hasidic family were conducted over the phone and recorded using Zoom's speaker function. The evolving nature of the pandemic necessitated flexibility in both design and communication style, including adaptations to rapport-building, ethical procedures, and the use of participant-generated data.

A flexible research plan

The data collection methods used in this study included semi-structured interviews, documentation of participants' literacy resources and/or environment, and my own fieldnotes. While I initially hoped to replicate the same methods with all three families, this was not always possible as detailed below, due to the different ways

that the families used technology, my status as insider or outsider with each family, and my own emergent insights as data collection progressed. However, as a qualitative researcher adopting an ethnographic perspective, I anticipated such variations across the families, and thus, from the outset of the study, my research design and plan were tentative, leaving space for flexibility and adaptation based on the relationships that I would go on to develop with my participants and the information that I would receive from them (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). Emergent insights that I developed throughout the data collection process required me not only to review my research questions as described above, but also to adapt my research methods and tools and seek different kinds of data from each family. Maxwell (2013) asserts that while a flexible approach such as this may compromise the generalisability and comparability of the case studies to some degree, it nevertheless trades these for internal validity and a deeper contextual understanding of each case. Indeed, this less structured approach allowed me to focus and tailor my methods for each individual family, helping to ensure that my research questions were answered in a detailed and thorough manner in each case, and an in-depth understanding of the participants' multilingual literacy practices was gained for each family.

1. Semi-structured interviews.

This study's main data collection method was semi-structured interviews, 'where the researcher has some headings or points to be covered in the interview but not a strict format' (Ogier, 1998, p.50).

Two interviews were conducted with the mother in each household: in the first or second week, and the fourth (and final) week. The first interview aimed to explore general questions about their contexts, including migration histories, reading histories, reading habits, and languages spoken and read in the household. The second interview intended to explore any questions that arose throughout the case study, and invited parents' reflections, thoughts and reports on specific events or practices reported by their children throughout the study, drawing inspiration from Solsken's (1993) methodology in her own research.

Additionally, weekly interviews were held with a primary-school-aged child, and at least two interviews were held with a secondary-school-aged child, exploring their

multilingual reading experiences each week. The exception was the Polish family, in which the secondary-school-aged child, Simon, was interviewed four times, since he expressed interest in the research and asked to be interviewed weekly like his younger sister.

With the Polish and Bangladeshi families, the interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom, although the Bangladeshi family members decided to keep their camera switched off during our interviews. With the Hasidic family members, the interviews were conducted over the phone, since they do not use devices like smartphones and computers, and do access to the internet in their home. Nevertheless, I recorded these interviews on Zoom as well, since I found the recording function on Zoom easy to operate and access. Therefore, during my interviews with the Hasidic family, I kept my phone on loudspeaker and recorded the conversations using a Zoom session that I had set up for myself.

During the interviews, I took notes and recorded notable quotes, which helped simplify the subsequent writing of fieldnotes and served as 'insurance' in case the recordings did not work. I transcribed all the interviews as soon as possible after they took place. To ensure I captured the nuances of spoken language – such as pauses, incomplete words, and to provide added context when necessary – I employed a specific transcription system (see Appendix I for the transcription key that I utilised, outlining these conventions).

Semi-structured interviews were the best research tool for the purpose of this study. Firstly, interviews are considered one of the most important sources of evidence in case study research, since they are typically targeted and focused directly on the case study topic, and resemble guided conversation with participants, which invites their explanations and personal views on their contexts (Yin, 2014). Secondly, interviews are also a highly significant research tool in ethnographic and literacy-as-social-practice research, since they can elucidate participants' reports of their lives, as well as their experiences, perceptions and constructions of literacy, and the range and types of texts available to them (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995). For example, Kenner (2005) used semi-structured interviews with parents to learn about their biliterate children's everyday literacy experiences, and how family members helped them acquire bilingual literacy skills. Similarly, Barton and Hamilton (1998)

relied on interviews to learn about participants' literacy practices across various domains of life, and generate data that reflected participants' interpretations of literacy that would not have been possible to infer from observations alone. Thirdly, semi-structured ethnographic interviews are also commonly used in family language policy studies, due to their great potential to reveal the factors affecting language maintenance decisions (Schwartz, 2010).

Specifically, this study used the strategy of ongoing, repeated interviews with participants. All participants in this study were interviewed at least twice, with the primary-school-aged child interviewed weekly over four weeks. This had three main reasons. Firstly, I aimed to paint a comprehensive picture, with detailed and in-depth descriptions of the family members' reading practices and experiences, and several interviews were needed to gain sufficient information. This is in line with Barton and Hamilton (1998), who conducted long, repeated interviews which allowed their participants to gradually open up and reveal areas of their lives that they had not talked about before. Secondly, recurring weekly interviews can reveal a range of experiences that may affect the reading practices within the household. In an ethnographic study examining children's meaning-making in the home context, Pahl (2002) found that the home setting was ever-changing, with meaning-making resources constantly being replaced by others. Therefore, families' experiences around literacy may differ from one week to the next, and conducting recurring interviews can capture a wider range of experiences. Indeed, for example, during my four-week case study with the Hasidic family, they celebrated the religious festival of Purim, and were able to provide rich information about the literacy practices that they were undertaking in their preparations for the festival as well as the celebration of it. Finally, repeated interviews with the same participants helped enhance the trustworthiness of the data. Yin (2014) contends that case studies typically rely on 'multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion' (Yin, 2014, p.17). Although Yin generally refers to various methods for data collection, he acknowledges that in case studies led by an interpretivist paradigm, the phenomenon of interest might be 'a participant's distinctive meaning or perspective' (ibid, p.122). In those cases, triangulation is still important 'to ensure that the case study has rendered the participant's perspective accurately' (ibid, p.122), and therefore, the researcher should query the same participant several

times which can serve as 'multiple' sources (Yin, 2014). Indeed, my use of multiple interviews with each participant, as well as my interviewing of several members in each family, were beneficial in ensuring data convergence and enhancing the trustworthiness of the research.

1.2 Interview pilot studies.

Prior to the main stage of data collection, I conducted two pilot studies with multilingual individuals I was acquainted with, which assisted me in the development of relevant lines of inquiry for my interviews (Yin, 2014).

The first pilot study tested a draft interview schedule with a parent. This pilot study revealed that my draft interview schedule was too long, and that some of the questions were too specific and did not allow the parent to provide elaborate answers and share different aspects of their experiences and lives. I subsequently significantly reduced the number of questions in my interview schedule and refined them.

The second pilot study tested the method of conducting weekly online interviews with a primary-school-aged child. As part of this pilot study, I conducted two semi-structured interviews, one week apart, with a child via Zoom, and tested questions such as: 'can you tell me about one thing that you read today?' and 'what do you enjoy reading the most?'. This second pilot study helped inform my practice in two key ways. Firstly, it helped me formulate questions that could better answer my research questions, and that addressed children's reading choices and experiences from different angles. For example, to gain a deeper understanding of the child's reading preferences, I devised questions that asked about the reading materials that they did not enjoy, for example: 'what do you find boring to read?' and 'can you tell me about something that you read recently that you did not enjoy?'. Additionally, in order to learn about the child's reading environment and school practices, I asked questions such as: 'what do your friends like to read?' and 'what do you and your friends like to do during break?'. Secondly, when conducting this second pilot study, I struggled to engage the child in our conversations, particularly since they took place on Zoom, and on several occasions the child simply left the room that she was sitting in, leaving the iPad that she was using to converse with me in the room, and leaving me feeling quite helpless until she returned to the room. I subsequently resolved to

learn about methods of engaging children in online interviews before the study's main stage of data collection. Therefore, I sought advice from my supervisors and colleagues, and attended a workshop, on how to promote children's engagement in online research. One helpful method that was proposed, suggested asking children to draw while conversing with me. I subsequently used this method in my first case study when interviewing Gabriela, my youngest participant at just eight years old, and she was indeed more engaged in our conversation as a result.

1.3 Adapting my interview schedules as data collection progressed.

Maxwell (2013) asserts that 'the methods you use to collect your data (including your interview questions) don't necessarily follow by logical deduction from the research questions; the two are distinct and separate parts of your design' (p.100). He further argues that, while research questions formulate what the researcher seeks to understand, the interview questions are what the researcher asks the participants to gain that understanding. Therefore, the development of good interview questions requires creativity and insight, and depends fundamentally on the researcher's understanding of the context of the research, as well as how the interview questions are understood by the participants and how they work in practice (Maxwell, 2013). Indeed, I found that, despite having conducted several pilot studies, my interview questions needed constant revision and adaptation, both within each case, and across cases as data collection progressed.

After conducting and analysing my case studies with the Polish and Bangladeshi families, I felt that the interview schedules that I used in the first interviews with my participants (follow-up interviews were generally less structured and took on a more conversational form), could benefit from further revision, since some questions tended to be overly specific and fact-oriented, and did not allow for elaborate answers from the participants. Therefore, prior to my final case study with the Hasidic family, I reflected on the interview schedules and transcripts to identify the questions and prompts that worked well, and those that needed revision since the answers that they yielded were often not elaborate enough. I then revised the latter to foster a more conversational approach, encouraging participants to share detailed insights, opinions, and reflections on their lived experiences. This approach moved beyond simply listing the materials they read, allowing for richer, more engaging

narratives about their reading practices and experiences. While revising the interview schedules before the final case study may have implications for the trustworthiness of my research, such adjustments were essential. Adaptations of this nature are common in qualitative research, as researchers often refine methods after entering the field and gaining insight into which approaches are effective and which require modification (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013).

For example, the first question in the original parent interview schedule (see Appendix II for the original parent interview schedule) was: 'tell me about you and your family and how you've come to be living here' and prompts included the parent's occupation, education, place of birth and migration history. While these prompts ensured that I received the desired facts from the parents, I felt that an element of remembering and storytelling was missing from their answers. Therefore, following multiple conversations with my supervisors, reviewing interview questions used in various literacy studies (e.g., Levy, 2011; Scholes, Spina & Comber, 2021), and much thought and reflection, I decided that beginning the parent interview with a question that enquires about the languages they were aware of growing up and used in their everyday lives ever since, might lead them to remember different stories and experiences, and provide an answer that would not only reveal their backgrounds and migration histories, but also their engagement with different languages in their lives and their attitudes towards speaking and reading in these languages (see Appendix III for the revised parent interview schedule).

I made similar changes to the child interview schedule as well. For example, two of the questions in the original child interview schedule asked: 'tell me about the things that you read at home' and 'tell me about the things that you read at school.' Prompts included the types and forms of resources, the languages they encode, where and when the child typically reads, and what their favourite book is (see Appendix IV for the original child interview schedule). When analysing and reflecting on my interviews with the Polish and Bangladeshi children, I felt that these questions and prompts were merely inviting the children to list different resources, rather than share and reflect on their experiences of reading in multiple languages throughout their lives. Therefore, in the child interview schedule that I revised prior to my case study with the Hasidic family (see Appendix V for the revised child interview schedule), I devised the following questions: 'can you tell me about what you have done today /

you did yesterday? What did you read during this day?'; 'can you tell me about the first thing that you can remember, that someone read to you?'; 'can you tell me about the first thing that you ever read yourself?'; and 'do you ever read in other languages? Can you tell me about the last time that you read in [these languages]?'. These questions made the interviews more conversational, and invited the children to tell stories about their lives. They shared their opinions and reflections, which allowed for richer, more compelling findings, and enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences of reading in different languages.

Additionally, in revising both the parent and child interviews, I decided to refrain from seeking prompts that referred to the sorting and mapping of literacy resources in the participants' homes. While I initially hoped that these prompts would reveal compelling information about the ways that the participants approach their different literacy resources in different languages, upon analysing the interviews with the Polish and Bangladeshi families, I felt that they did not serve my purpose well: the participants were often confused when asked where they kept the different resources in their homes, and their answers did not reveal much information about their multilingual literacy practices and experiences. Instead, the new interview questions that I used in my case study with the Hasidic family, invited reports and reflections that oftentimes revealed participants' approaches and attitudes towards their literacy resources, without the need to list or map them in an overly technical manner.

In essence, upon reflection, I felt that my original interview questions represented a somewhat mechanical conversion of my research questions into methods (Maxwell, 2013). I tended to seek answers that often 'listed' all the information that I felt I needed to answer my research questions, rather than ask questions that invited my participants to talk about their experiences in rich detail. As noted earlier, Maxwell (2013) argues that research methods should constitute means of answering research questions, and are not a logical transformation of them. He further asserts that 'their selection depends not only on your research questions, but also on the actual research situation and on what will work most effectively in that situation to give you the data you need' (Maxwell, 2013, p.100). Indeed, the constant analysis of and reflection on my methods – crucial in qualitative and ethnographic research – allowed me to adapt, revise and refocus them based on my learning and the answers that I received from my participants. In this way, through careful listening,

analysis, and more precise questioning, the insights produced from the revised interviews became more conversational, contextual, and narrative (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This, in turn, allowed for the collection of data that better answered my research questions, and helped address plausible threats to the trustworthiness of the study (Maxwell, 2013).

1.4 Advantages and limitations of conducting remote interviews.

After conducting online interviews with the Polish and Bangladeshi families, and phone interviews with the Hasidic family, I have found that carrying out interviews in these ways had some key advantages as well as limitations. The first advantage was that, given my position as an outsider, participants may have felt more comfortable conversing with me online or on the phone, rather than letting me into their homes. The second advantage was the easily accessible video or audio recording functions on Zoom, which helped me transcribe the interviews accurately, and, in the case of the Polish family members whose camera was on, the video recording also allowed me to transcribe body language and take snapshots of different items that they showed me. Conversely, the main limitation in conducting remote interviews was my inability to be present in the field, in this case the family homes, and observe the full range of events and interactions. The second limitation that I have found is the challenge in building rapport with participants, particularly children. Building rapport with participants is considered necessary in qualitative research, in order to allow for a comfortable space for them to share their personal experiences (Flick, 2018). However, the physical proximity of researcher and participants became impossible in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced researchers to use alternative methods which may be obstructive to the establishment of relationships (Torrentira, 2020). While in the field it is typically possible to build rapport with children by asking questions and making comments about their personal lives and hobbies, thus creating a warm and supportive environment for them (Teoh & Lamb, 2010), this was more challenging online and over the phone, and the absence of my physical presence may have led the participating children to be more suspicious of me and less willing to share their experiences in length.

2. Documentation of the home literacy environment and resources.

The second data collection method that I used was the documentation of the home literacy environment, particularly reading resources, in the households.

While I originally intended to conduct home visits to each family and document the reading resources and literacy environment myself, this was not possible due to the Covid-19 context, and I decided instead to use visual data produced by participants or captured by me during online interviews. This appeared to be a useful alternative, and indeed, the use of visual research tools like photographs and videos has been popular in ethnographic literacy research even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, providing an additional, complementary lens to the understanding of literacy in particular contexts (Flewitt, Pahl & Smith, 2015; Kendrick, 2015). Therefore, when designing this research, I planned to document the participants' home literacy environments and resources using visual data, including: a video tour of the home reading environment led by a child participant; snapshots of literacy resources taken during online interviews; photographs taken by participants on smartphones or disposable cameras provided to them, and sent to me either online or via post; and maps drawn by participants. From the outset, in order to ensure that my participants felt comfortable and to protect their privacy, I kept these methods optional, and my participants could decide whether they wished to use them.

In line with the ethnographic perspective adopted in this study, my aim in documenting participants' reading resources and literacy environment was to understand what they regarded as a 'reading resource' within their homes, as well as the attitudes and values they associated with various reading materials in different languages. Additionally, documenting these resources served as a way to corroborate and enrich the insights gained from participants' interview responses (Yin, 2014). Although my primary focus was on texts containing written language, I sought to remain open to the types of materials participants might identify as reading resources. I recognised that items like board games, social media, and computer games could play a meaningful role in their home literacy environment. I decided that if participants referenced such materials in their discussions of reading, this might suggest that they viewed these activities as forms of literacy engagement. Ultimately, however, participants primarily highlighted resources aligned with traditional definitions of reading, such as printed books. This emphasis offered valuable insights

into how my participants conceptualised 'reading,' a topic I explore further in this thesis.

2.2 Home video tour pilot studies.

Before beginning data collection, I conducted two pilot studies with multilingual children from different families to test the primary tool I initially planned to use for documenting reading resources and the home literacy environment: an online video tour of the literacy environment led by a child participant. This method proved effective in the pilot studies; however, during the main data collection phase with the first two families, it was less successful than anticipated. In the case of the Polish family, technical limitations arose because they used a stationary desktop computer that could not be moved around the house. For the Bangladeshi family, their choice to keep the camera switched off during our sessions limited the method's effectiveness. This approach was also unsuitable for the Hasidic family, as they do not use technological devices that enable video calls. Ultimately, this research tool was not employed in the final study.

2.3 The different uses of digital technology in each family and how they affected the documentation of their reading resources.

As described above, each family's approach to technology during this research varied, resulting in differences in the types of data I was able to gather. The Polish family kept their camera on during our interviews and were open to showing me various reading resources they used and kept at home. With their permission, I was able to capture numerous snapshots of these resources throughout our online sessions.

In contrast, the Bangladeshi family kept their camera off during our interviews, which meant I was unable to view their home reading environment or ask them to show specific reading resources around their household. Aadya, an 11-year-old, mentioned several times that she enjoyed drawing, so at the end of our first two interviews, I asked if she might be interested in drawing a picture of herself or someone else reading, or even of a reading resource. Although she initially expressed willingness, she did not end up creating a drawing. Respecting my ethical responsibilities, I chose not to press further on the matter. At the end of our third interview, I instead asked if she would be open to photographing some reading

resources in her home. She agreed and, using her mother's phone, sent me three photographs after our interview. In our final session, she elaborated on these images, providing further insight into her home reading environment.

From the outset of my research, I anticipated that the documentation of the Hasidic family members' reading resources and environment would pose a greater challenge, since they do not use technological devices that allow for such documentation and sharing. Before the onset of my case study with them, I considered sending the family members disposable cameras, and asking them to take photographs and then send the cameras back to me by post (with all relevant arrangements made by me). However, soon after my first encounter with the family, I realised that such an operation would not be possible in their busy household of nine children. While I initially found this lack of visual data concerning, I later found that it did not limit the information that I received from the family members. I believe there are three main reasons for this. Firstly, perhaps due to the revision of my interview questions, both the mother and daughters were very talkative, and painted a nice and elaborate picture of their lives that made up for the lack of visual images. Secondly, I was able to find websites, photographs and online descriptions of the magazines and books that they reported reading, and this helped make their reports 'come to life.' Thirdly, my knowledge of the Jewish world perhaps helped me to 'fill in the visual blanks': for example, when the family members reported praying or reading the Torah, I knew what such practices in the Jewish world look like, and I thus found their reports easier to understand.

2.4 Advantages and limitations of collecting visual data in online research.

I found that collecting visual data online presented both a notable limitation and an advantage. The limitation stemmed from the restricted number and variety of reading resources I could observe, potentially affecting the trustworthiness of this study, as a comprehensive view of the home reading resources and literacy environment was not fully captured. However, an advantage of this method was that participants likely chose to document and share only the reading resources they used frequently or found meaningful. In this way, the visual data offered insights into participants'

reading experiences from their perspective, which proved significant in discovering their constructions and perceptions of reading.

3. Fieldnotes.

In line with ethnographic tradition, I kept fieldnotes throughout the data collection phase (Heath & Street, 2008). These were written immediately after each encounter, and detailed the date, time, and participants. Additionally, they included descriptions of the context and setting, my recollection of what had occurred, my thoughts and reflections, initial points of analysis, and questions for the next encounter. These fieldnotes helped me keep a full record of my involvement with the participants and my thoughts during the study, and were later helpful in recounting the events in the findings section of this thesis, and maintaining reflexivity and acknowledgement of my positionality when analysing the data (see appendix VI for an example fieldnote from my first encounter with the Polish family).

Data analysis

In this research, the initial steps of data analysis for each case study involved writing field notes after each interview, listening to, and transcribing interview recordings, and composing short memos during transcription. This ongoing data analysis facilitated my analytic thinking throughout the data collection process and stimulated analytic insights early on (Maxwell, 2013), allowing me to identify emerging themes, write analytic reflections useful in later analysis stages, and refine interview questions for subsequent interviews and case studies. This process helped me to seek information essential for answering my research questions while also enabling me to adapt my focus based on the data I was receiving. For example, as noted earlier, the analysis of my first interviews with the Polish family showed that my initial emphasis on reading for pleasure overlooked other significant reading practices that the participants were engaged in. This early realisation prompted a shift in focus, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of participants' multilingual literacy practices.

At the end of each case study, I conducted a more systematic data analysis using a *thematic coding analysis* technique, a widely used approach in qualitative research (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This method includes constant reviewing, comparing, and rethinking of the data. Thematic coding began with generating initial codes for

data segments that seemed meaningful or significant (Maxwell, 2013). The coding stage was not linear; as I continued to code interviews, I grouped certain codes, merged similar ones, and eliminated those that seemed less relevant. I used colour-coding to differentiate participants within each family, creating matrices that displayed codes and related quotes in an organised format. An extract from the matrix used in the data analysis of the Polish case study can be seen in Figure 3.1. These matrices provided a visual display of the results of the initial coding stage, and enabled me to see where some participants did not exemplify a particular code, helping me to further develop my analysis (Maxwell, 2013) and distinguish between the reports of different family members. For example, in the example presented in Figure 3.1, the differences between the Polish family members' plans to return to Poland are made explicit: the mother, Nadia, clearly had a lot to say about the subject; Simon was more tentative; and Gabriela did not discuss the topic at all. The presentation of the different family members' reports in this way, made clear the differences between the family members' connection to the Polish diaspora and strength of Polish identity.

Polish family: preliminary data analysis (coding)

Code	Nadia	Simon	Gabriela
Plans to return to Poland in the future	In the future, we want to back in Poland, but/ {shrugs} we must wait the kids, about the kids finish the school. (I1) You said that you want to move back to Poland in the future, do you think your children will come with you? N: I think so, I don't know really. I think so maybe, for me, maybe, I want to, but {laughs} we'll see. (I1) S: Yes, so I know that it's very important for you that your children know how to read and write in Polish. So I'm wondering, why? Why is it very important for you? N: Uh, because, in the future, maybe we, they, they want to live in Poland, I don't know. (I2)	'Do you think you would ever want to move to Poland? Simon: Yeah, maybe one day, like, I don't know, but, yeah.' (I3)	

Figure 3.1: An extract from the matrix used in the data analysis of the Polish case study.

Following the initial coding stage, I identified themes emerging from the data and developed thematic networks that made connections and relationships among themes more apparent (Robson & McCartan, 2016). For example, as analysis

progressed, it became increasingly clear that families' migration histories and their positioning in relation to wider society were central to shaping their multilingual literacy practices. These insights informed the direction of the thesis and are woven throughout the findings and discussion chapters. I explored how family members' migration histories – whether *open-ended* or *settled*, and their positioning towards the wider society – whether *semi-open* or *closed* – affect their literacy practices and socio-cultural identities. Recognising these dimensions added depth to the analysis and offered a more nuanced understanding of how social and migratory contexts shape the multilingual experiences of each family.

To organise these networks, I created a PowerPoint presentation for each case study, beginning with a slide listing all the codes that had emerged (see Figure 3.2 for an example slide showing the codes that emerged from my analysis of the Bangladeshi family case study). Through trial and error, I experimented with grouping codes into coherent themes, eventually consolidating them into larger themes that aligned with my research questions and focus.

Figure 3.2: The codes that emerged in my data analysis of the Bangladeshi family case study.
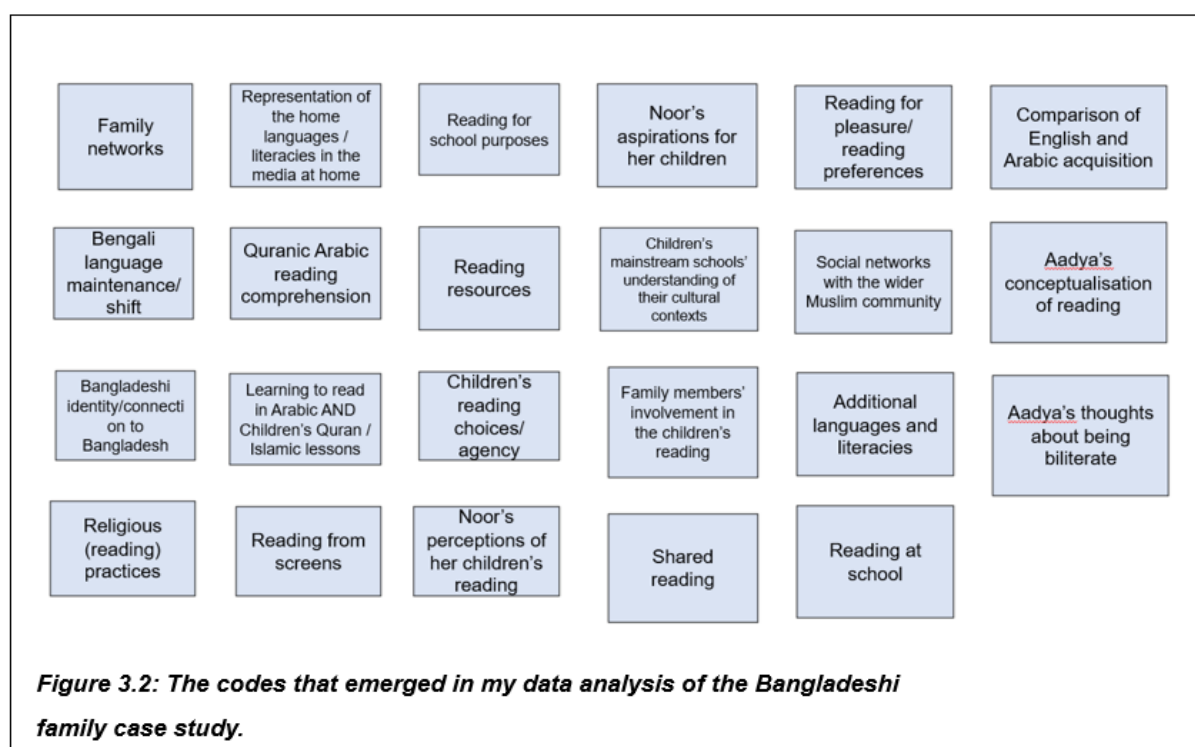
This process was not straightforward; some codes were included in multiple themes, while others were removed as they did not contribute significantly to answering my research questions. For example, the first theme in the Bangladeshi family case study was titled 'family members' English reading practices' and included codes like

'reading at school,' 'reading for pleasure/reading preferences,' and 'reading from screens' (see Figure 3.3 for the slide that I created for this theme). The second theme was titled 'family members' Quranic Arabic reading practices' and included codes such as 'reading from screens' again, 'family networks,' and 'children's reading choices/agency' (see Figure 3.4 for the slide that I created for this theme). Both themes were essential in addressing my research questions by illuminating how family members navigated their multilingual daily lives. The 'English reading practices' theme provided insights into their engagement with English across various contexts, while the 'Quranic Arabic reading practices' theme underscored how religious literacy shaped their multilingual experiences, showing the significance of both languages in their everyday lives. These themes, along with others in this case study, illustrate an example of my data analysis approach. I used the same technique of drawing codes, developing themes, and organising them into a PowerPoint presentation for each family in the study. As accepted in qualitative data analysis, the data analysis of each case study was not linear or straightforward: it involved going back and forth between reading the interview transcripts, generating codes, and grouping them into themes (Maxwell, 2013), until I reached the final themes that I felt could best answer my research questions.

Figure 3.3: The theme 'family members' English reading practices' in the Bangladeshi family case study.

Figure 3.4: The theme 'family members' Quranic Arabic reading practices' in the Bangladeshi family case study.
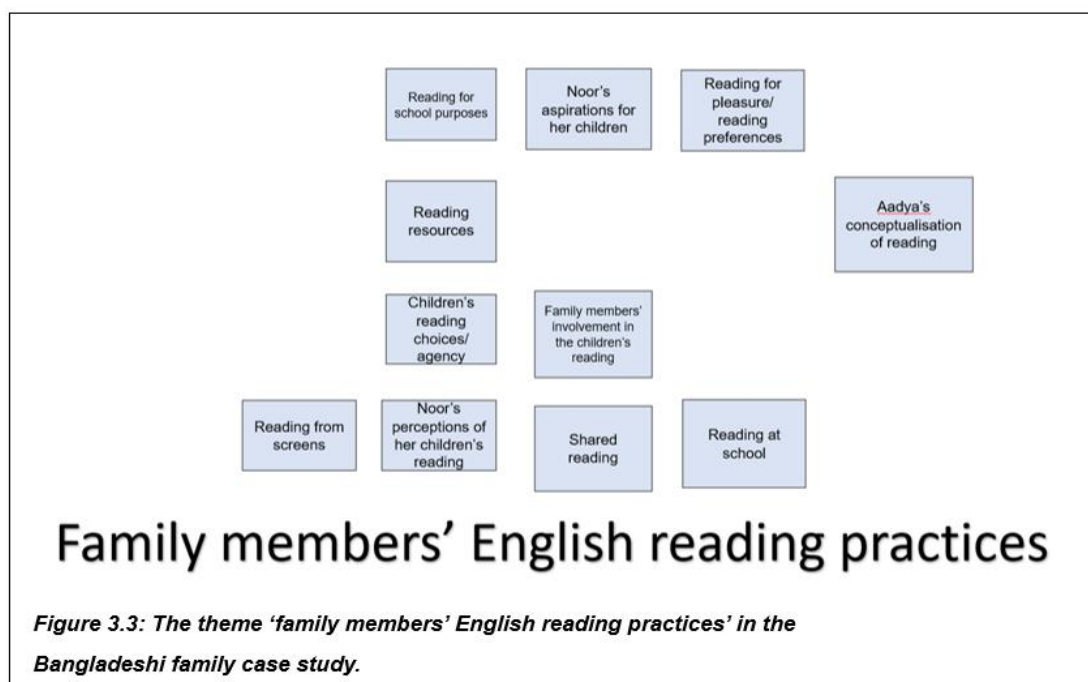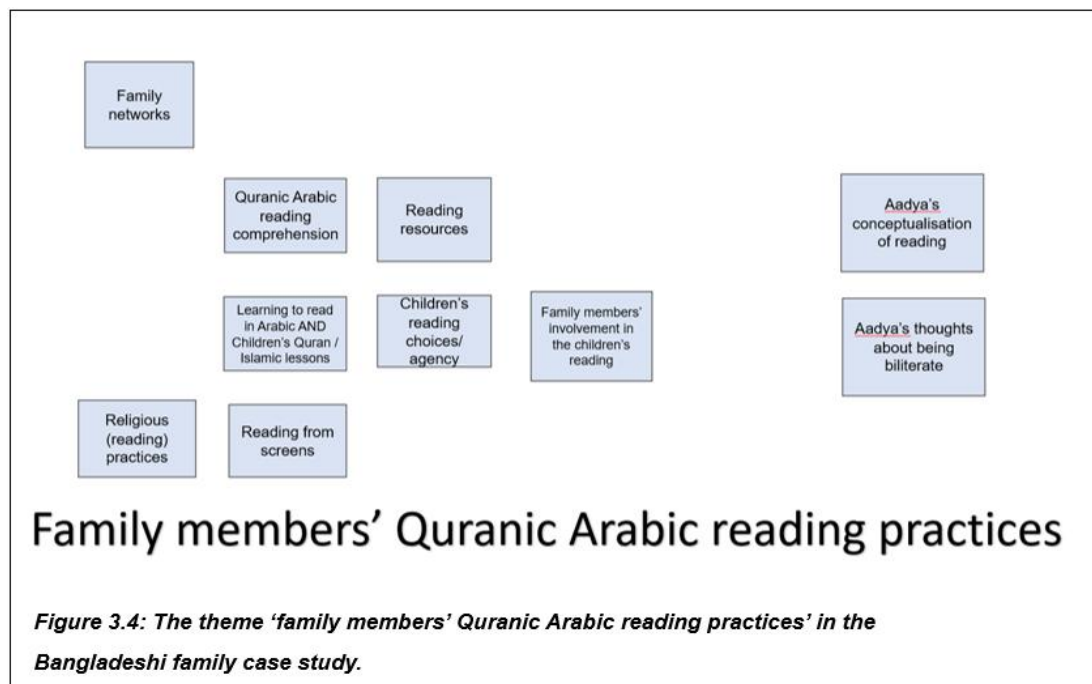
The final stage of thematic coding analysis involved integrating the themes to create a cohesive interpretation of the data, linking the findings to broader theoretical concepts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Robson & McCartan, 2016). I began this process by drafting analytic summaries that outlined the themes identified in each case and their relevance to my research questions. These summaries formed the foundation for the more detailed findings chapters presented in this thesis. Each chapter illustrates the themes with supporting quotes, visual data, and connections to abstract theoretical ideas, allowing conclusions to emerge from the findings in a way that contributes to relevant theoretical frameworks.

As common in qualitative research, the process continued to evolve while writing the findings chapters. For both the Polish and Hasidic families, I ultimately organised the presentation of the findings differently than initially planned: I included a concise 'family context' section with thematic headings to outline the shared themes, and then followed with in-depth individual sections for each participant where relevant themes were explored in detail. This approach, focusing on individual narratives, proved more effective in capturing the unique experiences of each family member and provided a richer analysis of the data. The final structure illustrates how, even with pre-established themes, the qualitative analysis process often adapts in response to the data and the specific dynamics within each case.

Additionally, while I originally planned to conduct a separate systematic data analysis to analyse the documentation of literacy resources that would be documented, the limited number and range of visual data that was eventually received rendered such systematic data analysis futile. Instead, I analysed each photograph, snapshot and webpage individually without a structured technique, but rather in a more flexible manner: I examined each document in detail after conducting the above thematic data analysis for the interview schedules; wrote notes that detailed my observations, thoughts and conclusions about the document and how it may have supported or contrasted the reports received from participants in the interviews; and, finally, incorporated these notes into the findings chapters.

After conducting data analysis for each case study as described above, I conducted a *cross-case analysis* (Yin, 2014). This approach enabled me to compare and contrast the multilingual reading practices and experiences of family members across the three families. By first conducting a vertical, case-specific analysis, and then a horizontal, cross-case analysis, I followed the data analysis strategy used by Barton and Hamilton (1998). This cross-case analysis offered critical insight into the variations in literacy practices across multilingual families, directly informing my response to the third research question. Through this broader analysis, I identified how social, generational, spatial, and temporal factors contribute to shaping and explaining the diversity of literacy practices within and across these families.

During this process, *migration history* repeatedly emerged as a key analytical lens through which to understand families' multilingual literacy practices. Specifically, I sought to develop a language of comparison that could capture how families' social positioning, and migration status and trajectories, shaped their multilingual literacy practices. I developed the terms *open-ended* and *settled* to distinguish between families whose migration to the UK was framed as temporary and potentially reversible, versus those who had firmly established themselves as permanent residents. Alongside this, I identified families' positioning in relation to wider English-speaking society as a critical axis shaping access to and valuation of literacy practices. Here, I used the terms *semi-open* and *closed* to characterise how families oriented themselves towards mainstream society – whether through selective openness or through firm boundary maintenance. These categories did not come from pre-existing typologies; rather, they emerged inductively during data analysis as

a conceptual tool that enabled me to compare and understand the three families more effectively.

I chose to present these categories under the broader framing of *migration history* as the primary organising framework because it offered a stable, structural through-line across the cases. Migration history enabled me to explore how length of time in the UK, intended permanence of stay, and families' social orientation to wider society intersected to shape what literacy practices were possible, encouraged, or marginalised. This framework ultimately became a central organising principle in the analysis presented in the discussion chapter.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study is largely measured by the rigour applied in data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Mason (2006) highlights that the strength of qualitative research lies in its capacity to capture the dynamics of social processes, change, and context, and in its ability to answer 'how' and 'why' questions within these domains. Reflecting this, I have provided a detailed account of my research design, decisions, pilot studies, data collection, and analysis processes in this chapter, including the rationale behind each step. While constant reflection and adaptation may be seen as a threat to validity in fixed, quantitative designs (Robson & McCartan, 2016), these qualities are strengths in flexible, qualitative research, provided they are explicitly documented and well-explained. By adapting my methods throughout the research process, I was able to address potential validity concerns that might arise if initial methods did not fully capture the data needed to answer the research questions accurately (Maxwell, 2013). Moreover, the data collection process was systematic, with careful preparation for each participant encounter and detailed field notes recorded afterward, enhancing the study's trustworthiness. Finally, I aimed to capture participants' reading practices in rich detail, allowing for trustworthy comparisons, conclusions, and theoretical insights. This was facilitated by audio and video recordings, which allowed for precise transcriptions and quotes, as well as visual data collected in two of the case studies.

At this point, I wish to emphasise the steps taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the interviews in particular, given that they were the main data collection method in

this study. Firstly, prior to the main data collection stage, I aspired to refine my interviewing skills, by attending courses and workshops, reading relevant papers, and having critical discussions with my supervisors and colleagues. Secondly, as described above, my interview schedules did not remain static throughout the research process, but rather were constantly analysed, reflected upon, and adapted according to participants' responses and understandings, thus counteracting potential threats to the trustworthiness of the interviews (Maxwell, 2013). Thirdly, I attempted to enhance the trustworthiness of the interview data through the use of data triangulation (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Conducting multiple interviews with the same participants allowed me to test whether similar answers were provided when asking similar questions over time, thus creating a convincing analytical narrative that was based on rich and complex detail (Baker & Edwards, 2012), and, in essence, providing 'multiple measures of the same phenomenon' (Yin, 2014, p.121). Furthermore, conducting interviews with three members in each family allowed me to compare and check their answers against one another, allowing for the data within each family to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin, 2014).

The limited documentation of participants' reading resources and environments may impact the trustworthiness of the findings, as it could result in an incomplete portrayal of their reading practices. However, this limitation might also serve as a strength. In the cases of the Polish and Bangladeshi families, the items that participants chose to share may hold particular significance for them, potentially highlighting the most meaningful reading resources rather than a broad, less impactful selection. Additionally, although limited, the documented reading resources complemented participants' interview reports, enhancing the overall trustworthiness of the findings.

Ethical considerations

There were several important ethical considerations in my research, and I followed the BERA ethical guidelines (2018) throughout. All participants were informed of the purpose and scope of the study through both information sheets and a preliminary conversation, which provided an opportunity for them to ask questions and raise concerns (see Appendix VII for a copy of the information sheet provided to primary-school-aged children who participated in this study). Informed consent was obtained

from all participants before data collection began, with clear communication that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

The research methods employed in this study, namely semi-structured interviews and participants' self-documentation of their reading resources, required participants to share personal information, including their feelings, opinions, experiences, and aspects of their home environments. This posed ethical considerations, as the sharing of such personal information could have caused discomfort for some participants. This risk was potentially heightened by the fact that participants belonged to minority communities, which may have led to a degree of suspicion towards me as a researcher and positioned me as an 'outsider' (Ryan et al., 2011). Such concerns were evident in the case of the Bangladeshi family, where family members chose to keep their camera switched off during our interviews, opting not to show their faces or visually 'invite' me into their home by sharing their reading resources and environment. Similarly, while the Polish family appeared more comfortable sharing their reading resources and environment, it is possible they also harboured some reservations about my role as an 'outsider,' which may have affected the extent of their openness, both visually and in their interviews. The Hasidic family, likewise, may have experienced similar concerns.

To address and minimise these ethical considerations, I began by explaining to participants in our initial conversations that the study's aim was to understand their reading practices and experiences, with no judgement involved. I also made efforts to be respectful and understanding of each family's cultural context, taking time to learn about their customs and norms to help them feel comfortable and at ease with my virtual presence. Additionally, I made the use of visual methods optional from the outset, clearly stating that participants had full control over the amount and type of information they chose to share. Nevertheless, I understood that the participants' feelings of suspicion and discomfort could not be eliminated completely, and respected their decisions throughout the study, whether they decided not to switch on their cameras, or not elaborate on some topics. At no point did I attempt to propel them to share information beyond what they seemed comfortable sharing, thus prioritising their feelings of comfort and safety.

An additional ethical consideration in this research pertained, again, to the families' different cultural contexts, particularly in the case of the Hasidic family and their lack of use of technological devices like smartphones and computers. I respected the family's practices with regard to technology, and accommodated them by conducting our interviews over the phone, and sending them the information sheets and consent forms by post.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how my ethnographic approach informed my research decisions, and guided me in adapting my research focus, questions and data collection tools in light of emergent findings as data collection progressed. I have justified the use of a multiple case-study design, and my data collection methods, for gaining an in-depth understanding of my participants' multilingual literacy practices and experiences. I have also discussed my data analysis techniques, and considered this study's trustworthiness and ethical issues. The next section of this thesis presents the findings from each family case study, beginning with the Polish family.

Chapter 4   Case Study 1: Findings from the Polish Family

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the multilingual literacy practices of the Polish family members I interviewed, focusing on how they navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities through reading practices in Polish and English. I also explore how these practices vary among individuals within the family and intersect with their social context, migration history, and cultural identity.

The findings presented in this chapter take on a dual structure. The first section presents the family context drawn from my cross-family analysis. There, I explore overarching themes related to the family structure and dynamics, as well as the family members' multilingual environment and literacy resources. The second section delves into a more elaborate individual analysis, shedding light on the reading practices, social context and cultural identity narratives of each family member. After the presentation of the findings, the final section of this chapter presents reflections and conclusions drawn from the findings.

Family context

In this section, I establish the family context drawn from my cross-family analysis, and present the patterns observed through this analysis.

Family structure and dynamics

The structure and dynamics of the Polish family that I interviewed for this study present an intriguing case for exploring multilingual literacies, migration histories, and the intersection of language and cultural identity. The family, residing in London, consists of the mother, Nadia, her husband, and their three children: Simon, aged 16; another son aged 14; and Gabriela, aged 8 (see Appendix VIII for a table presenting the family members, their ages, and number and length of interviews I held with each participant). Nadia works as a cleaner, and her husband as a driver. The children all attend English-speaking Catholic schools.

For this project, I conducted interviews with Nadia, Simon, and Gabriela. My plan for this project was to interview one parent and two siblings, one in primary school and another in secondary school. Since my initial contact was with Nadia, she became the selected parent for the interview. Additionally, while Nadia had initially planned for

her 14-year-old son to be the secondary-school-aged child that would be interviewed, she later informed me that he declined to participate in the interview, as he was not comfortable with it. Instead, Simon willingly volunteered to be interviewed in place of his younger brother, and even requested to be interviewed every week over the four-week period, despite my intention to interview the older sibling only twice.

Simon and Gabriela are notably at different stages in their educational journeys, with Simon in Year 12 and Gabriela in Year 3. These educational disparities provide valuable insights into understanding the differences in their multilingual literacy practices and narratives. While Simon's educational journey revolves around academic pursuits and exams, Gabriela's school environment centres more on fun activities, some occasions of reading for pleasure, and playful interactions with friends. This contrast in their school experiences highlights the potential variations in their agency and reading habits, the purposes behind their reading choices and their cultural identity formation.

Multilingual environment and migration history

The family's multilingual environment and relatively recent migration history are deeply interwoven with their Polish heritage and their life in England. The mother, Nadia, who grew up in a small village in Poland, moved to England two decades prior to the time of the study. Her migration followed the completion of her studies and the decision to join her husband, who was already residing in the country. This transition marks a significant shift in the family's linguistic and cultural landscape, as they navigate between their Polish roots and their current life in England.

Nadia reflected on her migration experience:

> 'I come to, to England almost 20 years ago {laughs}. I think so/ we stayed because/ the kids born here, they, they go to school, we want them to finish the school in this country.' (Nadia)

Despite living in an English-speaking society, Nadia and her husband made a deliberate choice to predominantly speak Polish at home and instil Polish literacy skills in their children, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to preserving their linguistic heritage:

'We use the Polish languages at home. We speak Polish together. … Only Polish.' (Nadia)

While the children attend English-speaking Catholic schools, the parents' consistent use of Polish at home has fostered a multilingual and multiliterate environment within the household. The family's reading practices encompass texts in both Polish and English, reflecting their dual socio-cultural positioning.

They also maintain strong connection with the wider Polish diaspora, which plays a central role in their socio-cultural identity. These connections are sustained through various means: within the home, through the preservation of Polish language and reading practices; in the local community, through their active participation in a Polish church, a Polish complementary school, and the Polish Scouts; and abroad, through regular visits to extended family in Poland:

'We go twice a year, on Christmas time and summer time.' (Nadia)

These ongoing connections to the country they migrated from, and where their extended family still lives, add a temporal dimension to the analysis of this case. This family's history, present context, and future aspirations are closely linked to their investment in Polish language and literacy.

In the context of this study, I consider the family's migration history as *open-ended*, since Nadia and her husband maintain strong connections with Poland, and Nadia expressed a clear, if indefinite, intention to return. As she explained:

'In the future, we want to back in Poland, but/ {shrugs} we must wait the kids, about the kids finish the school.' (Nadia)

At the same time, the family maintains a *semi-open* positioning in relation to the wider English-speaking society. The children attend Catholic English schools, and the family is embedded in everyday life in the English-speaking society. Yet, they preserve Polish as the home language, regularly visit Poland, and participate in Polish religious and cultural institutions such as the church, Scouts, and complementary school. This duality enables them to maintain a distinct Polish identity while remaining engaged with the structures of the wider society.

Multilingual resources and digital engagement in the home

The multilingual resources present in the home reflect the family's *semi-open* positioning in relation to wider society while also maintaining the Polish language. During our interviews, I noted a range of reading materials in both Polish and English, including fiction, non-fiction, religious texts, and children's literacy workbooks. This diversity of materials, primarily purchased by Nadia, reflects her commitment to maintaining the family's home language and literacy while also engaging with English, the dominant language of their current societal context.

In Polish, the family members have access to various types of books. One notable type of reading resource includes the Polish Bible and Catholic texts purchased by Nadia, reflecting her commitment to preserving the family's Polish heritage and religious practices. However, there is a noticeable variability in the children's use of these books, with Gabriela being the only child who reads the Bible regularly, as part of a shared reading practice with her mother. Additionally, the family home contains children's Polish literacy workbooks, which Nadia had used in the past to teach her sons Polish literacy and was actively using with Gabriela at the time of this study. The children's Polish literacy workbooks and shared reading practices thus serve specific language and cultural preservation purposes within the family. Furthermore, Simon possesses Polish history books, which he had read for enjoyment in the past, as well as a Polish Scouts handbook which he uses regularly. In English, their collection includes books for leisure and educational purposes. The use of these books, again, varies, with Gabriela discussing some instances of reading for pleasure, while Simon focuses more on books for school purposes.

Beyond physical books, the family's multilingualism extends to digital platforms and media. They engage with Polish and English content on their mobile phones, reflecting the evolving nature of home language maintenance in a technology-driven world and adding another layer to their multilingual and multiliterate repertoire. The family television offers channels in both English and Polish, and their smartphones and laptops provide access to both languages. However, there is a variety in how different family members engage with these digital settings. Nadia predominantly uses her devices to access the Polish church Facebook group, stay updated with Polish news, and watch television in Polish. In contrast, Simon primarily accesses news content in English on his devices. Furthermore, both Simon and Gabriela have

the option to access television channels in both Polish and English, but both expressed their preference for English.

This digital dimension of their language and literacy practices highlights how multilingualism adapts and evolves in the digital age. It also highlights opportunities for reading in multiple languages that were not as easily accessible until recent years.

The entry of Polish reading resources into the family home

The pathways through which Polish reading resources have entered the family home are varied. Nadia is a pivotal figure in the household, and evidently plays a crucial role in providing Polish language resources and teaching her children Polish reading from a young age. Many of the Polish reading resources in the household were purchased in Poland, either by Nadia or by extended family members who gifted them to Simon for his birthdays. Other Polish reading resources entered the family home through the local Polish complementary school, attended by Simon and his brother in the past, and the Polish Scouts' group, where Simon and his brother are still active participants. The participation of Simon and his brother in these settings, along with the family's regular attendance at a Polish church, further demonstrate the family's active engagement with the local Polish community, facilitated by their mother, and constitute significant routes through which Polish reading resources enter the family home. These settings not only help maintain their home language and literacy but also serve as conduits for cultural and religious education, which are integral to their cultural identity development.

An individual analysis of the family members

This section of the chapter explores each family member individually, examining their multilingual language and literacy experiences within the context of the family's social environment and migration history, and connecting these experiences to their socio-cultural identities.

Nadia's narrative

Here, I delve into the different aspects of Nadia's life, where she strives to maintain her cultural and linguistic heritage within her family, while also actively engaging in

religious practices. Nadia's experiences offer a unique lens through which I explore how language maintenance, cultural preservation and identity are navigated from the perspective of a migrant mother leading a multilingual household.

Nadia's approach to reading in the home

Nadia reported that she mainly reads online, accessing the Polish news and information on social activities at her Polish church via the church Facebook group. Her reading is mostly conducted in Polish, whether through books she owns or borrows, or on her mobile phone. She shared that she does not own any English or Polish leisure books, but occasionally borrows Polish novels from her friend.

Nadia does, however, own a copy of the Polish Bible and some Catholic books that are placed on the shelf in the reception room of her house:

> 'I've got the books downstairs like the/ I think so, mainly books, I've got the Catholic books … about the people who are the important in the Catholi- in church. … I've got some, not much, but I've got some books.'

In comparison to her own relatively modest collection of Polish reading resources, Nadia has deliberately prioritised her children's access to a wider range of Polish texts. This reflects her belief that maintaining their home language requires not only oral fluency but also reading and writing skills. Her investment in workbooks and literacy materials suggests that she sees direct teaching as essential to developing their Polish literacy.

Specifically, Nadia spoke fondly of a phonics book that she used to teach Gabriela Polish reading (see Figure 4.1). She explained that she had learnt Polish reading from the same book when she was younger:

> 'At the moment, I start to learn, read the easy book like {makes pretend writing motion in the air}, this book from when I was small, I read, I learn from this book. Do you want to see now? … {shows me the book} This is, like, the Polish book, to start to learn read. And {Nadia opens the book enthusiastically}, and she {refers to Gabriela}, at the moment is easy, because I am, when I was younger, I use at school, this book. This, like, easy for the kids {she laughs}.'

Figure 4.1: Snapshots of the phonics book that Nadia was using to teach Gabriela Polish reading and writing.

Additionally, Nadia reported that there are many Polish children's books in the house, including children's Catholic books (see Figure 4.2):

> N: I've got like small books, I'll show you for the kids {gets up and pulls out a book from a bookshelf next to Gabriela}. Like, the, this is, like, this books, {shows me the book, on the cover there is an illustration of a happy-looking boy standing in front of a church} is everything, like, all we say in the church…

> I: Are these songs, or prayers?

> N: Just prayers. … this is {picks up the book again to show me}, I use at church when was, they were smaller {points at Gabriella}, was smaller, at the moment she know everything.

Figure 4.2: Snapshots of the children's Catholic book that Nadia used in the past to teach her children Catholic prayers and traditions.

The multitude of reading resources that Nadia has acquired over the years indicates her significant investment of time and resources in enhancing her children's Polish

literacy skills and religious knowledge. This underscores the importance that Nadia places on maintaining the Polish language and Catholic religious traditions in her household. However, when discussing her children's reading habits, Nadia revealed that they have no interest in reading for pleasure, whether in English or Polish:

> N: They, they don't want to read.
>
> I: In English or in Polish, or both?
>
> N: Both {laughs}.

She further described their lack of enthusiasm for reading as 'very hard, no, at the moment it's very hard.' When I asked her to clarify what she meant by 'at the moment,' whether she was referring to the Covid-19 context or another factor, she replied:

> 'No, I think so, they play on the Internet, I think that's a problem.'

From Nadia's perspective, her children's preoccupation with technology, such as the internet and computer games, are a negative influence that distracts them from reading, which she considers a positive activity. Despite her efforts to maintain Polish in the household, Nadia reported that she would be content if her children chose to read in English at home, as long as they developed a reading habit:

> I: Is it important for you that your children read in English at home? Or is it more important that they read in Polish?
>
> N: I want to, uh, doesn't matter which one, in English, I want to but they won't, I want them to read, but {shrugs}/ English books and Polish books, as well.
>
> I: So you're happy either way, if they read English or if they read Polish.
>
> N: Yes, I'm happy, doesn't matter which one, I happy or English or Polish.

Nadia's concerns about her children's interaction with digital technology reflect her belief that this engagement interferes with their reading of print-based texts, regardless of whether they are in Polish or English. While she encourages reading in any language, she perceives the internet and technology as a significant distraction from developing a consistent reading habit.

Nadia's perceptions of Polish language maintenance and shift

At the heart of Nadia's efforts to preserve her cultural identity lies the maintenance of the Polish language in her home. Over the years, Nadia has actively participated in her children's Polish reading development, and emphasised the importance of her children being fluent in Polish speaking, reading, and writing:

> 'At home, we always speak Polish, we always speak Polish together, because English they speak in school.'

When asked specifically about her children's reading and writing skills, she confidently stated:

> 'The older ones, they read and write in Polish, very, very, no problem, they read and write, and speak.'

As aforementioned, all of Nadia's children have either attended – or, in Gabriela's case, will attend – a local Polish complementary school. Nadia spoke very positively about this school throughout our interviews, mentioning both its attribution to the children's language maintenance, as well as its adherence to the Polish curriculum, indicating Nadia's strong connection to Poland:

> 'This school, they have the programme, the same like in Poland. … they learn everything the same like the Poland … the Polish school in Poland.'

At the same time, over the years with her older children and now with Gabriela, Nadia has not relied solely on the Polish school for Polish language and heritage maintenance. As noted above, Nadia has used workbooks to practise with her children, and specifically discussed one phonics book that she used to teach Gabriela Polish reading and writing. This book, discussed by Nadia, fulfils two purposes for her: Polish language maintenance in her household, as well as the transmission of tradition and heritage, having used the same book that she had learnt from as a child. Indeed, throughout our interviews, Nadia's role as a mother and caregiver was evident in her active involvement in teaching her children to read and write in Polish. While she mentioned that her husband occasionally reads with Gabriela at bedtime, the responsibility for ensuring language maintenance at home has been taken on mainly by Nadia.

Despite Nadia's efforts to maintain the Polish language in their household, there is evidence of language shift occurring at home and in the local Polish community.

According to Nadia, there are instances when her children speak to each other in English at home. When asked whether she actively asks them to switch to Polish, she said: 'not at the moment, because they older, they older.' Nadia also mentioned that at the Polish complementary school that her sons used to attend, the students used to speak English during breaks:

> I: And do they only talk in Polish in the school, or Polish and English?

> N: {laughs} honestly? They should be speak Polish, but… they have their, after lesson, they have their, like, break, they speak Eng-- everyone speak English. It's Polish school, but everyone speak English {seems amused}.

Furthermore, Nadia acknowledged that while her children possess good oral and literacy skills in Polish, they struggle with understanding higher-level Polish:

> 'I think so they [the children] doesn't understood a lot of Polish, uh, Polish words, because, uh, doesn't really understood the hard sentences, but I think so is the// at the moment they mainly use the English at all the, at school, all day in English school, and, sometimes they at home they speak together in English, sometimes, but not, not often, but I hear some English {laughs}.'

She also recognised that their English reading skills are stronger, stating, 'I think so, for them, it's better, I think so English better, than Polish.' This observation suggests that despite Nadia's commitment to Polish language maintenance, the presence of English in her children's daily lives has, expectedly, had a big impact on their language use, making English a more dominant language in certain aspects of their lives.

In summary, the language maintenance and shift patterns reported by Nadia highlight how multilingualism operates within this family. Nadia's proactive efforts to ensure her children are proficient in Polish reflect her commitment to their cultural heritage. However, she faces challenges in managing language and identity in her family's multilingual environment. Despite her strong efforts to preserve the Polish language and culture, the influence of English in the children's daily lives, both at school and socially, has led to a shift towards greater English proficiency. The family's *semi-open* positioning to wider society, characterised by the children's attendance at English-speaking schools and their engagement with English-speaking

peers, significantly contributes to this language shift. While Nadia encourages Polish at home, she acknowledges the natural progression of her children incorporating more English into their conversations as they grow older. This tension between preserving the Polish language and recognising the influence of the dominant English language in their environment highlights the complexity of maintaining their home language in a multilingual environment. Nadia's flexibility – demonstrated by her acceptance of her children reading in either language and her tolerance of them occasionally switching to English – indicates a pragmatic approach to home language maintenance and her awareness of the need to adapt to changing linguistic circumstances.

Nadia's religious engagement efforts

In addition to promoting Polish language and cultural engagement in the family, Nadia also invests time and effort in engaging her children in religious practices and activities. She mentioned the Bible several times throughout our interviews, reporting that the family owns copies of the Bible designed specifically for children:

> 'I read at home … I got also for the, um, for the kids, Bible, with the, like, pictures.'

Additionally, Nadia reported having a collection of Catholic books displayed in her living room, possibly indicating the importance she attributes to these books. She further shared that she reads the Polish Bible almost daily, both individually and with Gabriela:

> I: When you read the Bible, are there special times in the day or specific days when you read the Bible?

> N: No, we got, read, before, before, before sleeping at the night. … I read also myself and also with my daughter.

However, some of Nadia's religious engagement efforts may be less successful than others. She reported that each family member owns a copy of the Bible in Polish and English, but noted that her sons, Simon and his 14-year-old brother, do not read their copies frequently:

'Oh {laughs}, they got [Bible copies], but I'm not... {laughs} but I think so they read at school a lot because they're going to a Catholic school.'

One pivotal structure that plays a central role in supporting Nadia's Polish identity and religious engagement efforts is the church. Nadia regularly attends a local Polish church for Sunday Mass with her husband and sons and reported to be involved in different activities at the church. For example, she reported that she receives a newsletter from the church every week, and is a member of the church Facebook group, where news about activities at the church are announced. She reported that she attends many of the church social events and activities. The church, in this context, is more than a place of worship; rather, for Nadia and other family members and fellow churchgoers, the church may also constitute a communal sanctuary where the Polish diaspora come together to celebrate their shared heritage. Thus, for Nadia, the church fulfils not only a religious purpose, but also a social one, constituting a setting where she and her family members get together with other Polish families and, in this way, maintain ties with the wider Polish culture and society.

This interaction between religious and cultural identity in Nadia's life emphasises how religious practices can serve as a conduit for preserving cultural heritage. Moreover, the incorporation of religious readings into her daily routine highlights how religion and language have become intertwined in her family context: these religious practices are not isolated; rather, they are integrated into everyday life, shaping Nadia's, and her family members' identities and connections with their heritage and the Polish community.

Nadia's cultural identity and future aspirations

Nadia's interviews indicate a strong and enduring connection to her Polish identity, despite many years of living in England. Throughout our interviews, Nadia repeatedly mentioned her and her husband's plans to return to Poland in the future and her hope that their children will accompany them. In our first interview, she expressed her aspiration to return to Poland:

'I would like to go back to Poland, maybe not now, but in the future.'

Additionally, in our second interview, I asked Nadia why it is important for her that her children speak, read, and write in Polish, to which she replied:

> 'Uh, because, in the future, maybe we, they, they want to live in Poland … in the future we want to back to Poland, me, me and my husband, what about kids I didn't know, maybe they will want to stay here, I don't know {laughs}.'

This *open-ended* migration history may explain Nadia's commitment to maintaining the Polish language at home. She explained that her children 'must' speak Polish in Poland:

> 'When we go into Poland, I, they [her children] must to speak with Polish language, because no one speak English.'

Nadia's strict maintenance of the Polish language in her home is thus tied in with her desire for her children to be able to manage and be independent when they visit – and perhaps even settle in – Poland in the future.

Overall, Nadia's attachment to her Polish identity is palpable, highlighting her dual identity, poised between her present life in England and her Polish heritage. Her tentative language when suggesting she may return to Poland in the future, using 'I would like to' and 'maybe not now,' reflects the uncertainties and complexities inherent in navigating dual identities as a migrant parent, with children who were born in the diaspora and may wish to continue their lives there.

Conclusion

Nadia's narrative offers a glimpse into the dynamics of language maintenance, identity, and literacy from a mother's perspective, within the context of a multilingual family. Her experiences highlight the resilience of her Polish identity, and the vital role that she, as well as structures like the church and religious texts, play in supporting her children's cultural identity and Polish language and literacy skills. Her narrative also sheds light on the challenges and adaptations required to navigate a multilingual world while preserving and transmitting her cultural and linguistic heritage to her children.

Simon's Narrative

The narrative of Simon, the eldest child in the family, provides valuable insights into

the interaction between identity, language, and cultural maintenance. His experiences as a multilingual adolescent residing in London shed light on how younger family members navigate their social and cultural worlds while balancing heritage and belonging.

Simon's multilingual reading practices

Simon has a collection of books that includes English schoolbooks, a Polish Scouts handbook, the Bible, and several non-fiction history books in both Polish and English. During one of our interviews, I noticed a small bookshelf in his bedroom that contained around ten books. When asked about the books he owns, Simon provided the following response:

> S: I have a few Polish books, I think {turns around to look at the small bookshelf behind him}. Yes, I've got a few books, so I've got a Polish Bible, I've got some history books in Polish … I've got one English book there, maybe two or three, and then the rest are all Polish.

> I: What kinds of books are they? Are they fiction books, or more textbooks?

> S: It's the Bible and then, the other ones are history books. So, like, um, 'cause I'm very interested in history and, like, World War Two and stuff, so I've got {points at the books behind him} a few books about that (See Figure 4.3 for one Polish history book that Simon showed).

> I: Are they from the Polish school or did you get them just because you're interested in them?

> S: Uh, so, I bought one, when I was in the museum/ like, last year or something, maybe two years ago, and like, a few I got for my birthdays and then, yeah, like, I've got some Polish books from Polish school, but they are in my brother's room.
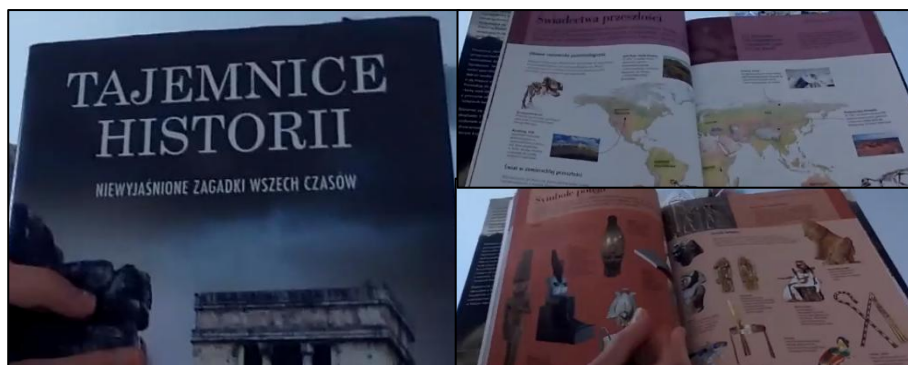
Figure 4.3: Snapshots of a Polish history book that Simon received as a birthday present from family in Poland and sits on his shelf.

Simon reported that he used to enjoy reading his history books, both in English and Polish, but he no longer reads them frequently. He recalled a time when he would thoroughly read an entire book within the first month of owning it:

> 'I had these books for like, a good like, five/ yeah, like five, six maybe years, so like when I first got them like I would read them, I would read all, the entirety of that book, in like the first like month or so and like, whenever I would do something, I would go back to that book 'cause I really find it very interesting … learning back about a topic.'

However, as a Year 12 student focusing on his A-level exams, Simon reported that his academic commitments consume much of his free time and attention, which may explain why he does not engage in reading for pleasure as often as he did when he was younger.

Therefore, in contrast to Simon's enthusiasm when discussing his book reading in the past, when I enquired about his daily reading habits, he responded, 'I mean, I don't really read day-to-day.' On another occasion, when I asked if he could tell me about 'something' he had read the previous day, he could not recall anything specific. Eventually, when I suggested options like homework, he mentioned that he had read the previous day as part of his homework but added:

> 'Reading wise, like, other than the homework, which, I'm not, I didn't mind so much yesterday, I did a bit of physics, but other than that I didn't really, read.'

However, in contrast to his statement that he does not 'really read day-today,' Simon, in another interview, revealed that he reads English 'every single day' primarily for school purposes and exam preparation:

> 'I'll read English every single day, at school, and like, in Polish I do read from time to time, but, like, it's more, like, English is used more commonly.'

He reported that his English reading mainly consists of textbook reading, and that he occasionally reads online for research purposes when required for homework. Moreover, he mentioned that he frequently reads news articles on his phone, primarily in English.

This apparent contradiction between Simon's initial claim that he does not engage in daily reading and his subsequent description of regular, school-related reading suggests that he may not view reading for school or routine purposes as 'real' reading in the same way he regards reading for pleasure. His initial dismissal of daily reading might reflect a specific understanding of reading, where only non-academic or reading for pleasure experiences hold significance in his perception.

In addition to his daily English reading, Simon also engages in Polish reading more often than he had initially reported. As aforementioned, he has approximately ten books in his bedroom, mostly encoding Polish. When asked which book he reads most frequently, he mentioned his Polish Scouts handbook (see Figure 4.4), which he said he reads 'for reference.' He reported that this book provides guidance on various aspects of the Scouts group, including its structure, ranks, and practical information. While he knows most of the content 'by heart,' he still refers to it occasionally:

> 'I use this Scouts handbook basically every single week, well, not every single... 'cause most of this stuff I know by heart, but at times for reference.'
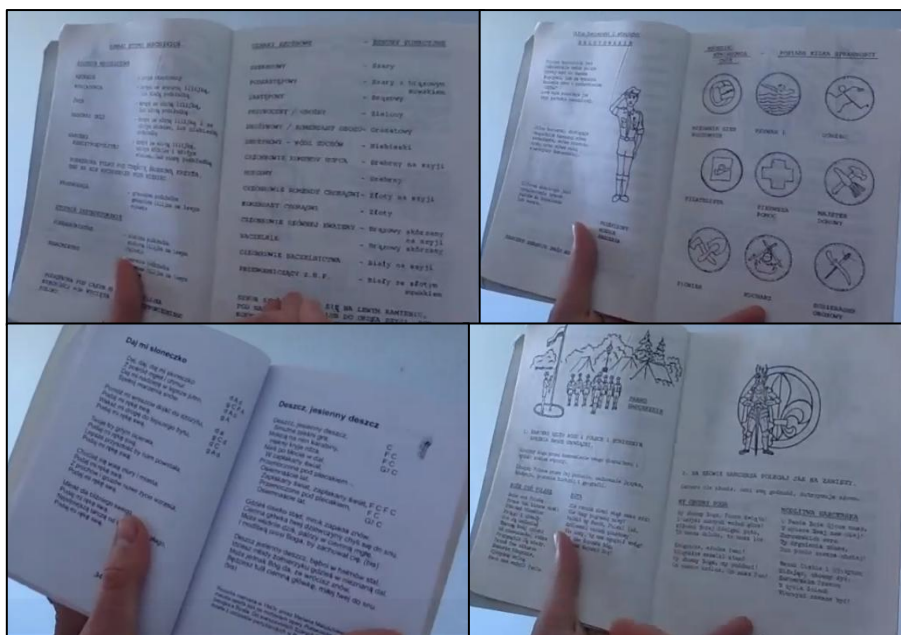
Figure 4.4: Snapshots of Simon's Polish Scouts handbook.

Additionally, Simon mentioned that his phone's default language is set to Polish, and he therefore reads Polish often on his phone:

'I've got my phone that's set to a Polish language so that's when I read, basically, usually, if I Google something it pops up in Polish.'

In summary, Simon engages in both English and Polish reading in various types and genres of reading resources. He owns English and Polish Bibles, is in possession of history books in both languages, and reads online in both English and Polish. However, each language is also exclusively associated with a different domain of life. While English reading is associated with mainstream schooling, Polish reading is associated with domains external to school. Overall, Simon's multilingual reading practices indicate more frequent and elaborate reading practices in his daily life than he initially recognised.

Polish language maintenance and shift in Simon's life

Confirming Nadia's efforts, Simon shared that he finds Polish speaking, reading, and writing to be natural and easy. Despite residing in London his entire life, Simon is fluent in Polish and has reported several times how central this language is to his life, reflecting Nadia's emphasis on the importance of the home language and cultural identity.

For example, he mentioned that, as a child, he was able to speak and read Polish before he could speak or read English. He further reported that his parents used to read to him in Polish when he was younger, and said that, when he began attending school, he faced challenges with English, requiring additional support:

S: As a child, I'm pretty sure, I only read, like, in Polish. Like, when I grew, grew older then, I figure, I read in English, but when I was little it was Polish.

I: Did you learn to read in Polish before you learned to read in English?

S: Yes.

I: How come?

S: Because, my parents, like, we speak in Polish, and like, before I went to school, I, they taught me, and, because I remember, when I was, when I joined school, I, like, struggled with English quite a lot {smiles}.

I: Speaking it, or reading it? Or both?

S: Both, like, both. So, like, I had to get help in primary. … say, if I had a problem, I had one of my Polish friends translate, like, they would translate.

However, Simon acknowledged that he finds English reading easier these days, and that he reads in English every day as part of his studies. Despite the efforts his parents have made to maintain Polish at home, Simon is inevitably exposed to English daily, making him more comfortable reading in English, and associating the practice of reading more with the English language.

Simon also revealed a preference for watching television and films in English. He reported that although he occasionally watches Polish television channels at home, he tends to opt for Netflix on his laptop, where he can access English-language films and programmes:

S: Yes, we have Polish TV downstairs. It's like, news, and like Polish TV programmes, like the entire TV is in Polish.

I: And do you ever watch that?

S: I mean, I watch it, like, not every day but quite often, but like, usually when I watch movies or something like that, I watch it on Netflix on my laptop or

something, but like if I watch movies and it's in Polish and the TV is in Polish as well, so, yeah.

This preference for consuming media in English indicates a greater familiarity and comfort with the English language in the context of entertainment.

Overall, Simon's language preference depends on the specific context in which he is communicating. He stated:

'Usually, it's what feels more, um, what feels easier. Like, let's say, if I'm speaking about a topic I learnt at school, then, um, let's say I learn about, I don't know, atomic physics, or something like that, some random topic, like, for me, because … I learn in English, it's much easier for me to use English, because if I was to use Polish, I'd have to translate that.'

Therefore, for topics learnt at school or discussions involving specialised vocabulary, Simon finds English more natural to use due to his learning experiences. Conversely, this suggests that in situations involving prayer or specialised vocabulary related to activities like Polish Scouts, where he is accustomed to using Polish, Simon would express a preference for Polish.

Supporting structures for Simon's Polish literacy skills and cultural identity

Simon has maintained close links with the wider Polish community through three main domains: the Polish complementary school, the Polish Scouts group, and the Polish church. These surrounding social structures have significantly contributed to the formation of his Polish language skills and cultural identity, and he has seamlessly communicated in Polish in those various settings:

'In church, there's a lot of Polish people I know, that I speak to in Polish as well, and in Scouts, 'cause it's a Polish Scouts group, so I know, like, a lot of people from there, so we speak in Polish as well, I've got a few friends from there, and then, yeah, Polish school I've got one friend that I speak to in Polish.'

Nadia reported that when Simon attended Polish school, he met Polish youth from all over London. There, he learnt not only Polish language skills, but also Polish history and literature as studied in schools in Poland. In one interview, Simon showed me a

book that he received at the end of one academic year at the Polish school, as a reward for good grades and behaviour (see Figure 4.5):

> 'So this is like a book that I learnt about in Polish school … So like, I got this specific book at the end of, um, my year at Polish school, because, like, at the end of the year we have this, like, big ceremony where we get given our grades, and like, if you get high grades you get given like a little gift, and the gift is usually a book, so I got given this, well, I think there's like a little {opens the book} yeah, there's like a little letter here {takes out a red card with the Polish coat of arms and several hand-written sentences in Polish} … it says that I got given this for good grades and good behaviour by my Polish school.'

Figure 4.5: Snapshots of the book and card that Simon received from the Polish school.

Simon also studied for his Polish GCSE and A-level exams in the Polish school. Therefore, the Polish school constitutes an important domain for maintaining and strengthening his connection to the Polish language, community, and culture. It does so through the teaching Polish language and literacy skills, lessons on Polish history and literature, and by providing a setting where Polish youth can come together, practise their Polish language skills and connect with peers who share similar cultural backgrounds. It is interesting to note that, as an end-of-the-year gift to the high-achieving students, the school typically awards books, likely implying high regard for literacy in the school.

The Polish Scouts group, in particular, emerges as a vibrant avenue for Simon to engage with his Polish peers and connect to his Polish heritage. He reported that the group members gather once a week, read patriotic Polish songs and poems, and use their Polish Scouts handbook to complete different tasks and acquire badges. For example, when discussing the Polish Scouts handbook that he uses in the Scouts meetups, he mentioned that it includes several elements related to the Polish culture:

> '{Showing me several pages of his handbook} it's like, the ten, like rules that we follow, so like, the first one for example is like, um, that Scout serves, um, serves God, and Poland, and um, that, yeah, that's the first one, and the second one is basically, like, we don't, like, we don't lie, it's kind of like the Ten Commandments but like for Scouts.'

According to Simon, the group members communicate with each other primarily in Polish, and often use text messages to communicate with one another outside their regular meetings. He reported that the text messages that they send are a mixture of Polish and English. As part of his participation in the Polish Scouts group, which, according to Simon, is sponsored by the Polish embassy, he had gone on an international trip to Canada, where he had met Polish Scouts groups from around the world and communicated with them in Polish:

> 'Every seven years, we have like a world, uh, camp, where every Polish Scout … from a lot of nations around the world, we come and join in this one place, for like a big camp, so in Canada in 2017 we had Scouts from, uh, Poland, UK, Canada, USA, New Zealand, Australia, Ukraine, and I think a few others as well.'

Thus, the Polish Scouts group serves as an important socialisation context for youth like Simon, providing regular opportunities to gather, communicate, and engage with the Polish language and culture. Through activities such as singing patriotic songs and reading their Polish Scouts handbook, they further connect with their Polish identity. Additionally, international trips offer exciting experiences and interactions with Polish youth from different countries, deepening their engagement with Polish culture and society.

Finally, Simon also mentioned the church as a solid structure that he has been involved in, in different capacities over the years, from learning towards and participating in the Holy Communion and Confirmation ceremonies in the Polish language, to having served as a voluntary server in the past, and still attending Sunday Mass every week with his family these days. It is evident that the Polish church has played a significant role in supporting his increasing participation in the Polish Catholic community. While the primary purpose is religious and not centred on language and cultural maintenance, the church setting allows Polish churchgoers to gather, converse in Polish, and maintain connections with the wider Polish community. It is possible that the sense of Polish community fostered by the church is equally important and fulfilling for Simon, alongside the religious aspect.

In fact, all the activities that Simon reported to be involved in outside of his English day school, namely the Polish scouts, Polish school, and the Polish church, are associated with his Polish heritage. As a teenager who was born and raised in England by Polish parents, Simon's exploration and navigation of his Polish culture and identity are at the core of his narrative. His involvement in these activities reflects the resilience of his Polish identity amidst his navigation of life in London. The above structures serve as supporting structures in Simon's life, instrumental in sustaining his Polish identity.

When asked whether he felt it was important to be able to read in Polish, Simon expressed the strength of his Polish identity and the significance of preserving the language:

> 'Yes, yes. Because I am Polish as well, I mean, I am Polish, so ... it's really important to have that extra language, so … you don't let it die within you, so like, let's say, if one day I want to go to Poland, then, like, I could communicate with people in Polish, because, if I forget that language, then … it's gonna be kind of sad.'

Therefore, in addition to the role that Nadia has taken in maintaining Polish and facilitating access to external literacy spaces, Simon has, over time, taken on an agentic role in maintaining his own Polish identity and language maintenance. Simon's active participation in Polish cultural activities over the years, like the

church, Polish Scouts and the Polish school, emphasises his commitment to preserving his Polish heritage.

'It kind of is, like, two separate worlds': Navigating language and identity in a multilingual world

Throughout our interviews, Simon reported his ability to adeptly navigate between Polish and English, reflecting his adaptability in multilingual contexts. While he converses in Polish with friends who share the language, he seamlessly switches to English when discussing school-related topics learnt in English:

> 'To my friends I usually speak in Polish, like, if they are Polish, of course … to my parents I speak in Polish, and well, usually, it's what feels more, um, what feels easier. Like, let's say, if I'm speaking about a topic I learnt at school, then, um, let's say I learn about, I don't know, atomic physics, or something like that, some random topic, like, for me, because I learn, I learn in English, it's much easier for me to use English, because if I was to use Polish, I'd have to translate that.'

Additionally, with his fellow Polish-speaking friends, he often switches from English to Polish and back, depending on the context and the topic of conversation:

> 'When we meet on the Scouts meetups, we speak Polish, we write Polish, but like, um, at times, like, when we organise stuff, like, we would speak English or, like, text in English or Polish, like, it just depends, like, we can change like that.'

Simon's adeptness at navigating between Polish and English in various social contexts demonstrates his conscious effort to preserve his Polish language skills while being an active participant in English society and the English education system.

According to Simon, his mainstream English school teachers have always been aware that he speaks and reads in Polish at home. However, he noted that they rarely enquire about his language and literacy experiences outside of school, and he has never felt the need to share these experiences with them. While Simon acknowledged that 'it would be nice' if his teachers showed interest in his experiences, he does not expect them to do so:

> 'I think with, like, teachers already have quite a bit on their minds, like, they have to teach, they have so much other things happening, that like, it's [enquiring about his Polish experiences out of school] not a necessary thing, I would say, for like a teacher to do, but like, it would be nice.'

Simon added, 'I feel like it kind of is, like, two separate worlds'. This statement reflects the division of English and Polish in his life. Most aspects of his life are strongly associated with one of these languages, such as English dominating at school and Polish being prevalent at home, the Polish Scouts and church.

Due to Simon's immersion in these 'two worlds,' he is exposed to different perspectives that broaden his horizons. A notable example is when he learnt about Napoleon from contrasting English and Polish viewpoints. Simon recalled:

> 'I remember, in, like, Year 8 or something like that, in English school we learnt about Napoleon, and at Polish school we also learnt about Napoleon, and like, because those are two points of view, because, like, from the English, they were fighting against Napoleon, but the Polish were with Napoleon, so … I got two points of view, where some people were, like, "oh yeah, Napoleon was a really bad person," but with Polish school, we learned that he did some good, but then he did some bad, so … we had like, debates and stuff like that … it was quite interesting, like, learning about, um, that specific topic, from two points of view.'

Thus, while Simon perceives his experiences in English and Polish as separate, there are instances where these worlds converge, providing him with a unique opportunity to enrich his knowledge in ways that may not be available to speakers and readers of one language.

Conclusion

Simon's narrative highlights his experiences navigating a multilingual world, balancing his Polish heritage with his English educational and social environment. Through active participation in Polish community structures like the Polish school, Scouts, and church, Simon has maintained his Polish language and literacy skills, shaping his cultural identity. Despite the dominant presence of English in his daily life, Simon's commitment to preserving his Polish heritage and language reflects a conscious effort and agency to sustain his Polish cultural identity.

Gabriela's Narrative

Gabriela, the youngest child in the family, offers a unique perspective on the relationship between language development, cultural preservation, and identity formation in a multilingual environment. Her experiences, shaped by growing up in a now more established English-speaking setting, contrast with those of her older brother, Simon, highlighting the role of age and generational differences within multilingual families.

Gabriela's multilingual literacy practices

Gabriela has several bookshelves in her bedroom, which are stacked with dozens of books, the majority of which she reported to be in English (see Figure 4.6). Among the books are fictional English books, English encyclopaedias, a Polish Bible, and some Polish fiction books that were handed down to her by her brothers from their early years in the Polish school. During two different interviews, I spoke with Gabriela and Nadia – who sat with Gabriela for parts of our interviews – about the books on her bookshelves.

Figure 4.6: Snapshots of the bookshelves in Gabriela's bedroom, including mainly English books and some Polish books.

During our second interview, I asked Gabriela and Nadia about the languages that the books in Gabriela's bedroom encode:

> I: Wow! Are all of these your books, Gabriela?
>
> Gabriela: =Yes.
>
> Nadia: =Yes.
>
> I: Are they in English and in Polish?
>
> N: English and Polish.
>
> G: It's more in English.
>
> I: Yes. Are these schoolbooks or also books that you read at home?
>
> N: No, this is not schoolbooks. That we read, we read at home.
>
> I: Are they mainly fiction books?
>
> N: Yes, some are fiction, yes.
>
> G: {examines the shelves} most are fiction.
>
> …
>
> I: And when do you read them?
>
> N: Before sleep {laughs}.
>
> I: You read them before you go to sleep?
>
> G: {nods} yeah.

In our third interview, I asked Gabriela about the number of Polish books she has in her room and how often she reads them:

> I: How many books do you think you have in Polish over there?
>
> G: Not really a lot.
>
> …
>
> I: Do you read them a lot? Any of these books?
>
> G: {shakes her head}.

Like Simon, when I asked Gabriela about her reading habits, she reported that she does not read often and further mentioned that she finds reading 'boring.' On one occasion, when I asked if she could recall 'something' she had read the previous day, and mentioned that reading text messages and computer games may also be considered 'reading,' she replied that she had not read anything in the previous day.

Despite Gabriela's reports of limited reading time, she reported more instances of reading for pleasure than her mother and brother. She told me that she reads for pleasure during designated reading time at school, and when I enquired about her

favourite book, she replied that she does not have a favourite book, but mentioned the *Horrible Histories* as a series of books that she enjoys reading in class:

> 'I really don't have a favourite book, but, the *Horrible Histories* are kind of fun 'cause there are a lot of *Horrible Histories* in my class … and the *Horrible Histories* are seriously, like, real histories, and we sometimes watch it and we sometimes read it. … sometimes when we have reading time, I read it 'cause I have it on my table.'

Additionally, Gabriela reported that she occasionally reads one of her favourite books, *The Witches* by Roald Dahl, when she is at home.

During another interview, I asked Gabriela how she selects her books for reading time at school:

> I: How do you choose what you want to read during reading time?
> G: I look for some of, um, history books, and I look for some longer, so I don't need to change the, the book next day.
> I: Mmm, so then you go back to that book every time?
> G: Yeah.
> I: Yes, I understand. Yeah. Can you tell me about one thing that you read this past week at reading time?
> G: I read the *Horrible Histories*, the Second World War.

This implies that Gabriela's reading, even when undertaken for pleasure during her free time at home, is influenced by the reading practices and resources that she encounters at school. When she reads independently, she always reads in English, and often selects books that are available in her classroom library. Other than that, her choice of reading materials is practical, favouring longer books during reading time at school to avoid frequently looking for new books to read.

Finally, it is interesting to note that, despite Gabriela's many Polish reading experiences described later in the chapter, she continually only referred to her English reading experiences when asked generally about her reading. It appears that she perceives 'reading' as 'reading for pleasure' and associates it with reading books in English for enjoyment. While she finds her Polish reading experiences enjoyable,

she does not consider them as 'reading' and only discussed them when specifically asked about her Polish reading.

Gabriela's Polish language and literacy development through shared reading practices

Gabriela, while speaking and understanding Polish fluently, was in the process of learning to read and write the language at the time of the study, through regular shared reading practices with her mother, Nadia. Nadia has made significant efforts in Polish teaching with Gabriela, who, at the time of this study, was unable to attend what would be her first year of Polish school due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Shared reading sessions, particularly with the Polish Bible at bedtime, are a central part of Nadia's efforts to promote and maintain Gabriela's Polish language and literacy skills. While Bible reading at bedtime is an important practice for Nadia to share with Gabriela, Gabriela reported to initiate this practice herself:

> I: Who decides to read it? Does your mum tell you that she wants to read it or do you ask to read it?

> G: I ask.

Gabriela indeed appeared fond of the practice of reading the Bible with her mother, mentioning the illustrations in both her English and Polish Bibles as particularly exciting.

In addition to reading the Polish Bible and using a book that Nadia herself had learnt reading from as a child, Gabriela and her mother often engage in bedtime reading sessions with books used in the past by her brothers in the Polish school. They reported that some of these books feature exercises to enhance Polish literacy skills (see Figure 4.7 for snapshots of one Polish literacy book that they showed me), while others include fictional stories like Cinderella and a poem book:

> N: … yesterday, we, we read, uh, the story from the Polish school. Like Cinderella, and, uh.

> G: {pulls another book from the shelf and hands it to her mother. Nadia shows me the book, it seems to be designated for beginners (says '1 klasy'), and it

includes a picture of a severe-looking woman reprimanding a young child working by a fireplace}.

N: This is like, the, this is from, from the school. … this is after boys {laughs}.

I: And what's inside?

…

N: … this is some, this is some poem. Polish poem. {Nadia flips through the pages and shows them to me. They include short stories, colourful pictures, and a colouring page}. This is, like, short story.

I: And you read that yesterday?

N: Yes, not every night, one poem and one story. And this is, like, the exercise {shows a page with text and pictures of different modes of transportation}, this is, like, poem in Polish and after this poem there is some exercise for this poem.

…

I: Gabriela, do you understand all of these words?

G: {smiles and nods}.

Figure 4.7: Snapshots of a book from the Polish school that Nadia was using to teach Gabriela Polish reading.

These shared reading sessions have a significant role in nurturing Gabriela's Polish language proficiency and reinforcing her cultural and religious connections. Through these interactions, which encompass both religious and other Polish texts, Gabriela's

exposure to Polish literature and religious materials during her formative years establishes a foundational framework for her cultural identity development. Nadia enthusiastically encourages and guides these sessions, investing considerable time, thought, and effort into transmitting Polish language skills to Gabriela and shaping her cultural identity. Furthermore, Nadia stated that she plans to continue supporting Gabriela's Polish reading even when she attends Polish school in the future, since she believes the limited school hours are insufficient to meet her high expectations:

> 'I think I must help her at home because, uh, there's only, uh, five hours per week in … Polish school.' (Nadia)

The shared reading practices reported in this section fulfil both Nadia's desire to maintain Polish in the household, and Gabriela's enjoyment of spending quality time with her mother while also appreciating the content of the books that they read together.

It is important to note that these shared reading practices appear to be the first stage in Gabriela's cultural identity formation, with practices rooted at home and in family time. According to Nadia, Gabriela's age at the time of the study prevented her from joining her family for Sunday Mass and from joining the Polish Scouts. In the future, according to Nadia, Gabriela's home-based shared reading practices will be replaced by or complemented with supporting structures outside of the family home, including the church, Polish scouts, and Polish school. By nurturing these early shared reading practices at home, Gabriela's cultural roots are firmly established, setting the stage for her increasing participation in the broader Polish community as she continues to grow.

Navigating language and identity in a multilingual environment

Gabriela's journey, navigating language and identity in a multilingual environment, is marked by her exposure to both Polish and English. While English dominates her school life, bookshelves and reading for pleasure, her proficiency in Polish is nurtured daily through oral communication at home with her parents and brothers, as well as being exposed to Polish television and reading various Polish texts with her mother.

When asked about the importance of reading in Polish, Gabriela offered a practical perspective, stating, ''cause, if you go to Polish school, you will need to read.' Gabriela's response reflects a more straightforward and practical viewpoint compared to Simon's, which could be attributed to her younger age and limited exposure to the Polish context. Additionally, as the youngest child in the family, Gabriela may not feel as strongly about her Polish identity as Simon does, especially considering her family's greater English fluency and engagement with wider society at the time of the study, in comparison to when Simon was her age.

Like Simon, Gabriela expressed that reading in English is significantly easier for her. During the study, Gabriela was in the early stages of learning to read Polish, and shared that when her mother is unavailable, her father attempts to read with her in Polish. Gabriela stated that she finds this challenging:

> I: Your mum told me that sometimes your dad reads with you as well, right?
> G: Yeah.
> I: Is that the same as reading with your mum or is it different?
> G: Different.
> I: Why?
> G: 'cause I need to read and my dad listens.
> I: And you read in Polish?
> G: Yeah {opens her eyes widely and dramatically, to indicate that that is challenging}.
> I: Ooh, is that difficult?
> G: {determinedly} yes.

Additionally, when asked about watching television, Gabriela immediately replied: 'I prefer watching in English.'

Gabriela's responses suggest a general preference for speaking, listening to, and reading in English. Unlike Simon, Gabriela did not mention any specific domains in which she feels more comfortable with Polish. This preference for English could be attributed to Gabriela being the youngest child in the household and therefore more immersed in the English culture. Additionally, she likely has more opportunities to interact in English with her older siblings and parents, whereas her older brothers may not have had the same opportunities when they were growing up, since their

parents were new migrants at the time. However, it is important to note that Gabriela's language preferences may evolve as she grows older and becomes more involved in settings like the Polish school, Polish Scouts, and the Polish church, where she will become increasingly immersed in the Polish language and culture.

While the development of Gabriela's Polish skills is clearly very important for Nadia, Nadia still provides Gabriela with a degree of flexibility when it comes to choosing between Polish and English. Nadia's comment that her children do not read enough in her opinion, and her desire that they read more in either language, is reflected in Gabriela's bookshelves, which includes mainly English books. When reading the Bible with her mother, Gabriela also reported that Naida encouraged her to use both her English and Polish copies of the Bible. Gabriela first read a segment in English, and Nadia then read the same segment in Polish:

> G: I read it with my mum. First I read it, the, the Holy Spirit, and then my mum read it in Polish. … Like, my mum read the Polish one and I read the English one.
>
> I: Oh, at the same time?
>
> G: Like, I, I did the English one first then my mum did the Polish one.
>
> I: And did you read it out loud or to yourself?
>
> G: I read it out loud to my mum.
>
> I: And your mum read the exact same thing later on in Polish?
>
> G: Yeah.

Nadia's flexibility in allowing Gabriela to choose between Polish and English for her reading materials is a noteworthy aspect of her approach to family literacy. While it is evident that Nadia places great importance on the development of Gabriela's Polish language skills and cultural identity, she also recognises the need for flexibility in nurturing her daughter's literacy habits. This flexibility stems from a pragmatic perspective: Nadia acknowledges that her children may not read as much as she would like them to, and she prioritises the act of reading itself, regardless of the language. The use of both English and Polish versions of the Bible in their shared reading sessions exemplifies this flexibility, as well as a subtle scaffolding of Polish

through English. This approach takes into account Gabriela's natural inclination towards English, which is the predominant language of her environment, particularly her school. Nadia's understanding of Gabriela's preferred reading language reflects a balance between fostering Polish cultural, religious and linguistic ties and recognising the practicalities of raising a child in a multilingual environment.

For Gabriela, as a daughter of migrant parents living in London, this flexibility likely offers a sense of agency and autonomy in her reading choices. It allows her to explore literature in the language she feels most comfortable with, which, in turn, can enhance her overall reading experience. Additionally, this approach aligns with the idea of creating a positive and enjoyable reading environment, irrespective of the language, which can contribute to Gabriela's enthusiasm for reading and her overall literacy development. While the emphasis on maintaining Polish language skills is crucial for cultural preservation, Nadia's flexibility acknowledges the complex linguistic and cultural dynamics that her daughter faces in a multilingual environment.

Conclusion

Gabriela's early exposure to both Polish and English, fostered primarily through school, shared reading practices and family interactions, highlights the relationship between language and literacy development and cultural identity. As the youngest child in the family, Gabriela is growing up in a more established English-speaking environment. Through shared reading practices and Nadia's flexible yet determined approach, Gabriela is nurtured in both Polish and English, allowing her to navigate her multilingual world with growing proficiency and confidence. While her preference currently leans towards English, the foundational work being done at home sets the stage for a deeper connection to her Polish heritage as she matures and engages more with the Polish context.

Reflections and conclusions

This chapter has examined the multilingual literacy practices and experiences of the Polish family in this study, and how these intersect with their social context, migration history, and cultural identity. By examining the family's collective and individual narratives, I have uncovered how English and Polish serve different roles in their lives, shaping their identities and experiences living in a multilingual world.

In this reflection and conclusions section, I critically examine three themes that have emerged from my analysis of this case study: navigating multilingualism and literacy in the family; socio-cultural identity and community connections; and children's agency in navigating multilingual literacies and identity. Following these themes, I provide a section situating the family within social, spatial, temporal, and generational dimensions, before presenting a conclusion for this chapter. The exploration of these aspects provides a deeper understanding of the experiences and complexities involved in maintaining a home language and culture while living in England and interacting with the wider English-speaking society.

Navigating multilingualism and literacy in the family

The family's Polish and English language use is distinctly divided, with Polish primarily facilitating cultural and religious identity as well as a practical tool for family and community communication, while English serves educational and leisure purposes and a practical tool for communication with the wider society.

Polish is the language of the home, rich in socio-cultural significance and religious practices. Nadia prioritises maintaining Polish through consistent engagement with religious texts, such as the Polish Bible and Catholic literature, and has acquired various reading resources and shared various Polish reading practices with her children over the years. This conscious effort emphasises her commitment to creating a Polish-rich environment at home and ensuring her children retain strong ties to their Polish roots and religious traditions, despite the dominant English-speaking context outside.

Conversely, English dominates the children's academic, media consumption and leisure reading practices. Simon's narrative highlights the predominance of English in his academic pursuits. His engagement with English textbooks and online resources for his A-level studies contrasts with his occasional reading of Polish texts and the Scouts handbook, which are more aligned with his interests outside of school. Gabriela, too, illustrates this divide as she leans towards reading English books for pleasure and English television watching, reflecting the influence of her school environment on her reading habits.

This separation in language and literacy use demonstrates the family's structured and purposeful approach to multilingualism. They use Polish for religious and cultural

purposes, as well as family communication, and English for educational and leisure activities, with each language occupying distinct domains in the family's daily life. This strategic approach aligns with their *open-ended* migration history and *semi-open* societal positioning, enabling them to maintain a strong connection to their Polish heritage while navigating life within an English-speaking society.

Their *open-ended* migration history, representing Nadia and her husband's intention to possibly return to Poland in the future, deeply influences this approach to multilingualism. Maintaining Polish at home ensures that the children remain proficient in the language and connected to their heritage, which would ease any potential transition back to Poland. This readiness to return to Poland, as well as the desire to preserve her cultural values, is a driving force behind Nadia's efforts to instil Polish literacy in her children. Her commitment is evident in her regular Polish reading sessions with Gabriela, the provision of Polish literacy resources for her children over the years, as well as her dedication to involving them in Polish settings such as the Polish church, Polish scouts, and the Polish school. These reading practices and language maintenance efforts have been integral to the children's cultural identity development. By prioritising Polish literacy, she ensures that her children remain connected to their heritage, even as they navigate their multilingual world.

Simultaneously, the family's *semi-open* positioning in relation to the wider English context allows them to function effectively within the English-speaking society. The children attend English-speaking schools, and their daily exposure to English ensures they are well-integrated into society and can fully participate in the educational system. By maintaining clear boundaries between Polish and English across different domains – home and community versus wider society – the family manages their multilingual environment in a structured and purposeful way.

Socio-cultural identity and community connections

Socio-cultural identity development within the family is profoundly influenced by their multilingual environment and robust community connections, mostly within external domains. The family's connections to the Polish community in London provides a supportive framework for maintaining their cultural identity. The family members maintain close ties with the Polish community through active participation in various

settings, such as the Polish school, church, Scouts, and regular visits to Poland. These engagements offer a sense of continuity and belonging, reinforcing their Polish identity amidst the backdrop of their English-speaking surroundings.

Simon's involvement in the Polish Scouts and his participation in Polish cultural activities exemplify how cultural identity is maintained and expressed through supportive structures. His engagement with the Polish school, which mirrors the curriculum in Poland, and his role in the Scouts highlight the importance of these institutions in sustaining his cultural heritage. These experiences enable Simon to navigate his socio-cultural identity, balancing his Polish heritage with his daily life in England. The Scouts, in particular, serve as a critical domain for shaping identity and belonging, where patriotic songs, poems, and the Polish language are integral to their activities, thereby solidifying his connection to Polish culture.

Gabriela's socio-cultural identity is still in its formative stages, influenced by her early exposure to both languages and cultures. Her early Polish reading experiences with her mother lay the foundation for her cultural development, ensuring that she retains a connection to her Polish heritage even as she grows up within an English-speaking society.

Children's agency in navigating multilingual literacies and identities

Although the family maintains a structured approach to language and literacy, with Polish and English used across distinct domains of family, culture, education, and leisure, the following analysis focuses more closely on how the children themselves navigate their multilingual literacy worlds – highlighting their agency in shaping language use, reading preferences, and cultural identity.

Simon demonstrates a strong sense of agency in his language and literacy use. His active participation in Polish social, cultural and religious life reflects his commitment to maintaining his Polish heritage. His engagement with Polish texts, often pursued independently, contrasts with his school-based English reading and highlights how he allocates different literacy practices to distinct domains of life. Simon chooses which language to use based on context, audience, and purpose, illustrating a reflective and strategic approach to navigating his multilingual environment.

Gabriela also displays clear agency in her everyday decisions about language and literacy. She gravitates toward English in her media and pleasure reading, shaped by her school environment and peers, but she also actively participates in Polish reading sessions with her mother. While her socio-cultural identity is still developing, she is already making intentional decisions that reflect her engagement with both languages across different contexts.

Importantly, Nadia's supportive and open approach to language and literacy creates the conditions for her children's agency to flourish. By maintaining an environment where both Polish and English are valued and made accessible, she enables Simon and Gabriela to exercise choice, negotiate identity, and engage with literacy practices that are meaningful to them. Together, Simon and Gabriela's experiences show how multilingual literacy practices are not only structured by parental decisions and migration histories, but also largely shaped by children's own investments, preferences, and everyday choices.

Situating the family within social, temporal, spatial and generational aspects

Situating the family's experiences within social, temporal, spatial and generational contexts, provides a deeper understanding of their multilingual literacy practices and cultural identity.

Temporally, the family's relatively recent and *open-ended* migration history, characterised by Nadia and her husband's intention to return to Poland in the future, significantly influence their language and cultural practices. This temporal dimension shapes Nadia's commitment to preserving Polish, ensuring her children are versed in the language for their frequent visits to Poland as well as a potential move to Poland in the future.

Socially, their *semi-open* positioning to wider society, characterised by attending English-speaking schools while maintaining Polish at home, reflects a balanced approach. This approach allows the family to navigate dual cultural identities, adapting to their current environment while preserving their cultural and linguistic heritage. This duality is evident in their strategic and distinct use of language, where Polish is reserved for familial, cultural and religious contexts, and English is used for educational and leisure purposes.

Spatially, the availability of local Polish settings, such as the Polish church, Polish school, and Polish Scouts, provides essential support for maintaining their cultural heritage. These spaces offer a sense of community and belonging, allowing the family to engage regularly with their cultural roots. Additionally, their home environment, rich with Polish language resources and practices, further reinforces their cultural and linguistic heritage, providing a stable foundation for their Polish language and literacy skills.

The generational differences between Nadia and her children further highlight the varying impacts of multilingualism within the family. Nadia, as a first-generation migrant, is deeply rooted in Polish culture and language. Her experiences growing up in Poland and migrating to England as an adult shape her strong commitment to maintaining Polish language and cultural practices within the home. This generational perspective drives her dedication to ensuring her children are proficient in Polish and connected to their heritage.

In contrast, Simon and Gabriela, born and raised in England, navigate a more complex multilingual environment. They are immersed in an English-speaking society while maintaining ties to their Polish heritage through their mother's efforts and the attendance of supportive structures in the community. At the same time, their different experiences illustrate how their multilingual literacy practices and identity formation are influenced by their age differences, developmental stages, and their evolving family context. Simon, as the eldest, has a more established sense of Polish identity, reinforced by his involvement in cultural activities. Gabriela, being younger, is still in the early stages of her cultural identity formation, with her experiences heavily influenced by her school environment and shared reading practices at home.

These generational differences illustrate how the family's multilingual literacy practices are shaped by both Nadia's first-generation-migrant perspective and her children's experiences growing up in a multilingual environment. Nadia's commitment to cultural preservation and her flexible approach to language maintenance provide a foundation for Simon and Gabriela to develop their multilingual and cultural identities, each in their unique ways.

Conclusion

The Polish family's multilingual literacy practices and narratives reveal the ways they navigate their socio-cultural world and identities through language and literacy. Their relatively recent and *open-ended* migration history, marked by the possibility of returning to Poland, significantly influence their language and cultural practices. Nadia's unwavering commitment to maintaining Polish language and cultural traditions within the home, alongside the children's engagement in English-dominated educational settings, exemplifies their *semi-open* positioning in relation to the wider English society. The family's strategic use of Polish for cultural and religious purposes and English for educational and leisure activities demonstrates how they balance heritage preservation with engagement with the wider society. The differences in Simon's and Gabriela's reading practices, choices, and experiences are shaped by their ages, social contexts, and developmental stages, highlight their agency in navigating their multilingual world. The family's experiences emphasise the importance of home and community settings, connections, and strategies in sustaining their home language and cultural identity, offering valuable insights into the ways the family members navigate their multilingual environment.

Chapter 5   Case Study 2: Findings from the Bangladeshi Family

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the multilingual literacy practices of the Bangladeshi family members that I interviewed for this project, focusing on how they navigate their socio-cultural worlds through reading practices in English and Quranic Arabic, while communicating in English and Bengali. I explore how these practices intersect with their social context, migration history, and cultural identity, shedding light on the ways in which language and literacy shape their experiences and sense of belonging.

In contrast to the diverse data observed in the analysis of the Polish family described in the previous chapter, interviews with the Bangladeshi family yielded responses that were more consistent across family members, with greater convergence on similar reading practices and shared aspects of identity. As a consequence, I have made the family the unit of analysis, rather than the individuals within it. I begin this chapter by providing a short family context section with essential background information about the family, its structure, migration history and range of languages. Three main sections are then organised according to the languages and literacies that the family members practise: English, Quranic Arabic, and Bengali. I have decided to divide the chapter in this way, since all three languages and literacies are practised almost entirely separately, in different manners and for different purposes.

By presenting the data in a three-section structure, this chapter aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the Bangladeshi family's reading practices and narratives, with the overarching goal of gaining insights into how family members navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities through multilingual literacy practices. After presenting the three sections described above, the final section of this chapter involves critical reflections and conclusions drawn from the data.

Family context

The Bangladeshi family, residing in London, consists of the mother, Noor, her husband, and their three children: Mahia (aged 13), Aadya (aged 11), and a younger

boy aged 6 (see Appendix IX for a table presenting the family members, their ages, and number and length of interviews I held with each participant).

Noor and her husband were both born and raised in Bangladesh. Noor migrated to England 18 years prior to the study, with her parents and sister. While her sister continues to reside in England, Noor's parents divide their time between England and Bangladesh. Similarly, her husband moved to England during his youth with his parents and six siblings, all of whom currently reside in close proximity to the family in London. Noor met her husband in England and married him three years after her migration to the country. All three of their children were born and raised in England, and attend mainstream English schools. Noor works as a nursery practitioner, and her husband as a driver.

Over four weeks, I held weekly informal Zoom interviews with Aadya, as well as two interviews with Mahia (in the first and second weeks), and two interviews with Noor (in the first and fourth weeks). The research plan was to interview one parent and two siblings in each family, one in primary school and another in secondary school. My initial contact was with Noor's husband, who referred me to her. After a phone conversation in which she agreed to participate with her daughters, Noor became the primary parent participant. Mahia is the only secondary-school-aged child in the family and was therefore interviewed, and Noor suggested that I interview Aadya as the primary-school-aged child, explaining that she is very expressive, and suggesting that her younger son was not mature enough to participate.

The interviews were conducted over Zoom, but the family members preferred to keep their camera off. Therefore, aside from three photos that Aadya sent to my phone via WhatsApp on one occasion, I do not have visual data from this family. While in one sense this is a limitation in my exploration of the family's practices, the interviews alone yielded a comprehensive account of the family members' multilingual literacy practice, experiences, and narratives. This is the data that I present in this chapter.

The three main languages practised in the household are English, Bengali, and Quranic Arabic. Bengali is a primary language of oral communication between Noor, her husband, and their children; however, the children predominantly respond in English, while maintaining a fluent understanding of Bengali. Furthermore, the family

practises Islam, with all members engaging in Quranic Arabic reading and daily prayers. Previously, Mahia and Aadya attended Quranic Arabic and Islamic lessons at a mosque, where they partook in Saturday school activities and interacted with Muslim peers from various areas of London. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, these in-person lessons were discontinued. Consequently, all three children transitioned to daily online private lessons, that focus on Quranic Arabic reading as well as learning the principles and regulations of Islam.

During our interviews, the family members reported that they own a variety of reading materials in both Quranic Arabic and English. These materials include English schoolbooks and fiction books, and Quran copies written in Arabic. Technological devices like iPads and smartphones are used for both English and Quranic Arabic reading. These resources came from various sources. Some of the English-language resources were provided by the children's schools, while others were purchased locally. Noor explained that many religious materials, written either in English or Quranic Arabic, were brought from Bangladesh or bought from Islamic shops in the UK, which offer Qurans, prayer guides, and books on religious teachings and prophet stories. The children also received prophet storybooks from their Islamic school teachers.

Overall, this family is firmly rooted in life in England, with no plans of returning to Bangladesh, and Noor stated that she expects her children to attend university and work in England in the future:

> 'I really wish my children to go there, to study at uni and to finish their studying and go to the next level. It's good for them as well.' (Noor)

In the context of this study, this makes their migration history *settled*. They exhibit a *semi-open* positioning towards the broader English-speaking society, exemplified by their children's attendance at mainstream English schools and Noor and her husband's jobs which involve encountering members of the wider population daily. English serves as a crucial tool for their participation in various facets of life in the country. However, amidst their engagement with English language and culture, the family remains deeply connected to their religious identity and community. Quran reading holds significant importance in their daily lives, serving as a cornerstone of their spiritual practice and heritage. This highlights their unique experience, as they

navigate the intersections of language, culture, and religion within the context of their *settled* migration history and *semi-open* positioning to wider society.

Family English reading practices: Exploring reading for school, enjoyment, and learning

This first section explores the family members' English reading practices at home, covering primarily reading done for school, for pleasure, and for knowledge-building. Through these practices, distinct patterns emerge in their literacy engagement and approaches to knowledge acquisition. This section is organised around two main themes: English reading practices, opportunities, and conceptualisations in the home, and the shared reading practices that have taken place and supported these activities within the family over time.

English reading practices, opportunities, and conceptualisations in the home

The examination of the family members' English reading practices, opportunities, and conceptualisations, provides insights into the family's engagement with different forms of literature and their perspectives on the value and meaning of reading.

Noor stated that she rarely reads books, and prefers reading newspapers, especially on her phone:

> 'If I read, I read sometimes newspaper… it's easier to read in the phone {laughs}, my phone, instead of newspaper I can just download the app, so I do read in my phone.'

When asked if she reads both English and Bengali on her phone, she clarified that she only reads English on her phone.

When discussing her children's reading habits, Noor immediately mentioned their screen-based reading, followed by her description of how school-related reading, particularly in English, is an integral part of their daily routines. She explained that her children are required to read books daily for school, and this practice involves her directly:

> 'They read on the telly and the iPad, and every day they have to read a book because it's compulsory at school. My little one, I had to read with him at least

ten minutes, and my older one they have to do as well so we can sign, to prove they read.'

When asked about the content her children read on their iPads, Noor mentioned that they engage in stories, games, and occasionally read the news. I then asked her whether everything they read on their iPads is in English, to which she said:

'Yes, English, because they can't read any other language/ apart from Arabic.'

In our first interview, when asked about specific times her children read, she primarily focused on reading for school, stating:

'Yeah, before bed they have to do it ... My little one, he has to do with me, because he's only six, and the older children they're already teenagers, they can do by themselves. But as long as I notice they're reading, I can tell that they're reading and I can sign it … for school.'

She then elaborated on her son's reading, discussing both his English and Arabic reading learning experiences. She explained the support she provides to help him keep up:

'To be honest, he doesn't like none of this, I have to like push him to do it ... I have to sit with him and make sure he's reading it, either, both of them, like English or Arabic … Every day … I have to create some time with him, for reading.'

When asked why she reads with him in English daily, Noor clarified that although it is not mandated by the school, she takes the initiative to prevent him from 'falling behind':

'So that he doesn't fall behind, yeah. No, the school, they don't really ask, but if he gets homework, he really wants to finish it on time. He knows if he doesn't finish it, he's gonna get in trouble … he's gonna start Year 2 in September, so I have to make sure he's doing well … he used to get [books] from school, but at the moment he got a holiday, so they took all the books from him, so I just got some at home, I got it for him so he's just reading them.'

Noor's proactive approach to sourcing reading materials for her son during holidays demonstrates her commitment to promoting consistent English literacy development and academic achievement.

Beyond reading with her son and her children's screen-based reading, Noor mentioned the presence of physical English reading materials in the house, including fiction and non-fiction books, schoolbooks, as well as her own workbooks related to her role as a nursery practitioner. She stores her children's books in a cupboard under the stairs, which is easily accessible to everyone:

> 'I've got under my stairs … my husband built a cupboard so I put all the books in there, it's like a little cupboard so it's easier to open, everyone can get in there, my children and me, so I put books in there.'

Noor acknowledged that her younger children rarely read for pleasure, while her eldest child, Mahia, reads for pleasure more often. Noor expressed her desire for her children to read more frequently, stated that she believes technology acts as a distraction from reading for her children, and emphasised the importance of reading for knowledge and learning:

> 'I wish they can read more … I really encourage them to read more and more, yeah. They are reading, but, you know, as a mother, I think, still, I wish they would read more {laughs}. Because at the moment, because of … technology, they use more, and they read less, really, but we always tell our children to read more because it's knowledge, they can learn different stuff.'

Noor's emphasis on the importance of reading for learning and gaining knowledge, indicates that for her, the benefits of English reading lie in its practical use as well as in fostering knowledge and academic success. While she does not impose additional reading requirements beyond what is compulsory for school, she strongly believes in the value of reading to support her children's knowledge and academic achievements. Her efforts to ensure her children's reading progresses during both school and holiday periods reflect her commitment to their success and adaptation within their English-speaking educational environment.

Mahia's accounts of her reading habits indicate her particular interest in reading within the family. Her own accounts of her reading habits confirm her mother's earlier

description: she enjoys studying and reading even when it is not required by school. When asked about her reading, Mahia initially only mentioned English reading, particularly reading books and the news, indicating that she associates the practice of reading primarily with the English language. She mentioned:

> 'I like reading news on my tablet, 'cause it sometimes just pops up and I like going through it, and I like reading, like, fictional books, uh, like Harry Potter and stuff.'

When I asked whether her reading is undertaken by her own choice or for school purposes, she stressed that reading is her choice:

> 'Uh, I choose to read, because we're not like, we don't have to read at school, it's like, a choice, if you want to do it at home then you can.'

However, when asked about her reading the previous day, Mahia only mentioned reading text messages that she had received from friends. Given that this interview occurred at the beginning of the summer holiday period, it is challenging to ascertain the extent to which book reading holds importance for her during this time. It remains unclear whether Mahia might primarily engage in book reading during the school year and takes a break from it during the holidays.

In contrast to Mahia, who reads frequently for pleasure, Aadya expressed enjoyment of reading but mentioned that she does not do it as often, saying, 'I do enjoy reading but I don't do it, like, very often.' Once again, this is in line with Noor's reports on her children's different reading preferences.

Like Mahia, Aadya's conceptualisation of reading is closely associated with the English language and the act of reading for pleasure:

> I: When you hear the word 'reading,' when I talk to you about reading, what do you think about? What image pops in your head?

> A: Um so, most of the time it's somewhere like cosy or something and it's always like with a book and like something like that or like a library, maybe.

> I: And what language do you think about, when you think about reading?

> A: Mostly English, when I think about reading.

When asked about the importance of reading in English, she suggested that English reading serves the purpose of acquiring knowledge that can have practical applications:

> 'I think it's important to read in English because then, um, we sort of like gain knowledge from reading and then we can also, like, um, if we know how to read in English then it's more helpful because, like, in other things we can use that.'

Aadya's perspective on the importance of reading in English aligns closely with her mother Noor's view of English reading as a valuable tool for acquiring practical and academic knowledge. This shared outlook between mother and daughter highlights their mutual understanding of the instrumental value of English reading, a theme that will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

In three separate interviews, when asked if she could tell me about 'something' she had read recently, Aadya consistently reported reading from screens:

> 'I read just like a text message on, like, Sunday, 'cause that's when I was talking to my friend, and that's basically it.' (Interview 2)

> 'I did read, like, when I go into Google there's like news and stuff so sometimes I do read that, um, yeah.' (Interview 3)

> 'I think I read some of the news, like I did read some things. I think also a few days ago I read *Captain Underpants*, the book, like the comic book...' (Interview 4)

Aadya's report that she had read Captain Underpants in our fourth interview was an exception, in that, for the first time, she reported reading a book for pleasure, in addition to reading from a screen. When I asked what she liked most about this book, she explained:

> A: I like how it's like funny and it's kind of like childish and easy to read and understand, and it's got like fun drawings, yeah like really easy to understand.

> I: So what made you decide to read it a few days ago?

> A: I just, just felt like it, I guess.

Considering that our interviews took place during the summer holiday period, I asked Aadya about her preference for screen-based reading and whether she might read more frequently during the school year. In reply, Aadya linked book reading to doing schoolwork:

> 'I read more when I have school … it's either like homework, or sometimes I just, like, prefer reading when there's school around, because I know I have to get, like, these things done, to remember things and like understand stuff for work and stuff...'

Aadya's frequent reference to reading text messages and news snippets on her phone during the summer holiday suggests a pattern of consuming bite-sized information rather than delving into longer texts. This aligns with her perception of reading primarily in the context of schoolwork and knowledge acquisition, indicating a pragmatic approach that prioritises practicality over reading for pleasure. However, although Aadya reported that she primarily reads for school purposes, she also mentioned occasionally enjoying fiction books, particularly in the fantasy genre. She explained that she accesses these books through her school library, where she can borrow books of her choice:

> A: Yeah, I prefer fiction books.
>
> I: Are there books that you take from school? Or do you mainly read books that you bought and have at home?
>
> A: We have books at home, but also our school provides us with books, so we can take one home every, I think, Tuesday, and we give it back the next coming Tuesday.
>
> I: Do you get to choose the books?
>
> A: Yeah, we get to choose the books, 'cause we have a library at school.

On a different occasion, I asked Aadya where she accesses her books, and she mentioned her school library again, as well as the cupboard under the stairs which was mentioned by Noor:

'They're library books from school … but I do have a small cupboard in our house where we keep all our workbooks and books and reading books and stuff like that.'

After this interview, Aadya sent me a photograph of the contents of this cupboard (see Figure 5.1) and then elaborated on it in our following interview:

'So these are all the books and where we keep them, we sort of have like storge room for all our books and we keep them all stacked up so you can go through them and pick which one you want … these are just English.'

Figure 5.1: A photograph of the cupboard where the children's English books are stored

The books seen in Figure 5.1 comprise a mixture of thicker 'chapter books' and thinner volumes typically found in primary school, apparently catering to the diverse reading levels and preferences of the children in the household. Indeed, Aadya clarified that the cupboard contains a collection of books, primarily fictional, and further mentioned that the cupboard is primarily accessed by her and her siblings:

I: Yeah, so what would you say there's more of? Would you say it's more textbooks and schoolbooks or more, kind of, just books for fun, like fiction books and stuff like that?

A: More books for fiction and reading and, like, just enjoyment.

I: Do you go there often, to pick out books?

A: Yeah I do go there, once in a while.

I: Is it everyone's, yours and your siblings' and also your parents'?

A: It's mostly me and my siblings. 'Cause my mum has a separate place where she keeps her, all her, either, workbooks and stuff so she doesn't really use that.

Aadya's remarks regarding the reading resources stored in the cupboard under the stairs in her house yield several notable conclusions. Firstly, the presence of a separate storage space for her mother's workbooks implies that the cupboard is primarily designated for the children's reading resources. Secondly, the cupboard serves as a central location for books the children might enjoy, with Aadya and her siblings having easy access to select materials. Its convenient location and the organised stacking of books within highlight its accessibility, facilitating easy browsing and selection. In essence, the cupboard emerges as an integral part of the home literacy environment, reflecting the family's emphasis on English reading and providing a practical arrangement for exploring an array of reading resources and opportunities. At the same time, without visibility into the specific titles and genres represented in the collection, it is challenging to assess the breadth of reading opportunities provided. Additionally, while the convenient location and organisation of the cupboard suggest accessibility, Aadya mentioned to only browse it 'once in a while,' prompting a consideration of whether the prominence of screen-based reading might overshadow engagement with physical texts, as suggested by Noor.

Overall, the family's English reading practices, opportunities, and conceptualisations in the home reflect their recognition of English reading as a significant aspect of both enjoyment and knowledge acquisition. Although they reported not often engaging in reading for pleasure (with the exception of Mahia), Noor, Mahia, and Aadya nonetheless value English reading for its dual role in providing enjoyment as well as knowledge. Their literacy practices incorporate both traditional print and screen-based resources, suggesting a blended view of reading as both educational and enjoyable. This emphasis on English reading may relate to their *settled* migration status and *semi-open* positioning toward wider society, aligning with Noor's aspiration for her children to achieve fluency in English and succeed academically –

facilitating their adaptation, engagement, and progress within England's cultural and linguistic environment.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that while Mahia and Aadya are close in age, they express distinct perspectives on reading that reflect their individual interests. Although only two years apart, Mahia shows a stronger inclination toward reading for pleasure, often choosing fictional books and news articles even outside of school requirements. Aadya, meanwhile, enjoys reading but engages with it less frequently, associating it more with school tasks or shorter texts. These differences highlight how each sister approaches reading uniquely, influenced not just by family attitudes, age, or school stage, but by personal interests and motivations.

Shared reading practices

All three family members reported engaging in shared reading practices in the home.

Noor mentioned various instances of shared reading involving different family members. Firstly, she discussed shared reading instances involving her and her children. One instance she highlighted is her daily reading sessions with her son, which help ensure his reading progresses as expected at school. This links again to the strong emphasis Noor places on the role that reading in English plays in progressing successfully at school and becoming more knowledgeable. Additionally, she used to read English fiction books with her daughters when they were younger. Noor emphasised the important role that this attention and quality time with her children has played in their shared reading practices, stating:

> 'When [Aadya] was younger, she used to read every day with me and ... I was just giving time to her, so she used to read with me and then she was, yeah, she was good.'

Secondly, Noor discussed past occasions when her sister used to read with Aadya:

> 'Sometimes my sister, before she got married, she used to come here and live with us, like, for some time, when she got holidays, she used to read books with her.'

Although her sister's availability has been limited since becoming a mother herself, Noor said that she still manages to find the time to read and engage with Noor's children, emphasising her dedication and appreciation for them:

> 'At the moment she has a baby boy … so when she comes she's with her boy so she's, like, very busy with her baby. But she still manages to get some time to read with them, and watch TV programme with them … she really creates time for them, she really appreciates them, yeah.'

These shared reading experiences with extended family highlight how the family fosters a supportive environment for literacy and learning. This also points to the close relationship the family has with extended relatives, a theme discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Mahia also reported shared reading instances, particularly with her siblings:

> 'With my little brother, I help him read his books that he gets from school, and I sometimes listen to my sister read.'

Thus, it appears that Mahia's role as the 'big sister' translates into her assumption of an educational role regarding her siblings' reading.

Shared reading instances were also mentioned by Aadya throughout our interviews. From her perspective, that was how her parents taught her how to read in both Arabic and English:

> 'When I was younger, yeah, my parents were trying teaching me how to read and learn Arabic and English as well, I was taught from like my parents and stuff.'

She also recalled her parents and her aunt reading to her in English, and how much she had enjoyed these moments:

> 'When I was younger, I think my parents did like to do that... in English, like, tell me stories or read stories, stuff like that. My auntie loved doing that to me when I was younger, we would lay in bed and she would read me a story or tell me a story … it was really fun.'

Finally, when asked about shared reading in the present day, Aadya mentioned occasional reading with her parents, stating, 'most of the time it's by myself but

sometimes I read with my parents.' Unlike Mahia, Aadya did not report reading with her siblings. This may reflect her less frequent reading habits compared to Mahia, as well as her younger age, which means she is not taking on the role of the 'eldest sister' in guiding or supporting her brother's reading like Mahia.

Overall, the shared reading practices within the family indicate the value placed on reading. It is also clear that the nurturing of English literacy skills plays a key part in the family literacy practices. It is important to note that the large majority of the shared reading practices reported by the family members have been undertaken using English reading materials.

Conclusion

Overall, the family's English reading practices reveal the roles that English literacy plays in their household, encompassing academic support, knowledge acquisition and opportunities for enjoyment. Noor's prioritisation of school-related reading reflects her commitment to English literacy as a foundation for her children's knowledge and academic success, a priority influenced by her and her husband's intention for their children to remain, attend university, and establish careers in England. Meanwhile, the distinct preferences and practices of Mahia and Aadya further highlight individual pathways in developing literacy, where reading is not only a school requirement but also a source of enjoyment and learning. While their practices differ in emphasis, there is broad convergence between family members in their conceptualisation of reading as a valuable and purposeful activity – one that supports both academic success and personal growth. Together, these practices reveal the family's engagement with English literacy within their multilingual environment, aligning educational objectives with personal interests and future aspirations.

Quranic Arabic reading and religious identity

Quranic Arabic reading occupies a unique place in this family's literacy practices, reflecting a deeply integrated aspect of their religious and spiritual life. In this section, I examine how the children's Quranic Arabic learning experiences and religious reading practices contribute to their religious identity. I then consider the interactions between English and Quranic Arabic in their daily lives, highlighting how these two literacies coexist and occasionally overlap. Together, these practices provide insights

into how the family's Quran and religious reading practices support their routines, interactions, and sense of identity.

Quranic Arabic learning experiences

The learning of Quranic Arabic holds an important place in the children's religious and educational journey.

Noor reported that her children used to attend mosque lessons where they learnt to read the Quran and practise Islamic teachings. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they switched instead to attending daily private lessons online:

> 'My children used to go to mosque to read the Quran, to learn the Quran, and because of the pandemic everything is online, so they're doing it online, every single day after, uh, they do five o'clock, every child they're doing half an hour, so for supper they finish at half six.'

When asked about these lessons, Noor mentioned that they encompass learning to read Arabic and understanding the rules and regulations of Islam:

> '[They] read it [the Quran], and sometimes they do/ you know, the rules and regulations about the religion and stuff like that, they learn it from, you know, their teacher, 'cause, you know, they know more than us, they're experienced and we're learning from them, my children are learning from them.'

Noor explained that her children's Quranic Arabic teacher lives abroad. When I enquired about the reason she approached this specific teacher, Noor mentioned seeking recommendations from other parents in the Muslim community. She stated:

> 'I asked some of the parents, and they said he's really good ... so I just tried for like one or two weeks, and then I saw they're really improving and they're doing good, so I just keep them with him.'

This comment made by Noor regarding reaching out to other Muslim parents, was the only instance in our interviews when she mentioned being in contact with the local Muslim community. Noor explained that women and girls do not typically attend the mosque. Instead, the close community bonds Noor mentioned are those that she and her husband maintain with their extended family members in London – some live a short walking distance from their house.

Noor explained that since the children have daily Quran lessons, there is no need for her to remind them to read the Quran. She mentioned that they are bound by the time of their lessons and attend them even when they are not at home:

> 'They know that's their lesson time, I don't need to tell them, like "organise your lesson," they know already, even though they're going somewhere they know their lesson and they just take it off, the computer and they just read it.'

Noor expects her children to engage in independent reading of the Quran upon completion of their daily lessons. She reported that Mahia reads the Quran independently without being asked:

> N: I think, Mahia, she's gonna finish [her daily private lessons] soon, and, even though she's gonna finish it, but, she's not gonna read with the teacher but she is gonna read by herself … like we're doing at the moment, like whenever we create some times, we can read every day or every other day, or maybe once a week, they, they're not gonna like, leave reading, they have to read, so, they know that. Even Mahia, she, whenever she gets time she reads.
>
> I: So you don't have to tell her? She knows it herself?
>
> N: Yeah, she knows, I don't have to tell her, yeah.

It is clear from the interviews with Noor that reading the Quran regularly is an important part of Islamic religious practice.

Transitioning to Mahia, Mahia shared that she started attending lessons in the mosque when she was five years old. Initially, she attended a local mosque but later transferred to a more central mosque, before switching to online tutoring:

> M: I've been doing these lessons since I was, like, five. We used to go to our local mosque then we changed to one that's in, like, [name of area omitted], and then we changed, 'cause like, lockdown and stuff happened, we, like, changed to, like, online, so, yeah.
>
> I: So why did you change from the local one to the one in [name of area omitted]?

M: Um, because, like, we thought it'd be better and stuff, 'cause we get, as well as, like, learning how to read the Quran and learning all the rules, we get to learn, like, the history of Islam and stuff like that, so, it was better.

In Mahia's narrative, her representation of learning Quranic Arabic suggests a well-rounded approach that goes beyond Quranic literacy learning. She emphasised not only the technical aspects of Quranic reading but also the broader educational experience encompassing the history of Islam. This highlights the intertwining of religious education with cultural and historical understanding, indicating a more holistic approach to learning within the family's religious practices.

From Mahia's description, the second, more centrally located mosque functioned as a type of complementary school, providing structured, classroom-like sessions for learning. She mentioned:

'It was kind of, like, basically, like a school, basically, so you would have your levels, and then you'd just switch to, like, classrooms, so, like, when the bell rings you go to your next class, and then there's lunch, then the next classes, so around, like, in the class, there's around, like, twenty people, or like, fifteen people.'

In addition to mentioning the mosque's wide variety of lessons, Mahia also expressed her enjoyment of the social aspect of the lessons:

'I liked it, it's like, cool, I got to, like, meet friends and, actually (…) is kind of nice.'

It is worth noting the agency displayed by Mahia when discussing the decision to change mosques. Her comment, 'we thought it'd be better,' indicates that, despite her young age, she considered the decision as a collective one involving her and her family, rather than solely her parents. She thus represents herself as an active participant in her family's decision-making process on this issue.

Aadya began learning Arabic around the age of three or four when she first attended mosque lessons. She recalled attending the lessons with her sister and cousins and expressed how enjoyable it was for them to attend together:

'We went to the mosque lessons, I went with my cousins and stuff, we really really enjoyed going all together. We found it fun.'

These narratives shared by Noor, Mahia, and Aadya shed light not only on their Quranic Arabic learning experiences but also on the significant social and familial dimensions intertwined with their encounters with Quranic literacy. Noor's proactive approach to seeking recommendations from other Muslim parents reflects a sense of community reliance and support within the wider Muslim network. Furthermore, Mahia's description of her mosque lessons resembling a school environment, complete with structured classes and social interactions, highlights the communal learning atmosphere fostered within mosque settings. Similarly, Aadya's fond memories of attending mosque lessons with her cousins emphasise the familial bond that was enhanced through the shared learning of Quranic Arabic. Overall, these narratives illustrate how Quranic Arabic learning extends beyond individual literacy learning to encompass communal support, social interaction, and familial bonding within the context of religious education.

Aadya reported that she primarily uses her tablet for accessing Arabic reading materials rather than reading in English. When asked about her tablet usage, she clarified:

'I don't really read like, English, on my tablet, most of the time it's just Arabic, especially now because, um, we can't like see a teacher … we've been doing our lessons over, online, so I do read online when I need to practise … We do our lessons over Skype, so our teacher just sends us pages that we have to practise … we get pages to read and I usually read them on my tablet.'

Before our final interview, Aadya sent me three photographs of reading resources. One of the photographs was a screenshot of a Quran page (see Figure 5.2), which she explained that she had read during one of her recent private lessons. When I asked Aadya if she could describe what was in this photo, she said:

'Yeah, that is a page from the Quran, also from my Arabic lesson, and we sort of practise that. We don't memorise them, but we just practise reading them.'

Figure 5.2: A screenshot of a Quran page that Aadya read in her lesson.

I then sought to explore what Aadya's lesson in the previous day looked like, and she provided insights into the structure of her daily private lessons. She reported that they typically involve revising the previous lesson's Quran portion, reading a new portion, and discussing any difficulties or the meaning of the text. Additionally, she reads *surahs* (Quran chapters) or *duas* (prayers/blessings) related to various situations. Aadya explained:

> 'So, we read our lesson, like the lesson that we practised before. Then we practise a new lesson and we talk about that lesson and what we struggled with, what we need help with, or what the lesson was about, then we either read our *surahs*, which is like, you know {I nod}, and then, or we do like a *dua*, which is like, what we do, like, if we want to say before we eat, or when we enter the house, or before we go to bed and stuff like that.'

From the family members' recollections and reports of learning to read Quranic Arabic, I go on in the next section to discuss the family members' daily Quranic Arabic reading practices and experiences.

Quranic Arabic reading practices and experiences in the home

When asked to describe her family at the beginning of our first interview, Noor said: 'we are a Muslim family.' She then highlighted the practice of reading the Quran in Quranic Arabic as an integral part of their religious beliefs and identity. She stated:

> 'As part of our religion, we have to read Quran, so Quran is in Arabic, so we have to read, my children, my three children can read Quran, and I do as well.'

When asked whether she reads the Quran with her family, Noor mentioned that she occasionally listens to her children's reading but does not need to be extensively involved, due to their daily Quran lessons. She explained:

> 'I read by myself, they read by- sometimes I sit with them and they read by themselves, every single day they do about ten, fifteen minutes, they revise, which they have to do it for their lessons anyway, so it's good for them to then revise on their own, so they can prepare for the next day, for their lesson.'

Noor's emphasis on the family's Muslim identity and the practice of reading the Quran in Quranic Arabic highlights the central role of religious obligations within the household. The emphasis on individual responsibility for Quranic reading aligns with Islamic teachings, where the Quran holds immense significance as the central religious text. While the frequency of Quranic reading may vary among individuals and communities, there is a general expectation for Muslims to engage with the Quran regularly, with daily recitation during prayer forming a fundamental aspect of religious practice for many. This obligation stems from the Quran's role as a source of guidance, wisdom, and spiritual nourishment, with believers encouraged to seek knowledge and deepen their understanding of its message (Sardar, 2011). By attributing equal importance to her own Quranic reading alongside her children's, Noor reinforces the notion that Quranic Arabic reading is a shared responsibility among all family members, irrespective of age or gender. This sense of collective obligation towards Quranic literacy highlights the significance of Quranic Arabic reading practices within the family's religious identity.

Noor emphasised that each family member possesses their own copy of the Quran, and they keep their religious books in a special place separate from their English books:

> 'We don't mix Quran and daily reading books, we put them separately. Quran in my room, in my cupboard, and my daughters, in their cupboard, you know. We put it on the top of the shelf, there is one shelf, so we put the Quran in there.'

Noor elaborated that their religious resources were sourced from multiple places. Some were brought from Bangladesh, while others were purchased from Islamic shops in the UK, which she noted carry a wide variety of materials:

> 'Some of them from Bangladesh, that I brought with me, and some of them we bought in this country, because it's available everywhere, like, Islamic shops, like my religion stuff, if we go there we can find my Quran, my religion books- not only Quran, there is like different books as well, like … how to pray properly … how to learn about religion.'

She further explained that the children's previous Islamic school teacher had also given them prophet storybooks:

> 'Children used to go, like, in Islamic school, they got, from there, their teacher gave them, like, prophet books, about the prophet stories.'

Noor then mentioned that she and her children occasionally read these stories, as well as the Quran, using an iPad or physical books:

> 'Sometimes I tell them the story and they, they read on iPad, the story, and sometimes they read the book … I've got in my phone, even in my phone I downloaded my Quran so I can read it when I'm free. My children, when they're free they can do it in their iPads as well.'

This suggests that for Noor, the sacredness of the Quran lies not in the physical format of the text but in its content and recitation. The use of digital devices reflects a flexible approach to accessing religious texts, aligning with her broader emphasis on maintaining religious practices in practical and accessible ways.

Noor mentioned that although the family members can all decode Arabic, their understanding of the language is limited. To overcome this, they often research the meaning of the stories online or seek direct English translations, either online or in the books:

'It's really hard to understand, but … in, some of them [Quran copies] are like English translation, so we read that so we can understand … sometimes if I look for the translation, if I want to know the meaning of the, what I'm reading, so I just look for it, otherwise I don't understand, I just read it.'

However, Noor emphasised that they do not typically read the translation, but rather, most of the time they simply 'read in Arabic': 'Sometimes we read the translation but most of the time we read in Arabic.' This aligns with the religious Muslim obligation to read the original Quranic text, deeming the understanding of the text not as significant as the act of reciting it in its original language, even if that language is not part of the linguistic repertoire of the reader.

Although understanding Arabic while reading the Quran is not a religious requirement, Noor still recognises its value and uses the resources she has at hand to help her. When she attended Quranic Arabic lessons as a child in Bangladesh, the focus was primarily on decoding rather than understanding. In contrast, her children's lessons involve learning the meaning of the stories that they read and the reasoning for their Quran reading practice. Noor reported to appreciate this aspect of their studies, contrasting with her own, more limited, experience of learning the Quran:

I: Did you learn in a similar way to how your children learn now? Did you also have private lessons?

N: No, yeah private lessons but it's different now, because nowadays … they're learning a different way, more meaningful … We used to just learn language … we just knew we have to do it, but now my children, they understand why they have to do it, why they're learning it, what the meaning, because sometimes they're searching it, Google, in YouTube they … search for the meaning and everything, but I used to didn't do it.

The change to the ways in which Noor's children learn Quranic Arabic, and the focus on understanding the meaning of the text as well as reading it, is made possible by the transformative impact of modern technology and digital resources. These resources open up new ways for multilingual children to learn their home languages and literacies. In this case, through tools like Google and YouTube, as well as their daily private lessons on Skype, this family can search for translations and explore

the significance of the Quranic text. Noor sees this as providing a more meaningful engagement with the text and expanding their language and literacy skills.

Noor mentioned that her husband does not read the Quran daily due to time constraints. However, all family members practise the 'compulsory' act of praying five times a day, which involves reciting certain *suras* (Quran chapters) from memory. Noor clarified:

> 'In prayers it comes automatically, we have to like, we read, we memorise some *suras* … from Quran as well. So we read it, so basically we don't need to, like, open the book and read it every day … Quran is not compulsory, if you read it it's really good for you, but praying is compulsory, we have to do it.'

In line with her report that reading the Quran is not compulsory, and regarding the duration of Quran reading, Noor stated that it varies based on availability and the reader's inclination:

> 'It just depends how much you want to read … But you don't need to read like the whole thing in one day, it just depends, when you feel good you can read like two or three pages.'

Noor's comments indicate that, while clearly a very important practice, she attributes a degree of flexibility to Quran reading. When I asked Noor what the practice of reading the Quran means to her, she reported:

> 'Feels good from inside, yeah, I feel good when I read it … because when I don't read it I feel like … sometimes I feel guilty, "oh, I couldn't read the Quran today, I didn't get time to read my Quran today," but when I read it I feel really good.'

For Noor, Quran reading evokes a strong sense of personal fulfilment and inner peace, contrasted by feelings of guilt on days she is unable to read. This reflects her deep, personal connection to the practice, illustrating its intrinsic value in her spiritual life and identity. Although it is not compulsory on a daily basis, the children's daily private lessons, alongside Noor's expectation that they continue reading beyond formal lessons, highlight the importance she and her husband place on this practice as a key part of their religious identity.

When I first asked Mahia about her reading habits, she primarily spoke about her English reading. However, when I inquired further about other types of reading, she added that she also reads the Quran, and explained that she has the autonomy to decide the duration of her Quran reading sessions:

> I: How do you choose which part of the Quran you want to read each time?

> M: Um, we read from the start, um, then we carry on to the end, so, basically where we leave our bookmark, we carry on from there.

> I: And then do you choose how long your reading is going to be? Like, whether it is going to be one verse or a few pages?

> M: Yeah

When asked if her family members join her in Quran reading or listen to her read, Mahia mentioned that her mother occasionally listens: 'When I read Quran, like, sometimes my mum's there listening to me as well.' This alignment between Mahia's and Noor's accounts of Quran reading practices suggests a consistency in approach within the family. Mahia's report that her mother occasionally listens to her Quran reading confirms Noor's statement regarding her involvement in her children's Quranic literacy development. However, Mahia's agency in deciding the duration of her Quran reading sessions indicates a level of independence and agency in her approach to the religious practice. This duality highlights the dynamics within the family concerning Quranic reading, where elements of parental guidance intersect with agency and individual autonomy.

When I asked Mahia about her understanding of Quranic Arabic, she acknowledged that she does not fully grasp the language. However, she expressed her intention to learn by utilising apps and websites for language acquisition:

> M: Um, I don't really understand it, but hopefully, like, I'm trying to learn the language as well, so hopefully I'll be able to understand it but it's like foreign language to me, mainly.

> I: Right, how are you trying to learn the language?

> M: I learn it by myself, 'cause I have a, like, apps that I use and like websites that I use to learn it.

On a different occasion, when asked about her experience of reading the Quran despite the language barrier, Mahia described it as a 'peaceful' and relatively easy activity and reported that she occasionally relies on Google and translation apps for assistance:

> M: It's quite peaceful, um, I find it quite easy to read now and stuff, so yeah.

> I: Do you ever think about the stories that you are reading about?

> M: Yeah, sometimes I research about the specific parts of it and, like, what it means, and, yeah.

> I: How do you research it? Do you Google it?

> M: Yeah, Google, or, like, I have one that translates it, like, yeah. And I use Google sometimes.

Mahia's motivation to understand the meaning of the Quranic words that she reads appears to be intrinsic, stemming from a personal drive to learn rather than being required to do so by her parents or teacher. This is evident in her independent pursuit of language learning through apps and websites, which are not explicitly associated with her lessons or mentioned by Noor. In fact, Noor may not even be fully aware of Mahia's independent language learning efforts. Overall, Mahia's efforts to learn Quranic Arabic and explore the meanings of its verses align with the broader Islamic tradition of seeking knowledge and connecting with the divine through scripture (Sardar, 2011), likely contributing to the development of her religious and spiritual identity.

During our first interview, when asked about her reading, Aadya immediately referred to her daily Arabic lessons:

> I: Can you tell me about the things that you read at home?

> A: Um, well, every day we have an Arabic class, so we study reading and like learning the language.

However, during our second interview, when asked about her recent Quranic Arabic reading activities, Aadya indicated that she had not engaged in any Quranic Arabic reading in the past week. In fact, during the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, which occurred in the week leading up to our interview, the children's daily Quranic Arabic

lesson did not take place. This suggests that Aadya's engagement with Quranic Arabic reading is closely linked to the structure of her formal lessons and tends to lapse in their absence. In contrast, Mahia demonstrates a stronger personal commitment to this practice, reflecting greater autonomy and intrinsic motivation in her approach to Quran reading.

Like Mahia, Aadya also mentioned that she has the freedom to decide the duration of her Quran reading sessions. She shared that she typically reads the Quran daily during her private lessons, but she also dedicates time to Quranic practice during her free time.

Like her mother and Mahia, Aadya associates reading the Quran with a sense of peace and tranquillity. Like her sister, she also mentioned researching the meaning of specific parts of the Quran, indicating that it adds to the meaningfulness of her practice:

> 'Well, sometimes it's quite peaceful and calming, and also like when you read … some parts you sort of understand and you can, like, basically there are stories that relate, to like, the things once you translate them, so sometimes we think of those stories as well. Like I was reading with my teacher once, and he was talking about, like, um, what one of the pages meant, and yeah, we were discussing that.'

These practices not only deepen Aadya's understanding of Quranic texts but also contribute to the development of her religious and spiritual identity. Through daily lessons, reflection on the Quran's meaning, and the recitation of duas, Aadya builds a connection with her faith, reinforcing her sense of belonging to the Muslim community. Additionally, Aadya expressed pride at her ability to read in Arabic, considering it 'kind of cool' to be able to read a language that others around her may not understand:

> 'It's kind of cool knowing that you know a different language, and it seems so normal to you, but other people have no clue what you're actually reading or saying.'

In addition to Quran reading, Aadya also mentioned the practice of reciting *duas* (prayers or blessings) for various situations. She explained that she learns these

duas in her daily lessons, initially decoding them from text and eventually memorising them for recitation. Aadya provided a screenshot of a *dua* she had learnt during her online Quran lessons (see Figure 5.3), and said:

'You were asking about the *duas* that we do, and this is one of them, so we have the, in the middle line, we have the one in Arabic, so this is what we read and then at the bottom we have the meaning.'

Figure 5.3: A screenshot of a dua (prayer or blessing) that Aadya had learnt during her lesson.

Aadya then clarified that this screenshot was taken on her mother's phone: 'we have the lesson on my mum's phone so I just sent it to you from there.' This shows how digital means have become integral to the family members' Quranic Arabic reading practices, particularly through the use of online lessons and accessible digital resources as part of their daily routine.

In summary, the family members engage in Quranic Arabic and religious reading through both printed materials and digital devices. Noor, Mahia and Aadya display agency and have the autonomy to decide how much they read, but the children are expected to read at least a few lines regularly. Noor and her daughters all find the practice of Quran reading to be peaceful and positive, often reflecting on the stories they encounter.

Developing religious identity through language and literacy

Religious practices hold significant importance for Noor, and she is ensuring that her children are following Muslim religious practice from a young age.

Noor shared that the children are expected to pray the five daily prayers, even if she knows that this may be difficult:

> 'So there are five prayers, children miss, like, the middle prayer, like, they pray the morning one, they go to school, they miss the afternoon one, and when they come back from school they pray the missed one.'

She further explained that while men can perform prayers at the mosque, women primarily pray at home:

> 'Men can do it at mosque … We [females within the family] can go to mosque, but, if it's available, 'cause some mosques, they don't allow because of the pandemic, but yeah, it's better to pray at home for women.'

The children's early introduction to Quranic Arabic reading, daily private lessons focusing on Quranic Arabic and religious principles, and the expectation of five daily prayers underscore the centrality of literacy within these practices. While engagement in these practices is obligatory, Noor provides her children with some autonomy, allowing Mahia and Aadya to decide the duration of their Quran reading sessions. This balance of structure and flexibility reflects Noor's commitment to immersing her children in Islamic traditions while fostering their independence in navigating religious literacy. Moreover, Noor expressed satisfaction with her children's progress in their private lessons, highlighting not only their improved reading skills but also their deepening comprehension of the meaning and significance of Quranic texts. This emphasis on comprehension alongside literacy reflects Noor's intention to instil the religious practices and values integral to Islam, forming a key part of the family's identity.

As part of their religious identity, both Mahia and Aadya derive enjoyment from their interactions with family members. For example, as aforementioned, Aadya emphasised her enjoyment of the time she spent with her cousins at the mosque lessons. Additionally, Mahia reported spending time with her family members during the religious holiday of Eid al-Adha, which occurred during one week of my case study with the family. These experiences revolved around religious occasions, and further contribute to the children's socialisation into the religious Muslim world. Therefore, there seems to be an overlap between their sense of religious identity and their sense of family membership. Extended family members play a prominent role in

fostering and reinforcing their religious identity by engaging in religious activities together, often involving reading in Arabic.

Furthermore, the mosque's weekly lessons attended by Mahia and Aadya in the past allowed them to identify with the wider Muslim community committed to the same religious practice. Specifically, Mahia expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to engage with her Muslim peers, since she is the only Muslim student in her year at her mainstream English school: 'I don't really have any, like, Muslims in my year and my classes.' Therefore, the family's strong affiliation with Islam not only constructs a robust sense of religious identity within the family but also serves as a mechanism for social connection and cohesion within the wider Muslim community. Through their past participation in mosque-based lessons and engagement with fellow Muslims, Mahia and Aadya not only reinforced their religious identity but also established bonds of solidarity and belonging with others who share their faith.

In addition to their religious gatherings and social interactions, the family's connection to the broader Muslim world is further reinforced through Arabic-language media. Aadya shared that during Ramadan and Eid, news about the Muslim world is often broadcast on their television in Arabic with English subtitles:

> 'My dad does sometimes watch it and throughout Eid, and like, in Ramadan, we would watch it as well.'

This additional medium further supports the family's religious identity by providing exposure to news from Muslim regions and utilising the Arabic language.

In summary, the family's development of their religious identity is closely intertwined with various practices that prioritise language and literacy, including Quranic Arabic reading, private lessons, prayer, and watching Arabic news. These practices form the core of their religious upbringing and exert a significant influence on their daily lives. Their *settled* migration status and *semi-open* positioning in relation to the wider society – particularly evident through the children's attendance at mainstream English schools – coexists with a strong anchoring in the Muslim world. This consistent immersion in the Muslim world and focus on their religious identity reinforces for the children that their cultural identity differs from that of their peers in their mainstream English schools and encourages them to maintain it.

'Sort of like juggling both': The intersection of English and Quranic Arabic in the family members' lives

The family's daily engagement with both English and Quranic Arabic reading highlights distinct purposes for each literacy, as English is primarily associated with school and daily communication, while Quranic Arabic centres on religious practice. However, despite these separate functions, there are points where the two literacies intersect or mutually influence one another. For example, moments in early childhood indicate that Aadya's initial experiences with both literacies were intertwined. For instance, Aadya shared that she initially struggled with writing direction, occasionally writing from right to left due to her early exposure to Arabic: 'When I first went to school, I was writing from right to left {laughs}.' Nevertheless, she soon adapted and learnt to navigate both English and Quranic Arabic reading:

> I: Yeah, so when you learnt to read in English, what was it like for you? At school?

> A: It wasn't too hard because I knew how to speak English, but like, once, I, like, I slowly got used to it, so, sort of like juggling both.

Beyond these early experiences with both languages, the family's digital devices act as a common ground for both literacies, integrating English and Quranic Arabic in various activities. On these devices, the children engage in activities such as reading text messages and news in English, as well as accessing apps and the internet to read the Quran, learn Arabic, explore the meaning of Quranic stories, and participate in Quran lessons.

In addition to these digital resources, the children's mainstream English schools further acknowledge and respect their religious background, providing them with opportunities to discuss their Quranic reading in an English-speaking setting. For example, Noor recounted an incident where her son's teacher inquired about his ability to speak Arabic during religious education lessons, and the class clapped and encouraged him in response:

> 'Once, my son … his teacher asked him "do you speak Arabic? Can you say what do you speak and what do you do in your I-" 'cause they do RE, religion studies, so they have to tell, tell the teacher … how they read Quran and pray

and stuff like that, and … they would like clap him, and encouraging him to, like, like every religion they do every week, so he was doing his one.'

Similarly, Aadya mentioned discussing her Quranic Arabic reading and reciting lines from the Quran during her religious education lessons:

'When we have RE, religious education … I do talk about like what I read and I have read, once, to them … I was supposed to read, um, maybe a sentence or two, so I did read that in front of them.'

Altogether, while English and Quranic Arabic practices generally serve distinct roles, these examples illustrate instances of convergence, showing how the family members navigate their multilingual literacies in different life domains.

Conclusion

Quranic Arabic holds profound religious significance for the family members, reflecting their deep connection to their Muslim traditions and identity. The family's commitment to Quranic Arabic lessons, initially at the mosque and later online, reflects a structured approach to religious education. Despite the structured nature of these lessons, Mahia and Aadya display partial agency outside of them, particularly in the duration and engagement with their Quran reading, as well as their independent exploration of the meanings of the text. The family's use of technology, such as tablets and online resources, illustrates how modern tools support transnational multilingual literacy practices and learning, bridging geographical distances and providing access to specialised education. This integration of Quranic Arabic reading allows the family members to maintain their distinct identity while navigating life in an English-speaking society.

Bengali language dynamics in the home

So far, I have discussed two languages practised in the family members' household: English, which is regularly spoken, read, and written, and Quranic Arabic, which is decoded regularly from the Quran and recited during prayer. A third language that is used in the household is Bengali, and its language maintenance and shift patterns within the family members' home are discussed in this section.

Noor mentioned that she and her husband speak Bengali to each other and their children, but the children prefer to reply in English despite understanding the language:

> 'To be honest, we don't read our language, Bengali, in this country you don't have to do it, but speaking, we speak Bengali … me and my husband, we speak Bengali, but children not, they were brought up in this country, they, they don't want to speak in Bengali, but … they understand when we speak. We encourage them to speak, at least they know our language, you know, they know their mother tongue … sometimes they answer in Bengali, and they fluently understand it. Obviously, they can't fluently speak Bengali, but yeah, they know Bengali.'

While Noor can read and write Bengali, her children are not literate in the language: 'I can read and write Bengali … but my children can't.' During our interview, I asked Noor whether she desires her children to have the ability to read in Bengali. In her response, she once again emphasised the value she attributes to speaking the language, rather than reading it:

> 'We really don't force them, if they want to read, if they're interested in Bengali, they can, but we don't force them to … at home we really wish they can speak Bengali, and they do speak Bengali with me, because I can answer them and they speak in English, and sometimes I don't answer them, I say "you have to tell me in Bengali" {laughs}.'

While Quranic Arabic reading holds high value for religious practices and cultural identity, the utility of Bengali literacy skills in the family's daily lives is limited. Noor mentioned reading Bengali only when practical needs arise, such as assisting her husband with letters, as he is not literate in the language. Thus, Noor has prioritised languages in line with both practical needs and her own sense of familial responsibility, choosing to maintain Bengali in its oral form. It is notable that she emphasises her children's freedom of choice in language usage, acknowledging the practicalities of English dominance over Bengali in their environment, unlike the reading of the Quran, which is upheld with more emphasis. Overall, Noor's practices construct a clear hierarchy of languages: Quranic Arabic is prioritised for religious

and cultural purposes, Bengali is maintained primarily in oral form for family communication, and English is used for educational and wider societal engagement.

When I asked Mahia whether she speaks Bengali, she said that she fully understands it and occasionally uses it when communicating with her parents, grandparents, and other relatives. However, when asked whether she can read any letters or words in Bengali, perhaps her own name, she replied that she cannot. When further asked if she recognises any Bengali letters, she laughed and said: 'No, not at all.'

Although Mahia does not possess reading skills in Bengali, she does encounter Bengali script in her home. She mentioned that her mother has a Bengali Quran, and when she visits her grandparents' house in England, she sees Bengali letters. She did not, however, demonstrate a strong desire to learn to read in Bengali, responding hesitantly with 'yeah, maybe' when asked about it.

Additionally, Mahia recalled last visiting Bangladesh with her family when she was five years old and expressed fond memories of the trip. However, she expressed her clear preference for living in England:

> 'I liked it there, but I think I prefer here more than there. … The last time that we went was when I was five, so that's like, nine or eight years ago, and … we were meant to go last year … but then it got cancelled, 'cause, you know, Corona.'

In line with her mother's and sister's reports, Aadya stated that she can speak Bengali but occasionally chooses to respond to her mother in English instead:

> 'Sometimes my mum speaks in Bengali to me, so I either speak back in English or Bengali.'

She further mentioned, on two different occasions, that her proficiency in Bengali diminished as she started school and spoke English more frequently:

> 'Growing up, I was like, quite good at speaking Bengali, but like, slowly as I came into school and stuff, I slowly got, like, a bit not as good, so I have forgotten things, so yeah, I do speak in English more often than I do in Bengali.' (Interview 1)

> 'I spoke mostly Bengali when I was little, because um, most of the time my auntie and my mum would speak Bengali so I sort of learned that, but then as I grew older I slowly forgot the Bengali {laughs} and started speaking more English because of school and, you know, I just got more used to it.' (Interview 3)

Additionally, Aadya clarified that while she mainly speaks Bengali with her grandparents, who divide their time between England and Bangladesh, she switches to English when she forgets certain Bengali words:

> 'We speak to them mostly in Bengali, but, occasionally we do talk to them in English because I do forget some words {laughs}.'

The above comments highlight the language shift that has occurred for Aadya, with a gradual transition from speaking Bengali to predominantly using English as she began attending school.

Regarding Bengali reading, Aadya, like Mahia, stated that she cannot read Bengali and emphasised that her use of Bengali is primarily for verbal communication:

> 'I can, not read words, but I can speak words. I'm not very good at, like, writing Bengali. I think it's just talking from me…'.

Like Mahia, she reported that she cannot read Bengali, and would not recognise her name written in Bengali.

Aadya also mentioned that her family owns a television with Bangladeshi and Arabic news channels, which her parents occasionally watch with their relatives. However, they do not have children's channels in Bengali:

> 'We have, like, the Bangladeshi news and stuff, but we don't, and we also have like Arabic news as well, but we don't really have like kids' channels in those languages.'

Like Mahia, Aadya mentioned visiting Bangladesh once with her immediate family when she was around four or five years old. She also noted that her father visits Bangladesh by himself every year.

The reports presented in this section suggest that while Noor and her husband strive to maintain spoken Bengali in their daily interactions with their children, they do not

insist that their children reply in Bengali, and do not actively engage in structured efforts to teach their children Bengali literacy. Noor's emphasis on speaking Bengali rather than reading it reflects her prioritisation of Quranic Arabic for religious practices and identity. The family's immersion in Quranic Arabic reading and learning likely takes precedence over the maintenance of Bengali literacy skills. This is evident in the children's lack of proficiency in reading Bengali despite their exposure to the language at home. The language shift observed among the children, from Bengali to English, highlights the influence of the dominant language environment, particularly as they began attending school and interacted more frequently in English. Despite their parents' efforts to uphold Bengali as a spoken language in the household, the children's preference for English responses underscores the impact of external language influences. Overall, while Bengali remains a significant language in the family's linguistic repertoire, its maintenance is secondary to Quranic Arabic and English, highlighting the complexities involved in navigating a multilingual, multiliterate environment.

Reflections and conclusions

This chapter has explored the distinct multilingual literacy practices of the Bangladeshi family, showing how English, Bengali, and Quranic Arabic each play a unique role in their social and cultural worlds. By exploring how the family navigates these languages, this analysis highlights the ways in which their literacy practices shape their identities and experiences living in a multilingual environment.

In this reflections and conclusions section, I reflect on and critically examine four key themes that have emerged from my analysis of this case study: the family's navigation of multilingualism; the role of digital technology in the family's multilingual literacy practices; children's agency in multilingual literacy and language use; and the role of literacy practices, extended family, and community in fostering identity. This is followed by a discussion of the family's social, spatial, temporal and generational dimensions, and how they relate to their multilingual literacy practices and cultural identities. These themes collectively offer a comprehensive understanding of the ways that the Bangladeshi family members navigate multilingual literacy practices and identity in their everyday lives.

Navigating multilingualism in the family

The family navigates multilingual practices encompassing English, Quranic Arabic, and Bengali, each serving distinct functions and purposes within the family's daily life.

English emerges as the dominant language for communication and literacy, reflecting the family's *settled* migration history and *semi-open* positioning in relation to the wider English-speaking society. The children's fluency in English and the emphasis on English literacy, both for academic success and general knowledge acquisition, underscore its practical and instrumental value. Additionally, discussions with the family implied that English reading is not solely confined to educational or knowledge-building purposes; the children occasionally engage in reading English for pleasure, particularly fiction, highlighting a broader, more personal connection to the language. Noor's encouragement of English reading further highlights the importance she places on her children's educational attainment, as well as their overall engagement with literature in their daily lives.

Quranic Arabic, on the other hand, holds a profound religious significance. The family's dedication to Quranic Arabic reading and daily prayers reflects their deep connection to their religious traditions and identity. Noor's commitment to ensuring her children's proficiency in Quranic Arabic, even if they do not fully understand the language, highlights the religious importance of this practice for her.

Bengali serves a distinct role again, primarily as the language of oral communication between Noor, her husband, and their children. The children's preference for responding in English, despite their understanding of Bengali, indicates a shift towards English dominance. Noor's flexible approach to Bengali, valuing spoken proficiency over reading and writing skills, reflects practical considerations and the realities of living in an English-speaking country.

The family's approach to language maintenance and shift suggests a pragmatic adaptation to their linguistic environment. While Noor and her husband maintain Bengali as their primary language of communication, the children's shift towards English reflects their daily interactions in their mainstream English schools and the broader society. Noor's prioritisation of spoken Bengali over teaching reading and writing in the language suggests an acceptance of the natural language shift that has occurred, while still valuing the preservation of oral proficiency.

The distinct roles of English, Quranic Arabic, and Bengali in the family's communication and literacy practices illustrate a nuanced navigation of multilingualism. English serves mainly as the language of participation in wider society and academic success, Quranic Arabic as the language of religious and spiritual literacy practices, and Bengali as the language of familial communication.

The role of digital technology in the family's multilingual literacy practices

The family's use of technology for reading and learning highlights the intersection of traditional literacy practices with modern digital tools. Noor's acknowledgement of technology as both a distraction and a tool for learning shows the dual role it plays in her children's literacy learning and reading practices. The children's engagement with English reading materials on tablets and smartphones, alongside their use of these devices for Quranic Arabic lessons, illustrates the versatility of screen-based reading.

Additionally, the children's online Quranic Arabic lessons exemplify the potential of digital technology to bridge geographical distances and provide access to specialised education. Their ability to connect with a teacher living abroad and the convenience of accessing reading materials on digital devices highlight the transformative impact of technology on multilingual literacy practices and learning in present time.

Children's agency in multilingual literacy and language use

Mahia and Aadya demonstrate different forms of agency across their language and literacy practices, shaped by the expectations, opportunities, and preferences tied to each language.

Their agency in English literacy reflects a balance between Noor's emphasis on academic success and their personal interests. Noor prioritises her children's academic success, especially evident through structured reading with her son to support his schoolwork. With her older daughters, she adopts a more flexible approach, fostering their autonomy in selecting reading materials. Mahia's engagement with English reading extends beyond school requirements to include reading for pleasure, showcasing her personal investment in literacy. In contrast, Aadya's approach is more pragmatic, associating English reading primarily with

school and selecting materials like news snippets that align with her interests. This balance between structure and agency highlights how Noor's approach supports both her children's academic achievement and individual literacy preferences, enabling them to navigate their educational and personal lives as a multilingual family.

In the domain of Quranic Arabic, the children's agency is shaped by more structured expectations, such as daily lessons and regular recitation. While these routines offer less scope for choice in comparison to English literacy, both Mahia and Aadya find ways to exercise autonomy within this framework. Their ability to determine the length of their Quran reading sessions exemplifies their partial agency in this aspect. Additionally, Mahia's motivation to understand the meaning of the Quranic text stems from a personal drive rather than parental or educational mandates. This initiative reflects her intrinsic motivation to connect more deeply with her religious practice. Furthermore, Aadya's active involvement in discussing the meanings with her teacher and her pride in reading Arabic reflect a personal commitment to this literacy practice.

The children's agency in Bengali is noteworthy, too. Despite being encouraged by their parents to speak Bengali, Mahia and Aadya exercise their choice in whether to respond in Bengali or English. This flexibility indicates their ability to navigate between languages based on context and preference. Noor enables this agency in Bengali by not forcing her children to speak it, instead allowing them to choose their mode of communication. She prioritises English and Quranic Arabic literacy over Bengali literacy, reflecting practical considerations and the realities of living in an English-speaking country while maintaining their religious practices. This prioritisation emphasises the importance Noor places on proficiency in English for academic success and Quranic Arabic for religious obligations, while still valuing the cultural heritage and convenience associated with Bengali.

The children's agency in language use across English, Quranic Arabic, and Bengali highlights their active roles in shaping their multilingual experiences. The autonomy given to Mahia and Aadya in deciding how much Quran to read, whether to read for pleasure in English, or which language to use in family conversations reflects different forms of agency that enrich their multilingual literacy practices. Their ability

to choose when and how to engage with each language, illustrates the complex and varied nature of multilingual literacies within the family.

The role of literacy practices, extended family, and community in fostering identity

The children's literacy practices in Quranic Arabic, English, and Bengali play a pivotal role in shaping their religious and cultural identities. Quranic Arabic reading and daily prayers, supported by structured lessons, are central to their religious practice, while English literacy connects them to academic and some social domains. Mahia and Aadya's efforts to explore the meanings of Quranic texts reflect their personal commitment to deepening their religious understanding. Similarly, Aadya's pride in her ability to read in Arabic highlights the role of literacy in fostering a sense of accomplishment and identity.

Alongside these literacy practices, extended family and community serve as additional anchors in nurturing their cultural and religious identity. Shared experiences during religious holidays, such as Eid, and Aadya's recollection of attending mosque lessons with her cousins emphasise the familial bonds that reinforce cultural traditions. Community spaces like mosques, where the children previously engaged in religious education, provide opportunities to connect with peers who share similar cultural and religious values, offering a sense of solidarity and belonging. Together, these family and community connections complement the children's multilingual literacy practices, creating a robust framework for developing and sustaining their religious and cultural identities.

Situating the family within social, spatial, temporal and generational dimensions

The family's multilingual literacy practices are deeply embedded within social, spatial, temporal, and generational dimensions.

Socially, the family's engagement with English and Quranic Arabic reflects their interaction with diverse linguistic and cultural communities. Their use of English, both at home and in their mainstream English schools, supports their engagement with the broader English-speaking society, aligning with their *settled* migration history. The children's fluency in English and their participation in English-based education

underscore the importance of English for academic success and social participation. This engagement with the wider society is further supported by Noor's encouragement of English reading proficiency, which she views as essential for her children's knowledge acquisition and prospects in England. Concurrently, the family's active participation in the Muslim community, through religious education, prayers, and Quran reading, strengthens their cultural and religious identity. This dual engagement allows them to maintain their distinct cultural heritage while navigating the social landscape of their English environment, thus establishing them as *semi-open* in their positioning toward wider society.

Spatially, the family navigates environments that shape their multilingual literacy practices and identity development. At home, the children engage with English texts for both academic purposes and pleasure, while Bengali is maintained as a spoken language, fostering cultural continuity. Quranic Arabic is a central part of their home literacy practices, with family members independently reading the Quran and participating in lessons that reinforce their religious routines and identity. Beyond the home, online Quranic Arabic lessons connect the family to a teacher abroad, demonstrating the role of digital spaces in their religious education. In this context, although not a physical space, the online space functions as a space nonetheless, enabling the family to bridge geographical distances and access specialised education. This inclusion of digital spaces as separate, significant environments highlights the evolving nature of spatial dimensions in contemporary multilingual literacy practices. Additionally, the family benefits from the presence of extended family members who live nearby and play a supportive role in fostering a shared sense of belonging and reinforcing religious identities.

Temporally, the family's multilingual literacy practices have evolved in response to their migration history and the demands of their social environment. The family's *settled* migration history – marked by no plans to return to Bangladesh – has shaped the prioritisation of English for academic success and everyday communication. Concurrently, the continuity of religious practices, such as daily prayers and Quran reading, reflects a consistent engagement with their religion across time.

The intergenerational dimensions of the family's multilingual literacy practices reflect the transmission and adaptation of cultural and religious values. Noor and her

husband, as first-generation migrants from Bangladesh, are deeply rooted in Islamic traditions, which guide their strong commitment to ensuring their children engage meaningfully with Quranic Arabic for religious practice. While Bengali remains the language of oral communication at home, there is a clear language shift across generations, with the children often preferring to respond in English, reflecting their engagement with the wider English-speaking society. For the children, growing up in England has shaped a multilingual experience that is centred on English but enriched by their parents' efforts to maintain both Bengali and Quranic Arabic. Quranic Arabic reading holds a central place in their religious identity, and they demonstrate agency in how they engage with these practices by exploring the meanings of Quranic verses independently, illustrating their personal investment in connecting with their faith. The extended family further reinforces these intergenerational ties by participating in religious and cultural activities, providing a support system that strengthens the children's sense of identity.

The family's *semi-open* positioning to the wider English-speaking society, characterised by their active participation in both English and Muslim communities, exemplifies their ability to maintain distinct traditions and identity while being *settled* in England. This approach allows them to navigate and balance their multilingual literacy practices within the diverse social, spatial, temporal, and intergenerational dimensions of their lives.

Conclusion

The multilingual literacy practices of the Bangladeshi family examined in this study illustrate how one family navigates their socio-cultural world and constructs identity through distinct uses of language and literacy. The family's strategic use of English for practical endeavours as well as academic success and engagement with wider society, Quranic Arabic for religious practices, and Bengali for familial communication demonstrates a nuanced approach to maintaining cultural heritage while adapting to their environment as a *settled* family in England. The children's reading practices, choices, and opportunities are shaped by agency, individual preferences, parental influence, and the practical needs of their social context. Noor's emphasis on English proficiency for knowledge and academic achievement, coupled with a flexible approach to Bengali and a structured yet meaningful engagement with Quranic

Arabic, reflects the diverse literacy experiences within the family. The family's engagement with the broader English-speaking society, their connection to the Muslim community, the evolving role of digital spaces, and the intergenerational transmission of cultural and religious values highlight the dynamic nature of their multilingual literacy practices. Ultimately, the family's ability to balance these dimensions while maintaining their distinct identity and traditions exemplifies the everyday negotiations involved in living a multilingual, multicultural life.

Chapter 6 Case Study 3: Findings from the Hasidic Family

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the multilingual literacy practices of the Hasidic family members that I interviewed for this project, focusing on how they navigate their socio-cultural world through literacy practices in Yiddish, English, and liturgical Hebrew. I explore how these practices intersect with their social context, migration history, and cultural identity within their tightly-knit community.

The findings presented in this chapter take on a dual structure. The first section discusses the family context, explaining the overarching themes related to the family's migration history, structure, and dynamics, as well as their multilingual and multiliterate environment and literacy resources. Following this, the second section delves into a more detailed individual analysis of the family members that I interviewed, shedding light on the multilingual reading practices and narratives of each, as well as gender differences in the family as they relate to language and literacy. After the presentation of the findings, the final section of this chapter offers reflections and conclusions drawn from the findings.

It is important to highlight once again my role as somewhat of an 'insider' during the interviews and the analysis of findings in this family's case study. As explained in the methodology chapter, I believe the family may have perceived me as more of an 'insider' compared to the other families in this study, which likely encouraged greater openness and facilitated access to their world. This perception was likely influenced by my Jewish background, fluency in liturgical Hebrew, and familiarity (although limited) with Yiddish. At the same time, I personally experienced a greater sense of familiarity and identification during the interviews with this family, which enabled me to understand many of the Hebrew and Yiddish terms used by the interviewees and to grasp references to religious practices and festivals. These factors likely contributed to a more detailed and nuanced analysis in this chapter compared to previous ones.

Family context

In this section, I establish the family context drawn from my cross-family analysis, and present the patterns observed through this analysis.

Family structure and dynamics

The family, residing in London, consists of the mother, Pessi, her husband, and their nine children, ranging from the eldest child, aged 19, to the youngest child, aged two (see Appendix X for a table presenting the family members, their ages, and number and length of interviews I held with each participant). The area where the family resides is home to a sizable Yiddish-speaking Hasidic community, complete with local Hasidic schools, shops, restaurants, libraries, and synagogues. All the children, with the exception of the eldest who attends a Hasidic educational institute in New York, are enrolled in private Hasidic educational institutions within the local community. The children attend single-gender schools, with separate institutions for boys and girls. Pessi is a stay-at-home mother, and her husband owns a business within the Hasidic community.

For this project, I conducted interviews with Pessi, her daughter Devorah (aged 15) and her daughter Miriam (aged 11). Since my initial contact was with Pessi, she became the selected parent for the interview. During our initial phone call, I asked Pessi whether I would be able to interview two of her children, one who attends primary school and another who attends secondary school. In our subsequent conversation, Pessi confirmed that both Devorah and Miriam met these criteria and were willing to participate in the project.

Devorah and Miriam are at notably different stages of their educational journeys, with Devorah in Year 11 and Miriam in Year 6. However, since they both attend Hasidic school settings, their daily schedules are structured in the same way: the first half of the day is dedicated to Jewish studies – conducted in Yiddish and involving liturgical Hebrew reading – while the second half focuses on mainstream English subjects.

Multilingual environment and migration history

This family's multilingual environment, rooted deeply in their religion, traditions, and unique migration history, presents a vivid picture of the interplay between adherence to religious and cultural practices and the demands of daily life in London.

Pessi, born and raised in London, grew up in a Hasidic household. Both her parents, London natives as well, fostered a multilingual environment where both English and Yiddish were spoken. However, Pessi reported that her fluency in Yiddish as a young girl, before attending school, was limited, as her father conversed with her brothers in Yiddish while addressing her and her sisters in English.

Pessi's husband, on the other hand, grew up in a Hasidic community in New York and exclusively spoke Yiddish until marrying Pessi. Pessi noted that, to this day, his proficiency and fluency in English remain limited:

> P: He's from New York, strictly Yiddish-speaking. … I taught him English after we got married, yeah.
>
> I: So he didn't know English when you got married.
>
> P: No, very little, very basic. We make some jokes about it, but, basically, like, he speaks English, it's not, like, the way we talk, but he's using very immature vocabulary, yeah.

In their household these days, both Yiddish and English are spoken:

> P: What do we speak to our kids? We speak Yiddish and English, I end up, like, using in one sentence, using five words and five words. You know what I mean?
>
> I: Yes. So really a mixture. Does your husband do the same?
>
> P: No, he uses more Yiddish, and some English here and there.

Yiddish, a language historically spoken by Ashkenazi Jewish communities across Europe, is a blend of Germanic, Hebrew, and Slavic linguistic elements. It lacks a single national origin, reflecting the dispersed nature of European Jewry (Weinreich, 2008). Today, Yiddish is primarily spoken by Hasidic Jewish communities, where it serves as both a cornerstone of daily communication and a means of reinforcing cultural continuity and religious identity.

With roots extending across several generations in England on Pessi's side, and no plans or intentions to migrate to another country, the family's migration history in England in the context of this study is *settled*. This brings into focus the significant role of English in their daily lives, primarily as a practical tool for navigating life in an

English-speaking society. Despite their *settled* migration history, the family is still part of a closed community – one that maintains limited engagement with wider society, functions with a high degree of internal self-sufficiency, and interacts with external institutions selectively and on its own terms. Within this structure, gender plays a role in shaping exposure to the wider English-speaking world: girls in the family have greater interaction with English through schooling and everyday life, whereas boys are more insulated within Yiddish-speaking religious domains. The parents' deliberate choice to enrol their children in Hasidic Jewish schools, and their efforts to maintain a robust connection to Yiddish, speak to their deep commitment to preserving the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Hasidic community.

This duality between their *settled* migration history and *closed* societal positioning reflects a complex navigation of language and identity. While fluency in English facilitates practical engagement with the wider society, the deliberate preservation of Yiddish acts as a guard against integration, maintaining the distinctiveness of their communal identity. The family's language and literacy practices, therefore, represent a balance between maintaining a family life in England and upholding the traditions that anchor them to their Hasidic heritage. This balance highlights the complexity of living as part of a closed, insular community within a country that is perceived as 'home,' with each context holding different values and language repertoires.

The family's multilingual resources and their pathways into the family home

The multilingual resources in the Hasidic family home play a central role in reinforcing their Yiddish, English and liturgical Hebrew language and literacy skills, deeply intertwined with their religious and cultural identity.

The household is stocked with a diverse range of reading materials that reflect the family's Hasidic Jewish heritage while also engaging with the broader English-speaking world they inhabit. This collection includes religious texts in liturgical Hebrew, such as prayer books and the Torah, alongside storybooks, educational workbooks, and magazines in both Yiddish and English. The English-language materials, including books and magazines, frequently feature Jewish themes, with characters, settings, and events rooted in religious Jewish life, ensuring that the children's reading practices remain closely tied to their heritage and cultural values.

These resources come from a variety of sources, including the children's schools and the intentional efforts of their mother, Pessi. Pessi carefully selects English books from a local Jewish library and Jewish bookstores, which stock extensive collections of religious and culturally relevant materials in English. She also purchases weekly Yiddish newspapers and magazines from local Jewish shops to support the family's connection to their linguistic and cultural traditions. Religious texts in liturgical Hebrew are either provided by the children's schools or sourced from local Jewish shops, further reinforcing the family's commitment to maintaining their religious practices and values.

The predominantly religious or Jewish-themed nature of the reading materials in the family home, coupled with the sources from which these materials are acquired, highlight again the family's unique position as being part of a *closed* community while being *settled* in England. The family's reliance on Hasidic schools, the local Jewish library, and local Jewish shops for their educational and religious reading materials illustrates a self-sufficient ecosystem that allows them to live fully within the bounds of their community's traditions and values, without the need to venture beyond for educational or cultural sustenance, where they will inevitably be exposed to materials prevalent in the wider English-speaking society. Thus, their *settled* migration history in England is marked not by a blending into the wider society but by a deepening of their roots within the insular community they inhabit, where every aspect of life, including literacy, is intertwined with their religious and cultural identity and easily available to them, showcasing a unique model of cultural continuity that prioritises preservation over integration.

An individual analysis of the family members

This second section of the chapter analyses the narrative of each family member that I interviewed, exploring their multilingual literacy practices and experiences as situated in the family's migration history, and relating to their cultural and religious contexts.

Pessi's narrative

In exploring the dynamics of language, literacy, and cultural identity within the Hasidic family, Pessi emerges as a central figure whose experiences and practices

offer valuable insights. Her narrative presented below sheds light on the ways in which multilingual literacies serve as a conduit for the transmission of cultural values and religious beliefs within her family.

Pessi's childhood reading experiences

Discussing her reading habits and practices growing up, Pessi reported that she liked to read 'sometimes,' and elaborated:

> 'I didn't like heavy books. It had to be like, light, yeah … war books I ran away from. It was too much, for me, it made me just very sad.'

Asked about specific reading resources she had read growing up, Pessi described books, comic books and newspapers in both English and Yiddish:

> I: Can you tell me if there is anything in particular that you remember reading as a child?
>
> P: Um, uh, what's his name and the chocolate factory, what's it called again?
>
> I: Charlie and the-
>
> P: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, yes. Uh, what else did we read? A lot of fun stuff. Um, *The Wishing Chair*, Um, *Tintin*, the comic books, um, what else did we read? Uh, we used to get *The Jewish Tribune* and the *Yated* (weekly newspapers for the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, written in English), um, and then, Yiddish books, there's the *Machanayim* books.

Pessi's childhood engagement with both Yiddish and English literature, including mainstream works like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, reflects a more diverse reading landscape than I had expected within the Hasidic context. However, it is noteworthy that Pessi's children, as described in more detail next, predominantly engage with Jewish-themed literature, suggesting a potential shift towards more insular literary choices in Pessi's present life.

Pessi's role as the primary facilitator of literacy within the family home

During our interviews, Pessi painted a vivid picture of her family's reading practices at home, emphasising the profound significance of reading within the household.

Firstly, I enquired about what Pessi's children read during a typical week, to which Pessi replied:

> 'My kids all have, like, a little bit of reading homework, um, whatever, I have books, I do go to the library, I do bring home stuff … because they want it.'

She further reported that she typically borrows English books from a local Jewish library, stating: 'they have such an amazing collection, so many amazing books out there.' She explained that this library, which serves the Hasidic and broader Jewish community, offers materials closely aligned with her family's cultural and religious values. While Pessi used to visit a local public library accessible to the general community, she finds that its resources are less relevant to her family's needs, as she elaborated during our discussion about her process for selecting books:

> I: How do you choose which books you want to bring home for the kids?

> P: Um, if, if like a child is going through an issue or something, then I, sometimes, you know, if I just see a book like that, then I'll bring it home for them.

> I: Would they usually be Jewish books? With Jewish characters and themes?

> P: I feel, at this stage in my life, I used to bring home other stuff, I used to go to [name of area omitted] public library, but there's no need nowadays, the standard and the quality and the quantity [of Jewish-themed books] are so amazing, that we really don't have to.

Pessi's account of her family's reading practices offers insights into the evolution of literacy resources in her life. While her own childhood included both Jewish-themed and 'mainstream' literature, her approach to selecting books for her children has shifted toward a more insular, Jewish focus. By "Jewish-themed," Pessi referred to books that depict religious Jewish – often Hasidic – life, retell stories from Jewish religious texts, or convey moral and behavioural lessons aligned with Hasidic values. This emphasis on Jewish-themed literature reflects a deliberate choice to reinforce cultural and religious identity and boundaries through literature, aligning with the community's insular approach. This shift prompts critical reflection on the role of community sites, such as specialised Jewish libraries and shops, in shaping reading preferences and habits, affecting readers' cultural and religious identities, and

contributing to the community's strict prioritisation of cultural preservation over participation in wider society.

At the same time, the practices reported by Pessi not only highlight her efforts to preserve the family's Hasidic heritage and culture, but also demonstrate her commitment to foster a love of reading among her children. In their home, both Yiddish and English are used for daily communication, with each language playing a distinct role in the family's cultural and literacy practices: Yiddish maintains a strong connection to their Hasidic cultural identity, while English, used primarily by the girls, facilitates engagement with the wider English-speaking society and allows access to a broader selection of Jewish-themed literature. This gendered distribution of language use reflects wider structural norms within the Hasidic community, where girls are expected to pursue employment and navigate aspects of the secular world, while boys remain more embedded in religious study and Yiddish-medium environments. The presence of reading materials in both languages thus aligns with these differentiated social trajectories and marks a significant contrast with the other families in this study. By contrast, liturgical Hebrew remains primarily a language of religious texts, reinforcing the family's distinct spiritual practices – a theme that is discussed in more detail later.

Describing a typical bedtime routine in the family home, and without being asked about reading specifically, Pessi remarked:

> 'Bedtime, my kids love books … my younger ones, love books.'

Pessi went on to reveal that, for her children, reading is not confined to bedtime alone:

> 'My two youngest are obsessed with books, they have 65 little books, they go everywhere and anywhere … they can read them, I read them a lot of times at mealtimes, to get everyone to relax and sit in their place … and then if I'm reading a story then they're all there, they'll join in. … Then mealtime goes more smoothly. … Basically, every single day there is some time that is story time.'

When I asked which of the kids join the book reading at mealtimes, Pessi clarified:

'My youngest five. But, like, if I can't do it, then my older one will do it for me sometimes, you know, if I get a phone call, or if I need to go food shopping sometimes.'

Pessi's depiction of her family's shared reading practices highlights the central role of literature in shaping their daily interactions and strengthening familial bonds. The extensive collection of books, especially favoured by the younger children, indicates her dedication to creating a rich literacy environment within the home. Notably, this environment nurtures a love for reading from a very early age, with room for Jewish-themed fiction that is not necessarily tied in with religious observance. Rather, these books support reading as a pleasurable activity, offering stories that resonate with the family's cultural values without centring strictly on religious instruction. In this way, literature in Pessi's household serves as both a source of enjoyment and a means of connecting with Jewish cultural narratives beyond formal religious contexts. Furthermore, it appears that the absence of digital devices such as televisions and smartphones in the household shifts the focus to more traditional forms of entertainment, namely storytelling and book reading. This distinction highlights a unique aspect of the Hasidic family dynamics, where literary engagement serves as a primary means of entertainment and relaxation for the children, contrasting with the prevalence of screen time in many modern households. In this way, Pessi's approach to reading creates a family setting where books and stories become a natural part of daily life, offering her children a meaningful way to spend time and connect with their culture and heritage.

Asked about the specific languages she uses to read to her children, Pessi noted that she typically reads English books to them, and added:

'In the beginning I used to interpret them to Yiddish for my younger ones 'cause that's, basically, their mother tongue, like, what I started speaking to them … They always understood English, but I thought that, like, sometimes the words were like a bit big, so they needed help with them. … I bring it down to their level, like, you know, so that they understand the story.'

Pessi's practice of interpreting English books into Yiddish for her younger children demonstrates her commitment to making literature accessible while addressing language disparities. It further highlights her role as a facilitator in their literacy

development, where, beyond sourcing the books and reading them, she also ensures that they are fully comprehensible and engaging for her children.

Beyond English books, Pessi reported that her children read Yiddish texts as well:

> P: Over *Shabbos* (the Jewish Sabbath, taking place weekly from sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday), I get one of these magazines … for children, the *Kinder Shrift* (kids' script) … In the *Kinder Shrift* (see Figure 6.1 for a screenshot of a *Kinder Shrift* volume, sourced from the magazine's official website, https://kindershrift.com/), let's say, they'll take a point … like interesting fishes in the sea, and then they go into detail about it … and then there's … experiments, and there's stories, and, whatever, serials, and comics, and it's endless, full of information, it's phenomenal.

> I: Yes, and do some of your children read this magazine by themselves, or do you read to them?

> P: Yeah, for sure, for sure, it goes from child to child, yeah.

Figure 6.1: A screenshot of a 'Kinder Shrift' volume, sourced from the magazine's official website, https://kindershrift.com/.

Pessi further explained that she purchases these magazines on Thursday, and her children carry on reading them for the rest of the week, 'because it's so full of information.'

The inclusion of a Yiddish-language magazine in Pessi's children's reading repertoire reflects her efforts to provide culturally engaging and relaxing activities, particularly suited to times when religious observance restricts other pastimes. This choice highlights the importance she places on cultural preservation and language maintenance in accessible, enjoyable formats. The magazine's popularity among her children beyond the weekend suggests a continuous engagement with Yiddish literature, reinforcing its role in their intellectual and cultural development.

Finally, when asked whether she reads these days, Pessi responded immediately and determinately: 'I don't have time, no.' She then explained that she occasionally flips through some magazines on the Sabbath, but that is the extent of her reading. She elaborated:

> 'I enjoy reading, but I, I, I could live without a book, whereas for my oldest, like, a book is like, like {laughs}, you know what I mean? I have family that they come on *yom tov* (Jewish festivals), and *yom tov* (the festival) can't start if they don't have a book to read. I'm not one of those, no, I'm not like this.'

Pessi's firm assertion that she 'could live without a book' implies a stark contrast between her personal reading habits and the prevalent culture of reading within her family, exhibited by her eldest child, younger children, and other relatives, as she reported. Therefore, while she does not have time for personal reading habits, Pessi is certainly surrounded by – and encourages – a culture of reading in her household.

In summary, Pessi emerges as the primary facilitator of literacy within her family home, assuming a pivotal role in curating a diverse and enriching literacy environment for her children – particularly her daughters – within the Hasidic Jewish cultural boundaries. Her proactive engagement in purchasing magazines and sourcing books, coupled with her selection process based on her children's needs, interests and challenges, and her translations into Yiddish, reflects her commitment to nurturing her children's intellectual and emotional development through literature. Additionally, her consistent practice of reading to her children every day at mealtime not only fosters a love for storytelling but also reinforces familial bonds and creates

cherished moments of shared reading practices and connection. Furthermore, Pessi's instrumental role as a facilitator of literacy within her family offers valuable insights into her efforts to preserve the Hasidic heritage and values in her home through language and literacy. Her deliberate selection of Jewish-themed literacy resources tailored to her children's needs, and the focus on both Yiddish and English in the family's reading practices, serves as a means of cultural preservation and accommodation to the wider English-speaking context and language within the family unit.

Liturgical Hebrew and Yiddish learning in Hasidic education

Interestingly, throughout our interviews, Pessi only mentioned liturgical Hebrew in the context of her children's learning to read the language, and only when prompted by my questions. She did not otherwise mention liturgical Hebrew when discussing her or her children's reading practices, suggesting that she may not necessarily conceptualise religious reading in liturgical Hebrew as part of what she considers 'reading' in the everyday sense.

Describing her children's school reading experiences, Pessi provided valuable insights into their process of learning to read liturgical Hebrew and Yiddish. She explained that liturgical Hebrew and Yiddish both use the Hebrew alphabet; however, while in liturgical Hebrew print letters are used and vowels are represented as dots and marks around the letters, in Yiddish scripted letters are used and vowels are represented as letters. Through this learning process and in their daily lives, her children encounter Yiddish as a spoken and literary language for day-to-day interactions, while liturgical Hebrew appears primarily in religious texts, such as prayer books and the Torah.

Pessi revealed that the initial focus in Hasidic schools is on learning the Hebrew alphabet. This initial phase is dedicated to acquainting students with liturgical Hebrew, primarily for the purposes of prayer and Torah study. She emphasised the careful separation of liturgical Hebrew and Yiddish in the Hasidic educational system, with Yiddish reading introduced only after students have mastered liturgical Hebrew reading: 'they do Yiddish afterwards, they don't confuse us.' The decision to introduce liturgical Hebrew first underscores the community's priority of imparting religious literacy, enabling children to engage in prayer and Torah reading with

proficiency. This structured approach not only facilitates language acquisition but also safeguards their Jewish heritage. It reflects an effort to help the children develop an understanding of the unique characteristics of each language while gradually acquiring proficiency in both.

Gendered language and literacy in the family from Pessi's perspective

The language use and literacy practices in Pessi's family offer insight into how gendered roles within the Hasidic community shape educational and linguistic pathways. Pessi's accounts illustrate distinct expectations for boys and girls, particularly in their engagement with Yiddish, liturgical Hebrew, and English, reflecting broader societal roles assigned to each gender.

Looking back on her own childhood, Pessi's account unveiled an intriguing pattern of language use within her parents' home when she was growing up. She reported that her father chose to primarily speak Yiddish to her brothers while opting for English when interacting with her and her sisters:

> 'My father spoke Yiddish to my brothers, but not to us. We spoke to our brothers in English, very interesting.'

When I enquired about why he chose to do so, Pessi speculated that he may have sought to spare her and her sisters the 'burden' of an additional language, yet his true motivation remains unknown:

> 'Maybe he didn't want to burden us, I never really asked him why … I never actually asked him, I didn't think about it, we just, I just took it, like, like, natural, I mean, because when you see things from birth, you just, just go with the flow.'

This recollection of Pessi's childhood language dynamics offers a glimpse into how family language choices are shaped and negotiated. The deliberate decision of her father to speak Yiddish to her brothers while using English with Pessi and her sisters raises intriguing questions about the perceived value and implications of linguistic transmission, and gender differences, within the Hasidic family unit.

Discussing her children, Pessi emphasised that both boys and girls receive substantial exposure to Yiddish literacy at home and in their schools, resulting in

comparable proficiency between the genders. However, she also elucidated the gender-specific pedagogical methods employed when teaching Yiddish, with boys receiving a more fact-based and straightforward approach compared to the interactive learning style favoured for girls:

> 'Girls, like, you know, we do learn games and whatever, whereas … the boys don't need to learn it that way, they're more/ facts, you know what I mean? "Tell me," You know what I mean? "Tell me about it but I don't want to fuss around." I think that is the key difference, really. It's just, the makeup of men alone is totally different, so…'

Discussing her children's religious education and liturgical Hebrew reading, Pessi provided valuable perspectives on the differences in the religious educational journeys of her sons and daughters. She articulated a distinct emphasis on '*koidesh*' (Jewish studies) for boys, where they receive an education that prepares them for Torah learning and potential roles as rabbis. Despite boys acquiring proficiency in English reading, Pessi emphasised that the overarching objective remains the cultivation of expertise in Jewish studies:

> 'There's a main emphasis on, *koidesh* (Jewish studies), right? Um, every boy will come out reading English … some schools do take GCSEs and some don't, and a lot don't, they stop [English studies] at a young age. They go roughly 'til about eleven, twelve, then they stop. They give every boy an opportunity to be able to, if they want to take that, the opportunity to become a rabbi if they want. And … we really keep to our heritage and the men in particular, do you know what I mean? So we teach them English but we also want to make sure they take their *koidesh* (Jewish studies) seriously.'

Pessi then also reported that the boys in her family outperform the girls in liturgical Hebrew reading, explaining that '[liturgical Hebrew] is just part of them [the boys] … it's just them.'

On a different occasion, Pessi reported that her eldest son, aged 19, had been studying in a *yeshiva* in New York, where his studies focus solely on Jewish education and are conducted entirely in Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew.

The gendered linguistic dynamics within the family, as detailed through Pessi's narrative, highlight the interplay between gender, religious identity, and the division of secular and religious spheres. This gendering of language and literacy is not merely a matter of personal or familial preference but is deeply embedded in the broader religious and cultural framework of the Hasidic community and its clear distribution of the different gender roles and responsibilities. Pessi explained that for boys and men, the emphasis on Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew literacy is directly tied to their roles in religious life. Their proficiency in these languages is not only a marker of religious observance but also equips them with the necessary tools to participate in and eventually lead religious rituals, studies, and gatherings. This preparation is indicative of a broader expectation that men will serve as the bearers of religious tradition within their families, a role that necessitates a deep engagement with the languages of sacred texts. The boys' education, therefore, is structured around ensuring they emerge as proficient in the community's traditional language, Yiddish, and literate in religious texts written in liturgical Hebrew, aligning with the community's valuation of religious scholarship and leadership as primarily male domains. Conversely, the resonance of English for girls in the family speaks to a nuanced navigation of identity and adaptation within the English-speaking context of England, due to the community's *settled* migration status. The girls' better fluency in English and pursuit of a formal English education reflect a pragmatic approach to equipping them with the tools to manage family life within the broader English-speaking context without compromising their cultural and religious identity. This approach acknowledges the practical necessity of English literacy for girls, as a means to fulfil future roles expected of them as wives and mothers in the future – managing household affairs, engaging with external services like health and government services, and acting as intermediaries between the family and the outside world. Here, English literacy becomes a vehicle for girls and women to navigate secular spaces while maintaining the boundaries of their family's religious and cultural identity.

Pessi's role within the family illustrates how gendered expectations shape language and literacy practices. Her active curation of her children's literacy environment – seeking out Jewish-themed English literature and Yiddish magazines – serves as a conduit through which gendered roles and expectations are reinforced and

transmitted. Through her selections, Pessi not only facilitates her children's reading skills but also imparts the values and norms of the Hasidic community, preparing her sons and daughters to inhabit their respective roles within it. This practice underscores the instrumental role of women in the community not just as caregivers but as guardians of cultural continuity, tasked with the balance of fostering engagement with the wider society without eroding the foundations of their religious and cultural identity. In this way, the gendered distribution of linguistic competencies within the family reflects a broader strategy of survival and identity preservation, where language serves as both a boundary and a bridge. Through this lens, the differential emphasis on Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew for boys, and English for girls, emerges as a complex, strategic engagement with multilingualism, crafted to ensure the family's – and by extension, the community's – continuity within the wider context of English society.

Conclusion

Pessi's account shows how, in her role as a mother, she actively shapes the linguistic, cultural, and religious environment of her Hasidic family home. From her reflections on her own childhood reading practices to the curation of her children's literacy experiences, a vivid picture emerges of a household where literature serves both as a mirror reflecting their cultural and religious values and as a means of fostering a love for reading and storytelling. The methodical introduction of liturgical Hebrew followed by Yiddish in her children's Hasidic education system highlights a deliberate effort to anchor them firmly in their heritage while equipping them with the linguistic tools to navigate their multilingual contexts. Her accounts further illuminate how language and literacy practices are tailored to gendered roles, reflecting the distinct societal expectations for boys and girls within the family and community. Pessi's narrative reflects the embodiment of the Hasidic community's commitment to preserving its linguistic traditions and the pivotal role of the family in this process. Pessi's role as the facilitator of this rich linguistic and literacy environment thus ensures that her children's identities as members of the Hasidic community are nurtured and maintained, but also cultivates an appreciation for reading as a source of enjoyment.

Devorah's narrative

This section delves into the narrative of Devorah, a 15-year-old in Year 11, focusing on how her multilingual literacy practices and language choices reflect and shape her cultural and religious identity.

'A pure mix': Multilingual identity and language choices in Devorah's family life

Discussing her language upbringing, Devorah acknowledged a solid foundation in Yiddish, albeit not with precision in specialised vocabulary:

> 'We were brought up with quite a good Yiddish, I'm not saying I know it very accurately, but I know the basics of it quite well. I don't know all these, you know, big words … I'm not gonna try, whatever, to call all the fruit by their real Yiddish names … but, the basics, I know Yiddish quite well.'

Devorah also mentioned that her language usage at home typically involves an equal distribution between English and Yiddish, although she noted that she may speak English more frequently overall, particularly because of her time spent at school:

> 'I know both of them equal, so it's, depends who I'm speaking to, if I know someone knows Yiddish better I will straight away speak [to them in Yiddish], it's not gonna be hard for me to, like, to decide to speak Yiddish or English.'

> 'I would say that I do speak probably a bit more of English, but, not particularly, I mean, maybe because I'm more, like, a big chunk of the day I'm in school, so that's why I speak more, but at home I speak a mix, pure mix.'

Further insights into her language choices demonstrate a nuanced, gendered pattern. Devorah reported that she tends to communicate in English with her mother and sisters, while opting for Yiddish when conversing with her father, brothers, and younger sisters:

> 'To my mother and some of my, most of my sisters I speak in English, and to, maybe, my younger sisters and my brothers and father I speak Yiddish.'

This distinction resembles Pessi's family language patterns when she was growing up. It suggests a pragmatic approach, where language selection aligns with the different family members' linguistic proficiency and preference, facilitating effective communication within her family. This distinction is deeply rooted in Devorah's

perception of gender roles and differences within the Hasidic family and community, discussed in more detail later in this section.

As a reader to her younger siblings, Devorah's choices mirror her multilingual adaptability. She reported that she primarily reads English materials to them, but she occasionally explains challenging English words in Yiddish to ensure comprehension:

> 'They choose mainly English, but sometimes I'll just … tell it to them in Yiddish. It depends. Sometimes if it's, like, a hard word, a word I know they won't understand, then I, just, like, kind of say that page in Yiddish.'

This multilingual reading approach reflects her linguistic adaptability in bridging language gaps for her younger siblings, highlighting her multilingual fluency as well as her commitment to facilitating their engagement with reading.

When discussing her personal reading habits, Devorah reported that she slightly favours English, 'probably a bit more than Yiddish.' Her inclination towards English reading materials might be influenced by her educational environment, where English is the predominant language, as detailed next.

Devorah's educational environment and literacy practices

Devorah's educational journey is an integral part of her literacy narrative. As mentioned by Pessi, Devorah reported that her school days are divided into religious studies conducted in Yiddish and involving liturgical Hebrew reading in the mornings, and 'core subjects in English' in the afternoons. She further elaborated on her school schedule:

> 'First we do *davening* (praying in liturgical Hebrew) and then we have, we have four Yiddish lessons, and then we have a break in between, then another two of them, then we have a longer break, and then we switch to English, then … we have five lessons.'

The structural separation of the two languages, with the first half of the school day conducted in Yiddish and including liturgical Hebrew for prayer and religious study, highlights the deliberate effort to preserve and prioritise these languages within the school. This division reflects the broader Hasidic community's commitment to

maintaining both Yiddish as the vernacular and liturgical Hebrew as a sacred language, alongside the religious rules, practices, and rituals that are taught and practised during the first half of the school day.

Devorah provided further insights into the school's curriculum across the different school years, demonstrating a deliberate emphasis on preserving Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew. She reported that in her reception year, she was taught the Hebrew alphabet and vowels, gradually progressing to reading words in liturgical Hebrew by Year 1, and being able to read segments from the Torah in Year 2:

> 'In Year 1, you already start putting sounds together, and that's when we start reading words, and then, only in Year 2 do we start learning *chumash* (Torah, written in liturgical Hebrew).'

The introduction of Yiddish reading occurs later, in Year 2. When discussing her Yiddish reading in the present day, Devorah described it as 'fluent.'

Despite her school's clear efforts to instil and maintain good Yiddish oral and literacy skills in the students, Devorah revealed that she and her friends primarily converse in English, reserving Yiddish for interactions with teachers:

> D: Between friends we speak English anyways, it's just, when we communicate with the teachers, we speak Yiddish. I mean, most of them keep to Yiddish.

> I: If the teachers hear you speak English to each other, do they say anything?

> D: So our headmistress asks us to keep in the morning to Yiddish, so sometimes she does, like, with programmes, she tells us, like, if someone introduces something … then she tells them to speak in Yiddish to the school.

When asked specifically whether her teachers ask her and her peers to switch to Yiddish during break, she said that they do not.

The phrase 'keep to' mentioned twice by Devorah in relation to Yiddish reflects, again, the school's deliberate effort to maintain Yiddish as the language of instruction and communication among students and teachers. However, the fact that students default to English among themselves indicates a language shift within the school. The use of English for 'core subjects' in the afternoon reflects the pragmatic

necessity of being proficient in English to access a broader academic curriculum and be able to function in the wider English-speaking society. Devorah reported that most of the reading that she undertakes in her daily life is done in English for school purposes, particularly since she was studying for her GCSE exams during the time of this study. Devorah further told me that, in the following school year, she would be transitioning into a Hasidic higher-education institute for females called a *seminary*, where the educational focus shifts predominantly to English, and where she would pursue A-level exams in subjects like finance.

The school's multilingual approach not only fosters Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew skills but also equips students like Devorah to navigate life beyond the close-knit Hasidic community, where English proficiency is essential. This reflects the balance between preserving cultural identity and adapting to external linguistic demands in England, particularly for women in the community. The shift toward English among female students highlights how gender roles shape language practices, as women are expected to bridge their family life with the broader English-speaking environment more than their male counterparts.

Devorah's reading practices: Selectivity, social influence, and cultural negotiations

Devorah's approach to reading is characterised by selectivity and a notable influence of her peers at school. Her engagement with literature largely depends on her being persuaded by her peers, as she articulated:

> 'I'll tell you the truth, I'm really not the reading type. If someone really persuades me to take this book 'cause it really is, whatever, I will really have to be persuaded by the whole class that this book is really good and only then I will read it.'

This social dimension of reading reflects a broader pattern in her literacy practices, where, according to Devorah, peer recommendations play a crucial role in shaping her reading choices. However, Devorah reported that she still often finds her peers' book recommendations, which are all for books written in English, not to be to her taste:

'There was one [book] called *Invisible Me* but I didn't enjoy it, it was very boring. But most of my class really enjoyed it {laughs}. I was like, reading and reading, 'cause everyone was, everyone was saying how good this book is, and I was reading and reading and thinking, "okay, maybe now will be the good part," but, I don't know, I never made it to the end.'

As previously mentioned, much of Devorah's reading during this period was in English, as part of her preparation for GCSE exams. Devorah's experience of discussing English book recommendations with her peers in her Year 11 classroom struck me as an extraordinary occurrence in today's society, possibly highlighting a unique aspect of the tight-knit Hasidic community that she belongs to. In a world increasingly dominated by digital technology and media consumption, the fact that Hasidic teen girls are actively engaging in discussions about books is noteworthy. The absence of smartphones, television, and similar distractions may contribute to this phenomenon, fostering a communal atmosphere where shared literacy experiences play a central role in social interaction.

Despite her peers often discussing books, Devorah admitted that she 'never really... saw the joy in reading,' even at a young age. When asked about her associations with the word 'reading,' she explained that she thinks of books, because reading is 'something that bookworms do':

> D: I think about a book more than anything else, 'cause for me, reading, is just something that bookworms do {laughs}.

> I: Yes {I laugh}. And you don't consider yourself a bookworm.

> D: No, I don't. That's how I think of my sister who's older than me, she's just well into reading. … She's married. She reads, she can read all day long. All day long.

> I: In what language?

> D: She reads in English.

Despite reporting several times that she is 'not the reading type,' there were a few instances during our interviews when Devorah implied great enjoyment of reading,

when reading texts that she finds entertaining. For example, she described her experience of reading books that fascinate her from the very beginning:

> 'When I read something I need to, like, if it's interesting, if it catches me straight from the beginning, I like, I won't be able to put it down until the end, I will literally, like, read every spare second that I have, um, but I'm not really this, like, reading type, that would go to the library and choose a good book.'

Additionally, she reported that she enjoys the magazines that her mother brings home every week for the Jewish Sabbath:

> D: So we buy Yiddish magazines for *Shabbos* (the Sabbath), so I do get to read.
>
> I: What do you read in these magazines?
>
> D: Um, so I read, I read usually the comics, and I read, a few, like, interesting easy things.

She also expressed feeling disappointed if she misses a week of reading those magazines, adding that she used to enjoy reading short stories:

> 'Magazines that, like, I keep up with every week, the serials … the week that I miss it I'm, like, disappointed, so, in that way, I read a lot, and I'll tell you what else, other books that I used to read … I used to read books that are very, that have short stories, 'cause I like books that are not boring, just, like, light, fun … short stories could never be boring because, like, it was just short, so it had to have all the action in just, like, four, five pages.'

Therefore, despite describing herself as not 'the reading type,' Devorah's subsequent descriptions point to a more complex view of her reading habits. Interestingly, her conceptualisation of 'the reading type' highlights a tension between her self-perception and her actual engagement with reading. This discrepancy may stem from a narrow definition of reading as solely engaging with long, 'serious' books, overlooking the value of shorter texts and magazines that she admitted to enjoying. In spite of her own reservations, Devorah acknowledged that many of her peers and siblings enjoy reading, suggesting an overall positive cultural disposition towards

literacy within her family and community. Thus, Devorah's narrative highlights the importance of considering individual perspectives within broader cultural contexts.

Shifting to a discussion about her perception of reading in different languages, Devorah explained that she does not read Yiddish books:

'A book in Yiddish I would never read. I find that … I speak a basic Yiddish that's, like, nothing too heavy, but the books usually are quite, um, I would say it's much, uh, more sophisticated Yiddish, it's harder for me to read.'

Devorah's answers, again, pertain to her conceptualisation of reading as the engagement with long, 'serious' books. Therefore, and despite having daily Yiddish lessons at school and reading Yiddish magazines weekly, she reported that she does not 'really' read Yiddish.

Devorah's liturgical Hebrew reading experiences

Discussing the reading of liturgical Hebrew, Devorah reported that her school is 'advanced' in its teaching of the language, saying that she can translate liturgical Hebrew words quite easily, but still finds English and Yiddish easier to read:

'Our school's quite, like, an advanced school in that way … we can open up and just translate quite easy words, like, we do that a lot, although, Yiddish and English I can read faster than that.'

When I asked why she finds Yiddish easier to read than liturgical Hebrew, despite both languages using the same letters and her ability to understand both, Devorah explained that it is because of the vowels used in liturgical Hebrew:

D: Hebrew has all the *nekudos* (vowels represented as dots and marks around the letters) so it makes it, kind of, takes me a second to, like, figure out what it says.

I: Yes, so do you find it easier in Yiddish, where there's no *nekudos*?

D: Yeah, definitely.

Like her mother, Devorah discussed the reading of liturgical Hebrew only in the context of religious practices, and only when prompted. For example, she mentioned understanding most of the morning prayer recited at school by herself and her peers.

Additionally, during our interview the week following the Jewish festival of Purim, she described attending a reading of Book of Esther in liturgical Hebrew, a religious practice associated with the festival, at her neighbour's house:

> 'So we have a neighbour that does *megillah* (the Book of Esther reading), so we just popped over there. … it's just, um, someone who reads for his wife so a few ladies joined.'

Devorah's limited discussion of liturgical Hebrew reading, only addressing it within the context of religious practices and when prompted, suggests that she may not perceive this form of reading as equivalent to her engagement with English and Yiddish reading. Instead, it is integrated into her religious rituals and practices, indicating a distinct categorisation in her mind between reading for religious purposes and reading for enjoyment or educational purposes.

Gendered language and literacy in the family from Devorah's perspective

As aforementioned, Devorah noted that while English serves as the primary language of communication among females in her family, Yiddish takes precedence in interactions with male family members, and explained:

> 'The boys, I mean, my brothers, my father, I mean, they know English, but no, they're not too, I would say, they're basically fluent, but not amazing'

She observed that boys receive a more intensive focus on Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew at a younger age compared to girls:

> 'Because, the boys, they, they, they just do maybe, like, an hour or two at *cheder* (a primary school for Hasidic Jewish boys) of English … the boys' first language is, is, Yiddish, so that's why.'

Asked whether the males in her family can read English, she responded:

> 'Um, so my father, he is not amazing at reading English, like, he'd ask us sometimes to read some things to him because he's not really amazing, but my brother is, I wouldn't say he's amazing, but he, yeah, he's got the gist of it.'

Devorah stated on a different occasion:

'The girls read better, because they learn it better, then they can obviously read it better. … Do they [the boys] learn to read [English at school]? I think they do, but, very, quite basic. … but I think they do catch on a bit on their own, that's what I saw with my brother, 'cause sometimes I could see him read, and I could think, like, "do they really learn that at school?" Sometimes I think that maybe he just caught onto it on his own.'

Devorah's reflections provide valuable insight into the gendered linguistic dynamics within her family, echoing patterns reported by Pessi but also indicating some differences. Notably, Devorah described the boys' 'first language' as Yiddish, in contrast to girls, reflecting the boys' greater exposure to Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew and the community's expectation for males to prioritise religious study and leadership. This perception underscores how deeply intertwined gender and language use are in shaping individual identities and roles within the Hasidic family. However, while Devorah perceived the boys to be more proficient in Yiddish, Pessi rejected this notion, attributing any differences in literacy to teaching methods rather than language use. Devorah further noted that girls in her family are more fluent in English literacy, a view consistent with Pessi's account of girls receiving more formal education in English to prepare them for societal roles requiring engagement with the broader world. Together, their narratives highlight how gendered linguistic practices are shaped by broader community norms while also reflecting variation in individual perspectives, family practices, and generational experiences.

Conclusion

Devorah's narrative provides a vivid glimpse into the everyday realities of language, culture, and literacy within her life. At 15 years old, she effortlessly navigates a multilingual landscape, seamlessly switching between English, Yiddish, and liturgical Hebrew in different contexts. Her language use at home and in the community is shaped by family dynamics, gender roles, and the practicalities of communication within her household and classroom. In her school environment, Devorah's experiences highlight the importance that the community places on maintaining Yiddish while also recognising the necessity of English proficiency. While she predominantly enjoys light, entertaining stories in English and expressed reluctance towards more sophisticated Yiddish texts, her engagement with reading varies

depending on the content and format. Additionally, her limited discussion of liturgical Hebrew reading suggests a perception of reading as a practice related to personal enjoyment or educational pursuits.

Miriam's narrative

This section delves into the multilingual experiences of Miriam, an 11-year-old girl in Year 6. Miriam's narrative provides valuable insights into her engagement with reading practices, language choices, and cultural identity formation within the framework of her Hasidic Jewish upbringing.

'I like to mix it': Navigating English and Yiddish at school and at home

Like Devorah, during the first half of her school day, Miriam participates in religious activities conducted in Yiddish, involving liturgical Hebrew reading in practices such as prayer, Torah study, and discussions about Jewish festivals. In the second half of the day, she has what she terms 'English' lessons, which encompass subjects like English, mathematics, and science.

While she switches between English and Yiddish in various contexts, Miriam reported that she mainly speaks English to her friends:

> 'Mostly English, but, in Yiddish time [at school], we have to speak Yiddish … in the garden [i.e., during break time at school], we speak English.'

She explained:

> 'Everyone used to only know Yiddish, and in time we got into English, and English got easier, so … everyone is used to speak English so everyone, like, speaks it. But there's, like, some girls that are not so fluent, so they speak in Yiddish, I mean, everyone, like, goes and speaks to them in Yiddish, but otherwise we speak English.'

I asked Miriam whether her teachers ask her and her peers to switch to Yiddish, to which she responded that they do:

> M: They do care, they want more we should speak Yiddish, but, we like, hide {laughs}.

> I: You hide that you speak English?

M: If there's teachers in front of me, like, they turn around and then we, like, speak English.

I: If the teacher is right in front of you, do you switch to Yiddish?

M: Yeah.

I: So if they hear you talk in English, do they tell you to switch to Yiddish?

M: Yeah.

Miriam's proficiency in English, coupled with her peers' growing familiarity with the language, reflects the family's and community's *settled* migration history and highlights how external societal factors shape linguistic practices within the Hasidic community. However, in contrast to Devorah's experiences, where her teachers do not intervene when she speaks English with her friends, Miriam's teachers maintain a stricter approach with the use of Yiddish, in line with the community's *closed* positioning to wider society, and its commitment to instilling Yiddish language skills in the next generation. This difference may stem from the age gap between Devorah and Miriam. Older students like Devorah, who may have greater fluency in Yiddish, might also have more autonomy in their linguistic choices due to their more advanced age.

Miriam's interactions with her family further highlight the diverse ways in which she uses her language repertoire. She reported to 'mix' English and Yiddish when speaking to her parents and siblings at home:

'I like to mix it … I don't speak the high Yiddish, I speak, like, the normal one. So I don't speak the hard words.'

Although she prefers speaking English to her friends, Miriam reported finding Yiddish easier to understand than English. However, she mentioned that she considers both languages equal in terms of speaking ability:

M: I understand more Yiddish than English, because in English there's more high English, I mean, I understand a few words that we learnt, like, in literature, but…

I: Mmm. Yes. So, you're saying that you understand Yiddish better. Which language do you think you can speak better?

M: I don't know.

I: You're not sure. So do you think it's more or less the same?

M: Yeah.

Miriam's ability to navigate between languages reflects the fluidity of linguistic practices in her life, shaped by factors such as education, as well as cultural and family boundaries and practices.

Miriam's Yiddish and English reading experiences

When asked about her conceptualisation of reading, Miriam reported that the language that came to her mind was English, explaining that she finds English reading easier:

M: 'cause I'm more fluent in English than in Yiddish … 'cause it has much more, like, things that you have to remember and everything, if not, it's not correct.

I: What? In English?

M: In Yiddish.

I: In Yiddish. So do you find English easier, a bit?

M: Yes.

I: Yes. To read and to speak, or just to read?

M: Just to read.

When asked about her English reading habits, Miriam mentioned reading a worksheet at school and recalled enjoying a book titled *Yanky's Amazing Discovery* a few years prior, which she borrowed from the local Jewish library. My online search of the book revealed the book cover (see Figure 6.2, sourced from the Menucha Publishers website, https://menuchapublishers.com/products/yanky-s-amazing-discovery), as well as a short description of the book, written in English and telling the story of Yanky:

'Yanky Rosen is having a hard time in yeshivah. The Gemara is too hard, and he doesn't want to review with his father or let his rebbe know he didn't study.

All the boys in his class are learning, but Yanky just can't concentrate. To forget his difficulties, Yanky escapes to the attic, where he finds an unusual treasure. Will his amazing discovery help him solve his problems?'.

Miriam's mention of this Jewish-themed book illustrates the type of reading material commonly enjoyed by children in her family and mentioned by Pessi.
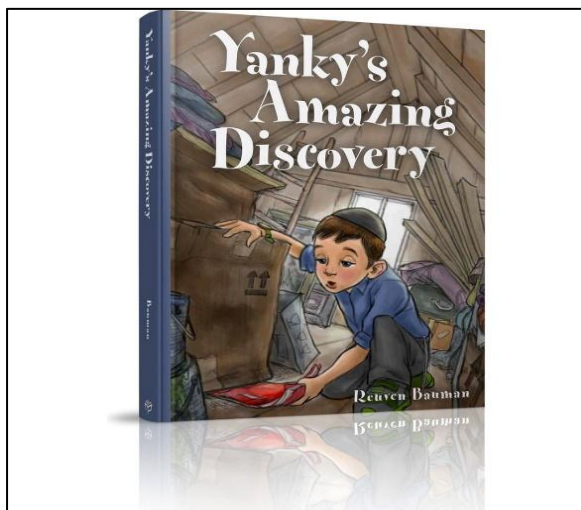
Figure 6.2: A screenshot of the cover of the book 'Yanky's Amazing Discovery,' sourced from the Menucha Publishers website, https://menuchapublishers.com/products/yanky-s-amazing-discovery.

Another book that Miriam mentioned was *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, saying:

'My mother bought [it] … I started it, but then my mother said, "put it away for *Pesach* (Passover)".'

I wondered whether Miriam's mother had purchased this book for her daughter following our previous interview, where she recalled reading the same book as a child. Although she mentioned bringing home only Jewish-themed books, her decision to acquire *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* for Miriam, despite its non-Jewish theme, suggests the lasting impact of the book on Pessi.

Miriam's account of her mother requesting to put the book away for the Passover festival, due to take place several weeks later, offers insights into the balance between religious observance and leisure activities within the family. In the family home, adherence to religious customs dictates a distinct lifestyle during the Sabbath

and Jewish festivals, characterised by refraining from activities like driving, using public transportation, and even walking more than a short distance. Consequently, opportunities for socialising and leisure pursuits are limited. As a result, the practice of 'putting books away' for these occasions provides alternative forms of entertainment and intellectual stimulation that are permissible within the constraints of religious observance.

Miriam reported that she had struggled in the past with both English and Yiddish reading; however, she received help with her English reading and finds it easier these days:

> M: English I don't struggle so much but I used to struggle.
>
> I: When did you struggle with English?
>
> M: When we started reading, I knew it, then I just, like, slipped, everything just slipped, so I got someone to help me, and now, *baruch hashem* (thank God) I know it.

In a different interview, when asked if she could tell me about something she had read that day, she replied:

> M: I didn't read anything, because I don't really, like, too much fluent in reading, I mean, I'm not fluent in reading, in Yiddish and in English.
>
> I: Can you read in both Yiddish and English?
>
> M: Yiddish I struggle much much more, but in English it's easier.

Despite her greater proficiency in English reading, Miriam discussed her efforts to improve her Yiddish reading and writing skills. Her engagement with Yiddish reading primarily occurs within the structured environment of her school, where she participates in reading and writing exercises under the guidance of her teacher. She described her classroom activities, including Yiddish story writing and reading aloud to her teacher and peers. When asked about her experience of writing stories in Yiddish, Miriam reported:

> 'I mean, my spelling is totally wrong {laughs}, that I can tell you, but … [the teacher] goes through it when she takes it in and then I read out the story for her, because I know what I wrote.'

Miriam's experiences further highlight her enjoyment of stories in Yiddish, both in and outside the classroom. She shared that every '*rosh chodesh*' (the first day of a new Jewish month), her teacher reads the classroom a story in Yiddish instead of the usual work that they are required to do in Yiddish class, mentioning that it is a 'treat' for the special occasion. Additionally, Miriam shared her experiences reading Yiddish literature outside of the classroom, particularly enjoying comics and serialised stories in magazines that she reads on the Sabbath. She noted her preference for stories with fewer words and more illustrations, which facilitate her comprehension and enjoyment of the story.

While Miriam's multilingual reading journey is marked by enthusiasm and determination, it also highlights the complexities of navigating multiple linguistic and literary landscapes. Miriam's comfort with English reading contrasts with her efforts to enhance her Yiddish literacy, showcasing the tension between oral language fluency and literacy proficiency. Furthermore, Miriam's engagement with Yiddish literature underscores the cultural significance of maintaining linguistic traditions within the Hasidic community and her own family, where Yiddish serves as a conduit for preserving heritage and tradition and maintaining the *closed* positioning of the community.

Reading practices and storytelling at home from Miriam's perspective

At home, Miriam's reading experiences are shaped by her mother's nurturing engagement with literature, fostering a rich environment where stories hold a central place in the family life. From early childhood, Miriam recalled her mother reading to her in Yiddish, explaining: 'I didn't really understand proper English so in Yiddish.'

Miriam further reported, several times throughout our interviews, that her mother primarily brings home English books from the library, however they are not typically the types of books that Miriam enjoys:

> 'My mother goes to the library, she brings some books home and then we give it back. But … she doesn't bring home [books] with the pictures. … my mother brings them only without pictures, that's why I don't enjoy it so much.'

Despite the absence of pictures in the library books, Miriam's enjoyment of storytelling is clear, particularly during 'supper time' when her mother reads to her

and her siblings. She provided the example of *Rusty the Train* as a book her mother had recently read to her and her siblings, and reported that her mother mainly reads to 'the younger ones. From me down.' While Miriam's mother primarily takes on the role of storyteller within the family, Miriam reported that she occasionally takes on the role of a storyteller herself with her younger siblings:

> 'I can read, imagine, to my brothers some of the children's books. … like *Topsy and Tim* and the train, *Thomas and his Friends*.'

Interestingly, the examples Miriam provided are popular English books rather than Jewish-themed books, which contrasts with Pessi, who reported bringing home primarily Jewish-themed books. This suggests that while Pessi's general approach to literacy remains culturally bounded, her book selection for her younger children shows a degree of flexibility – likely reflecting practical considerations such as availability or age-appropriateness, rather than a deliberate shift in policy.

Miriam's participation in reading to her siblings underscores the intergenerational transmission of literacy within the family, where older siblings play an active role in nurturing younger ones' literacy skills and fostering a culture of shared storytelling.

Through these family reading practices – often supported and facilitated by Pessi – literature becomes a conduit for both enjoyment and bonding in Miriam's life, enriching everyday experiences with storytelling in both Yiddish and English.

Miriam's conceptualisations of reading

Asked about 'something' she had enjoyed reading recently, Miriam was quiet for a few moments, then answered, 'I don't enjoy it,' referring to reading, and explaining that she does not enjoy reading since she is 'not good at it':

> 'Because I'm not good at it and I don't enjoy it. … I don't enjoy reading, that's why I don't read, really.'

On a different occasion, I asked Miriam what she finds 'boring' to read, to which she replied: 'books.' I sought to understand what she meant exactly:

> I: Books, in general?

> M: Yes.

I: All books?

M: I, I only like reading comics, because it has pictures, the pictures, like, push me…

I: They push you to do what?

M: Like, to read more, 'cause the picture explains it, like, imagine, like, I don't know a word, the picture explains it.

When prompted to envision the act of reading, Miriam associated it primarily with comics rather than traditional books, emphasising the significance of visual storytelling in her conceptualisation of reading. Additionally, she reported that the language that she thinks about when she thinks of the word 'reading' is English, explaining, "cause I'm more fluent in English than in Yiddish.' Miriam's identification of English as the language linked to reading aligns with her perceived fluency in English reading compared to Yiddish.

Despite expressing a disinterest in book reading, and as described previously, Miriam reported finding enjoyment in being read to, like when her mother reads to her at home, or when her teacher reads stories to the classroom. These insights shed light on Miriam's unique perspective on reading, characterised by a preference for visually stimulating narratives as well as oral storytelling as a means of literary enjoyment, perhaps stemming from the difficulties she reports with reading.

Miriam's religious practices and liturgical Hebrew reading experiences

Miriam's narrative revolves around her Hasidic Jewish identity, evident in her adherence to religious customs and participation in liturgical Hebrew reading practices. During our initial interview, I enquired about Miriam's hobbies during her free time. She mentioned doodling and drawing pictures. When prompted about the subject of her drawings, she responded:

'Depends on what like, season, it is, if it's Purim (a Jewish festival characterised by festive costumes and theatrical performances, including the portrayal of characters such clowns) then I like to draw clowns, but if it's, like, *Pessach* (Passover) then I like to draw, like, like… *Pessach* type of things.'

From a young age, Miriam's exposure to liturgical Hebrew began with her learning of the alphabet and progressed through her schooling. Miriam's introduction to liturgical Hebrew reading coincided with her early years of schooling, where she acquired foundational knowledge of the Hebrew alphabet and basic prayers. Reflecting on her initial encounters with liturgical Hebrew texts, Miriam recalled:

> 'I learnt [the Hebrew letters] at the end of Year 1. At the end of Year 1, we got our *siddur* (prayer book), and then, by, like, the middle of Year 2, we started learning *chumash* (Torah).'

Before that, she recalled, she used to recite prayers in liturgical Hebrew from memory, mainly through chanting and singing. This progression underscores the structured approach to liturgical Hebrew literacy instruction within her school, where students are introduced to religious texts in a systematic manner.

Despite the initial challenges posed by the language's complexity, Miriam gradually mastered the intricacies of liturgical Hebrew reading through consistent practice and guidance from her teachers. However, she reported that some texts are easier for her to read than others. For example, she explained that she finds the daily prayer easy to read, 'because we sing it like a song, so it's just, I do that every day.' Reading the Torah, on the other hand, is more challenging for her: 'I struggle a bit, 'cause I don't read, like, every single day the same words.'

She described a typical day of liturgical Hebrew reading at school:

> 'I *daven* (pray) every day. And yesterday, we had *chumash* (Torah reading) groups, so we, I had a, I was the lucky one to get picked and to read from the *chumash*.'

Miriam went on to describe a weekly lesson where the classroom reads and discusses the weekly Torah portion, to be read the following Sabbath in the synagogue. Miriam explained that the Torah portions are typically in the form of stories, and detailed the structure of those lessons:

> '[The teacher] talks about [the weekly Torah portion], and then we, like, write down notes, or she lets us colour, and she gets us paper to colour, it's, like, a fun lesson. … I enjoy it, 'cause we, just, like, it's more of a, like, story time.'

When asked about the languages used during those lessons, Miriam explained that the teacher reads the weekly Torah portions in liturgical Hebrew, and then translates them into Yiddish for the class.

Asked whether she understands the liturgical Hebrew texts that she is required to decode in the classroom and as part of different religious rituals, Miriam replied, 'depends what,' and explained that her school implements a structured programme aimed at enhancing students' comprehension of liturgical Hebrew prayers and religious texts. This structured programme frames the comprehension of liturgical Hebrew texts as a form of academic achievement, reinforcing the perception of religious texts as part of schooled work. As part of the programme, each month, the school focuses on a different prayer, and various elements are incorporated, including worksheets, tests, and collectable cards. Miriam explained that this programme is optional for students, but most students choose to engage in it, since through their active participation they can earn points and rewards. Students are required to learn independently, but are also encouraged to study during break times, often gathering in groups to review material and sing in different tunes:

> 'Everyone has to learn it themselves, but, like, at break time, if there's, like, a few girls that want to learn it, there's like, chairs in the garden, so we all, like, come and sit together, and we learn it. And then sometimes teachers sit with us, and we learn together, and we sing [the prayer] in different tunes.'

Within the programme, tests primarily assess students' comprehension of the prayers and their ability to decode those prayers from text. Miriam explained that the tests are optional even for students who take part in the programme:

> M: If you do the test, they put your name into a *goral* (raffle) when the girls get picked. But, if you don't do the test and the worksheets, you're like in a half, not completely going in, only, like, half way…

> I: So not everyone has to do it.

> M: No, but the more you do it, the more, like, um, more points you'll get.

Through this comprehensive approach, Miriam and her peers gain a deeper understanding of liturgical Hebrew prayers and traditions, reinforcing their connection to their Hasidic Jewish identity and religious practice.

Miriam's immersion in liturgical Hebrew reading practices in the classroom reinforces her engagement with religious practices and traditions at home and in the community. She described having a good knowledge of the stories described in the weekly Torah portion read at the synagogue each week, and explained that the practice of reading the Book of Esther in class ahead of Purim allowed her to read it easily and even understand the text which was read on Purim day. Thus, the school's liturgical Hebrew practices and programmes allow Miriam to actively participate in religious rituals and community services, where she encounters opportunities for liturgical Hebrew reading, as she follows along with prayers and the reading of religious texts. Additionally, the focus on liturgical Hebrew reading and storytelling in the school may deepen her connection to her Hasidic Jewish heritage and faith. Through these experiences, Miriam not only strengthens her liturgical Hebrew literacy skills but also internalises the values and teachings embedded within those texts, strengthening her identity as a member of the Hasidic Jewish community.

Despite her extensive liturgical Hebrew reading practices, Miriam did not mention this aspect of her reading practices when discussing her daily reading habits, focusing instead on English and Yiddish. Additionally, when queried about her reading at the synagogue on Purim day, Miriam initially responded that there was 'nothing to read,' yet later acknowledged reading the Book of Esther when prompted:

> I: Did you read anything when you were at *shul* (the synagogue)?

> M: There was nothing to read.

> I: Nothing to read. But you did read the *megillah* (Book of Esther typically read on Purim), didn't you?

> M: Yes I did.

This discrepancy suggests that Miriam may not categorise the reading of religious texts as part of her broader understanding of 'reading', perhaps associating 'reading' primarily with the reading of stories, or limiting her definition of 'reading' to instances involving languages she fully comprehends, such as Yiddish and English.

Overall, Miriam's incorporation of liturgical Hebrew reading into her daily life underscores the profound impact of religious literacy on her cultural and religious identity.

Conclusion

Miriam's narrative provides valuable insights into the multilingual experiences, reading practices, and cultural identity formation within the context of her Hasidic upbringing. Her experiences reveal an intersection of English and Yiddish in various contexts, reflecting her proficiency in English and her community's commitment to preserving Yiddish language skills. Miriam's interactions with her family and peers illustrate her diverse experiences of language use, highlighting her comfort with English speaking and reading, while also acknowledging her ability to better comprehend Yiddish. Additionally, her engagement with Yiddish and English reading materials, both within and outside the classroom, reflects the significance of maintaining linguistic traditions within her family and community, characterised by the tension between a *settled* but *closed* community. Furthermore, Miriam's immersion in liturgical Hebrew reading practices at school deepens her connection to her religious heritage, reinforcing her identity as a member of the Hasidic community.

Reflections and conclusions

The case study of the Hasidic family presented in this chapter offers insights into their multilingual literacy practices, and the ways they use and navigate the various languages and literacies in their life to perpetuate and maintain cultural identity within a deeply traditional and insular community. This reflections and conclusions section aims to critically analyse the emergent themes from this study: Navigating Yiddish and English: family, community, and gendered roles; fostering cultural continuity through multilingual literacy practices; and the role of educational institutions in maintaining language, literacy, and cultural identity. Subsequently, this analysis situates the family within the broader context of their social, spatial, temporal and generational contexts, concluding with an overarching reflection on the family's navigation of their multilingual literacies and identities.

Navigating Yiddish and English: Family, community, and gendered roles

Language use within the family reflects a balance between Yiddish and English, tailored to meet both internal family dynamics and the broader societal demands. For the females in the family, both languages are seamlessly integrated into daily life, not only at home but also in school, social, and community settings. In the interviews, Pessi, Devorah, and Miriam did not explicitly discuss the importance of maintaining Yiddish, likely because its use is so deeply ingrained in most domains of their lives that it seems self-evident. For them, Yiddish is encountered naturally across most domains of daily life – family, school, and community – making its use habitual and not something that requires conscious effort to maintain at home. This seamless integration allows both Yiddish and English to play vital roles in their routines, serving cultural and practical needs alike. For example, Pessi's weekly purchase of Yiddish magazines and the children's consistent use of the language at home reinforce its ongoing presence.

While both languages are central to family life, the balance differs based on gender. For boys, Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew are prioritised, reflecting their importance for religious and cultural leadership roles. Boys' schools strongly emphasise these languages, preparing them for future responsibilities within the community. In contrast, girls' education places greater emphasis on English, ensuring they can manage external interactions such as healthcare and official communications, while maintaining functional proficiency in Yiddish for family and community roles.

These gendered linguistic paths highlight adaptive strategies to balance cultural preservation with practical needs. By ensuring fluency in both Yiddish and English, the family enables its members to uphold their cultural identity while engaging effectively with the wider English-speaking world. For women and girls, the natural integration of Yiddish across multiple spheres equips them to navigate seamlessly between the insular community and external society, bridging these distinct linguistic and cultural domains.

Fostering cultural continuity through multilingual literacy practices

The family's engagement with both English and Yiddish literacy, particularly through Jewish-themed materials, demonstrates a deliberate effort to cultivate a reading culture that is aligned with their community values and religious beliefs. Pessi, as the mother, plays a central role in fostering this environment by carefully selecting

materials that reinforce the family's cultural norms. Her daughters, Devorah and Miriam, enjoy reading through some of the reading materials that Pessi brings home, and contribute by reading to their younger siblings, creating a shared practice of storytelling, and nurturing a love for reading within the household.

This focus on literacy highlights two key themes. Firstly, storytelling and reading serve as primary forms of education and entertainment in a household that avoids mainstream media, which is often viewed as conflicting with community values. While this creates a context where reading is central to family life, there are individual variations in how family members engage with it. For example, both Devorah and Miriam mentioned they do not particularly enjoy reading, and Pessi herself admitted that she does not love it as much as other family members. This suggests that while reading is encouraged as a cultural and educational tool, personal preferences still play a role in shaping individual experiences.

Secondly, the family's literacy practices and pathways of reading resource acquisition reflect their reliance on the Hasidic community's self-sufficient ecosystem, including Jewish libraries, shops, and school resources. This system enables them to uphold their cultural and religious identity without significant interaction with wider society. The focus on Jewish-themed materials and the minimal presence of English mainstream books highlight the community's *settled* migration history yet *closed* societal positioning. By deepening their roots within their own community, they prioritise cultural preservation over integration. Within this context, literacy practices are tailored to reinforce communal values and identity, with Pessi ensuring that reading materials serve as vehicles for transmitting these norms to the next generation.

An integral part of the family's literacy practices is the inclusion of liturgical Hebrew reading, primarily used for prayer and Torah study. This supports the children's proficiency in sacred texts and their understanding of their religious Jewish identity. Interestingly, however, none of the participants mentioned liturgical Hebrew when asked about their reading habits unless specifically prompted. This suggests that religious practices involving liturgical Hebrew are not conceptualised as 'reading' in the same way as their engagement with Yiddish or English texts. For the family members I interviewed, reading is more strongly associated with materials intended

for pleasure or knowledge, rather than religious observance. Furthermore, the prominence of liturgical Hebrew reading at school may reduce the need for Pessi to emphasise its practice at home.

Overall, the family's multilingual literacy practices serve as a key component of their cultural preservation, illustrating a model that prioritises strict boundaries of cultural and religious maintenance over integration into wider society.

The role of educational institutions in maintaining language, literacy, and cultural identity

In addition to the home and family unit, the children's schools play a vital role in shaping identity development within the Hasidic community, instilling the norms, values, and traditions that define Hasidic way of life. Specifically, the educational approach in the girls' Hasidic schools reflects the distinct roles and expectations for women within the community. The school day is divided into two distinct halves: religious studies, conducted in Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew, take place in the morning, followed by English-based studies in the afternoon. This structure reinforces the importance of maintaining both heritage languages for cultural preservation and English for pragmatic purposes, preparing girls for their anticipated dual responsibilities of preserving cultural traditions within the community while managing external interactions with the broader English-speaking society. The boys' Hasidic schools, by contrast, operate with a different structure and emphasis, focusing more intensively on Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew for religious purposes. However, this study focuses on the experiences of the participants interviewed – all female – whose schooling takes place in Hasidic schools where the curriculum balances religious and English education more evenly, in preparation for their future roles.

Moreover, Hasidic schools alleviate much of the responsibility for home language maintenance from parents. These schools provide an immersive linguistic environment, enabling Yiddish to thrive as a primary language of instruction and daily interaction alongside English. This means that families do not need to rely entirely on deliberate or structured Yiddish maintenance practices at home, as the schools play a significant role in ensuring that Yiddish remains a living and vibrant language for the children, making the parents' role in this regard somewhat easier.

Overall, the children's Hasidic schools provide a continuity of heritage that spans generations, ensuring that students not only learn their community's languages but also internalise its values, traditions, and worldview. In doing so, these schools help create a self-sustaining ecosystem where language and literacy are deeply intertwined with cultural preservation and identity, enabling the Hasidic community to thrive in its *settled* migration context in London.

Situating the family within social, spatial, temporal and generational dimensions

The Hasidic family's experience can be deeply understood by examining their position within specific social, spatial, and temporal contexts. Living within a *closed* and insulated community in London, the family interacts with a carefully maintained ecosystem which strongly influence their daily life.

Socially, the family is embedded in a community that values self-sufficiency and a strong internal support system, including their own languages and literacies. This community structure allows them to live in accordance with their cultural and religious norms without the need for extensive outside interaction. This insular approach ensures that while they are part of the broader societal framework of London, they maintain a distinct identity, with minimal participation in mainstream society. The community's social structures, such as schools and shops, are tailored to reinforce their values and meet their needs without compromising their beliefs.

Spatially, the family resides in a geographic area that supports their way of life, characterised by a concentration of Hasidic families and institutions that uphold their customs. This physical space both provides a buffer from the broader society and reinforces a sense of community and belonging. Their living spaces, places of worship, and educational institutions are all designed to perpetuate their cultural and religious practices within the safety of their community boundaries.

Temporally, the family's migration history is relatively distant, with their roots in England stretching back several generations on Pessi's side. This historical depth provides them with a firm sense of being *settled*, viewing England as their permanent home rather than a temporary residence. Unlike newer migrant communities that may still be navigating the complexities of establishing a new home in a foreign land or intending to move back to their homeland, this family sees England as their

established base, with no intentions of relocating. This long-term settlement has allowed them to build a stable community that meticulously preserves their heritage while adapting to the necessities of life in England.

Interestingly, there are minimal generational differences within the family regarding cultural practices, language use, and values. This continuity can be attributed to the insular nature of their community, which provides consistent reinforcement of norms and traditions across generations. The tightly controlled ecosystem of Hasidic schools, social networks, and community institutions ensures that younger generations are socialised into the same cultural framework as their parents and grandparents. This strong intergenerational alignment reflects the community's strong preservation of its heritage while adapting selectively to the broader societal context of England.

This contextualisation of the family within these dimensions highlights how their multilingual literacy practices, as well as their unique socio-spatial and historical contexts, play pivotal roles in shaping their identity and navigating their socio-cultural worlds. Their approach to balancing life in England with their cultural and religious values attempts to ensure that each generation continues to strictly maintain and uphold their traditions.

Conclusion

This case study of the Hasidic family effectively illustrates the dynamic nature of multilingual and multicultural navigation within this *closed* community. The family's strategic use of Yiddish and English, differentiated educational paths for boys and girls, and the meticulous integration of liturgical Hebrew into their religious and educational practices highlight a model of cultural preservation that prioritises continuity over participation in wider society. This case study not only sheds light on the unique multilingual literacy practices of a Hasidic family but also demonstrates how this multilingual family manages to sustain its linguistic heritage and cultural identity, supported by the community's self-sufficient ecosystem and strict lingual and cultural boundaries.

Chapter 7   Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, I shift from presenting and discussing individual case studies to analysing patterns across the three multilingual families in this study. I explore how these families use multilingual literacies to navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities, focusing on the similarities and differences that emerged across contexts, shaped by distinct migration histories, literacy practices, and their social, cultural and religious priorities. The chapter is organised around key thematic areas that cut across the cases: the role of mothers as decision-makers in family multilingual literacy practices; the influence of external literacy settings in shaping multilingual literacy practices; children's navigational strategies of their multilingual literacy environments; and the ways in which multilingual literacy hierarchies and boundaries are negotiated within and beyond the family, shaping socio-cultural identities.

These themes are considered in light of the overarching research questions that shaped the study:

1. How do multilingual family members in London use multilingual literacies to navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities?

2. In what ways do reading practices, choices, preferences, and experiences vary among individuals within and across multilingual families?

3. How do social, spatial, temporal and generational factors shape and explain the diverse literacy practices of multilingual families?

Mothers as decision-makers in multilingual literacy practices

In the three families I studied, mothers played a particularly prominent role in structuring their children's multilingual literacy practices. They took on two interconnected roles: curating the home literacy environment and resources (selecting materials and regulating literacy practices) and facilitating access to external literacy spaces (complementary education, religious institutions, community settings, and digital-transnational learning networks). While this pattern was consistent across families, the way literacy was curated by each mother differed significantly, shaped by a combination of migration histories, religious and cultural priorities, educational aspirations, and how the families positioned themselves in

relation to the wider English-speaking society. These themes are explored throughout this chapter.

Curating literacy environment and resources: Mothers as gatekeepers of home literacy practices

In each family setting in this study, mothers shaped their children's multilingual literacy environments through the selection, regulation, and promotion of literacy resources. Across all three families in this study, mothers were responsible for determining which resources in which languages were made available to their children, how these resources were embedded into everyday routines, and which aspects of literacy were prioritised. However, as aforementioned, their motivations for curating specific literacy resources varied, informing how multilingual literacies were prioritised, distributed across languages, and embedded into everyday life.

In the Polish family, Nadia deliberately curates Polish literacy resources, including a Polish phonics book, textbooks sourced from Poland and from the Polish complementary school, and religious texts. Nadia's curation of Polish literacy resources reflects the family's *open-ended* migration history and her desire to keep open the possibility of a future return to Poland linguistically viable for her children. While Polish literacy is deliberately prioritised, English literacy is not neglected: English books are readily available in both Gabriela and Simon's bedrooms, and both siblings engage with English reading daily, whether for academic or leisure purposes. However, Nadia did not explicitly frame English literacy as an academic tool, in contrast to Noor in the Bangladeshi family.

In the Bangladeshi family, Noor actively structures her children's multilingual literacy environment by providing Quranic texts, enrolling them in daily private Islamic and Quranic Arabic lessons, and regulating their access to both religious and academic literacy resources. While Bengali is maintained as a spoken language within the home, Noor does not actively encourage or structure Bengali literacy in the same way. Written Bengali was reported to be practised only on one occasion by Noor, describing her assistance with her husband's occasional letters. This limited engagement suggests that Bengali literacy has a reduced functional necessity in the family's daily life. In contrast, Noor's prioritisation of Quranic Arabic literacy reflects a clear literacy hierarchy rooted in religious obligations. This hierarchy is shaped not

by deliberate exclusion of Bengali literacy but by the higher cultural and religious significance attributed to Quranic Arabic. At the same time, Noor recognises the necessity of English literacy for her children's educational success and ensures they have access to English books for academic and leisure reading.

In the Hasidic family, Pessi's role in curating multilingual literacy practices is shaped by the unique institutional and social structures of the Hasidic community, where schools and community networks play a central role in sustaining children's multilingual literacies. Unlike Nadia and Noor, who must actively manage home-based multilingual literacy exposure, Pessi operates within a system where Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew literacy are embedded into schooling and reinforced through community expectations. However, this does not render her role passive. Pessi actively cultivates a rich home literacy environment by sourcing Jewish-themed resources in Yiddish and English from local libraries and bookshops, selecting materials that align with her children's specific interests and needs. Her commitment is evident in her daily routine of reading to her children at mealtimes, translating books into Yiddish when necessary, and selecting texts that reflect her family's religious and cultural values.

Yet Pessi's curation is not evenly distributed across her children. In this Hasidic family and community, girls are expected to develop functional English literacy to navigate interactions beyond the Hasidic world, while boys prioritise religious literacy in Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew. While Pessi provides Yiddish and English materials for all her children, English reading resources dominate the home literacy environment, suggesting her efforts may be more attuned to her daughters' literacy needs. Her daughters also reported reading aloud to younger siblings and engaging in book discussions, suggesting active home-based support for English reading. By contrast, Pessi did not mention curating resources in liturgical Hebrew, which forms a core part of her sons' religious education and is largely governed by school and institutional structures. While she supports Yiddish literacy at home – important for both genders – through the purchase of a weekly children's magazine read by multiple children, this was the only Yiddish reading resource the family members described, and this support is not explicitly gender-targeted. This gendered differentiation is central to understanding Pessi's maternal role. Her actions reinforce a literacy hierarchy in which liturgical Hebrew is the primary domain of institutional

religious learning for boys, Yiddish serves as a shared language of cultural life, and English is selectively cultivated in the home for girls' future social and practical engagement beyond the community. In this way, maternal literacy curation in the Hasidic family operates within – and reproduces – a broader system of gendered religious and social roles.

Additionally, across all three families, shared reading emerged as a meaningful aspect of the home literacy environment, curated and sustained by mothers. Whether in the form of reading the Polish Bible at bedtime in the Polish household, enjoying mealtime English stories with Pessi and her children in the Hasidic household, or engaging with both Quranic texts and English stories in the Bangladeshi family, these practices highlight how literacy is embedded in everyday family life. These shared moments reflect the relational and affective dimensions of multilingual literacies, demonstrating that maternal support for them can take place through shared and routine reading. They also underscore the role of shared reading in maintaining and transmitting multilingual literacies, not only as a means of instruction but as a form of emotional and cultural connection.

Mothers' roles in multilingual literacies: Extending current frameworks

Overall, the findings discussed in this section suggest that in multilingual families, home literacy practices are actively structured across different languages, with mothers acting as gatekeepers whose decisions reflect their migration histories, values, and broader societal positioning.

Notions of 'teach the mother, reach the child' (e.g., Sticht & McDonald, 1990) have long dominated educational research and family literacy interventions, positioning mothers as central figures in shaping children's literacy outcomes as they relate to schooling. A substantial body of research has highlighted how maternal literacy beliefs, educational backgrounds, and interactional styles influence both the quality of the home literacy environment and children's emergent literacy skills (e.g., Anyikwa & Obidike, 2013; Bingham, 2007; Marjanovič-Umek et al., 2017; Reece, 1995; Tracey & Young, 2002; Weigel et al., 2006). These studies collectively suggest that mothers' understandings of their role in supporting literacy development shape the types of activities they engage in with their children, the nature of joint reading

practices, and the degree to which home literacy aligns with school-based expectations.

However, the contribution of this thesis lies not in reaffirming the importance of mothers in the literacy lives of their children, but in offering a more contextually grounded and ideologically sensitive account of maternal agency. Specifically, this study demonstrates that in multilingual families, maternal curation of literacy practices is shaped by more than just academic aspirations. It is deeply embedded in religious values, migration trajectories, and culturally specific views of what literacy is for. Across the three case studies, maternal decisions about what to read, in which language, and for what purpose were shaped by wider goals that often did not align with dominant or schooled literacies. In the Polish family, Nadia's concern with her children maintaining Polish literacy was framed more around national identity and future belonging in Poland. While English texts were present in the home, they were not prioritised in the same way. In the Bangladeshi family, Noor did align her children's English reading with school success, as the literature would predict, but her strong investment in Quranic Arabic pointed to a parallel and equally prioritised literacy system rooted in faith and tradition. In the Hasidic family, Pessi's curation of English and Yiddish reading materials appeared to be driven more by a desire to instil a love of reading and offer entertainment than by concerns about school outcomes. These examples demonstrate that mothers in this study did not always position literacy as a bridge to academic achievement, but instead as a tool for cultural preservation, national identity, religious practices, and everyday enjoyment.

In this way, the study extends previous research by shifting the analytic lens from viewing mothers as merely facilitators of school-aligned literacy to recognising them as cultural gatekeepers who mediate multiple literacy systems, attached to different values. It adds an additional layer to the understanding of maternal agency by showing how it is situated within migration histories, shaped by religious and cultural ideologies, and enacted through the selective valuation of particular literacies. It also suggests that mothers' roles in multilingual families cannot be fully understood without considering the broader social and structural contexts in which their decisions take place.

These findings on mothers' roles also offer important insights for the Family Language Policy (FLP) literature. While FLP scholarship has often emphasised joint parental strategies or broader household-level planning (e.g., King et al., 2008; Curdt-Christiansen, 2012), the analysis here foregrounds maternal decision-making as a distinct and influential force in shaping multilingual literacy practices. It also challenges two common assumptions within FLP research: first, that home language maintenance is primarily oriented towards preserving the past; and second, that language planning is always structured around a binary of home versus dominant (school) languages.

In the Polish family case, Nadia's curation strategies suggest that multilingual literacies are an investment in future mobility, as well as a means of preserving a sense of Polish national identity and a language of family communication. In the Bangladeshi family, Noor's emphasis on Quranic Arabic over Bengali illustrates a literacy hierarchy driven by religious identity, challenging common FLP framings that often position home language maintenance as a binary choice between home and dominant languages. Meanwhile, Pessi's case in the Hasidic family complicates the assumption that home literacy is always a product of home management, highlighting how in some contexts, community structures – not parents – bear the primary responsibility for sustaining multilingual literacies. Yet within this rule-bound setting, Pessi also exercises agency, curating English and Yiddish materials that circulate across siblings. These actions reflect a form of maternal agency that operates alongside institutional structures, shaping the affective and gendered dimensions of home literacy. This suggests that in multilingual contexts where institutional structures tightly regulate literacy practices – as in the Hasidic community – maternal agency may not take the form of managing formal instruction, but instead resembles the more everyday supportive roles seen in mainstream families. However, unlike mainstream families, this support is shaped by community-specific norms: the materials selected must align with religious values, cultural expectations, and gender roles. Collectively, these three cases call for a broader conceptualisation of FLP that accounts for maternal decision-making, the strategic differentiation of literacies within the home, and the influence of external literacy support systems.

Given the significance of external literacy spaces in shaping how multilingual literacies are practised and sustained across all three families, in the following section I examine more closely how these spaces operate alongside – and sometimes independently of – maternal strategies.

The role of external literacy spaces in shaping multilingual literacies

In addition to the literacy practices shaped within the home, this study highlights the important role of external literacy spaces in shaping multilingual literacy practices. In what follows, I examine how various spaces, initially accessed through maternal facilitation, supported multilingual literacies across the three families in my study, dividing them into three main types: (1) community and educational institutions; (2) digitally mediated spaces; and (3) religious institutions and liturgical literacies. Then, I discuss the role of mainstream schools, where home literacies remained largely unsupported. This is followed by a discussion of how these external spaces interact with home-based practices, maternal strategies, and broader socio-cultural contexts to shape multilingual literacy practices.

Community and educational institutions

Community-based and educational institutions played a vital role in supporting the home languages and literacies of the three families in this study.

In the Polish family, Nadia has facilitated her children's access to a range of literacy-rich environments that support their home language, including the Polish complementary school, Scouts, and a Polish-speaking Catholic church. These spaces, run by and for the Polish diaspora, not only offer formal instruction in Polish literacy but also serve as key sites for cultural and national identity maintenance. Family members' engagement with these institutions illustrates how complementary education and diaspora-led community initiatives can embed home literacy practices into children's social lives. In this case, they reinforce the family's connection to the wider Polish diaspora and its cultural and religious practices. Importantly, Nadia herself is actively involved in some of these spaces, participating in church activities and maintaining connections with the Polish community in London via platforms such as Facebook. Her ongoing engagement reinforces the role of these institutions as meaningful extensions of the family's everyday multilingual practices and cultural life.

In the Bangladeshi family, complementary education initially took the form of structured lessons at the mosque, where Noor's daughters received instruction in Quranic Arabic and Islamic laws. However, this mode of learning was eventually replaced by daily private tutoring using digital platforms. Alongside these newer forms of digital instruction, which are discussed later in this section, it is worth noting that mosque-based instruction also functioned as a form of community-driven complementary education within this family, grounded in shared religious practices and expectations.

For the Hasidic family, the concept of complementary education is not applicable in the same way. Rather than accessing external or supplementary spaces, Pessi's children are enrolled in community-run day schools that fully integrate their home languages and literacies into the core curriculum. These schools, embedded within the Hasidic social and religious infrastructure, function as primary – not complementary – sites of home literacy practices and engagement. Literacy is also deeply gendered within this model. For boys, education in Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew is prioritised and largely school-governed, with English playing a minor, functional role. For girls, by contrast, English becomes increasingly central, particularly in the later stages of schooling. Thus, these schools not only transmit religious and cultural values, but also reinforce gendered roles through differentiated access to language and literacy. For girls, increased instruction in English equips them with the skills needed to navigate life outside the community, while boys remain embedded in Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew religious education. In this way, the boundary between religious and secular literacy is institutionally configured, with Hasidic schools shaping both the structure and gendered distribution of multilingual literacy practices.

Together, these cases illustrate the range of ways that community and educational institutions support home languages and literacies. Whether functioning as complementary spaces or as fully embedded systems, these institutions extend multilingual literacy practices beyond the home and anchor them in wider cultural, religious, and linguistic networks.

Digitally mediated spaces

Digitally mediated literacy spaces appeared unevenly across the families in this study, emerging as central in the Bangladeshi case, modestly present in the Polish case, and absent in the Hasidic case.

In the Bangladeshi family, Noor has constructed a transnational literacy space by hiring a Quranic Arabic tutor based abroad, who conducts lessons online. This reflects a growing trend identified in the literature, where digital technologies allow multilingual families to access home language instruction across geographic boundaries (Obojska & Vaiouli, 2023; Stavans & Lindgren, 2021).

In Noor's case, digital tutoring of Quranic Arabic, a sacred language not spoken in daily life, is not an optional supplement but a core element of the family's religious literacy strategy. Noor actively selected the tutor based on recommendations from other Muslim parents and chose to continue after noticing improvement in her children's reading. She chose him for his effectiveness rather than geographic or institutional affiliation, reflecting how digital spaces can become structured, socially mediated sites of religious literacy. While she did not oversee the sessions daily, Noor described how the lessons focused not only on reciting the Quran but also on learning the religious meanings, rules, and moral teachings embedded in the text. In this way, the digital platform becomes a structured and meaningful literacy space – one that operates beyond direct maternal instruction, yet aligned deeply with Noor's values and religious commitments.

The Polish family also demonstrated engagement with digital literacy spaces, albeit in more secular and individualised ways. Nadia primarily accesses Polish news and participates in her Polish church's Facebook group, while Simon reported reading news articles and conducting academic research online, mainly in English. His phone's default language is set to Polish and he reported that he reads Polish materials online, though less frequently. He also told me that he and his Polish-speaking peers often send text messages in a mix of Polish and English, reflecting fluid language use in everyday digital communication. These examples show that digital platforms can support home languages and literacies across different domains, providing continuity with cultural networks and enabling language-specific reading beyond the home. While not institutionally structured like the digital tutoring arrangements in the Bangladeshi family, these practices illustrate how families

leverage digital media to sustain multilingual engagement and access culturally meaningful content.

By contrast, digitally mediated literacy spaces did not feature in the Hasidic family. In line with community norms that discourage internet use, digital technologies are not part of the children's literacy environment.

These three cases illustrate how digital platforms are taken up – or remain absent – in ways that reflect each family's values, religious commitments, and societal positioning, highlighting how digital spaces can support multilingual literacies in varied and culturally specific ways.

Religious institutions and liturgical literacies

Across two of the families in this study, religious institutions and instruction played a significant role in shaping multilingual literacy practices – particularly through the transmission and use of sacred languages. Rosowsky (2008) introduced the concept of *liturgical literacy* to describe ritualised reading in languages not used for everyday communication – a concept that resonates with the practices observed in both the Bangladeshi and Hasidic families. Quranic Arabic and liturgical Hebrew both function as *liturgical literacies*: not spoken in daily life, yet central to how religious practices are carried out and how children understand their place within the religious community. In both families, these literacies are taught and reinforced through formal religious structures, including mosque lessons, digital tutoring, and community-run schools – reflecting how religious literacy is institutionally embedded and intergenerationally maintained. These patterns build on previous work that has identified religious settings as key sites for language, literacy, and identity transmission in multilingual contexts (e.g., Gregory et al., 2013; Lytra et al., 2016; Spolsky, 2003). Extending this work, the comparative lens of my study offers a more nuanced understanding. In both the Bangladeshi and Hasidic cases, liturgical literacy was formally supported, but the way it was introduced, structured, and experienced varied significantly.

In the Bangladeshi family, Quranic Arabic functions as a sacred literacy, distinct from both Bengali and English in purpose and status. Its use is limited to religious contexts, especially prayer and Quran reading. Reflecting this separation, religious texts are kept in a different location from secular books within the home. To support

this literacy, Noor first enrolled her children in mosque lessons and later arranged digital tutoring with a teacher abroad. In the Hasidic family, liturgical Hebrew similarly functions as a sacred language distinct from everyday spoken communication. Although not used in daily conversation, it forms a core component of the children's religious lives, with both boys and girls reciting prayers and reading religious texts from a young age. Literacy in liturgical Hebrew is sustained through the community's highly structured religious and educational infrastructure, beginning with early schooling and continuing into adulthood. While both boys and girls engage with liturgical Hebrew, their trajectories diverge over time: boys receive intensive instruction and progress to *yeshiva* education, where liturgical Hebrew texts remain central, while girls shift towards an English-medium seminary system from the age of sixteen, aligning with gendered expectations around future roles. These findings, showing that both Noor and Pessi rely on external, formal religious education to teach and sustain their sacred languages, reflect Fishman's (2006) argument that the transmission of sacred literacies is typically sustained through formal instruction.

Interestingly, even though liturgical literacy is often focused on decoding and recitation rather than full understanding, children in both families reported to engage in efforts to deepen their comprehension of the texts. Aadya and Mahia ask for explanations of the Quranic stories, while Mahia independently uses an app to support her Arabic learning. In the Hasidic family, Devorah and Miriam described school-based initiatives aimed at promoting understanding of liturgical Hebrew, with Miriam choosing to participate in an incentive-based programme that rewarded learning meanings and vocabulary. This suggests that even within highly structured and ritualised systems, children find opportunities or show willingness to enhance their religious engagement through comprehension.

By contrast, in the Polish family, religious engagement does not require access to a specific sacred language. Nadia and her sons regularly attend a Polish-speaking Catholic church, own Bible copies in both Polish and English, and the children all attend English-speaking Catholic schools. While Catholicism clearly holds importance for the family, engagement with sacred texts does not depend on a particular language. As Spolsky (2003) notes, religious literacy varies across faith communities in its linguistic demands; in Nadia's case, sacred texts may be accessed in multiple vernaculars without compromising religious observance. This

flexibility allows her family's religious practice to serve a dual function – supporting religious life while also reinforcing Polish language and cultural identity. Unlike the other two families, where sacred language is strongly prioritised and embedded within institutional structures, Nadia and her family's religious literacy practices remain flexible, reflecting both national and religious commitments.

Overall, the comparison across these three families shows that multilingual religious literacy practices are shaped by different types of institutional and community settings – and the ways in which they are introduced, valued, and experienced vary depending on the family's religious tradition, social structures, and everyday routines. In the Bangladeshi and Hasidic families, religious literacy is closely tied to specific sacred languages and delivered through formal structures, but varies in how it is taught, how often and deeply children engage with it, and in gendered expectations. In contrast, the Polish family's more flexible approach – where religious texts can be read in either Polish or English – shows that religious literacy does not always depend on a specific sacred language or formal religious instruction. Taken together, these findings suggest that religious literacy practices in multilingual families are shaped by a combination of religious commitments, cultural values, language priorities, and the specific ways families engage with institutional and community settings.

Home and mainstream school literacies

Beyond how families structure and practise multilingual literacies at home, the wider institutional context also plays a significant role. In the specific settings examined in this study, one striking feature across the children in this study who attend mainstream English-speaking schools is the clear boundary between home-based literacy practices and those recognised within mainstream schools. For the children in the Polish and Bangladeshi families, home and school literacies appeared as parallel but largely disconnected domains. Simon, for example, described his Polish and English literacy practices as belonging to 'two separate worlds.' While his teachers were aware of his Polish background, they never asked about his literacy practices at home, nor did he expect them to. This absence of recognition was not expressed as a problem but rather accepted as normal – reflecting how deeply the

dominance of English literacy in formal schooling has been internalised by some multilingual students.

Aadya's experience offers a partial exception: she recalled being invited to recite a line from the Quran during a religious education class. However, this instance was confined to a specific curricular subject and she did not mention a broader engagement with her multilingual repertoire in school.

Across both families, there were no examples of children being encouraged to draw on their home literacy practices within the wider school curriculum. These findings align with wider research highlighting the limited recognition of home languages and literacies in mainstream education (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018; Hatoss, 2020; Nordstrom, 2020; Yagmur, 2020). While previous research has shown that schools often overlook home languages, my findings highlight how children themselves come to view this separation as natural – rarely questioning the disconnect between their home and school literacies.

The findings discussed here are situated in my participants' specific educational contexts, and what they told me. They may not reflect the approaches taken in other schools or regions across the country. Further research could explore whether in schools situated within more linguistically and culturally aligned communities, these boundaries between home and school literacies may be bridged in more intentional and sustained ways.

Reflecting on the influence of external literacy spaces on multilingual literacy practices

While previous research has highlighted the importance of external support structures in sustaining multilingual literacies (e.g., Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Spolsky, 2003; Hatoss, 2020), the present study adds further insight by examining how access to these spaces is shaped by families' migration histories, religious commitments, and maternal decision-making. In particular, children's engagement with complementary education, digital platforms, and religious institutions is not simply additive to home literacy, but reflects deeper family ideologies around language, identity, and social belonging. At the same time, the limited recognition of home literacies in mainstream schools – as demonstrated in the Polish and Bangladeshi cases – highlights the marginal role that mainstream institutional

settings often play in valuing and supporting multilingual literacies, contributing to the compartmentalisation of children's multilingual literacy practices. As such, my findings call for a more differentiated understanding of external literacy spaces – one that accounts for the ways in which they intersect with, and sometimes reconfigure, the roles of parents, institutions, and children themselves in multilingual literacy development.

The findings presented in this section challenge home-centric models of multilingual literacies by foregrounding the crucial role of external literacy spaces in shaping multilingual family members' literacy practices. While much of the Family Language Policy (FLP) literature has focused on parental roles in curating home language and literacy environments (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen, 2012; King et al., 2008), and other research has highlighted the importance of complementary schools and religious institutions in sustaining home literacies (e.g., Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Lytra et al., 2016; Spolsky, 2003), these strands of scholarship have often been explored separately. What remains underexamined is the interaction between maternal strategies and community-based institutional frameworks – specifically, how mothers facilitate, rely on, and navigate access to external literacy spaces, and how these spaces, in turn, structure, support, or extend literacy practices beyond the home.

This study addresses that gap by showing that community-based institutions such as complementary education, religious settings, and digitally mediated platforms are not simply parallel supports but are interwoven with maternal decision-making. In cases like Pessi's, where institutional structures within the Hasidic community offer extensive support for multilingual literacies, active day-to-day maternal involvement is not as necessary, though still present in the form of ongoing, everyday support. By contrast, Nadia and Noor must actively identify and manage external opportunities, demonstrating how maternal agency continues to shape access and engagement even when instruction is delivered beyond the home.

Moreover, the role of religious institutions in supporting religious literacy has received comparatively limited attention in mainstream multilingual literacy and FLP literature. While important work has explored the role of religion in multilingual children's lives (e.g., Lytra et al., 2016), and the significance of religious institutions has been recognised (e.g., Spolsky, 2003), the mechanisms of religious literacy transmission –

including formal instruction, community support, and digitally mediated tutoring – remain underexamined. This study contributes to this growing body of research by showing that religious literacies are central to the ways multilingual families structure literacy practices and hierarchies, and maintain cultural and religious continuity, across home and institutional spaces.

Taken together, these findings call for a more integrated approach to multilingual literacy research – one that moves beyond the binary of home versus external environments. Rather than treating them as distinct forces, this study shows that they operate relationally: mothers mediate, negotiate, and often depend on external spaces to sustain the literacies they prioritise. In the following section, I explore how children engage with multilingual literacy practices shaped by their families and external literacy spaces.

Children's navigational strategies across home multilingual literacies

This section considers how children in multilingual families, shaped by diverse migration histories, navigate their literacy environments on their own terms. Rather than simply following the practices curated by their mothers or institutions, the children in this study navigated the multilingual literacies in their lives in varied ways – sometimes aligning with the expectations set by their family and community, sometimes extending them, and at times pushing against them. These navigational strategies were shaped by factors such as age, gender, schooling, personal preferences and broader societal expectations – revealing the different forms of agency children exercised across the three family contexts.

The Hasidic family: Navigating multilingual literacies within an immersive literacy environment

In the Hasidic family, Devorah and Miriam's multilingual literacy engagement takes place within a highly structured and immersive environment, where expectations around language and literacy are shaped by clearly defined communal norms rather than individual parental strategies. Their practices reflect the limited scope for negotiation in a setting where roles, languages, and literacies are closely tied to gender, cultural and religious norms, and future expectations. Rather than actively negotiating or resisting these structures, they engage with literacy practices that are

deeply woven into daily life and community expectations. In this context, Devorah and Miriam operate within a gendered and linguistic framework in which they and their mother are co-participants – one that clearly delineates distinct literacy paths for boys and girls within the community.

Their multilingual literacy engagement – encompassing Yiddish, English, and liturgical Hebrew – is deeply embedded in the community's social, educational, and religious structures. Unlike other children in the study who engage in explicit negotiation over literacy practices, Devorah and Miriam move within their environment with a sense of ease and shared understanding. The absence of alternative literacy trajectories within their immediate social world means that they have little reason to step outside community expectations. Their engagement with English literacy reflects both a pragmatic orientation towards their future roles outside the home and a genuine enjoyment of particular reading resources, supported by a rich home literacy environment and shared reading practices within the family. Devorah and Miriam also engage regularly with Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew, which are integral to their religious education and daily routines – especially in prayer and schoolwork – and which they accept as natural parts of their identity within the community. However, both girls described Yiddish as more difficult and less enjoyable to read, and expressed a clear preference for engaging with English texts. These personal reading choices reflect individual preferences and forms of subtle agency, as well as the gendered emphasis placed on different literacies within the community – with Yiddish reading potentially receiving less institutional focus for girls than for boys, as Devorah noted.

Overall, these findings suggest that the family's *settled* migration history and *closed* positioning to the wider society create a context in which home, school, and community all promote the same language ideologies and practices – offering Devorah and Miriam a unified literacy environment with little need to reconcile competing expectations. Within this context, their everyday engagement is guided by what is valued and familiar, with subtle forms of agency emerging through preferences, participation, and personal enjoyment.

The Polish family: Diverging paths of sibling multilingual literacy practices

The Polish family offers a compelling example of how two siblings, raised within the same multilingual environment, navigate their literacy worlds in markedly different ways.

Gabriela's literacy engagement reflects a blend of acceptance and personal preference, shaped by both her mother's guidance and her own interests. While she participates in structured Polish reading practices at home – including bedtime readings of the Polish Bible with her mother – these moments are less driven by internal motivation than by a sense of closeness and routine. Gabriela herself acknowledged that she would need Polish in the future for the Polish complementary school, suggesting some awareness of its instrumental value. However, she does not read in Polish on her own. When she requests to read in Polish with her mother, her motivation appears to lie more in the enjoyment of the shared activity than in the language itself. This resonates with research highlighting the relational nature of shared reading in families, where emotional connection and shared time can be central motivations for engaging in reading practices (Levy & Harrison, 2025). In contrast, Gabriela's independent reading for pleasure – though modest – tends to occur in English, aligning with her preference for English in media use and peer interactions as well. This contrast implies that Gabriela is beginning to associate Polish with structured, adult-led reading, and English with autonomy and pleasure. As the younger sibling growing up in a more settled migration context, Gabriela's exposure to Polish is shaped less by an emotional connection and more by familial priorities – including tradition and the ongoing possibility of return to Poland – which she engages with, but does not independently extend.

Simon, by contrast, demonstrates a distinctly self-directed engagement with Polish literacy, shaped by his own interests and strong socio-cultural identity, and supported by earlier maternal involvement, peer networks, and community spaces. His decisions to set his phone's default language to Polish, communicate with friends in Polish, and voluntarily read Polish books reflect an internalised commitment to the language that extends beyond formal instruction. Now a teenager, Simon actively manages his Polish literacy life across school, Scouts, and church – using Polish not only as a language used for communication at home, but as a tool for social connection, identity, and leadership.

While Nadia initially facilitated his access to Polish resources and external spaces, Simon now operates within these environments independently, taking on responsibilities – such as helping organise activities in the Polish Scouts and volunteering in the Polish church – that reflect his own values and sense of belonging. He also took pride in excelling at the Polish complementary school, not just attending but striving for recognition, as when he earned a book for his academic performance. These practices suggest that Simon's engagement with multilingual literacies is shaped by a range of influences – familial, institutional, and social – which he navigates with increasing autonomy.

The contrast between Simon and Gabriela illustrates how siblings within the same household can engage with multilingual literacies in diverging ways – shaped not only by personality and preference, but also by the family's migration history. While Simon's strong engagement with Polish literacy may reflect an earlier phase of the family's migration, when transnational ties were more active and Polish played a more prominent role in daily life, Gabriela has grown up in a more settled context. This suggests that, in families with relatively recent migration histories, children's literacy practices may evolve differently across siblings – reflecting shifting orientations toward language, identity, and cultural maintenance over time.

The Bangladeshi family: Navigating multilingual literacies across religious, educational, and home language domains

Both Mahia and Aadya in the Bangladeshi family demonstrate personal agency in their engagement with Quranic Arabic literacy, shaping their practices in ways that reflect both their mother's priorities and their own interests. Mahia takes an independent approach by using mobile apps and websites to deepen her understanding of Quranic texts and actively engages in discussions about religious meanings – an extension of her mother Noor's emphasis on Quranic literacy that she wholeheartedly supports. Similarly, Aadya chooses to read the Quran in her free time beyond her formal lessons, approaching religious literacy with a sense of personal curiosity and emotional connection. In addition to religious engagement, both daughters meet Noor's expectations for English literacy through strong academic performance, while Mahia, in particular, reads in English for pleasure. In both cases,

the girls take up and personalise their literacy practices, moving beyond passive participation toward active, self-directed engagement.

At the same time, Mahia and Aadya were the only children in this study who showed signs of disengagement from a home language. Rather than consistently using Bengali at home as encouraged by their mother, they increasingly respond in English – a shift that reflects both their own preferences and the broader patterns of language use within their household. This disengagement is not overt but is expressed through selective participation and gradual shifts in language choice. Bengali, which is maintained primarily as a spoken language at home, lacks the structured literacy support that surrounds their engagement with Quranic Arabic and English. Without opportunities for reading or writing in Bengali – and no external institutional reinforcement – the language holds a less prominent role in the children's daily literacy practices, making it more vulnerable to displacement.

These patterns invite a possible interpretation of why Bengali occupies a more peripheral place in their multilingual repertoire. Based on my analysis of the data – and in line with previous research (Guardado, 2018; Pauwels, 2016) – it seems that when a language is not supported by active literacy practices or embedded in external spaces, it becomes harder to sustain. In contrast, literacies that are consistently prioritised and woven into structured routines – such as English through school and Quranic Arabic through daily religious lessons – are more likely to be taken up and extended by children. Noor's strong emphasis on Quranic Arabic and English has required a degree of trade-off, in which Bengali is less actively maintained. Although she expresses a desire for her daughters to use Bengali, her efforts are more clearly directed toward sustaining the other two literacies. Mahia and Aadya, in turn, internalise this hierarchy, recognising Bengali's relatively lower status within the home and engaging with it less as a result.

This pattern is also shaped by the broader migration context. Unlike Simon, whose Polish literacy is reinforced by peer networks and community spaces, Mahia and Aadya have limited access to Bengali-speaking environments beyond the family. While ties to extended family remain strong, there are no institutional structures supporting Bengali literacy. Within the context of a *settled* migration history and a *semi-open* positioning toward wider society, the family's literacy priorities have

stabilised around Quranic Arabic and English – both supported by religious and educational structures – while Bengali remains a domestic, oral language without such reinforcement. The girls' multilingual literacy practices thus reflect both personal preferences and the ways in which different literacies are positioned and resourced within the family's sociocultural environment.

Multilingual literacies as a negotiated process

The findings discussed in this section show how children's engagement with multilingual literacies is shaped by a combination of personal preferences, their family's migration histories, and how these migration histories position them in relation to the wider English-speaking society. In the Hasidic family, where migration is long-*settled* and boundaries with mainstream society remain firmly *closed*, children's multilingual literacy engagement is highly structured by communal expectations. Yet within this structure, Devorah and Miriam demonstrate their own forms of agency – choosing what to read, enjoying serialised stories, and participating in shared reading as a valued family routine. In the Polish family, where migration is *open-ended*, Simon and Gabriela illustrate how sibling literacy paths can diverge over time – perhaps due to personality, but also due to age, identity, and shifting social and linguistic environments. Gabriela's engagement is currently shaped by family routines and maternal support, while Simon, now older, pursues Polish literacy independently across social and institutional spaces. In the Bangladeshi family, where the migration history is *settled* and positioning in relation to the wider society is *semi-open*, Mahia and Aadya actively invest in Quranic Arabic and English – while engaging less frequently with Bengali, a home language that is primarily oral and not supported by structured literacy spaces or wider community domains. Across all three families, children's navigational strategies are shaped by how different literacies are positioned, supported, and experienced within the family's migration history and societal positioning.

Another important finding concerns how children conceptualised reading itself. English consistently emerged as the language in which children felt most confident reading, and the one they most closely associated with both reading in general and reading for pleasure in particular. Even among children who regularly engage in religious literacy reading, English holds a distinctive place as the language of reading

and personal enjoyment. This finding reflects the regularity with which English is used for both academic and reading for pleasure across all family members – at school and at home – making it the language in which children are most accustomed to accessing texts independently.

Generational differences also shaped how multilingual literacy practices were experienced and prioritised across the families. In the Polish family, Nadia's first-generation perspective underpinned her strong commitment to maintaining Polish literacy as part of her children's cultural identity. Simon aligns closely with this goal, engaging with Polish literacy independently and across institutional spaces. Gabriela, by contrast, engages in Polish reading primarily through maternal facilitation and family routines, with less personal investment. These differences reflect both age and developmental stage, but also illustrate how parental intentions are variously taken up, personalised, or reshaped by children. In the Bangladeshi family, despite relatively recent migration, the children's engagement with Bengali was limited, with intergenerational transmission centring more clearly on Quranic Arabic as a religious literacy. In contrast, the Hasidic family showed minimal generational divergence, with tightly controlled communal structures ensuring continuity in language use, values, and practices across generations. Together, these examples show how differences and continuities across generations, shaped by community context and migration history, influence how multilingual literacies are sustained or reshaped.

Children's engagement with multilingual literacies, then, cannot be fully understood without attention to both the structuring environments they inhabit and the agentive choices they make within them. Rather than viewing multilingual literacy development and practices as a straightforward outcome of parental strategy, these cases highlight how children make use of the opportunities available to them, charting their own unique paths within and beyond the familial and external structures they are embedded in.

These findings contribute to existing literature in two key ways. First, while Family Language Policy (FLP) research has increasingly acknowledged child agency (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Fogle & King, 2013; Lanza, 2007; Smith-Christmas, 2020), it has often explored this agency through children's responses to parental language

goals – particularly through explicit negotiation, acceptance, or resistance. My study offers a different lens: it foregrounds the everyday literacy practices through which children navigate, personalise, and sometimes disengage from multilingual literacies. Rather than positioning children primarily in relation to parental planning, this analysis highlights how their literacy practices also emerge through interaction with broader structuring environments – including institutional access, community expectations, and the temporal and spatial conditions shaped by migration histories.

Second, this analysis draws on insights from the Reading for Pleasure (RfP) literature, which has long emphasised autonomy, affective investment, and social context in children's literacy practices (Cremin, 2020; Cremin et al., 2014; McGeown et al., 2015), as well as highlighting the relational dimensions of shared reading within families (Levy & Harrison, 2025). While RfP research is not typically situated in multilingual or migratory contexts, its attention to child-led engagement offers a useful framework for understanding how children in this study pursued reading as a meaningful, autonomous, and sometimes relational activity.

At the outset of the study, I set out to explore how families conceptualised and practised 'reading for pleasure' across multiple languages. However, as described in the Methodology chapter, this framing did not initially resonate with participants' self-reported experiences. During the Polish family case study, family members repeatedly stated that they do not read often – likely interpreting 'reading' in line with dominant conceptualisations of reading for pleasure, where the enjoyment derived from reading the text is articulated in specific terms, and the text itself generally assumed to be fiction. This response may have reflected their own understandings of reading, or what they thought I, as the researcher, was looking for. As a result, they may have overlooked or dismissed other meaningful and affectively rich reading events that occurred in their everyday lives. In response, I broadened the research focus to include all forms of multilingual reading practice – whether motivated by enjoyment, identity, religious practice, or functional needs. Through this expanded lens, it became clear that pleasurable engagements with reading did occur across all three families. However, these instances did not always align with mainstream understandings of reading for pleasure.

For example, Gabriela said she did not enjoy reading and rarely did so on her own, particularly in Polish, yet described how she asks to read Polish books with her mother at bedtime. Her motivation seemed relational – driven by closeness and routine – but nonetheless pleasurable. Similarly, Miriam in the Hasidic family described being the 'lucky one' chosen to read from the Torah at school, a moment she recalled with pride and joy. In the Bangladeshi family, Mahia and Aadya described Quranic reading as making them feel peaceful and connected. Simon, meanwhile, expressed enjoyment in reading the Polish Scouts handbook – not necessarily because of its literary content, but because it aligned with his identity, values, and leadership role.

These cases suggest that pleasure in reading is not always derived from textual content or literary engagement, but from affective, social, spiritual, or identity-related dimensions. While the RfP literature's core concepts of autonomy and affect were analytically helpful, the findings in this study call for a reconceptualisation of what counts as 'pleasurable' reading – particularly in multilingual families shaped by migration, religion, and cultural continuity.

In this sense, my study both moves away from and critically engages with the RfP tradition. While the original research framing proved too narrow to capture the complexity of participants' experiences, the concept of pleasure itself remained analytically valuable – once decoupled from the dominant literacy ideologies in which it is typically framed.

Taken together, these cases show that children's multilingual literacy practices emerge through a process of navigation, where agency is best understood as a situated practice that evolves through time, space, and access. Part of this navigation involves a high degree of flexibility in children's everyday language use – particularly in spoken interactions – which stands in contrast to how literacy practices are shaped and structured.

Across all three families, children demonstrated a high degree of linguistic adaptability in everyday communication, navigating multiple languages in flexible and context-dependent ways. Simon, for example, regularly switches between Polish and English in communication with friends, while Devorah and Miriam use a fluid mix of English and Yiddish at home and school. These practices reflect the children's ability

to move between repertoires with ease – responding to different audiences, relationships, and social contexts. However, this flexibility in spoken language use stands in contrast to how multilingual literacies were organised across the families. As the following section explores, reading and writing practices were far more structured and hierarchically arranged, often tied to specific domains (e.g., school, religion, or home) and shaped by clear social and cultural expectations. Recognising this distinction helps to clarify how children can move fluidly across languages while still engaging with literacies that are deliberately compartmentalised and regulated.

Multilingual literacies as structured, situated and negotiated practices

This section brings together insights across the three families to examine how multilingual literacy practices are shaped by broader migration histories and families' positioning in relation to the wider English-speaking society. As argued in the literacy-as-social-practice literature (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984), literacy is never neutral or decontextualised, but rather is always embedded in the social and cultural conditions in which it is practised. This perspective is especially pertinent in multilingual families, where literacy is not only a pedagogical activity but a means of sustaining identity, negotiating belonging, and marking boundaries. Multilingual literacies are shaped by complex negotiations within the home, the community, and broader institutional and ideological structures.

Building on the previous analytic sections which foregrounded the roles of mothers, external environments and children in shaping multilingual families' literacy practices, this section turns to the family as a whole – not as a coherent unit but as a dynamic configuration of interconnected parts. By examining multilingual literacies as a family-wide system shaped by both convergence and differences, it becomes possible to understand how identities, roles, and hierarchies are negotiated within multilingual households over time.

Extending foundational research that frames multilingual literacies as socially and ideologically embedded (e.g., Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Gregory et al., 2004; Kenner, 2004; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000), in this section I explore the wider contextual factors that shape how multilingual literacies are practised and experienced – and how different family members take up, resist, or repurpose those

practices in response to their positioning within the family, the community, and wider society. In doing so, I also seek to move beyond flat notions of 'the multilingual family' as a uniform or harmonious site of cultural transmission, offering instead a more differentiated view of how migration histories, religious affiliations, and generational differences intersect within the way multilingual literacy practices manifest in everyday life.

Migration histories as an organising principle

Across all three families in my study, migration history emerged as a central organising principle. In the Polish family, an *open-ended* migration history and sustained ties to the Polish diaspora underpin Nadia's ongoing investment in Polish literacy, while the children navigate varying attachments to Polish and English. This reflects a *semi-open* positioning in relation to wider society, where Polish literacy coexists with English literacy in school and social life. The Hasidic family, by contrast, reflects a *settled* migration history and *closed* positioning to the wider society, where both mother and daughters operate within a highly structured institutional system that tightly regulates multilingual literacy practices across home, school, and other domains. The Bangladeshi family occupies a more hybrid position: *settled* in England and holding a *semi-open* positioning to the wider society, Noor encourages both English and Quranic Arabic literacies through structured learning, while the children selectively engage with these alongside Bengali that operates as a language for oral communication.

Across all three families, migration histories and societal positioning shaped how multilingual literacies are practised, prioritised, and negotiated, through the everyday actions, investments, and trajectories of the different family members. They influence which literacy domains are reinforced through school, religion, and community; which are maintained through home-based routines; and which are gradually displaced. They also determine how children's literacy practices are framed: whether as acts of cultural preservation, religious practice, pragmatic purposes, or personal enjoyment. Within these frameworks, children display agency and engage with multilingual literacies in ways that reflect their own interests, identities, and contexts – shaped by personal routines, shifting preferences, and the meanings they attach to different literacies.

What emerges is a view of the family not as a fixed or unified literacy unit, but as a context in which multilingual literacy practices are shaped by both shared orientations and differentiated experiences. While family members may be influenced by common values – such as religious practice, cultural continuity, or educational achievement – their engagement with literacy varies depending on their age, gender, institutional access, and personal trajectories. The next section examines how these factors contribute to the prioritisation of certain literacies over others, and how multilingual literacy practices are used to uphold cultural and religious boundaries. This sets the stage for a reconsideration of how multilingual literacies are conceptualised within existing frameworks.

Multilingual literacies as a mechanism for boundary marking and identity negotiation

The role of multilingual literacies in marking boundaries is evident in the ways that family members in this study compartmentalise and structure language and literacy across domains of life. While previous research has highlighted fluid movement across linguistic contexts (e.g., Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Gregory et al., 2004; Gregory et al., 2013; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005), this study emphasises the deliberate and structured regulation of multilingual literacies to maintain socio-cultural and religious identity.

In each family in this study, multilingual literacies were shaped by implicit hierarchies and operated as mechanisms for demarcating cultural, religious, and sometimes gendered boundaries. In the Hasidic case, this was visible in the gendered literacy division, where girls are expected to achieve functional English fluency while boys remain immersed in Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew. This gendered boundary system in the Hasidic family case is consistent with Fader's (2001, 2008, 2016) findings, illustrating how multilingual literacies are used not only to draw boundaries *between* communities but also to regulate individuals' roles and responsibilities *within* them – reinforcing divisions of religious, educational, and societal functions along gendered lines. In the Bangladeshi family, Quranic Arabic and English literacies are prioritised through structured instruction, while Bengali literacy holds a more marginal status. In the Polish family, the hierarchy between English and Polish shifts across siblings and over time: for Simon, Polish remains a valued resource for identity, leadership, and

belonging; for Gabriela, it is more of a familial tradition sustained through shared practices with her mother, while English is the language of peer relationships and independent reading for pleasure. Across all three families in this study, these hierarchies are reinforced through access to literacy resources curated by the mothers, as well as everyday literacy practices and access to external literacy settings. Children navigate these boundaries, making decisions shaped both by their personal preferences and by the meanings assigned to those literacies within the family's migration history and societal positioning.

The idea that multilingual literacies function as boundary markers aligns with broader discussions on socio-cultural identity, particularly in relation to *social anchoring* (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2015) and *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al., 1992), highlighting how individuals create stability in multilingual contexts by drawing on accumulated cultural, linguistic, and educational resources within their families and communities. The present study contributes to these discussions by showing how families structure multilingual literacies to regulate belonging, differentiate social domains, and shape the roles and identities individuals inhabit. Migration history and societal positioning create frameworks within which mothers make decisions about language, literacy, and identity – and within which children find space to act, adapt, and contribute. Recognising these contextual influences allows for a deeper understanding of multilingual literacies as a lived and evolving process – one that reflects both migration histories and the everyday negotiations of belonging, purpose, and possibility within those contexts.

Reconsidering existing frameworks in multilingual literacy research

Much of the literature on multilingual literacies highlights the flexibility with which children engage in literacy practices across different languages and settings – including home, school, and community spaces (e.g., Gregory et al., 2004; Gregory et al., 2013; Kenner, 2005; Kenner et al., 2016). A related concept introduced by Gregory and Williams (2000b) frames multilingual literacy as an 'unofficial' practice – one that develops informally outside formal schooling. While these studies have been instrumental in shifting perspectives away from monolingual biases by demonstrating that multilingual literacies are deeply embedded in family and

community life, my findings complicate the assumption that they are often hybrid, fluid, or informal.

A key finding of this study is that multilingual literacies are both structured and often hierarchically organised within families. Rather than blending literacies fluidly across contexts, family members maintain distinct literacy domains, with clear priorities assigned to different literacies based on their socio-cultural, religious, and educational significance. This distinction shapes how literacies are practised and reinforced, as well as the spaces and contexts in which they are actively used.

For example, in the Bangladeshi family, Quranic Arabic is reinforced through structured daily lessons, regular recitation, and access to digital resources, positioning it as a formal religious literacy rather than an informal, 'unofficial' home practice. Importantly, Quranic Arabic is not blended with other literacies – religious books are stored separately, and engagement with Quranic Arabic remains distinct from both Bengali and English literacy. This separation challenges assumptions that multilingual literacies are hybrid or fluid; rather, it demonstrates that literacies can be maintained as distinct and compartmentalised within specific domains of life.

In the Hasidic family, literacy structuring is even more formalised through institutional education systems. Yiddish and liturgical Hebrew are reinforced for the daughters through daily homework, exams, and rigid divisions in literacy instruction by the school day, making them central, regulated literacies rather than flexible, 'unofficial' home practices. Literacy practices are hierarchically organised, with boys and girls prioritising their home literacies differently based on their religious, cultural, and educational roles. Rather than engaging in fluid, hybrid literacy practices, the children follow clearly defined literacy pathways, with each literacy serving a specific religious, cultural, or societal function.

In the Polish family, Polish literacy functions as a distinct literacy domain within the home and community, with a strong emphasis placed on maintaining Polish as part of the family's cultural identity. This maintains a boundary between the Polish and English literacy domains, where Polish literacy serves as a marker of cultural heritage and identity.

These findings challenge the assumption that home literacy practices are flexible and informal. While previous studies have demonstrated how multilingual literacy

practices can shift according to context and purpose (e.g., Sneddon, 2000; Lytra et al., 2016), my study takes this further by demonstrating how multilingual literacies are not only compartmentalised but also hierarchically organised within families. Rather than simply reflecting fluid or blended uses of language and literacy, families in this study actively regulate and prioritise multilingual literacy practices based on socio-cultural, religious, and educational significance.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how multilingual literacy practices are shaped, sustained, and negotiated within and beyond the home across three multilingual families in London. Through a discussion of maternal decision-making, external literacy spaces, and children's navigational strategies, I have demonstrated that multilingual literacies are not simply informal and fluid practices but are often structured, hierarchical, and deeply embedded in families' socio-cultural, religious, and educational contexts. Migration histories and families' positioning in relation to wider society emerged as crucial forces underpinning how literacies are prioritised, valued, and practised across different domains of life. These findings challenge dominant assumptions in multilingual literacy research, calling for a more differentiated and context-sensitive understanding of how multilingual literacies operate in everyday family life. The next chapter concludes this thesis by synthesising the key contributions of this study and identifying directions for future research.

Chapter 8   Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis set out to explore how multilingual families in London use multilingual literacy practices to navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities, with particular attention to how these practices are shaped by families' migration histories and their positioning in relation to the wider English-speaking society. Focusing on three distinct family contexts – Polish, Bangladeshi, and Hasidic Jewish – it examined how multilingual literacies are shaped by maternal strategies, external literacy spaces, children's navigational strategies, and the broader social, temporal, generational and spatial conditions in which families live. Adopting a literacy-as-social-practice framework, the study foregrounds the complex, situated, and often hierarchical ways in which literacy is structured and experienced within multilingual families. This concluding chapter synthesises the key findings in relation to the research questions, outlines the theoretical and practical contributions of the study, and identifies directions for future research.

Synthesising the findings

This section brings together the key findings of the study in relation to the three research questions, highlighting how multilingual literacy practices are shaped by maternal strategies, children's individual agency, and wider socio-cultural contexts.

In response to the first research question – *How do multilingual family members use multilingual literacies to navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities?* – this study found that multilingual literacies are often deliberately structured and hierarchically organised according to religious, cultural, and educational priorities. Families do not simply blend literacies in everyday practice; rather, they maintain distinct literacy domains and practices, using them to delineate social boundaries – between the home and community and wider society, between genders, and between religious and secular spaces. These literacies are actively employed to affirm religious commitments, cultural affiliations, and future aspirations. For example, Quranic Arabic and liturgical Hebrew function as liturgical literacies, embedded in structured religious instruction and disconnected from everyday spoken use, yet central to the children's positioning within their religious communities and socio-cultural worlds. In this way, multilingual literacies act as boundary-marking

tools through which families negotiate belonging, assert identity, and sustain continuity across time and space, shaped by migration histories and positioning in relation to the wider society.

Addressing the second research question – *In what ways do reading practices, choices, preferences, and experiences vary among individuals within and across multilingual families?* – my findings reveal that families' and family members' engagement with multilingual literacies is not uniform. While mothers play a central role in curating literacy environments and facilitating access to external literacy spaces, children do not simply respond passively to these resources. Rather, they navigate and negotiate their multilingual literacy environments in diverse ways. While some children in this study aligned closely with the structured literacy expectations set by their families and communities, others extended, adapted, or disengaged from these practices in ways that reflected their own interests and trajectories. These variations reflect how factors such as age, gender, religious expectations, peer influence, school context, personal motivation and internal family priorities – shaped by wider migration histories – influenced children's literacy practices. Importantly, such variation occurred not only across families but within them, as differences emerged both across generations and between siblings, shaped by changing experiences, responsibilities and contexts over time.

The third research question – *How do social, spatial, temporal and generational factors shape and explain the diverse literacy practices of multilingual families?* – was addressed by examining how migration histories and families' positioning in relation to wider society influence the structuring of multilingual literacies within the home and the ways children engage with them in everyday life. Migration history emerged as a central organising principle: in the Polish family, an *open-ended* migration history supported the maintenance of Polish literacy alongside English; in the Hasidic and Bangladeshi families, *settled* migration histories informed distinct religious and identity-driven literacy priorities. Positioning in relation to the wider society further shaped engagement: the Polish and Bangladeshi families adopted *semi-open* positioning, engaging selectively with English schooling and public life, while the Hasidic family maintained a *closed* positioning, with limited interaction with mainstream society. Access to external infrastructures – such as complementary education, religious institutions, and digital platforms – also intersected with these

factors, reinforcing and extending home literacy practices. Across all three families, migration histories, societal positioning, community networks, and institutional support shaped the contexts in which multilingual literacies were maintained, negotiated, and practised. Generational differences further shaped how these literacies were taken up and experienced, as mothers' goals and decisions were variously aligned with or reshaped by children across different ages and stages of development.

Rethinking multilingual literacy: The need for a more nuanced theoretical framework

The findings of this study call for a rethinking of how multilingual literacy is conceptualised within family and educational research. While much existing literature has framed home literacy practices as informal, flexible, or marginal in relation to dominant literacies, this study has shown that multilingual literacies can also be systematically structured, prioritised, and embedded within families' socio-cultural worlds. In the families examined, literacy was not always fluid or flexible; instead, it was often clearly differentiated and hierarchised in line with religious, cultural, and educational values. Furthermore, multilingual literacy practices were not simply responses to dominant pressures but reflected strategic and identity-driven decisions shaped by migration histories, long-term goals, institutional access, and socio-cultural positioning.

This more complex picture of multilingual literacy practices suggests the need for a theoretical framework that can account for both agency and structure, including how families organise literacies around specific cultural, religious, and educational priorities. By foregrounding this perspective, this study contributes to a more differentiated and layered understanding of multilingual literacy – one that moves beyond rigid binaries that frame literacy as either formal or informal, fluid or structured. Future research will benefit from attending more closely to how literacy practices and hierarchies emerge, how they are shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, migration history, religion, and community life, and how children themselves navigate these different frameworks.

This perspective helps clarify how multilingual literacies were positioned within family life, as a means of prioritising certain languages, structuring home literacy routines,

engaging with external institutions, and shaping socio-cultural and religious identities. These practices were shaped by factors explored throughout the thesis, including migration history, maternal decisions, children's navigational strategies, and access to community and institutional support. Rather than following a straightforward pattern of language maintenance or shift, multilingual literacy practices emerged as varied and context-dependent, shaped by the specific circumstances, values, and experiences of each family, as they unfolded over time and across generations.

Beyond offering conceptual clarity, these findings also carry practical implications. The study has relevance for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders supporting multilingual children. Recognising the diverse literacy practices within multilingual families, and understanding the various factors shaping them, can help educators support children's socio-cultural identity development and sense of belonging. By fostering educational environments that build on the linguistic and cultural capital of these families, multilingual children can thrive both academically and socially. This aligns with the work of García and Li Wei (2014) and Kenner (2004), who emphasise the importance of nurturing multilingual and multiliterate skills in mainstream schooling. Recognising children's full linguistic and literate repertoires can strengthen their sense of belonging, validate their home-based knowledge, and support more inclusive and equitable educational outcomes.

Avenues for future research

This study has illuminated the rich ways in which multilingual families use multilingual literacies to navigate their socio-cultural worlds and identities, while also opening up several promising avenues for further investigation.

Firstly, an important area for future research lies in examining how mainstream schools and other institutional structures can better collaborate with multilingual families to support home languages and literacies. This study reveals that, in the specific cases explored, engagement between schools and home literacy practices was often limited, contributing to a disconnection – as experienced by participants – between literacy at home and in the classroom. Further investigation into how schools might more effectively incorporate multilingual literacy practices into their curricula – taking into account the diverse linguistic and cultural resources

embedded in children's home literacy practices – could help address potential disconnects between home and school literacy experiences. Future studies could examine the role of professional development for teachers in recognising and drawing on the diverse linguistic and cultural resources multilingual students bring, as well as explore how policies might support more responsive and inclusive approaches to multilingual literacies within formal education systems.

Secondly, while this study highlights the pivotal role of mothers in structuring literacy practices, further research could investigate the contributions of other family members, such as fathers and grandparents, in shaping multilingual literacy. Understanding how paternal involvement interacts with maternal strategies, particularly in relation to gendered expectations within families, could paint a more detailed picture of multilingual literacy practices and identity formation in family contexts. Additionally, exploring the influence of grandparents or other relatives on multilingual literacies could offer valuable insights into intergenerational literacy transmission and the broader effects these family members have on children's negotiation of their socio-cultural identities.

Thirdly, future research could examine how families navigate and negotiate access to external literacy spaces – such as complementary schools, religious institutions, and digital platforms – and how these interact with home-based strategies. As this study has shown, these environments do not operate in isolation but are often mediated and sustained by maternal decisions. Looking more closely at how home and external spaces work together could offer further insight into how multilingual literacies are organised across different domains of life and how families draw on these spaces to reinforce particular literacy priorities.

Relatedly, while this study examined the role of digital literacies as one component of multilingual literacy practices, further research could explore these emergent forms of literacy in more depth, particularly in relation to how digital tools and online resources contribute to the construction and negotiation of multilingual identities. There remains an opportunity to investigate how these resources are integrated into daily home literacy practices and how they influence the maintenance of home languages and literacies in an increasingly digital and globally connected world.

Moreover, gender differences emerged as significant factors in shaping literacy practices, in a family where cultural and religious norms prescribe distinct roles for males and females. Future research could explore how gendered expectations within multilingual families influence access to literacy resources and the types of literacies that are prioritised. Understanding how gender shapes literacy practices in multilingual families and contexts could provide important insights into the ways in which literacy intersects with socio-cultural identity and positioning within the family and beyond.

Finally, longitudinal studies could provide a deeper understanding of how multilingual literacy practices evolve over time and across generations. While this study examined multilingual literacies over the span of four weeks for each family, a longer-term perspective could offer insights into how families adjust and restructure their literacy practices over time – particularly in response to changes in migration contexts, shifting educational or social circumstances, and evolving cultural or religious priorities. Such studies could also explore how families continue to prioritise certain literacies, how these priorities shift, and how they shape or reflect children's developing identities. This would offer a fuller picture of how multilingual literacy is practised, reconfigured, and negotiated across time and generations.

Ultimately, this study has revealed how multilingual literacies are not only tools for sustaining linguistic ties but are also pivotal in navigating socio-cultural contexts and identities. By addressing these avenues, future research can further explore how multilingual families continue to structure, negotiate, and prioritise their literacy practices, considering the evolving social and cultural contexts in which they live.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Transcription key

This transcription key provides a guide to the symbols used in the transcriptions of interviews conducted for this study. Each symbol corresponds to specific features of speech, such as pauses, incomplete words, or added context. The key ensures clarity and consistency in understanding the transcriptions, which have been used throughout my analysis of participant interviews.

/	*Forward slash* indicates pause of less than two seconds
//	*Double forward slash* indicates pause of more than two seconds
-	*Hyphen* indicates a speaker stopping mid-word.
=	*Equal marks at the end and beginning of the line* indicate that there is no gap between the utterances of two speakers
(…)	*Ellipses in brackets* indicate indecipherable speech
{ }	*Brace brackets* indicate contextual detail of actions relevant to, but outside of, the discourse
( )	*Round brackets* are used for additional context or explanations outside of spoken words.
[ ]	*Square brackets* indicate an added clarification or filling words.
…	*Ellipses* indicates that some part of the conversation has been omitted to maintain relevancy and avoid redundancy.

Appendix II: Original parent interview schedule

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. I would like to assure you that your identity will remain confidential and no records of the interview will be kept with your name on them.

- Tell me about yourself / describe yourself.

1. Tell me about you and your family and how you've come to be living here.
   Prompts:
   - Parents' occupation
   - Parents' education
   - Parents' places of birth
   - Migration history (when? Why? Where?)
   - Number of children in the family
   - Children's education: both formal and informal
   - Religious identity(?)

2. Which languages do you and your family use at home and in your everyday life? Tell me about them.
   Prompts:
   - Languages used for communication
   - Language read
   - Reasons for using these particular languages for communication/reading
   - Where else, other than your home, do you use these languages?

3. Tell me about the things you and your family read at home and the languages they are written in.
   Prompts:
   - Map(?)
   - Where do the children encounter the home language in written form?
   - Types of resources – books? Fiction/non-fiction? Newspapers? Magazines? Comic books? Etc.

- Form of resources – printed? Digital? Online?

- Where do family members tend to read?

- When? Are there particular times in the day or in the week when family members read more?

- Who reads what?

- Which resources are read more and which resources are read less by members of the family?

- Is there anything they particularly like to read? Anything they particularly do not like?

- How did they obtain the different types of reading resources in the house?

- Where is the largest collection of reading resources in the house?

- Where else, other than your home, do you and/or your family members read in these languages? What do the reading experiences look like in these settings? What resources do you use in these settings? Who are the other people attending these settings? Is it important for you that you and/or your children attend these settings and read there? Why/why not? How do the children feel about attending these settings and reading there? Are there gender, age or other differences in attending these settings and reading in them?

4. [if religious texts and reading were not mentioned in answer to previous question]
   In many homes, people read for religious purposes or have religious texts. Is that the same for you? Tell me about it.
   Prompts:

- Type of resources – prayer books? Religious texts? Etc.

- Form of resources – printed? Digital? Online?

- Where do family members tend to read these resources?

- When? Are there particular times in the day or in the week when family members read for religious purposes more?

- Who reads what?

- Which resources are read more and which resources are read less by members of the family?

- Is there anything they particularly like to read? Anything they particularly do not like?

- How did they obtain the religious texts and resources?

- Where is the largest collection of religious texts in the house?

- Do you and/or your family members attend religious settings outside your house? What languages do you speak and read there? What reading resources are used there? Who are the other people who attend these settings? Is it important for you that you and your children attend these settings and read there? Why/why not? How do the children feel about attending these settings and reading there? Are there gender, age or other differences in attending these settings and reading in them?

5. What do you think about your children's reading, and what are your priorities when it comes to their reading?
   Prompts:

- Settings children read in – home, school, religious(?)

- Do the parents read to or with the children?

- How did the children learn to read in these different languages?

- More important language to read than others?

- Private lessons? Complementary schools?

- Why is it important for the parents that the children read in these languages?

- What steps do the parents take to teach and enhance their children's home language and literacy skills?

- Different thoughts and priorities? E.g. differences between individual children, different ages, gender?

- Aspirations

- Expectations

6. Do you think your children's schools understand and support their reading experiences at home? Tell me more about this.
   Prompts:

- Languages read at school similar/different to home?

- Do children talk about their home reading at school? And vice versa

- Do teachers express interest in your children's reading at home?
- Should schools encourage and support their multilingual reading experiences?

That is all the questions I had, is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

Thank you for your time today.

Appendix III: Revised parent interview schedule

First interview:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. I would like to assure you that your identity will remain confidential and no records of the interview will be kept with your name on them.

- Tell me about yourself / describe yourself and your family (parents' occupation, education, place of birth, number of children).

1. Can you tell me about the languages that you used and heard growing up? Can you tell me about situations where you recall using each of these languages?
   Prompts:
   - Languages spoken
   - Languages heard
   - Languages read/written
   - Learning of these languages: how? Where? When? With whom?
   - Settings across which these languages were spoken/heard/read/written

2. Is there anything you particularly remember reading as a child? Tell me about it.
   Prompts:
- That's interesting, tell me a bit more about it.
- Language(s) used
- Type of text
- Setting
- Other participants in the event?
- Can you describe how you felt in this situation? (pleasure/ boredom/ interested/ intrigued/ perplexed/ etc.)
- Is there any reason why this memory sticks out in particular?
- Did this happen often?

3. Is there anything you particularly remember being read to, as a child? Tell me about it.

   Prompts:

- That's interesting, tell me a bit more about it.

- Language(s) used

- Type of text

- Setting

- Other participants in the event?

- Can you describe how you felt in this situation? (pleasure/ boredom/ interested/ intrigued/ perplexed/ etc.)

- Is there any reason why this memory sticks out in particular?

- Did this happen often?

- Do you remember if you asked to be read to, or if the reader suggested it?

- Did you enjoy it, or would you rather having done something else?

4. Can you take me through a typical day in your household these days?

5. Can you tell me about the reading that takes place during the days you have just discussed?

   Prompts:

- Language(s) read

- What do the family members' reading experiences look like?

- Family members' attitudes towards reading in the different languages

- Reading resources: where? What language? What type and genre? How were they obtained? Who reads what? Where is the largest collection of books in the house?

- When? Are there particular times in the day or in the week when family members read more?

- Family members' particular likes/dislikes to do with reading

- Shared reading?

- [if not mentioned by the participant] Religious reading: tell me about your and your family members' reading for religious purposes.
- Settings for reading outside the home: why do they attend these settings? Who else attends them? Resources used? Family members' attitudes towards attending these settings? Are there gender, age or other differences in attending these settings and reading in them?
- Do you have a favourite thing to read? Tell me about it.
- What about [other family members], are their tastes in reading similar to or different from yours?

6. Can you tell me about your children's experiences of learning to read in [insert language]? (***Will ask about each language separately***)
   Prompts:
- Settings: home? School? Complementary school? Private lessons?
- [if the learning takes place outside the home] What are the parent's thoughts about the setting their children attend to learn [language]?
- Resources
- Other participants in these learning experiences (parents? Teachers? Siblings?)
- Age at which they began learning to read
- [if the parents talks about a particular child] has it been the same for them all?
- How did each child find learning to read in [language]?
- What were/are the children's attitudes towards learning?
- Gender differences?
- Why is it important for the parent that the children learn to read in [language]?

7. What do you think about your children's reading, and what are your priorities when it comes to their reading?
- Value and purpose for reading in these languages
- Different thoughts and priorities? E.g. differences between individual children, different ages, gender?
- Aspirations

- Expectations

- What do you think your children spend most time reading now?

- Do you actively encourage your children to read? If so, how? Can you tell me some stories about that?

- Are there particular issues in encouraging your child to learn to read in two languages?

- Do you have any advice to give to other parents about this, or the school?

Second interview:

To include follow-up questions, following first interview and weekly interviews with the children.

Appendix IV: Original child interview schedule

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
   - Age
   - School year
   - Hobbies
   - School attended by child
   - Do you like school?
   - What languages do you speak? What languages do you read in?

2. Tell me about the things that you read at home.
   - Type of resources – books? Fiction/non-fiction? Magazines? Newspapers? Comic books? Etc.
   - Form of resources – printed? Digital? Online?
   - In what languages are these resources? How do you find reading in these languages?
   - How and where did you learn to read in these languages? What was it like for you, learning to read in these languages?
   - Favourite book(s)
   - Is there anything you particularly enjoy reading? Tell me about it.
   - Is there anything you particularly don't like reading? Tell me about it.
   - Where at home do you usually read?
   - Do you sometimes read to or with other people at home or in other places?
   - Are there any other places, outside your home, where you read or speak additional languages? What are these places? What languages do you speak or read there? What is it like, being in these places and reading there?

3. Tell me about the things that you read at school.
   - Type of resources – books? Fiction/non-fiction? Magazines? Newspapers? Comic books? Etc.
   - Form of resources – printed? Digital? Online?

- In what languages are these resources? How do you find reading in these languages?
- How and where did you learn to read in these languages? What was it like for you, learning to read in these languages?
- Is there anything you particularly enjoy reading? Tell me about it.
- Is there anything you particularly don't like reading? Tell me about it.
- Do you sometimes read these resources to or with other people?

Other questions:

General:

- How was your day?
- What did you do at school?
- Did you play with your friends?

General reading questions:

- What do your friends like to read?
- What do you not like to read?
- What's most boring for you to read?
- What's most difficult for you to read?
- School bag
- Where do you get your books from? (library, home, store, school, etc.)
- When do you read? Do you read before you go to bed or any other times?

Questions about a specific reading resource:

- [if shows me several reading resources] Which one of these would you rather read? Why?
- What is your favourite part about this book?
- What is it about … that you like?
- How do you feel when you read … ?

Appendix V: Revised child interview schedule

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
   - Age
   - School year
   - What do you like to do in your free time?
   - What are your favourite activities?
   - What do you not like doing?

2. Can you tell me about what you've done today / you did yesterday? What did you read during this day?
   - Type, form, genre, language
   - Why did you read it?
   - Where?
   - When?
   - [if applicable] With whom?
   - [if a physical resource] do you have it with you? Can you show it to me?
   - How did you feel while reading it? / What was it like, reading it?

3. Can you tell me about the first thing that you can remember, that someone read to you?
   - Language(s) used
   - Type of text
   - Setting
   - Other participants in the event?
   - Do you remember if you asked to be read to, or if they offered to do it?
   - Do you remember how you felt when this happened? Can you describe it to me? Why did you feel this way? (pleasure/ boredom/ interested/ intrigued/ perplexed/ etc.)
   - Do you remember if you enjoyed it, or if you would you rather having done something else?
   - How often did this happen – how often did someone read to you?

4. Can you tell me about the first thing that you ever read yourself?

   - Language(s) used

   - Type of text

   - Setting

   - Other participants in the event?

   - Do you remember how you felt when this happened? Can you describe it to me? Why did you feel this way? (pleasure/ boredom/ interested/ intrigued/ perplexed/ etc.)

5. Do you ever read in other languages? Can you tell me about the things that you read in [other languages]? Can you tell me about the last time that you read in [these languages]?

   - Type, form, genre, language

   - Why did you read it?

   - Where?

   - When?

   - [if a physical resource] do you have it with you? Can you show it to me?

   - How did you feel while reading it? / What was it like, reading it?

6. Can you tell me about something that you've enjoyed reading recently?

   - Type of resource, form, genre, language

   - What did you like about it?

   - [If applicable] What was your favourite part?

7. Can you tell me about how you learnt to read in [insert language]? (***Will ask about each language separately)***

   - Setting: home? School? Complementary school? Private lessons?

   - Child's attitude towards learning to read in [language]

   - Other participants? Teacher/parent/siblings/other students

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how easy or difficult was it learning to read in [language]? Why?

Other questions for later interviews:

General:

- How was your day?
- What did you do at school?
- What did you do when you came home?
- Repeat question from first interview: can you tell me about something that you read today/yesterday?

Questions about a specific reading resource:

- [if shows me or talks about several reading resources] Which one of these would you rather read? Why?
- What is your favourite part about this book?
- What is it about … that you like?
- How do you feel when you read … ?

General reading questions (if the child is not sharing much):

- What do your friends like to read?
- What do you not like to read?
- What's most boring for you to read?
- What's most difficult for you to read?
- School bag
- Where do you get your books from? (library, home, store, school, etc.)
- When do you read? Do you read before you go to bed or any other times?
- Where do you read? (settings)

Additional questions will be asked as follow-ups following previous interviews with the child.

Appendix VI: An example fieldnote from my first encounter with the Polish family

Field notes

<u>Case study:</u> Polish family   <u>Date and time:</u> 26.04.2021 5:05 PM

<u>Event:</u> Set-up meeting turned into first interviews with participants   <u>Participants:</u> Nadia, Gabriela and Simon

<u>Length of event:</u> 1 hour 20 minutes

Code

What happened	Thoughts
1. (45 minutes) I sent Nadia the Zoom details, and when she entered the Zoom call, she was sitting by a table in a seemingly large room, behind her there was an open door that seemed to lead to a hallway. Her daughter was sitting on her lap; this was the first time I saw and spoke to her. Nadia introduced me to her daughter, Gabriela (pseudonym), who was quite shy but seemed excited as well. I introduced myself to Gabriela, and asked her how old she is and what year she is in (8 y.o., Year 3). I then told her very briefly that I would like to speak to her about the reading that she does at home and at school, because I am very interested in learning about how she reads both in English and Polish. She seemed happy about this but did not say much. Both Nadia and Gabriela seemed like they were expecting to talk with me; I asked Nadia whether she would like me to speak to her or Gabriela first; she said it would be best if I spoke to her, so Gabriela left the room.	Both Nadia and Gabriela seemed like they were expecting to talk with me; I was not expecting this, since I had only planned a set-up meeting in which I explain to Nadia about the study and possibly interview her as well, if she provides her consent. I had prepared for the option of having a set-up meeting with Nadia's children as well, but did not think I would interview them that day. There had obviously been a misunderstanding in the initial phone call with Nadia; she did not understand my intention of just explaining to her about the research, and had already told

I asked Nadia whether her children will be talking to me as well, having seen Gabriela this excited, and she confirmed, saying that her children were waiting to speak to me. She said that her middle child, who is a boy in Year 9, was too shy to speak to me but her older son, Simon, will be happy to. I then began explaining to Nadia about the research, by sharing my screen to show her the information sheet, and slowly going through it with her. She seemed to understand and asked whether I could send it to her by email so that she could read it at home and fill out the consent form. She then seemed happy to begin the interview straight away; I asked her whether she wanted to do it then and she said yes.

The interview itself lasted 30 minutes. Some connection problems disturbed our conversation in the first 15 minutes, but it was better afterwards. Nadia was very pleasant and her face lit up particularly when she talked about reading the Bible at night with Gabriela, and teaching Gabriela to read Polish using a book that she herself used when she was a child learning to read in Polish back in Poland. She reported not to read much, and said that her children do not really read either. When asked about texts and reading resources around the house, she said that they do not have many, stating that her children mainly play and read on the internet, although she did not know what they were reading on the internet.

There were some language barrier issues, and Nadia misunderstood the meaning of some of my questions towards the end, providing answers that do not match the question. For example, she did not seem to understand my questions when I asked her whether her children's teachers are aware of their Polish reading experiences, and whether she would like the teachers to actively support their Polish reading. In those instances, I tried to repeat the questions and word

her children I would be talking to them that day.

From the way Nadia was talking about her children, it was clear that she was very proud of them. I got the impression that Nadia doesn't know much about the reading of her boys (Year 12 and Year 9); she said they don't read much in general, and when I asked what they read on the internet or whether they read the Bible, she said she didn't know, but mentioned that they each own their own bible in Polish. Nadia seemed to be more involved in Gabriela's reading; she described reading the Bible to her every evening in bed, and teaching her basic Polish reading from a book she bought in Poland.

Even though I had planned on asking Nadia to draw a map of the home literacy environment, during the interview I felt that it was not appropriate to do so, due to the Internet connection problems and the slight language barriers.

them differently, but in some cases, it did not work, so I moved on to my next questions.	
2. (15 minutes) When I finished the interview with Nadia, she called Gabriela into the room. Gabriela sat down on Nadia's lap and still seemed quite shy. I asked her whether she wants to hear about the study, she nodded and I shared my screen and showed her the information sheet designed for her age group. I went through the information sheet with her and read it out loud to her, every so often asking if she understood or if she had any questions. When I got to the point of asking for her consent to participate, I told her that she didn't have to make a decision straight away. She was silent for a few seconds, smiling shyly and looking unsure, and I then reassured her again that she didn't need to decide at that moment. I asked whether she would like to think about it and let her mother know when she makes a decision. She nodded, but then Nadia said a few sentences to her in Polish, following which Gabriela said that she will participate. I asked if she was sure and she said yes. We then began the interview which lasted 10 minutes. Gabriela mainly answered with 'yes' or 'no' and remained quiet in response to some questions. Nadia often answered instead of Gabriela or elaborated further on what she had said. Gabriela provided some interesting information about the books she was reading at school during 'reading time'. She did not talk about any reading done at home, saying that she does not really read at home. She did not talk about reading the Bible with her mother at bedtime until I brought it up.	Gabriela's uncertainty about providing her consent, followed by her agreement to participate after her mother talked to her in Polish, slightly unsettled me. I did not know whether I had made the right ethical decision by going through with the interview. Therefore, I attempted to keep the interview very short after that, but I felt a bit tense throughout. I expressed interest in her hobbies; when she told me she likes to draw, I asked to see her drawings and complimented her on them. She seemed to open up when I asked questions about her reading and why she liked particular books. Still, she remained silent in response to some of my questions.
3.	

(20 minutes) When I finished the interview with Gabriela, she left the room and Nadia then called Simon. Simon walked in and Nadia left. I introduced myself to Simon and asked him a few questions about himself. He said he is 16, turning 17 soon, and is in Year 12. I then told him about my research, showed him the information sheet and went through it with him, reading it out loud. He seemed very interested and said immediately that he would like to participate. The interview lasted 11 minutes, mostly because I was not prepared for interviewing Simon and ran out of questions quite quickly when he declared that he almost never reads. I asked him whether he reads online, and he said that occasionally he will read a BBC article if it pops up on his phone but not more than that. I asked if he mainly reads for school and exam purposes, and he said yes. He said that his phone is set to Polish, so when he searches terms on Google, they often come up in Polish and he will then read them in Polish. He also reported speaking to his Polish classmate in Polish more than in English, and talking to many of his friends in Polish.	Simon was very open throughout the interview; he seemed very interested in my research and in answering my questions, providing as much detail as he could.

Reflections afterwards: themes/ new questions

- The family seems quite serious about maintaining the Polish language and heritage: they speak mainly Polish at home, including the children, and Nadia reports that the children understand and speak it fluently. Both boys used to attend Polish school on Friday evenings, where they learned not only to read and write in Polish, but also Polish history in accordance with the Polish curriculum. Nadia seems to be proud of this fact, saying that this school is different from regular Saturday and Sunday schools in that it follows the same curriculum taught in schools in Poland. Nadia reports wanting to move back to Poland in the future, when the children finish school. Similarly, Simon seems to be very proud of, and connected to, his Polish identity: the default language on his phone is Polish; he talks to his friends in Polish; he says that he finds speaking in Polish and English

equally easy except for specialised words in English he learns as part of his A-level exams; and he took GCSE and A-levels in Polish as well. I did not observe such a connection to the Polish identity with Gabriela, but this was only my first meeting with her and she was not very talkative. She did seem proud when I asked her about learning to read in Polish and reading the Bible in Polish with her mother, but this could also be because she enjoyed making her mother proud or enjoyed her mother's attention during these events, rather than a strong connection to the Polish language or identity per se.

- The family members do not report to read very often, apart from Gabriela, who seems to enjoy fiction and non-fiction books.

- When the children are asked about reading, they talk about it mainly in relation to school reading; either reading of books introduced at school (Gabriela) or textbooks used for studying (Simon). When I asked Gabriela about the books that she reads, she talked about books borrowed from school.

- When I asked Nadia about the reading resources in her house, she said that they don't really have any because they mainly read on the Internet. However, throughout the interview she did show and talk about several books (Polish textbooks, children's books, Bibles). This may reveal something about how she conceptualises 'things to read'. It is also possible that she did not fully understand my question and therefore provided the answer that she did.

- When I asked Nadia about her and her children's reading, she reported that they don't read very often. However, later on, when I asked about religious reading, she mentioned reading the Bible every evening by herself and with her daughter. This may indicate that when she thinks of the term 'reading', she thinks about it in a similar way to the way it is conceptualised in the mainstream English culture: reading fiction and non-fiction texts, and reading for study purposes.

- The above point may apply to Gabriela as well. When I asked her about her reading, she only talked about her reading at school, and did not mention the Bible reading every night until I asked her about it.

- Gabriela seemed happy talking about reading the Bible with her mother: this was the only time in the interview when she smiled broadly and seemed proud. At the moment, I can think of three possible explanations for that. Firstly, it is possible that she indeed enjoys reading the Bible and feels proud when talking about it. Secondly, it may be that she reacts this way because her mother is sitting in the room, and she might want to please her mother. Thirdly, she may enjoy reading the Bible not because of the text, but because

of the connection with her mother and the undivided attention she receives from her during this event. When I asked her what she likes about reading the Bible, she did not answer.

- At the beginning of the interview, Simon said that he doesn't really read, but later on he said that he reads English every single day. This says something about how he conceptualises reading. He probably talks about reading at school every day, but does not consider it 'reading' when I ask him to tell me about his day-to-day reading.

Thoughts and further questions for next time

Nadia:
- In front of Nadia there seemed to be a bookcase of some sort, since she pulled out different books from there (Polish textbooks, Bibles). Next time I will ask them whether they would like to give me a video tour of the reading resources in their home (she agreed to this when I read the information sheet to her); hopefully, this will reveal more about their reading and lead to more questions for Nadia and the children.
- Nadia mentioned the boys in particular when she said that the children don't want to read – ask her about it next time.
- Ask Nadia (and the kids?) next time what learning to read in Polish was like for them. Ask if they think it is easier due to the letters being the same as English letters.
- Ask Nadia about expectations/aspirations for her children – what would she like them to do after finishing school? What do they want to do?
- Ask Nadia about her encounters with the children's teachers in the English school – for example parent-teacher meetings.
- Ask whether Gabriela also attends a Catholic, girls-only school.
- When I asked Nadia whether she reads at home or also at church she only mentioned her home. Next time, I can ask her if she went to church in the past year and if she can tell me about what she did there.
- Ask Nadia where she and the kids encounter Polish script (e.g., the supermarket).
- Ask about television/movie watching.
- Ask Nadia about her own reading as a child/teenager in Poland.

Gabriela:

- Gabriela said she likes to read both fiction and non-fiction – next time ask her about the non-fiction texts that she reads.
- Ask Gabriela what it is she likes about reading the Bible – perhaps ask her to tell me about an interesting story she read or her mother read to her.
- Ask Gabriela if she talks about her Polish speaking and learning in class, with her friends and her teachers.
- Ask Gabriela about her teachers and her school. Ask about favourite subjects and subjects she does not like.
- Ask Gabriela to describe her day, at home and at school. Ask what she did over the weekend.
- Ask Gabriela what makes her select particular books during reading time in class.
- Ask Gabriela why it's important to read in English and why it's important to read in Polish.
- Ask about television/movie watching.

Simon:

- Simon said that he usually speaks in Polish to his friend – ask who are these friends, considering that he said only one person in his school year speaks Polish?
- Ask Simon about what he wants to do when he finishes school.
- Ask Simon to describe his day, at school and at home. Maybe ask him what he does on the weekends.
- Ask Simon where he encounters Polish script.
- Ask Simon why it's important to read in English and why it's important to read in Polish.
- Ask about television/movie watching.
- Ask Simon whether he feels that his teachers at the English school value his Polish reading experiences at home and at Polish school.

Appendix VII: Copy of the information sheet provided to primary-school-aged children who participated in this study

Reading Choices, Practices and Experiences in Multiliterate Homes in London

Information sheet for children ages 5-11

Hello! My name is Shira. I study at UCL Institute of Education which is a university in London. I want to learn more about the reading you do at home and the languages you read in.
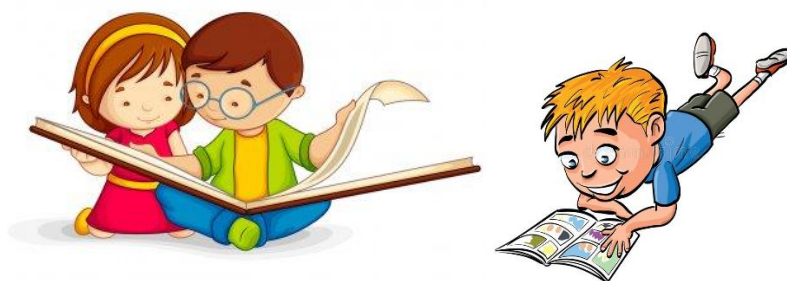
If you and your family agree, I will be talking to you in the next month, and I would like to ask you to tell me about what you have read each week at home and at school.

If you want, you can take photos of your reading or write in a diary about what you have read. If you and your parents agree, I may ask you or someone else in your family to film a video tour of the books, magazines and other things your family members read at home.

If you agree, I will record our conversations. Whatever you say to me or show me will be kept safe and protected. Nobody is going to know your name or see your face. Nobody is going to see the information except for me and my supervisors at my university, and some of the students who study with me.

You don't have to take part in this study, it is up to you to decide and you can speak to your parents about this. If you have any questions about the study, you can ask me and I will be happy to answer. Even if you said yes and then you change your mind, this is fine.

If you agree to participate, please tick or colour the boxes below:

	YES	NO
Do you want to take part in this study?		
May I write about the things you tell me?		

May I video record our

conversations?

Thank you! 😊

Appendix VIII: Polish family case study – participants

Family member	Age	Number and length of interviews
Nadia (mother)	-	• 1st interview: 45 minutes • 2nd interview: 25 minutes
Father	-	-
Simon (male)	16 (Year 12)	• 1st interview: 20 minutes • 2nd interview: 20 minutes • 3rd interview: 28 minutes • 4th interview: 8 minutes
Middle child (male)	14 (Year 9)	-
Gabriela (female)	8 (Year 3)	• 1st interview: 15 minutes • 2nd interview: 26 minutes • 3rd interview: 12 minutes • 4th interview: 7 minutes

Appendix IX: Bangladeshi family case study – participants

Family member	Age	Number and length of interviews
Noor (mother)	-	• 1st interview: 35 minutes • 2nd interview: 25 minutes
		•
Father	-	-
Mahia (girl)	13 (Year 8)	• 1st interview: 10 minutes • 2nd interview: 15 minutes
Aadya (girl)	11 (Year 6)	• 1st interview: 10 minutes • 2nd interview: 15 minutes • 3rd interview: 16 minutes • 4th interview: 10 minutes
Boy	6 (Year 1)	-

Appendix X: Hasidic family case study – participants

Family member	Age	Number and length of interviews
Pessi (mother)	-	• 1st interview: 35 minutes • 2nd interview: 26 minutes
Father	-	-
Child (male)	19	-
Child (female)	17	-
Devorah (female)	15 (Year 11)	• 1st interview: 36 minutes • 2nd interview: 14 minutes
Child (female)	13	-
Miriam (female)	11 (Year 6)	• 1st interview: 30 minutes • 2nd interview: 25 minutes • 3rd interview: 20 minutes • 4th interview: 11 minutes
Child (female)	8	-
Child (male)	6	-
Child (male)	4	-
Child (male)	2	-