

The family as a space for language / languaging

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A growing literature focuses on language learning and (trans)languaging in the classroom (cf. Garcia and Li Wei 2014), with the notion of linguistic repertoires coming to the fore in sociolinguistic approaches to language competence (cf. Busch 2012). The family has increasingly come under scrutiny in sociolinguistics as a space for language/ (trans)languaging through studies of family language policy, language socialization and heritage language transmission (King, Fogle and Logan-Terry 2008; Curdt-Christiansen 2013; Kheirkhah and Cekaite 2015; Lanza and Li Wei 2016; Song 2016). Indeed the family is a 'community of practice', a social unit that has its norms for speaking, acting and believing and hence provides a focus on praxis, the cornerstone for language socialization (Lanza 2007). The field of family language policy research has evolved in recent years from an emphasis on language policies as planned language management on the part of the parent/caregiver to the encompassing of language practices in the family, as inherently implicit policy, also including the child's own agency in the process (Gafaranga 2010). Questions have included What language conditions provide affordances and constraints for multilingual development? What types of language input and literacy practices facilitate children's multilingual development? What measures should parents take to ensure desirable multilingual outcomes? More recent shifts in focus in family language policy research, however, consider questions that examine language as a means through which multilingual adults and children define themselves and their families, with studies employing methods that attend to meaning-making in interaction also bringing in the broader socio-political context (King and Lanza 2017).

In this presentation I will discuss the family as a space for language/ languaging, bringing into focus both family language policies and practices. A myriad of methods has evolved to uncover the dynamics of family life and language. However, in the current digital age, the role of technology in communication and language learning still deserves further attention. We may ask How do family members engage in communication across various media, drawing on their entire linguistic repertoire? The family as a space for language / languaging has in the digital age become linked with ideas of good parenting, and many parenting websites, online discussion forums, and blogs have evolved, contributing to "sharenting" (Blum-Ross and Livingstone 2017), that is, sharing representations of one's parenting or children online. A growing number of such online spaces deal with bilingual/multilingual families and language development. How do online resources avail parents/caregivers with opportunities for sharing experiences and consulting on raising bilingual and multilingual children, transforming private family space into an arguably public space? I will critically examine a trajectory of studies that illustrate the family as an important space for language learning and use, and will conclude with a discussion of the role of technology in communication and language learning in the family, particularly through an examination of some selected websites for multilingual families. Investigating the family as a space for language / languaging can provide vital insights into understanding young children's orientation to, learning and use of language in the classroom.

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