



Micro-Level Language Planning: An Auto-ethnographic Study of Family Language Policy in Pakistan

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Abstract:

Language planning is often studied at the state or institutional level, while little attention is given to the micro-level contexts where language choices are made and enacted daily. This study investigates the evolution of linguistic practices within a Pakistani family across three generations using family language policy (FLP), a type of micro-level language planning. Based on the theoretical framework of Chua and Baldauf's multi-level model of language planning, and guided by the ethnographic theories of Agar and Hymes, this study uses an autoethnographic approach to investigate the gradual transition from Rangri to Urdu. The results show that a number of interrelated factors, such as the historical legacy of colonization, aspirations for education and social mobility, and the communicative need to integrate into a larger language group, influence this linguistic change. The study emphasizes how family language planning reflects larger sociopolitical and cultural dynamics rather than being solely a personal issue. It also helps raise awareness at both a personal and a societal level by motivating families to identify, consider, and intentionally create their own language policies in order to maintain linguistic heritage while adapting to changing social norms.

Key words: Family language policy, Micro level planning, Ethnography, Autoethnography, Rangri language

Introduction

Language planning and policy have emerged as a specialized discipline after decolonization which resulted from World-War-II. The term language policy and planning (LPP) was first used by Fettes (1997), and at present it is commonly used for policy and planning issues concomitant with language. Language policy is not just a top-down regulation; it is a dynamic social practice influenced by political, cultural, and ideological factors that impact how languages are used and valued in society (García, 2015).

As described by Chua and Baldauf (2011), in the policy and planning of language, there are four stages with ten levels. The first stage is Supra Macro Planning followed by Macro Planning, Micro Planning, and the last one Infra Micro Planning. All these stages have different levels of language planning and are interchangeable. Language planning can start from any level, and it is not necessary for it to follow a sequential order. The family language planning (FLP) is included in Infra Micro Planning, and it is also called Meso-Level Planning . Family language planning and policy according to King et al. (2008), is overt and explicit in relation to the language used inside the home among family members.

Family language policy plays a vital role in preserving and transmitting minority or endangered languages across generations through consistent home language practices (Van Mensel, 2018). FLP provides a cohesive overview of research on how languages are learned, managed, and negotiated in families. The family language policy allows us to examine language planning and policies that are implemented not at the state or macro level but at the micro level i.e., the language policy of a family. The interaction between national and family-level language planning becomes especially important in multilingual situations like Pakistan, where prominent languages like Urdu and English coexist with a number of regional and heritage languages. Estrada and Schecter (2018) point out that the growing dominance of English in educational settings can marginalize indigenous languages, illustrating how institutional language policies contribute to language shift and the gradual erosion of linguistic diversity in families and communities. Many families gradually move away from regional or minority languages as a result of shifting social, educational, and cultural dynamics, even as national policies frequently give priority to Urdu and English for official and educational purposes. Therefore, this study investigates how family language planning and policy functions as a type of Infra Micro Planning that is separate from, yet impacted by, language regulations at the state level. It seeks to investigate how families preserve, alter, or give up heritage languages over the course of several generations, as well as how these practices relate to more general trends of language change and identity development in multilingual cultures such as Pakistan.

This study is significant at both theoretical and practical levels in understanding how language planning operates beyond formal state boundaries and within the intimate domain of the family. By placing Family Language Policy (FLP) within Chua and Baldauf's (2011) notion of Infra Micro Planning, the study theoretically contributes to the growing framework of language planning and policy. It highlights how families act as influential agents in language maintenance, transmission, and shift, functioning as a microcosm of broader sociolinguistic forces. By looking at how family decisions may coincide with or deviate from state-level policies, we can better understand how language ideologies and practices evolve across generations in multilingual countries like Pakistan.

Practically speaking, the study places a strong emphasis on introspection and self-awareness regarding language usage in one's own family. It makes people realize that the linguistic choices they make in their homes, whether intentionally or unintentionally, have a significant impact on whether heritage languages are preserved or lost. This knowledge can encourage a

more thoughtful and informed approach to intergenerational language transmission by

encouraging families to reconsider their own language policy.

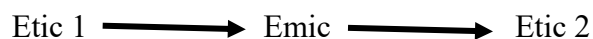
Furthermore, the research highlights the need for more inclusive and community-oriented language planning initiatives by emphasizing the gap between macro-level policies that support dominant languages (like Urdu and English) and micro-level family practices that frequently contribute to the decline of regional languages. The study has implications for language educators, policymakers, and researchers, providing insights into how state-level language planning interacts with the lived realities of families.

In the end, this study not only contributes to the scholarly discourse on language shift and maintenance, but it also acts as a tool for reflection, encouraging people and families to consider their own linguistic contexts and take proactive measures to preserve their cultural and linguistic legacy. Pillai, Soh, and Kajita (2014) emphasize that maintaining heritage languages across generations depends heavily on family language policies and supportive attitudes in the home. Therefore, there is a need for families to reconsider their language policy.

The study uses an ethnographic technique to investigate the (FLP) dynamics mentioned above in depth, which enables a thorough analysis of real language practices, beliefs, and relationships in the context of a typical family. By using this method, the researcher can observe how language policies are created, negotiated, and implemented in daily life, offering valuable insights into the relationship between individual experiences and more general sociolinguistic dynamics.

Ethnography

The present research is an ethnographic study of family language policy so there must be some overview of what ethnography entails. Ethnography by definition is the study and description of human culture as the word ethnography is the combination of *ethnos*, meaning ‘culture’ and *-graphy*, meaning ‘writing’ or ‘representation.’ . Carlos (2018) emphasized that ethnography is not merely a method of collecting data, but a way of being in research. It involves deep engagement with context, participants, and meaning to generate authentic understanding. Mostly anthropologists adopt this research approach as they seek to develop an insider’s perspective of a particular culture. This allows for an understanding of a culture from both inside and outside. Agar (1986) highlights two key features of ethnography (1) an understanding of how participants infer the events in their lives and (2) the search for patterns which involves a rich collection of different kinds of sentiments, information, and relations among them. According to Agar, ethnographers find the “stuff” that they don’t understand but are fascinated by, and try to make sense of it with the help of participants’ eyes. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 1) stated that ethnography primarily refers to a particular set of methods. It involves the ethnographer’s participation, overtly or covertly, in the life of people for an extended period of time, to observe and listen to them, ask questions and collect data related to every aspect of their lives to illuminate the issues that are the focus of the research. As stated by Johnson (2013) ethnographies of language policy may be of different form but they must have some following characteristics: first of all there must be a balance between emic and etic perspectives. Etic perspective is the perspective of the observer or the researcher. In this approach the researcher tries to explain observed social realities with the help of theoretical apparatus of social sciences. On the other hand, emic perspective is the perspective of the studied social group using their perspectives, logic, explanations, beliefs, and worldviews to interpret certain values, beliefs or practices. Hymes (1990) describes this as:



In other words, the researcher starts with knowledge of theories, policies and frameworks (etic 1), then collects ethnographic data to derive findings and test those frameworks/theories (emic) and then re-tools existing frameworks/theories on the basis of findings (etic 2). The second important thing is long-term engagement with target community or communities to have a deep insight of language policies of that community. The third aspect is data triangulation. The ethnographer must collect data from multiple sources to develop comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. All ethnographic studies must have these three characteristics in them.

Autoethnography

This research employed the methodology of Autoethnography to capture both etic and emic perspectives on family language policy. This allows the researcher to interpret personal experiences (emic) through the lens of existing theories and frameworks (etic). The word Autoethnography is the combination of three concepts (1) auto means personal experience (2) ethno means related to culture and (3) graphy means systematic analysis. So according to Ellis et al. (2015) Auto-Ethno-Graphy can be defined as an approach to research that systematically analyzes personal experiences to understand cultural experiences. To recognize life's intricacies and possibilities, social sciences need "more stories, less theories" (Coles, 1989). Autoethnography is the best research method that accepts and accommodates the muddled, unreliable, and emotional nature of social life by showing people in their process of figuring out what to do, how to live and the socio-cultural meanings of their struggles (Adam et al., 2015). This approach of conducting research is different from traditional ways of doing research and representing others. A researcher uses the doctrines of autobiography and ethnography to conduct an autoethnography. Autoethnography as a method is both a process and a product. An Autoethnographer not only tells the experiences but often is required to analyze these experiences. As cited in (Ellis et al., 2010), Mitch Allen in a personal interview with these researchers says that an Auto-ethnographer must

"look at experience analytically. Otherwise [you're] telling [your] story—and that's nice—but people do that on Oprah [a U.S.-based television program] every day. Why is your story more valid than anyone else's? What makes your story more valid is that you are a researcher. You have a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature to use. That's your advantage. If you can't frame it around these tools and literature and just frame it as 'my story,' then why or how should I privilege your story over anyone else's I see 25 times a day on TV?" (interview, May 4, 2006)

An Auto-ethnographer must not only use the methodological tools to analyze his experiences but must ponder personal experiences to elucidate different aspects of cultural experience and make the culture's eccentricities familiar to insiders and outsiders. The present research is an Autoethnography of family language planning and policies, so, in this research both the methodological tools and self-experiences are used to illustrate the culture's characteristics.

This research provides an insight into the family language planning (FLP) of a three-generation family living in a village of Vehari, Punjab, Pakistan. The language of the first generation of this family is a variety of Rangri language and this language belongs to the family of Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Western, Bhiland, Malvi Rangri. The language of second generation is also almost Rangri with a little change due to exposure and schooling etc. But the language of third generation is completely shifted to Urdu language. They even cannot speak Rangri, although they understand it. The purpose of this research is to identify and better

understand the many language policies that shape our daily lives. This research not only considers formal language policies decided by officials but also the policies we establish through daily social practice. The policy and planning of researcher's family is investigated in relation to national language policies of Pakistan. In this research I (the researcher) have inspected whether the policies of my family are in line with the overt and covert policies of my country (Pakistan) or they are out of line.

Research methodology

In this research, the method of Autoethnography is used to show how people figure out their daily family life matters especially language. This Autoethnography is primarily related to FLP of researcher's own family. This study has all the three major characteristics of ethnography (Johnson, 2013) as the emic and etic perspectives are considered in it. The etic perspective refers to the researcher's own viewpoint and the emic perspective refers to other family members' viewpoints, both are considered for conducting this research. Second thing was long-term engagement of researcher with the investigated community and as a part of that family the researcher was always with them and knew every aspect of their life fully well and she was also aware of many language policies and trends that prevailed in the family. Third essential characteristic was data triangulation and in this research the data was collected using different methods. Observation is the major source of data collection in this study, other than observations, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations have also been used for data collection.

Data analysis was conducted during and after data collection process ended. The collected data were explored through analytic memos. The examples from these analytic memos are presented in the section of findings to support the language policies of researcher's family. As stated earlier, Autoethnography is the best research method that accepts and accommodates the muddled, unreliable and emotional nature of social life by showing people in their process of figuring out what to do, how to live and the social cultural meanings of their struggles (Ellis et al. 2015). So, for present research not just ethnography but Autoethnography is selected as the best approach to investigate family language policy and planning. Although the researcher has tried to be neutral while conducting this Autoethnography, but there may be some bias in conducting interviews or having conversations with her family members. The researcher tried to minimize this biasness with the help of data triangulation and reflexivity concerning her own positioning. The researcher's personal history as a native of a village of district Vehari, Punjab, Pakistan, living with her family in this village, playing the role of daughter and also of a researcher. The data collection and analysis was influenced by her exposure to research. This study employs theoretical triangulation, drawing on language planning theory (Chua & Baldauf, 2011), family language policy framework (King et al., 2008), and ethnographic epistemology (Agar, 1986; Hymes, 1990) to provide a multidimensional understanding of family language practices.

Although the data collection time for this research was two months, but researcher's previous life practices as a member of investigated family could not be detached from this. Before conducting this research, the family was informed and consented for this research. As the author is a part of this family so it was not a big issue to take the consent of all family members. A total of 12 people from three generations live in her house, two members from first generation then seven from second and three from third generation. The three different, and changing language policies and planning of researcher's family were investigated in this study.

Findings

The findings of the research illustrate that language of the family is going towards vulnerability. According to UNESCO Language Endangerment Framework, a language is vulnerable if most of the children speak the language but it is restricted to certain domains (e.g., home). According to the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis & Simons, 2010), this language in the examined family scenario is at level 6b. The level 6b is labeled as threatened language. At this level, the language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child bearing generations are transmitting it to their children. The Rangri language spoken in the researcher's family is the source of communication between family members and with some of the relatives, as not all the relatives speak this language. When relatives with a different language visit the house, the family members speak with them using the language of visitors or if they are close ones then speak with them in Rangri. The language of first generation, i.e., mother and father of the researcher is Rangri, with almost no use of English in it. They are not literate but still their language is different from the language of other speakers of the same language. This could be the effect of their interaction with their children, their social circle, and their exposure. The language of second generation, i.e., the language of the researcher and her siblings is Rangri with a great influence of Urdu and English language. The Rangri language spoken by the author's family is not the same as was spoken by author's forefathers in India as, due to colonization, there is a great change in the words and also in the accent of language. Now, it is much influenced by Urdu and Punjabi languages. Let's have an example for same sentence in Rangri of India and in Rangri language spoken by the researcher:

Indian Rangri = Thara kay gyan say? (How are you?)

Rangri spoken by the researcher's family = Kay hal aa taira? (How are you?)

Although English is not spoken at home, it is still present in our (researcher's) lives in different forms. While speaking to the parents, the care is taken that there should be no word of English so that they may not have any difficulty in understanding it. Even the simple English words that are understood by the Parents are not spoken while conversing with them.

For example, when the researcher informed her parents that her research is on Rangri language, she told them as:

Maira kam apni boli pa aa. (My research is on our own language)

Whereas she told the same thing to my brother in a different way as:

Mairi research apni language pa aa. (My research is on our own language)

If there is no substitute of English words in our language, then the thing or concept is explained to them in Rangri.

For example, when I was having my M.Phil viva voce I told my parents that

“Ami maira Viva aa” (Mother, I have viva voice)

At that time my mother was not aware of what a viva voce is, so, I explained to her that “ami jaira kam mai krya aa na us kay swal pochha gy wa maira paa ar mai jwab dao gi fair” (Mother, they will ask question from the work that I have done and I will answer them).

With the passage of time, they have learned things and words from us (the researcher and her siblings) as we use them in our daily life but still, we try not to use English with our parents. Although, my parents never said that they can't understand English words but still this is the practice of family. The language of both generations i.e. the first and second generation, outside

the house is mostly Urdu or Punjabi, even most of the time outside the house they themselves converse in Urdu with one another. This is the prevalent ideology of all family members that this language has no status in the society and people feel difficulty in understanding it. We (researcher's family) is surrounded by Punjabi or local Saraiki speakers and we are in minority so we have to converse with them in their language or in Urdu. One common reason, told by my father, for not speaking this language outside the house is that people consider that if they are speaking Rangri language so they belong to Rajpoot family (a cast) whereas that is not the case. The researcher's family belongs to Syed/Shah Family (a different caste). When someone calls them Rajpoot due to the language, they stop its use outside the house. At the end, there comes the third generation of the family i.e. the kids of researcher's brother. The first and second generations are free to use any language but this is the third generation that is restricted from using Rangri language and all other family members remain correcting them.

For example, at one instance my niece Musfirah was saying that "Ami mujhy reel do" (Mother, give me the spool) and her mother corrected her that it is not "reel" but call it "nalki". Although reel is an English word but due to its excessive use it is considered as Urdu and my Bhabi (sister-in-law) feels that it is not an appropriate word so she corrected her.

They were not taught Rangri language at all. From the very first day of their birth every family member is speaking with them in Urdu. They have no association with Rangri and they cannot speak it although it is intelligible to them. Even if a family member is speaking Rangri with someone else and these kids ask something or talk to them, they shift their language to Urdu and answer them in Urdu. They are also open to English as the members of second generation, and use English words or sentences with them, whereas opposite was the case with first generation.

Then a question arises that why a certain social group is reluctant to speak its mother-tongue? Perhaps the most plausible explanation is offered by Fanon and Farrington (1965), an eminent Algerian psychiatrist and freedom fighter. From a psychological perspective, Fanon calls our attention to a social phenomenon what he calls Inferiority Complex. The inferiority complex leads a certain group or community to conclude that its language (which is vital component of culture of social group) is inferior to that of other community around it. In his seminal work, *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that during the process of colonization inculcated Colonial Mentality is inculcated among colonized community as a well-planned instrument of policy. Resultantly, colonized community perceives the culture of colonizer, superior to his/her own culture. Language being the core component of culture is immensely influenced by colonial mentality which eventually leads to inferiority complex among the natives who start thinking that their language is inferior to that of colonizer. Many postcolonial states are pursuing the linguistic policy of colonial powers even after they have departed from their colonies around the world. For instance, European colonial powers have immensely influenced the linguistic landscape of colonized communities in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Australia and North America.

Second, a language would be preferred by a community if that language is considered to be helpful in Socio-economic mobility. Status and prestige of a language play very important role for its preference and, in case of Rangri language, there seems no status of this language that is why the investigated family is shifting towards Urdu language as Urdu is national language and also MOI (medium of instruction). Another reason for this language shift is national language policy, which favors English and Urdu languages. Language policy is not just a top-down regulation, it is a dynamic social practice influenced by political, cultural, and ideological influences that impact how languages are used and valued in society (García, 2015).

When I (the researcher) came back from university, I usually ask my father in Urdu as "kya haal hy abu?" (How are you?) Whereas in Rangri language this sentence will be as "kay hal aa

abu?" I don't use this sentence because I don't feel it as respectable as its Urdu substitute and the second thing is that I became habitual of using Urdu language, whereas while speaking to my niece I used to say "How are you, Musfirah?" and she replied as "I'm good, Phopo" (Aunt). Although the kids are using some of English phrases and words but still they are not using the name of relations in English (Aunt, Uncle, etc.). This is intentionally done; we asked them to use Khala, Phopo, Chachu and mamu instead of Aunt and Uncle. This is the planning to retain them in contact with their roots. Souza (2015) focused on the simultaneous maintenance of the heritage language and adoption of the dominant language within family language planning. At some points, the researcher's family is also following Souza's concept of maintenance and adoption. Although we are trying to teach our kids English, but we do not want to completely shift them towards English. Moreover, this shift is not even possible as not all the family members are fluent in English. The language policy of our family is in line with the national policy of Urdu in Pakistan as the national language. It is important to note that after partition, our state has preferred Urdu by altogether ignoring the linguistically rich regional languages. Therefore, the state projected Urdu language as more important than the mother tongue of majority of Pakistanis. English is a global language and the gatekeeper of success but in my family we are not trying hard to shift our kids to this language but really trying hard to shift them to Urdu.

Conclusion

To conclude all the findings and discussion, we can comment that the language of the family is not out of line with the national language policies of Pakistan but are not completely following it. In Pakistan, the official language is English but in the researcher's family it is not taught extensively to the children. Urdu is used as a lingua franca in Pakistan and in the researcher's family its status is higher than that of English. Its relation to the researcher's mother tongue Rangri makes it a much-loved language in the researcher's family as compared to English that is considered a foreign language in the context of my family. Urdu language is replacing the researcher's language (Rangri) and there are many reasons behind it as have already been discussed in the findings. Some of the major reasons are colonization, the pursuit of social status, education and the need to convey messages clearly.

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