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CHILDREN'S AGENCY IN PARENT–CHILD DISCOURSES: A STUDY OF FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY IN A NDEBELE HERITAGE LANGUAGE FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how children assert agency in parent–child interactions. The inquiry was conducted through a linguistic ethnography of the Ndlovu family, an indigenous Ndebele heritage language family living in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The study shows how Suku and Thabo, the two children in the focal family influenced family language policy through contradictory practices by Suku and conformist practices by Thabo. The researcher conducted interviews with the parents of the focal family to establish their language ideologies and family language policy preferences. Parent–child conversations were recorded during eight visits to the focal family by the researcher. Analysis of the recorded conversations reveal how Suku, the older girl child in the family, participated in resistant agency by her preference for English-centred practices in parent-child interactions, defying her parents' explicitly articulated pro-Ndebele family language policy. Thabo, the younger child, asserted conformist agency by participating in and reciprocating his parents' Ndebele-centred practices. These practices by the children are attempts to enact their agency in family language policy, sometimes resulting in parents revising their original dispositions towards the use of the heritage Ndebele language at home. As a result, the parents did not take visible language management steps to correct their children's choices. The study concludes that children's contradictory practices are not innocent but instead, reproduce their language experiences in extra-familial spaces. Therefore, their agency is a combination of familial and extra-familial language ideologies and practices.

KEYWORDS: Family language policy, language ideologies, language socialisation, children's agency, Ndebele

INTRODUCTION

The study of agency in family language policy (FLP) is fast gaining momentum (Gyogi, 2015; Fogle & King, 2013). Within language policy studies in general, agency has long been ascribed to macro government institutions and other top-down role players (Maseko & Mutasa, 2018). However, emerging research has begun to recognise the contributions of bottom-up agency in the articulation of language policies in various social institutions. To that end, FLP is fast emerging as

a productive and popular area of research in language policy, particularly for scholars interested in understanding heritage language transmission and conservation among immigrant families in Europe, Asia and America (e.g., Yazan & Ali, 2018; Connaughton-Crean & Ó Duibhir, 2017). Other studies have deployed the FLP concept to investigate trajectories of children's bilingual development in different contexts (e.g. Gyogi, 2015; Said & Zhu, 2019). Within the discourses of FLP, agency has been attributed to parents as the most influential and powerful actors within the family (Spolsky, 2004; Fogle & King, 2013; Connaughton-Crean & Ó Duibhir, 2017). Parents and other linguistically and culturally more experienced and competent older members of the family are considered 'experts' or 'old-timers', while children are viewed as 'novices' or 'newcomers' (Duff, 2010:427). Within such a line of thought, children's language acquisition can only be thought of as being a function of parents' ideologies. Predictably, the focus has mainly been on understanding how these language ideologies impact overall FLP and children's language development (Maseko & Mutasa, 2018; 2019).

Fewer studies have attempted to examine how children enact and assert agency and how their practices and ideologies may potentially impact parents' explicitly reported ideologies (Fogle & King, 2013). Consequently, much remains to be understood regarding children's agency in FLP. To address this knowledge gap, the present study investigated children's agency in the Ndlovu family (not their real surname), a Ndebele–English bilingual family residing in Bulawayo—the second largest city in Zimbabwe—to reveal how children assert their agency in concrete parent–child conversations in the context of a bilingual indigenous family. By examining the children's language practices in concrete interactions with their parents, the study attempted to understand children's strategies and language negotiations to make conclusions about their language acquisition trajectories. The focal family is a Ndebele heritage language family. In Zimbabwe, Ndebele is the second most spoken language after Shona. Although there are no recent figures to confirm the demographics, Ndebele is thought to be spoken by 16% of the Zimbabwean population while Shona speakers are estimated to constitute 75% of the population with English, the colonial language, being spoken by one per cent of the population (Hachipola, 1998; Ndhlovu, 2009). Although Ndebele has been accorded the status of a national language alongside Shona for a long time, its history of marginalisation in public and official spaces has been documented (e.g., Ndhlovu, 2006; 2009; Nkomo & Maseko; 2017). Indeed, some scholars even consider it a minority language (e.g., Ncube & Siziba, 2017). Against this backdrop, it is imperative to investigate FLP within a Ndebele heritage language family to understand the trajectories of its intergenerational transmission. The paper consists of six main sections, including the introduction. In the next section, the notion of agency and how it intersects with FLP to provide the conceptual lens for the study is discussed. It is then followed by a review of related studies to demonstrate the need for the present study, after which the methodology deployed in the study is presented. Thereafter, a presentation of the findings and lastly, a discussion and conclusion are provided.

FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE NOTION OF AGENCY

FLP is a notion that seeks to explain how languages are managed within bi- or multilingual families (Slavkov, 2017). The concept of FLP draws on arguments and insights from studies of child language acquisition and language policy, fields which have hitherto been considered disconnected and unrelated (King, Fogle & Logan-Terry, 2008). As a nascent field of inquiry, FLP triangulates approaches and data from these previously disconnected fields to understand family language ideologies, i.e., how family members think about language, their language practices, what they do with language and the strategies they deploy to influence language use—also termed language management (Spolsky, 2004; 2009). This concept focuses on how families use their linguistic repertoires in their daily interactions, their beliefs and ideologies about language and language use and their goals and efforts to shape and influence language use and language learning outcomes (King, Fogle & Logan-Terry 2008). Consequently, it has been applied productively to understand why different families have different language practices and language acquisition preferences for their children. Hence, FLP is concerned with understanding language choices and practices, not only within western style nuclear families, but also within families of various forms (Macalister & Mirvahedi, 2017).

Until recently, studies on FLP and language socialisation have examined how parents' language decisions, practices and ideologies influence children's language practices and outcomes (e.g., Maseko & Mutasa, 2018; 2019). In studies with this focus, parents have been considered to be important agents of family language policy because they are authorities who can impose their language preferences on the less powerful members of the family, typically the children (Spolsky, 2004; 2009; Fogle & King, 2013; Yazan & Ali, 2018). However, FLPs and practices are never static or unidirectional (Fogle & King, 2013), but rather are nuanced and muddled, varying from family to family (Macalister & Mirvahedi, 2017). While previous studies have tended to foreground parents' agency, recent studies have begun to show that children are agents of FLP and their language socialisation in their own right (Luykx, 2005; Fogle & King, 2013). Although the notion of agency is fluid and complex (Gyogi, 2015), it is used in this study to mean the ability of participants in a sociocultural space or domain to actively shape their language learning trajectories by engaging in conformist or otherwise contradictory behaviours (Gyoyi, 2015).

In this study, agency is imagined within the frame of structure–agency dualism; agency relates to the intrinsic states of a person while structure is impersonal, external and objective (Fuchs, 2001). Nonetheless, agency and structure do not exist in a dichotomous relationship, but rather speak to each other in some ways. As Johnson (2020) argues, there is always structure to agency; decisions by agents of language policy are never arbitrary and innocuous but are responsive to social, educational and economic considerations. Along these lines, agency is more than just voluntary action. In this study, agency is conceptualised within the context of cultural, institutional and interpersonal factors. I deploy this concept to explain how children's dispositions towards parents' FLP preferences cast them as agents of FLP and their language socialisation. Where parental

impact beliefs are low (De Houwer, 2009), children's agency increases, at times to the extent that children socialise their parents into new ways of speaking and thinking about language (Luykx, 2005). Parents' capitulation to children's language practices has led researchers (e.g., Said & Zhu, 2019; Yazan &Ali, 2018) to rethink agency in FLP, overturning the enduring view of children as 'novices' (Duff, 2010) who are susceptible to parents' ideologies and preferences. Because it "unites research in child language acquisition and language policy …" (Fogle & King, 2013:1), FLP and language socialisation are intrinsically linked. FLP and language socialisation together can explain the mechanics of the family unit and how the family "acts like a natural boundary, a bulwark against outside pressures" (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013:2) to influence the choice of languages to be used and transmitted within the family.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While there is increasing literature on FLP, most of these studies have focused on families in immigration contexts to investigate how such families strike a balance between the need to blend into the host country's linguistic, cultural, educational and economic demands and the desire to maintain an affinity with, and proximity to their own heritage (Hua & Wei, 2016; Fogle & King, 2013; Kayam & Hirsch, 2014; Said & Zhu, 2019; Yazan & Ali, 2018; Gua & Tong, 2020). While some scholars have examined children's agency in FLP (e.g., Fogle & King, 2013; Luykx, 2005), fewer studies have investigated how this agency is enacted and asserted in concrete parent–child interactions. In the African context, studies have used parental reports of their observed children's practices to make predictions regarding the trajectories of children's bilingualism or the families' disposition towards maintaining their home language (e.g., Maseko & Mutasa, 2018; 2019). The view of FLP as a function of parental language ideologies and that children play an insignificant role in their own language socialisation is germaine to the arguments raised in most studies. Therefore, the present study builds on these studies to contribute to the growing body of literature that has begun to acknowledge children's agency in language learning and socialisation.

In one pioneering study on children's agency, Luykx (2005) focused on Quechua speaking in Bolivia to demonstrate how children's extra-familial imported language practices and beliefs can impact language socialisation within the home. The study showed that parents may stand down from or even abandon their explicitly held beliefs and preferred language acquisition paths for their children. Parents' aspirations for children's upward social mobility and assimilation into majority language practices led them to retreat from their original stance and capitulate to children's practice of using the dominant community language. This practice cast children as agents of FLP who are not only able to maintain their preferences, but also socialise parents into speaking new language varieties in the home. Said and Zhu (2019:771) studied the mealtime interactions of a transnational English and Arabic bilingual family in the United Kingdom to understand:

> How children in multilingual and transnational families mobilise their multiple and developing linguistic repertoires creatively to assert their agency in language use and socialisation, and why these acts of agency are conducive to successful maintenance of the so-called 'home', 'community' or 'minority' language.

These two studies showed how we could no longer regard children as 'novices' (Duff, 2010) who are passive consumers of parents' articulated FLP (Fogle & King, 2013). For example, Said and Zhu (2019) showed that children are able to manipulate their awareness of their parents' language policy creatively, to persuade them to give in to their language practices (Said & Zhu, 2019; Luykx, 2005).

In a case study of two Japanese–English bilingual children living in London, Gyogi (2015) identified two types of agency the children used to contest, negotiate and redefine mothers' language ideologies. The children used English to construct positive images of themselves while also resisting their mother's monolingual FLP by using English and Japanese (Gyogi, 2015). The study demonstrated the contextuality, multidimensionality and fluidity of children's agency by drawing on ethnographic data collected through audio recordings of conversations between the two focal children and their mothers as well as with the researcher and through semi-structured interviews with the mothers (Gyogi, 2015). For example, the children's practices were shown to differ when they interacted with their mothers compared to interactions with the researcher, possibly illustrating the conscious nature of their decisions to contradict their mothers' language choices for them.

In a study of FLP in South East Asian families living in Hong Kong, Gu and Tong (2020) also examined migrant mothers' language management strategies used "to construct new class identities and mobilise between different classed communities, and how the children aligned their linguistic practices with language policy, both at home and at the societal level" (Gu & Tong, 2020: 581). They found that mothers' desires and aspirations for their children's upward social mobility led the mothers and children to co-construct FLP, in conversation with broader educational and other social demands. They yielded to practices that were deemed favourable and more likely to provide their children with an advantage. Mothers' considerations of children's needs cast children as important agents of FLP. Mothers also drew from social and cultural capital, including social networking and language policy and experiences from their home countries to achieve class mobility (Gu & Tong, 2020).

Studies have also shown how FLP, which has hitherto been treated as merely a function of parental ideologies, is rather "a constant, ongoing and effortful notion that is understood and enacted in specific ways that suit the family" (Said & Zhu, 2019:782). Focusing on Russian adoptive and Spanish–English bilingual transnational families, Fogle and King (2013) investigated how children's agency and language practices impacted the language behaviours of their parents. They showed how adolescent girls expressed resistant agency by rejecting the use of English in their homes within an English-dominant American context. Fogle and King (2013) also demonstrated

how FLP is more than a function of parents' ideologies and preferences but that it responds to a range of factors, including those related to experiences of race and identity (Fogle & King, 2013). Schwartz and Verschik (2013) have also shown that the family is not completely insulated from ideologies that circulate beyond the family. Such ideologies have been shown to permeate the family in ways that result in negotiated FLP. School language practices and ideologies are often imported into the home, moving the family into new ways of thinking about language (Luykx, 2005). Within transnational families, different language learning experiences between children and parents bring about "intersubjectivity in interactions that yield opportunities for learning and construction of varied identities" (Fogle & King, 2013: 21).

Some studies have sought to understand how children's heritage language use positioned them and contributed to their negative and positive sociolinguistic identities. Seals (2017) analysed children's perspectives regarding their creation of linguistic identity drawings and how these reflected their language use at home (Seals, 2017). The findings of this study revealed how language practices at home and school contributed to the formation of negative and positive identities among children. For example, subtractive bilingual practices at school contributed to the forming of ideologies about the languages concerned, which often influenced children's positioning and identity negotiation. These findings demonstrate that extra-familial language practices can have a far-reaching impact on children's own language ideologies and linguistic identities. Thus, children's agency is never innocuous, but rather is enmeshed with experiences and ideologies circulating in extra-familial domains. Through a study of three multilingual transnational Chinese families residing in the United Kingdom, Hua and Wei (2016) also showed how language experiences of different generations within a single family affected individual members' construction and presentation of their own identities. Together, these studies present FLP as a complex issue, not just one where parents are the single most important 'experts' (Duff, 2010:427) and children are passive participants (Fogle & King, 2013). Drawing on data from two Chinese-English bilingual families in Singapore, Ren and Hu (2013:63) also revealed that FLP is influenced by a multiplicity of factors, some beyond the control of the family and that children are not always passive 'novices' (Duff, 2010:427) but can also be agents of their own language socialisation. Ren and Hu (2013:63) also demonstrated "how such language socialisation processes as prolepsis, syncretism and synergy mediate[d] the influence of the larger sociocultural context on … children's bilingual and biliteracy learning at home". The notion of prolepsis explains how parents' past language and literacy practices impact children's future language needs. Syncretic practices denote the infusion of old and new practices to maximise the acquisition of the home language while synergy refers to the reciprocity of the process of language acquisition among family members, regardless of their position in the family (Ren & Hu, 2013).

Slavkov (2017) investigated the link between FLP and language practices in Canadian schools to understand how parents' language strategies and resources set their children on different pathways to bilingualism and multilingualism in an English-dominant and French-subordinate context. The results showed that language choice in parent–child interactions impacted the course of children's

language development and that minority language programmes such as French immersion programmes and heritage language classes positively impacted children's bilingual development and general linguistic outcomes overall (Slavkov, 2017). In sum, these studies have built on the traditional conceptions of language socialisation which, until recently, have emphasised parents' caretaker role as the single most important source of child language socialisation to show that it is more than just an issue of 'experts' socialising 'novices' (Duff, 2010; Fogle & King, 2013).

While there is a dearth of scholarship on FLP within the African context in general, this appears to be changing. There is an increasing interest by researchers to understand bottom-up agency in language policy, particularly how FLP impacts the conservation of minoritised indigenous languages (Maseko & Mutasa, 2018; 2019). Yazan and Ali (2018: 369) studied the FLP of Libyan Muslim immigrants in the United States to examine "the impact of the parents' language ideologies and ethnolinguistic aspirations on their language planning decisions about their daughter's maintenance of Arabic" (Yazan & Ali, 2018: 369). Although their study relates to an African family in a migrant context outside of Africa, it presents an interesting dimension to the study of FLP. The study demonstrated how parents' aspirations for their children's bilingual development and the maintenance of their Libyan heritage as well as access to Muslim religious practices precipitated a negotiated FLP, undergirded by considerations of both linguistic and non-linguistic factors. For instance, parents' desire for their daughter to be a practicing Muslim who could pray in Arabic and access Muslim religious doctrines and texts led to an infusion of such considerations into the articulation of their FLP (Yazan & Ali, 2018).

In the Zimbabwean context, interest in FLP is still in its infancy, despite Zimbabwe being home to multiple minoritised and endangered languages of which intergenerational transmission is under threat. Studies on FLP have surfaced only recently. Maseko and Mutasa (2018) investigated how parents' ideologies influenced children's language practices among speakers of minoritised Kalanga in Zimbabwe. That study drew on parents' perspectives to examine how those parents reported language ideologies impacted their children's language practices at home. Within the context of the dominant Ndebele and Shona languages—which have a long history of being taught in schools—children were found to reproduce language ideologies circulating in the community through the practice of using Ndebele at home, contradicting parents' articulated Kalanga-centred FLP (Maseko & Mutasa, 2018). Parents' reports of their children's practices pointed to children's resistant agency to FLP. The present study builds on that observation to show how agency is enacted and asserted in parent–child interactions within a Ndebele–English bilingual family. In a study which also elicited parents' language management strategies within the context of intergenerational transmission of Tonga, another minoritised language in Zimbabwe, Maseko and Mutasa (2019) found that high levels of language awareness among parents had a positive effect on the trajectory of heritage language transmission. In particular, they demonstrated how strong impact beliefs, i.e., parents' conviction that they could positively influence their children's language practices (De Houwer, 2009) emboldened parents to take extreme language intervention measures to enforce a Tonga-only FLP (Maseko & Mutasa, 2019). The relatively longer history of

language and culture activism by Tonga speakers was thought to have cultivated language loyalty even among children. While the two cited studies provided important insight into how languages are managed within minority language-speaking families in Zimbabwe, the present study builds on these to discuss the precise mechanisms employed by children to resist and negotiate FLP in actual parent–child interactions in a Ndebele heritage family.

METHODOLOGY

The data presented in this paper is drawn from a linguistic ethnography of the Ndlovu family (not their real surname) living in a medium-density suburb in Bulawayo, the second largest city in Zimbabwe. The main thrust of the study was to document and describe children's actual language practices to show how these practices are acts of agency in FLP. Accordingly, a linguistic ethnography was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to observe and describe this agency more comprehensively. Linguistic ethnography is a methodological approach that combines linguistic and ethnographic tools to provide a precise account of language use to reveal how it shapes and is shaped by its social context (Khan, Imtiaz, Khan, Amina & Ahmed, 2020: 977). As a point of convergence for research traditions covering sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and language teaching and learning, linguistic ethnography provides a flexible approach to understanding how children's language practices, negotiations and contestations reproduced the sociocultural context (Khan et al., 2020). Consequently, linguistic ethnography was deployed as both a methodological and interpretive tool. To this end, participant observation and parental interviews were employed as data collection instruments. Data were collected over a period of four months. Participants' informed consent was sought before the commencement of data collection. This entailed the researcher providing a detailed explanation of the nature and purpose of the study, including how the participants' safety and confidentiality would be guaranteed. Since the study also involved children, their participation was sought through procedures of child assent and parental permission. Pseudonyms were used in the data presentation to ensure the participants' confidentiality. To collect data, the researcher made eight visits to the focal family, with each visit lasting between two and four hours. On the first visit, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the parents to establish their explicitly held language ideologies and their FLP preferences. On subsequent visits, the researcher participated in conversations with the members of the focal family on various subjects. In some instances, the researcher would deliberately initiate a discussion around a topic that appeals to children and then allow the parents and their two children to continue with the discussion while he occupied a vantage point to observe the family's language practices and negotiations. The researcher particularly looked out for instances where children' asserted their agency during these linguistic exchanges and examined how these practices reproduced or contradicted the parents' explicitly declared FLP preferences. The researcher audio-recorded the interviews and naturally occurring conversations between the parents, children and himself and also made field notes. During analysis, I triangulated insights gleaned from the field

notes and audio-recorded conversations to identify and describe the children's agency in challenging and negotiating their parents' practices. Data are presented in the form of narratives and excerpts from actual conversations to show how the children's agency was enacted in parent–child interactions.

FINDINGS

The focal family's linguistic repertoire

In Africa, the concept of family is complex. It encompasses relations of various types. Family is not restricted only to the western style nuclear type but can also be used in reference to extended families, incorporating grandparents and other filial relations. Some families are single-parent households, while others are known as child-headed families. In the present study, the focal family is a nuclear family residing in a medium-density suburb in Zimbabwe's second-largest city, Bulawayo. It consists of the father, the mother and their two biological children, Suku and Thabo (not their real names). Suku is a girl aged nine and attends school in the city. She is in Grade Three, while Thabo is a five-year-old boy who is still in preschool. The father is a 41-year-old geologist who works for a mining company located on the outskirts of the city; the mother is a 34-year-old accounts clerk at a bank. All members of the focal family are Ndebele–English bilinguals. The father and the mother can also speak and understand Shona although, according to the father, they "never use it at home" because the parents desired for their children to learn Ndebele first. Both children have varying degrees of fluency in English. Thabo, who is still in preschool, has relatively low English proficiency. According to the father, Suku has an "impressive command of English" although, by his own admission, she still has a lot to learn. Ndebele is the family's heritage language. The focal family has spent much of their lives in Bulawayo, although they alternate between their rural home and the city. The city of Bulawayo has long been considered an enclave of Ndebele speakers. However, in recent years, it has been transformed into a cosmopolitan city, as speakers of other languages such as Shona have flocked there. Still, the Ndebele language and culture remain at the core of the city's identity.

Parents' language ideologies, loyalty and awareness

Beliefs about language and language use predispose parents to take certain stances and make choices regarding FLP decisions. In this study, it was considered prudent to establish the nature of these ideologies from the parents as a starting point. This was deemed crucial to enabling the researcher to see how children's language practices in parent–child interactions helped them to assert their agency and to relate this agency to the parents' reported language ideologies during interviews. The findings of the study revealed that the parents had a staunch loyalty to the family's Ndebele heritage language. This loyalty ultimately results in their preference for a Ndebele-centred FLP. Both the mother and the father have a strong sense of their Ndebele identity and they also "wish that their children could acquire similar attitudes towards their Ndebele language". For

example, the father believes that the use of Ndebele would cultivate a sense of pride and help the children maintain a strong sense of identity, which is important for the preservation of their Ndebele culture. The father reiterated his preference for a Ndebele-centred FLP as follows:

> *I am strongly for the use of Ndebele at home. We all have to speak it. Children have to learn it so that they can have that association with their culture and roots. Ndebele is an important symbol of our identity and children must be taught to speak it with pride.*

The mother shared similar sentiments and also believed that speaking Ndebele at home would help their children develop a sense of identity and belonging, which is an important 'tool' for resisting cultural and linguistic domination by the predominant Shona language. She explains in the following transcription that she believes every Ndebele heritage family should do the same:

> *Ndebele speakers are getting fewer by the day, as you know. Many Ndebele speakers have left the country for South Africa. Us who remained have to be vigilant and ensure that our language and culture does (sic) not die just like that. It is important that we teach our children the language. Every family should do that. We have seen how our language is slowly being turned into something we don't understand. So for me, it should be every family's concern to teach our children the right version of Ndebele.*

Although both the mother and father exhibited a strong sense of loyalty to Ndebele, as can be discerned from the excerpts above, they also wanted their children to acquire a good command of English, especially for their schooling and for reasons of upward social mobility. For example, the father wishes to see the children foreground Ndebele as the main language of ordinary conversation at home, with English only being used when they are at school or when doing homework. However, despite the father's pro-Ndebele proclamations, he observes that the acquisition of English for schooling is inescapable. This also reveals the father's desire for the children's bilingual development, particularly their acquisition of English as a second language.

> *It is sometimes difficult to ensure that they stick to Ndebele all the time when at home. My wish is that they do. But sometimes they have homework in English, so I find myself having to speak to them in English. Those are some of the challenges we face. I believe they learn enough of it at school and at home it's time for the Ndebele but these days is difficult to separate home and school.*

Ideologies about English as the language of opportunity and upward social mobility clearly present a dilemma for the focal family as the parents attempt to balance their children's acquisition and use of Ndebele for identity preservation and the acquisition of English for socioeconomic reasons. Although English is a colonially inherited language, it has remained entrenched in education and other official spaces in post-colonial Zimbabwe, more than four decades after the attainment of independence (Kadenge & Mugari, 2015; Nkomo & Maseko, 2017). This has caused English to

become indispensable, particularly in education and to an extent, because schools, especially those that are privately run, use it as a medium of instruction from the early childhood development (ECD) stage (Nkomo, 2008). The requirement for a pass in English at Ordinary level (O Level) if one is to secure formal employment and for admission to higher and tertiary institutions has increased the desire for its acquisition by everyone. Predictably, the parents of the focal family are also aware of that reality. Despite their strong beliefs in the intergenerational transmission of their heritage Ndebele language, they are constantly presented with this dilemma. Indeed, some studies have shown that what parents claim to do is not what they do in practice (Gyogi, 2015). Parents may claim that they never use certain languages at home because of their beliefs, yet a closer look at their actual practices has shown that they indeed use other languages at home.

Asserting agency: Children's resistant and conformist strategies

Analysis of audio recordings revealed that the two children did not always conform to or reproduce their parents' language practices, but rather that there are many instances where one of the children deployed resistant strategies during parent–child conversations. In this section, I draw on the audio-recorded data to discuss how Suku and Thabo, the two children from the focal family, used multiple techniques to assert their agency. In the following transcript, the parents and children are discussing how Suku intends to celebrate her upcoming birthday:

Mother:	Suku *i*birthday *yakho isizafika. Ufuna ukwenzani lonyaka*? (Suku, your birthday is close. So how do you want to celebrate it this year?
Suku:	I don't know mummy but daddy promised me a bicycle, *phela.* (since) now I can ride.
Mother:	*Kodwa lalikuwisa nje elomgane wakho u*Lerato not so long ago. (But you couldn't ride Lerato's bicycle).
Father:	(laughing) *Ye ngiyakhumbula likubhuqa phansi. Kodwa sekhulile khathesi uSuku. Ngibona engani sengalitshova.* (I remember you falling heavily from the bicycle. But she (Suku) is grown up now, I think she can ride it).
Suku:	But daddy don't laugh at me. Ok maybe buy me *okunye-ke okungasilo bhayisikili* (something else which is not a bicycle).

In the above excerpt, Suku constantly uses English in responding to her parents' mainly Ndebele-centred utterances. She plainly understands her mother and father's Ndebele utterances yet she prefers to respond mainly in English, save for one response where she code-switches to Ndebele to suggest an alternative present, probably as a strategy to persuade her parents to consider another present for her, since they are not yet sure if she is grown up enough to be able to ride a bicycle. Although the mother also code-switches to English, it is intended to complement her mainly Ndebele-centred speech, so as to make the utterance less dense for the young Suku. By constantly

using English in her responses to her parents' propositions, Suku is exercising resistant agency and contradicts her parents' Ndebele-centred speech. Of interest is the absence of the parents' explicit language management to correct Suku's lack of conformity to their language practices. They seem to be content that the conversation is proceeding well. Gyogi (2015) has also shown how, despite strong beliefs in conserving Japanese, some mothers did not mind having children code-switch between Japanese and English in London, because they believed that it could be corrected later on in life when they returned to Japan. The mothers' desire for the acquisition of English in London also led to the preference for the flexible use of English and Japanese by their children. However, in Suku's case in the excerpt above, her preference appears to be for more English-centred practices, although she occasionally code-switches to Ndebele.

In the following excerpt, the family is discussing what they will eat for supper:

Mother:	*Namhla yi*Sunday, *siyapheka* something traditional *ntambama.*
	(Today is a Sunday, we are cooking traditional food for supper).
Father:	*Ye kulungile. Ubucabanga ukuphekani*?
	(Yes it's fine. What did you have in mind?)
Suku:	As long as you don't cook *delele* (Okra).
Mother:	(Laughing) *Yilo kanye engilicabangayo, lesitshwala lomhwabha.*
Suku:	But mummy it's the same things you cook all Sundays!
Mother:	No that's not true, last Sunday we had samp and liver.
Father:	*Sekhohliwe uSuku. Nguye owakholisa kakhulu futhi.*
	(Suku has forgotten. She's even the same person who seemed to enjoy that meal the most).

In the excerpt above, Suku continues to reify English-centred practices, contradicting her parents' implicit attempts to compel her to respond in Ndebele, as shown especially by the father's consistent use of Ndebele only in his speech. Interestingly, the data reveal the mother's eventual capitulation to Suku's English-centred practice. When Suku complains about the recurrent Sunday diet, the mother's response is entirely in English, albeit not to correct Suku's medium of expression—which deviates from the mother's explicitly held language ideologies—but just to correct the truth value of Suku's claim. The data presented in the two excerpts above suggest that the father is more consistent in maintaining his Ndebele-centred language practices in parent–child interactions while the mother seems quick to revise her language preferences by sometimes giving in to Suku's English-only practice, substantiating the view that children do not only act as their own socialising agents but can indeed socialise their parents into using the children's preferred varieties (Luykx, 2005).

The data also suggest that Thabo, the younger child, exercises less resistant agency compared to Suku. For example, in the excerpt below, where the father is quizzing Thabo on who had done some artwork on the kitchen wall, Thabo seems to show more conformity and reproduces the father's Ndebele-centred practices:

Father:	Thabo, *kanti ngubani obedweba umduli ekhitshini?*
	(Thabo, who did some art on the kitchen wall by the way?)
Thabo :	*NguSuku.* Daddy, *futhi ngimtshelile ukuthi ngizamcebela.*
	(It's Suku, and I warned that I will report her).
Father:	*Amanga Thabo! Mina ngibona engani nguwe odwebileyo.*
	(Lies Thabo! I personally think it was you who did).
Thabo:	*Qiniso* daddy, *ngu*Suku.
	(I'm telling the truth daddy, it was Suku).

Although Thabo uses the English word 'daddy' in his responses, he seems to conform to the father's practices throughout the excerpt by participating in a mostly Ndebele-centred conversation. Thabo is still in preparatory school and is yet to attend a mainstream school. His conformity to a Ndebele-centred FLP, as demonstrated in the above excerpt, could probably be because he is yet to gain as much proficiency in English as Suku for him to sustain a lengthy conversation in English. Therefore, Thabo's practices could conversely, be used to interpret Suku's contradictory practices as a reproduction of school language policy, which foregrounds and emphasises English as the main language of instruction from the lower grades. Even within Zimbabwean schools, the use of English is also a contradiction of the official policy which stipulates and provides for mother tongue school instruction in the lower grades. Suku's practice could thus be used to validate the avowal that FLP is never immune to extra familial practices (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013). Consequently, Suku's practices show how she participates in her own language socialisation by resisting her parents' attempts to compel her to speak Ndebele. She negotiates language policy by consistently responding in English, particularly in the absence of explicit correction and management from her parents.

When conversing with the researcher, both Thabo and Suku seemed to reciprocate the researcher's practice of using Ndebele. Such conformity was interesting as regards Suku. It led the researcher to conclude that perhaps her contradictory practices are only directed at her parents as a conscious strategy to challenge the parents to re-evaluate their FLP. In the following excerpt, both Suku and Thabo do not challenge the researcher's use of Ndebele by engaging in contradictory practices as they did when conversing with their parents, as shown in the previous excerpts above. In the excerpt below, the researcher probes the two children about their visit to their grandmother's house earlier that day:

Researcher: *Kanti lithi beliye kogogo, beliyekwenzani kogogo?*
(So you are saying you just came from your grandmother's house, what had you gone to do?)
Suku: *Besiyembona, uthe uyagula.*
(We had gone to see her, she said she is not feeling well).
Thabo: *Uyagula ugogo.*
(Gogo is unwell)
Researcher: *Wo, kulungile, manje limphatheleni ugogo?*
(Ok, so what did you get her?)
Suku: *U*mummy *umthengele amaphilisi lokudla.*
(Mummy bought her some medication and some food)

In the above exchange with the researcher, the two children used Ndebele throughout to describe their visit to *gogo* (grandmother) who was not feeling well. In the exchange, the children responded to the researcher's probing in Ndebele. Probably, the filial distance between them and the researcher made them to practice some kind of 'accommodation' by responding in the researcher's language of choice. For Suku, especially, this was rarely the case in parent–child interactions, showing that the dominance of English in her linguistic exchanges with her parents could have been a deliberate and conscious assertion of her agency in FLP.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study focused on examining how the two children in the Ndlovu family, a Ndebele–English bilingual family living in Bulawayo asserted and exercised their agency in FLP. The two children, Suku and Thabo, were the focus of the study. Suku was found to exercise her agency by engaging in practices that contradicted her parents' explicitly stated language preferences during parent–child interactions. Suku exercises resistant agency by supplying English-centred responses to her father's Ndebele-centred utterances as well as to the mother's both Ndebele-centred and code-switched speech. Suku's resistant agency could be a reproduction of her school language practices which foreground English as the language of instruction. Other studies have also shown how the importation of extra-familial language practices into the home is usually the source of children's antagonist practices to parental explicitly articulated language ideologies and FLP (e.g., Luykx, 2005; Maseko & Mutasa, 2018). Unlike Suku, Thabo seemed to mainly reproduce parental language preferences by conforming to pro-Ndebele practices although he sometimes uses English words. Thabo's conformity was thought to be informed by his English language development still being in its infancy, yet his range of expressions and proficiency in Ndebele is more advanced. Studies have also shown that contradictory and resistant strategies are not the only expressions of agency by children in FLP (Gyogi, 2015). Conformity is also a form of agency since it sets the child on a solid path towards the acquisition of the home language. Children's contradictory

practices and conformity are never arbitrary or innocuous, but are rather informed by sociocultural, economic and educational factors because there is always structure to agency (Johnson, 2020). However, the findings of this study cannot be generalisable to all Ndebele–English bilingual families in Zimbabwe because FLP is nuanced and varies between families (Macalister & Mirvahedi, 2017). Nevertheless, the findings add important insight into the question of agency in language policy studies by showing how children influence their own language socialisation at home. The study also contributes to the ongoing scholarship that seeks to expand the understanding of agency in FLP by focusing on children who have been considered 'novices' for a long time (Duff, 2010) in language socialisation. However, more research is needed to examine other kinds of agency exercised by children in other contexts. Future studies could conduct in-depth investigations into how the variables of age and gender are related to children's exercise of agency in FLP.

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