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Editorial

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Introduction: learning, re-learning, and un-learning language(s) in the multilingual family during COVID-19 lockdown

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1 Outside in- inside out: semi-reverse roles of family and school for learning

‘the family more than ever constitutes a learning space, in which parents and caregivers act as primary guides to support their children’s learning at home’ (UNESCO 2020, p. 1).

The global COVID-19 pandemic changed the ways in which education in general and language learning in particular took place, mainly in the form of learning from home with support from teachers and schools (Said et al. 2021). Schooling thus moved from physical interactions in educational institutions towards more distant, online, or blended approaches, with the home as the central educational arena. Consequently, formal learning, and with it the school system, entered the home in a way that it had not done so previously. This implied, in particular, that the language practices of schooling became a larger part of the language practices of the home than before, blurring the borders between educational language practices and family language practices. For instance, families that had chosen not to speak the language of instruction in their homes needed to speak it with their children to facilitate learning (see Chik and Benson 2021 for a commentary). At the same time, given the intense space and time sharing that families experienced, the language practices of the home became more present, qualitatively and/or quantitatively, in all pupils’ lives (Afreen and Norton 2021; Escobar 2020; Hardach 2020; Sheng et al. 2021).

During lockdown and other pandemic restrictions, language learning thus seemed to have changed within the home in three ways: in the form of the possible

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re-learning of lesser used home languages, and/or the un-learning of home languages and societal languages or learning a new language. This is not new, but the degree to which it took place was unprecedented and offered families and individuals an uninterrupted opportunity to do any of the above three. In this special issue, we therefore wanted to examine various facets of the *learning, re-learning and un-learning* of multiple languages that have taken place at home among multilingual families during this period. Did learning in the home lead to a greater use of heritage and home languages in children's lives, i.e., to a *re-learning* of parents' language(s)? Or did the presence of the school languages in the home lead to less attention to the minoritized languages, i.e., to a certain degree of *un-learning* of the home language(s)? What strategies have families applied for language *learning* in the home and what constraints have they experienced as affecting their language practices? This special issue investigates how families have acted upon and experienced the changed conditions for language learning during COVID-19, in research ranging from auto-ethnography and case-studies to smaller and larger-scale surveys.

2 The home and the family as spaces for language learning

The family and the home have always been considered as learning spaces and recognized as such in, for instance, anthropology, language socialization studies and most prominently in family language policy (FLP) studies (Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza 2018; Fogle 2013; King and Fogle 2017; Lanza and Lexander 2019; Lomeu Gomes 2022; Okita 2002; Piller and Gerber 2018; Said and Zhu 2019; Schalley and Eisenchlas 2020). FLP is the study of how languages are used, learned and managed within the home context and beyond (King et al. 2008). It interrogates parental and children's beliefs and attempts to manage how language is used. Lately, more attention has been paid to the role children themselves play in the process of family language learning and use and how they contribute to the overall FLP within the home and beyond in various ways (Said 2021a; Smith-Christmas 2021; Van Mensel 2018). In addition, important work on the different constellations of families and family types in varying and diverse contexts has been undertaken to further our understanding of what role the family as an entity plays in the learning of multiple languages within the home (See Lanza and Lomeu Gomes 2020; Palviainen 2020; Wright 2020; Wright and Higgins 2021). Similarly, research has also started looking into how such family-making language practices materialize in online contexts, inviting a conception of the family space as a transnational space (Lexander and Androutopoulos 2023; Palviainen and Kędra 2020; Said 2021b). This implies that

families are considered as continually negotiated by the use of linguistic and semiotic resources (Lanza 2021; Wright 2020), with transnational digitally mediated interaction as integral parts of such family-making practices (Lexander 2021; Palviainen 2020; Palviainen and Kędra 2020; Said 2021b).

More recently there has been a move away from looking at the family as a social or private domain towards treating it as a space – which goes beyond the constraints of geography or confined physical spaces (Lanza 2021). Lanza’s notion of “the family as space” (p. 764) illustrates the versatile nature of the family and the contexts within which it negotiates, re-negotiates, forms, defies, and creates ways of being in the world. It aptly captures the bidirectional reality of how family affects and is affected by its presence in the private, public, online, and community as it navigates, among many things, its language(s) use and learning. Applying such a notion to multilingual families and their language learning and language practices during lockdowns opens up another way in which to evaluate family as space and equally how the confinements of physical spaces within the home affected the families’ language learning practices. Papers in this issue demonstrate that very effect, that English use was augmented in different ways (García González et al.), that parents used the home languages more (Albadawi and Yazan; Zhang-Wu), that talking about the home language and language in general was more explicit (Li et al.), and that these practices affected the families as such.

3 Language learning in the family during lockdown

In the context of lockdowns or hybrid learning, the everyday subtle qualities of the home environment, socio-affective factors of language learning and language socialization (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984) become more pronounced. Increased interaction and more joint activities result from families spending more time together. COVID-19 thus turned homes all over the world into laboratories where the impact of shifting, family-internal and external, factors on language practices could be studied. Some of these studies have already appeared (Ettenauer et al. 2023; Hatoss 2023; Hopp and Thoma 2020; Kartushina et al. 2022; Lee 2021; Sulimova and Atanasoska 2023; Sun et al. 2023; Taneja-Johansson et al. 2022). They show that multilingual practices in the home were affected by the pandemic conditions, in different ways. Overall, many studies described differences in the use of home languages, translanguaging practices in the home (the use of multiple languages that form the families’ repertoire), learning language together-strategies, as well as tensions around language policy.

Parents in Hungarian families in Australia, for example, missed the interaction with Hungarian speakers outside the home, but found that the increase in the time the family spent together also led to various activities in which Hungarian was used, including online activities (Hatoss 2023). Still, they reported conflict and tensions around the use of English and Hungarian. Lee (2021) found that Korean immigrant mothers in the U.S. adopted a “learning English together strategy” whereby they searched for information online with their children. Through promoting bilingual resources, they furthermore found opportunities for heritage language maintenance through the increase of home language vocabulary. Shifting the focus away from the parents to their offspring, a study of three young men in Germany showed that the use of their home language Russian did *not* increase during the pandemic (Sulimova and Atanasoska 2023). There are also examples of how teachers took family multilingualism into account in new ways as a consequence of the insight they had gained under pandemic conditions, and this invited a change in communication practices with parents and increased the inclusion of children’s multilingualism in the classroom (Ettenauer et al. 2023). Other research explored the effect of the lockdown on language learning practices. It probed, for example, the impact of increased use of technology and devices as well as the effect on language learning of more parent-child time spent in the same space for longer periods of time (see for example, Hopp and Thoma 2020; Kartushina et al. 2022; Sun et al. 2023). Adults have been reported to turn to online classes and online interactions to revitalize indigenous languages (McIvor et al. 2020). Some of these participants were learning these languages for the first time even though they had a family or heritage connection to them; the development of learning online, coupled with the COVID-19 lockdown, afforded such language learning opportunities to those who sought them.

These studies illustrate a fundamental understanding within sociolinguistics, multilingualism and FLP which is that language use and choice are governed by many variables and that no two families are the same in their language choices. The pandemic conditions made some of the FLP insights even more clear-cut, emphasizing the importance of the home as an arena for language learning, where practices and policies are heavily influenced by demands coming from various instances (Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza 2018). The papers in this special issue investigate these dimensions further, through studying families in three different countries (Norway, the U.S, the UK) with various linguistic backgrounds (including Arabic and Chinese).

The papers in this special issue apply different methodological approaches, so a note on methods during pandemic restriction is warranted. As noted by Kartushina et al. (2022), COVID-19 constituted a unique opportunity for examining the associations between caregiver-child activities on the one hand and children’s language development on the other, since daycare centers worldwide closed. However, the pandemic put severe restrictions on researchers’ ability to carry out their work and it

led them to explore new ways of collecting data and to demonstrate an enhanced creativity in methods. Finding themselves confined to their home, some researchers turned inwards, to look at their own families and themselves, through auto-ethnographic approaches (Zhang-Wu this issue). Interviews have to a greater extent been carried out online (e.g. Albadawi and Yazan; Hatoss 2023; Li et al. this issue) and surveys have also been distributed and responded to online (e.g. Bulgarelli and Potter this issue; Garcia et al. this issue; Hatoss 2023) or on the phone (Taneja-Johansson et al. 2022). Some researchers have conducted online observations combined with interviews with children on WhatsApp or the phone, in combination with the collection of parents' social media posts and parents' online focus groups (Li et al. this issue).

4 The papers in this issue

This special issue presents a set of empirical papers that describe and chronicle the central role the family unit has played in the learning and use of multiple languages during the intense tempo-spatial home environment created by the pandemic restrictions. The issue seeks to explore the realities of private language planning, learning, and use within the home during this unique period of existence; and from that perspective, we asked the following questions in our call for papers:

1. How did the lockdown (and pandemic) conditions shape family language policies?
2. How did the influx of English/any other language into the home as a result of the language of medium of instruction shape the family's use and learning of their home language(s)/heritage language(s)?
3. How did the pandemic conditions affect the home language learning and literacy learning environments?
4. What is the relationship between families' (internal) language policies and those of the school's (external)? How has this relationship affected the internal home language policies?
5. What roles have different family members taken on in the process of learning and re-learning languages during lockdown? In particular, what did we learn about the nature of child agency and language learning during the lockdown?
6. How did fatigue in attending to educational and other needs of children affected heritage or home language(s) learning efforts?
7. For families with access to technology, how did constant and easy access to digital content augment the learning of language(s) in the home during the lockdown?

Taken together, the five papers in this special issue address all these questions, from different linguistic contexts and from different methodological perspectives.

Providing on the one hand data concerning language use in the home and on the other the complex decision-making processes that underlie it, the five studies show how various variables interconnected with the pandemic conditions to create different outcomes for different families.

Albadawi and Yazan found that Arabic-speaking mothers in the U.S. used more Arabic with their children, while in the Norwegian context, García et al.'s work shows that the exposure to languages other than Norwegian, English included, augmented. The parents in Li et al.'s study seized the opportunities offered by online classes to develop new patterns of active involvement in their children's heritage language instruction during COVID-19. These results indicated that home languages were used more during the pandemic restrictions. But this is nuanced by other findings presented in the special issue. Bulgarelli and Potter found that U.S. children's exposure to non-English languages remained consistent, but that the children's age and their parents' language proficiencies predicted higher or lower levels of exposure. Similarly, Albadawi and Yazan found that children's agency and concerns about family safety and well-being affected the Arabic-speaking mothers' efforts to use Arabic in the home. Li et al. observed that the burdens of home schooling, household duties and childcare left little time for literacy activities in the home.

Respondents in García et al.'s study also commented upon the fact that the lockdown closed doors to language learning in the dominant societal language. This was reported as a concern by parents in Li et al.'s study too and is further examined through Zhang-Wu's autoethnographic account. Her study provides detailed insight into not only what happened inside the home, but also into the multilingual mother's thinking and emotions, through reflections on how the constraints and demands of bringing up children multilingually influence everyday practices, choices, and worries (see also Okita 2002 on mothers' labour-laden efforts to raise multilingual children). One might think that being a researcher in multilingualism makes it easy to make language decisions in a multilingual home, but this study elucidates the intersection of the societal language with that of home language practices and policies (see also, Said 2021c). Uniquely, Albadawi and Yazan's paper brings to the fore issues related to family well-being. Parents in their study chose to place family well-being above their own linguistic preferences and hence allowed children to exercise their agency and choose their language of use.

5 Ways forward

Of all the activities that families jointly engaged in together during the pandemic, such as cooking, making bread, revising old family recipes, board games and puzzles, it was the choice of language learning and use that stood out. The choice stood out in

two ways: first, through the unintentional natural consequence of intensely sharing the same physical space, parents naturally resorted to using the language they would use on weekends or out of school hours with the children. This is where we see the increases in the use of home languages, or the increase in the use of the societal language, or the no-change in input of the home languages. Second, the resort to learning, re-learning, and un-learning language points to the mediating role language plays in the lives of families. The papers here and those elsewhere that investigated the mutual impact of COVID-19 and language use, share a common realisation: that language is more than input and exposure; that it is inseparable from human behaviour and social practice; and that it is intertwined with the everyday business of family and home life. For some speakers it defines their identities and for others their roles as parents in the family, or as teachers in schools. Research on language during pandemic times shows that different aspects of language and the beliefs associated with them motivate family members to use and learn one of these languages more than others. Language defines and is defined by the family unit and its needs, and the COVID-19 lockdown context acutely highlighted this fact.

In sum, FLPs are influenced not only by parental and familial factors but also by the society in which they reside (see for example, Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020; Selleck 2023). Based on the research presented in this special issue, as well as other research on family multilingualism during the lockdown, this editorial thus calls for more societal support for family multilingualism in new and creative ways. The inside-out outside-in continuum described at the beginning of this introduction, whereby the outside everyday life of work and school entered the home in unprecedented ways, should continue in the form of unparalleled support for family multilingualism outside of the home. While the view is often that home languages should be taught at home and remain the responsibility of families and the communities to which the children belong (see for example, Cunningham 2020; Szczepek et al. 2020a, 2020b), we argue that it should be recognised also in public space. Research has documented that home language resources are expensive and often unreachable for families (Karpava 2022; Said 2021c); provision of this, for instance through public libraries would make such access easier (Little and Murray 2022) and thus also make children's multilingualism a visible affair thereby psychologically supporting children and their families. Furthermore, just like families brought school practices into the home in ways that have permanently changed parental involvement in their children's education, schools can recognise children's multilingualism and make space for it in the education system, and thereby counter discourses about multilingualism which tend to treat it as separate from mainstream society or as a deficiency in communication. As the papers in this special issue show, language is a resource for family-making in many ways, but dominant language ideologies in society strongly affect to what extent home languages are experienced

as valuable resources by children and their families. Making families' and children's languages visible in their schools will support appreciation of their own multilingualism. We call for a sustainable multilingualism model, whereby HLs become visible in society through libraries, museums, and schools thus supporting multilinguals' long-term well-being and promoting social justice in a practical and concrete manner.

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