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Planning and teaching heritage languages in the translocal and digital space

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ABSTRACT

This Special Issue came about as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought unprecedented shifts in the conditions and opportunities for language education. In the context of heritage languages, there were significant challenges for learners, parents, and teachers, but there were also new opportunities for rethinking the ways in which languages were taught and passed on to the next generation. In this Special Issue, we take an ecological perspective on language policy and planning (henceforward LPP) and focus on micro- and meso-level LPP related to language learning and the intergenerational transmission of heritage languages. While the approach taken in this volume aligns with the notion that macro, meso and micro perspectives, goals and activities are not independent of each other but form a complex ecology (Baldauf, 2006), our focus here is not on formal policy making and implementation, but on the practices surrounding language learning, teaching and use, as forms of LPP (Liddicoat, 2020).

Introduction

Papers focussing on family language policy align with the notion that everyday family language practices can be taken as implicit *de facto* grassroots language policy (Lanza & Lomeu Gomes, 2020, p. 154). This approach is appropriate for exploring the linguistic ecology of transnational families, where new opportunities emerged and innovative pedagogies were developed (by families and schools) to maintain, transmit, plan and teach heritage languages. This changed ecology has brought irreversible and lasting changes in LPP for heritage languages and requires new conceptual development in the field. This Special Issue was motivated by the urgent need to explore these new forms of 'policy engagements' (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018) and provide the international research community with further empirical data, from which new theoretical, ontological, and methodological insights can be developed.

This special issue, therefore, aims to address the following questions:

- What translocal and transnational activities do heritage language communities engage in for the maintenance of their heritage language and for teaching it to the next generation?
- How do communities run their online heritage language programs, with a particular focus on the impacts of COVID-19?
- How do families engage with online resources for heritage language maintenance purposes?
- What challenges do small language communities face in setting up their heritage language programs and how do online opportunities provide new avenues for language planning?
- How can we theorise the expanding domain of translocal language planning?

Since most studies and policy reports on the impact of COVID-19 focussed on mainstream language education (see e.g. Council of Europe report edited by Rossner and Heyworth (2023)), we were motivated to review LPP developments and responses in the context of heritage languages, both in informal and formal contexts. This Special Issue, therefore, aimed to bring together a body of work that addresses language policy and planning (LPP) in relation to two major changes in social conditions that resulted from the pandemic: (i) translocality – how heritage language speakers and language planners connected across geographical space; and (ii) pedagogical innovations in the digital space – what strategies and challenges language planners faced and how they made use of technology. The *first* condition is not entirely new, as LPP scholars have long argued the need to conceive LPP beyond the local; paying attention to translocal social practices in diasporic communities (including immigrants, refugees and sojourners). On the one hand, many transnational individuals maintain strong ties with their homeland through frequent home visits. On the other hand, they also often form online connections through social media, staying up-to-date by engaging with news media from their home country, or watching their favourite TV channels online. These virtual connections with the homeland offer enormous opportunities for the learning and transmission of heritage languages. COVID-19 brought a new meaning to and highlighted the significance of these translocal connections.

The *second* condition directly relates to the impact of COVID-19. What is new is the way COVID-19 brought new ways in which communities and speakers connect across the transnational space and brought our attention to the distant and virtual forces that shape social actions, identities and community life (Canagarajah, 2017). These changes call for theoretical and conceptual work in the field of LPP for heritage language planning. Therefore, this Special Issue aims to bring together scholars working in diverse geographical and heritage contexts to provide empirical studies which can inform new theories about how LPP actions transcend the immediate physical and local contexts.

Conceptualising the translocal in heritage language planning

One of the overarching themes of this Special Issue is the way in which families, learners and schools engage in translocal activities. While the term *translocality* is used in a wide range of disciplines, we define this term in LPP contexts as referring to the processes and interactions which, either intentionally (planned) or unintentionally (unplanned), lead to enhanced interconnections between speakers and their linguistic resources across distant geographical locations. This interconnectedness across *locales* in heritage language

planning manifests itself in the development of social networks, heritage language main-tenance and development activities, and new forms of exchanges (e.g. via digital media) between geographical locations – cities, states, countries and continents. Typical examples are where diasporic communities engage in language planning through simul-taneously drawing on resources from their country of origin and their adopted country, or where diasporic communities from different geographical locations connect in cyber-space, forming '*cyberspora*' (Hatoss, 2019; 2020). While these processes have accelerated in the era of the Internet, it is important to recognise that diasporas have always been 'unmoored' (Canagarajah, 2010, p. 78), maintaining connections with their motherland and other diasporic communities around the globe. We were interested to see how these connections gained new meanings through the COVID-19 outbreak.

Translocality as a key feature of social action and as heritage language practice, there-fore, requires LPP scholars to work with a new paradigm that considers the multifaceted and complex nature of what we often refer to as local '*context*'. The context of heritage language planning is far more than the immediate geographical context of the speakers' residence. The theoretical ambition in this Special Issue, therefore, is a direct response to the increasingly evidenced paradigmatic shift in the sociolinguistics of globalization from looking at 'language-in-place', which assumes a static and horizontal arrangement, to 'language-in-space' which recognises that language use is shaped by complex spatiotem-poral frames interacting on multiple scales. The papers in this volume talk about these dynamic and multiscale arrangements demonstrating how language planners' actions, motives and challenges are connected not just with the local and physical, but also with the imagined, the translocal and the global space.

Informal and formal pedagogical innovations in the digital space

The second overarching theme in this Special Issue is the use of digital technology as an LPP tool to support learning and teaching. While such spaces have long been recognised as an important dimension of LPP in diverse linguistic contexts (Androutsopoulos, 2006; Block, 2004; Halwachs, 2011; Hatoss, 2020; Jany, 2018; Lexander, 2021; Little, 2020; Pal-viainen, 2020b; Palviainen & Kędra, 2020), the COVID-19 outbreak triggered major digital innovations both in informal language transmission contexts in families and in formal school contexts. During the lockdowns, school and family spaces intertwined in new ways and parents and teachers had to step into new roles as bilingual teachers and supporters (Li & Lin, 2023). COVID-19 has brought new spatial arrangements span-ning formal, informal, local and translocal spaces and these continue to have a flow-on effect on the planning and teaching of heritage languages worldwide. Therefore, it is our hope that this collection of papers leads to new ways of conceptualizing the social spaces in which LPP directed at heritage languages occur and that it inspires scholars to develop dynamic ways of exploring LPP in heritage language contexts.

The scalar dimensions of heritage language planning: LPP in times of emergency

This Special Issue presents LPP in times of change where LPP actions need to be swift and educators need to think outside the box. Therefore, the papers are useful for LPP scholars

interested in spatio-temporal dimensions of LPP which go beyond the static division of the macro and micro and the fixity of the *locale* of planning. Language development and family language planning take place across time and space (Palviainen, 2020a), but temporal and spatial arrangements are dynamic and changing all the time. The concept of policy implies a certain degree of endurance and consistency which leads to developing a shared habitus of rules and expectations regarding which language to use in which context. As Blommaert put it: '[f]amily language policies are, ultimately, self-induced and self-policed modes of "order" in social action, infused by polycentric and scaled language ideologies, accumulated and learned during biographically phased processes of socialization' (Blommaert, 2018, p. 5). However, when social conditions change, LPP actions and strategies need to respond to the changed circumstances. The papers in this volume turn their attention to the investigation of changed (often described as emergency) circumstances in the heritage language ecology, both in family language policy (FLP) and heritage language schools. Scholars present LPP efforts under extremely complex conditions, not only focusing their attention on the ways in which these factors come together to shape linguistic practices in multilingual and bilingual settings, but also providing theoretical insights for further conceptual development in the field. A common feature of the papers is that they break down the clear boundaries between the macro and the micro and use methods which contest the global-local dichotomy. Following Blommaert (2010), scholars draw on the scalar arrangement of LPP where LPP actions and language use occur in the vertical space reflecting power-relations. By using the notion of 'sociolinguistic scale' (Blommaert, 2007), LPP scholars can conceptually connect macro and micro level actions and motives that shape the local interactional regimes and LPP innovation. For example, Hancock & Hancock show how school leaders in complementary schools could be seen to be working both within and across the micro and meso levels of LPP. Similarly, Tse Crepaldi & Mirvahedi demonstrate the complex interplay of micro and macro factors governing family multilingualism.

With these theoretical and conceptual challenges in mind, this Special Issue aims to contribute to the international endeavour to capture empirical evidence where such complexity plays out in specific local contexts. COVID-19 created a unique opportunity for this. The papers in this volume provide empirical research evidence for the LPP challenges and strategies in relation to heritage language planning in families, communities, and schools. The language planners, including learners, families, teachers, have all faced similar challenges in responding to the changed circumstances triggered either by COVID-19 or simply by the need to embrace the digital space in LPP for schools. The papers highlight the social practice of LPP and the socioeconomic and political structures within which it occurs.

In all the papers presented, LPP is explored as a rational choice or an implicit practice by language planners to influence the development of heritage languages within the local context where the planning is situated. The agency is an important part of micro-level LPP (Baldauf, 2006) and the discussions in the papers demonstrate micro-implementation by diverse actors. Although this planning work is often local and small scale, the agency is further contextualised within the macro level affordances and policies and beyond the local, embracing the global. Whilst it was developed much before COVID-19, Macleroy, Anderson and Chung's project is a good example of this, expanding beyond the local and breaking down the barriers between learning in school, home,

community, and global contexts. Furthermore, Lytra explores the shifts in heritage language education and pedagogy during the move to online teaching during the pandemic, with the broader aim of capturing teachers' pedagogical and LPP innovations in the digital space. Drawing on the Greek heritage language teaching context in Switzerland, the study provides useful insights into teacher agency with regard to digital innovation and pedagogy in smaller heritage language contexts. Thus, LPP practices can be explored on several scale-levels (Blommaert, 2018) and the papers in this volume apply a *translocal* lens for exploring heritage language planning and contribute to a growing transnational consciousness that replaces binary and essentialised definitions of national LPP ideology (Macleroy et al.).

LPP activities have also increasingly embraced digital technologies and, correspondingly, scholars have brought attention to the ways in which families embrace digitally mediated interaction as part of their family language policy (Lexander, 2021). A recent review paper (Bose et al., 2023) has highlighted the increased attention to family relationships as managed and sustained through digital media and communication (Lexander, 2021) and the new affordances made by digital media in family language maintenance and family language policy (Guskaroska & Elliott, 2021; Lexander, 2021; Taipale, 2019). Scholars in FLP have embraced the notion of the digital family and family language practices have increasingly been explored not just in the physical space through face-to-face interaction, but also through virtual or digital media. Also, as Blommaert noted, the boundaries between online and offline social processes are porous. For example, repositories of online activities such as Mass Online Games can spill over into the everyday vocabulary of gamers (Blommaert, 2017).

This Special Issue addresses these newly emerging transnational spaces of LPP in the context of heritage language maintenance, where heritage language is understood to be an allochthonous language (originating from elsewhere) that is not the mainstream language of the society in which they reside. Traditionally LPP has been conceptualized on three main levels: micro, meso and macro (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997), where micro refers to the local scale (e.g. the family context or teachers' pedagogical practices), meso incorporates institutional and community level language planning, and macro refers to the top-down national or regional, supranational policy. However, these layers come together in dynamic ways, often overlap and simultaneously shape the linguistic ecology of local communities (Baldauf, 2006; Liddicoat, 2023). For example, Hancock and Hancock demonstrate that teachers in complementary (heritage) schools could be seen to be working both within and across the micro and meso levels of LPP (see also Nordstrom & Zhang, this issue). In the family language planning context, Hatoss demonstrates that micro-level planning can cross geographical boundaries through technology (Hatoss, 2023). The studies in this volume demonstrate how micro language planning has the capacity to open new spaces in the educational linguistic ecology, where relations of dominance can be contested and where alternatives can be enacted (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014, p. 240). These shifting power relations are also spatially re-organised. For example, while family language policies are implemented in family homes, the 'home' domain is not simply a physical space, but best understood as a 'point of reference' from which families navigate their world (Eisenchlas & Schalley, 2020, p. 29).

LPP scholars have long emphasised that language planning is a complex practice (Hogan-Brun, 2013) and have called for a complexity paradigm as a framework for conceptualising the interrelationship between normativity (as top-down language rules) and norms (as language practices) (Bastardas-Boada, 2013). This Special Issue addresses this complexity from the context of heritage language planning, where actors include policy-makers, teachers, learners, and parents at the same time. This cross-scalar complexity of FLP, as argued by Blommaert (2018), is relatively under-researched and requires new theoretical work. Similarly, the tripartite distinction between the elements of FLP, which include language practices, language management and ideologies needs to be interpreted as part of a whole and are inseparable, even though the internal contradictions and tensions between them can be a fruitful focus of research.

Responding to change: agency in FLP and heritage language planning

An ongoing task in LPP research is to explore how structure and agency simultaneously influence LPP goals and outcomes. In the context of the current volume, this translates to the fundamental question about how heritage language use (and learning) is conditioned by structural frames (class, national policy, also see Bourdieu's *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1991)), and how actors mobilise their resources to promote the acquisition, learning and transmission of heritage languages. In this broader context, questions arise about the freedom of action that individuals and communities have to influence the future of their heritage language. While in macro-policy agency is associated with government, in micro-level contexts agency lies with all those involved in any aspect of language policy engagement. Importantly, and in the context of COVID-19, the agency is interconnected with temporality (Block, 2012), as people's past experiences, present motives and future aspirations simultaneously shape their social acts.

Since LPP in the translocal space challenges the traditional romanticist ideology of looking at LPP within nation states, in this volume, national policies are backgrounded and what is discussed is the way language actors (teachers, parents, learners) deploy their agency to shape linguistic practices. As language planning is always interlinked with ideologies, the studies also pay due attention to the attitudinal and ideological factors that influence how language planners manage linguistic resources for heritage language development. The agency is necessarily future-oriented and requires a certain degree of 'projectivity' which involves 'imagining possible future trajectories of action that are relevant to the actor's hopes, fears, and desires for the future' (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2021, p. 6). For example, Hancock and Hancock (in Scotland), Lytra (in Switzerland), and Nordstrom & Zhang (in Australia) address agency in complementary school settings, specifically in times of flux or disruption.

Hancock & Hancock as well as Nordstrom & Zhang highlight the ways in which school leaders and teachers developed and enacted agency on multiple levels and in dynamic, complex, and nuanced ways as schools adapted their diverse provision in the face of challenges triggered by COVID-19. Lytra similarly explores agency through the nexus of Greek heritage language teachers' accounts of their emergency pedagogic responses and the social and institutional structures, discourses, and ideologies circulating locally and transnationally in francophone Switzerland. In Macleroy et al. grassroots policymaking in practice is explored, demonstrating how language activists (researchers,

teachers, parents/carers and students) can exercise bottom-up agency to address key issues in learning heritage languages through deep and meaningful collaboration. Agency in the family domain is also explored throughout this Special Issue. Hatoss explored the parental stance on agency in developing children's Hungarian as a heritage language in the Australian Hungarian diaspora. Tse Crepaldi and Mirvahedi focus on children's agency and illustrate how FLP is influenced by children's linguistic proficiencies and agency.

Shifting ecologies of heritage language planning

The papers in this volume challenge the traditional view of LPP planning as something necessarily conscious, well-planned and consistent. Instead, they highlight the *ad hoc* and flexible nature of language policies that emerged in times of changed social conditions during the pandemic. Papers addressing FLP describe shifts in the home language ecology where family routines and FLP had to be replaced by new social arrangements. Families' actions needed to change to respond to the changed sociolinguistic conditions of family interactions (see e.g. Hatoss). Hatoss's study of the Hungarian families in Australia illustrates that some stay-at-home heritage speaking parents took advantage of the COVID-19 lockdowns to socialize children into the heritage language, while in other families, the mainstream language gained more space due to the presence of the dominant language speaking caretaker. The language ecology also shifted in the context of heritage language schools (also referred to as complementary schools, Saturday, or community language schools). Most schools switched to online delivery modes, while others cancelled their classes (see Hancock & Hancock; Nordstrom & Zhang; and Lytra). These shifting conditions call for an understanding of the dialogic nature of social conditions and LPP activities.

The empirical data presented in this volume provide evidence that ideologies are not 'pre-given' or fixed but construed through social interaction and social action. The dynamics of heritage language planning and the dynamic nature of the ideologies underpinning such planning bring our scholarly focus to the dynamics of 'ideological work' (Gal, 2023) as a rich area of LPP research. FLP brings 'far more nuanced and dispersed, less linear conceptualization of power in the sociolinguistic field' (Blommaert, 2018, p. 2). Examples of such ideological work are provided by a range of different actors in diverse heritage language planning contexts. Through explorations of how language ideologies are constructed, the papers bring the micro and the macro under the investigatory lens at the same time. As Duff has pointed out: '[g]rass-roots or bottom-up processes within homes are also mediated by macro-level ideologies circulating in the wider society and in institutions as well as homes connected with language hierarchies (Duff, 2021, p. 492)'. For example, Hatoss demonstrates that parental agency was shaped by complex cultural, linguistic and social norms, expectations and ideologies on multiple levels or *scales* (Blommaert, 2015). The normalcy of Hungarian linguistic practices was simultaneously shaped by local language ideologies in the diaspora as well as those in the homeland. This is illustrated through the discussion on how some of the older diaspora members in the Australian Hungarian diaspora were seen by newcomers as 'too Hungarian' which prevented mother from engaging with the local Hungarian community.

In their paper, Macleroy et al critique the way national language policy in the United Kingdom marginalises heritage languages, and through a critical ethnographic lens, they demonstrate that, by moving away from a 'passive acceptance of an ideology which serves to shut out heritage languages, a subversive counter-cultural position can find space to breathe and grow' (p. 4). The authors show (through their project engaging language learners from diverse backgrounds) that language speakers and their multilingual literacies can be developed without national and ideological boundaries that normally limit opportunities for cross-fertilisation in languages education and the development of intercultural competence. For this, they use digital storytelling highlighting the opportunities that digital technology provides.

The changing ecology of heritage language learning was facilitated by the *digital shift* to online learning both in family language policy and heritage language schools. Digital tools in language learning became particularly important during the COVID-19 outbreak (Chik & Benson, 2021) and heritage language contexts also relied on these technologies to keep their classes running. The translocal 'virtual' and real connectedness of diaspora communities through digital media in cyberspace calls for a reconceptualization of traditional diaspora communities as *cyberspora* (Hatoss, 2020; 2019). These cyberspora are interconnected across the globe. Such cyberspora grew rapidly throughout the COVID-19 lockdowns, as physical isolation triggered new ways of connecting across geographical distances. Distant neighbourhoods and continents became contextually relevant in a new spatio-temporal arrangement of the language planning space. For example, home schooling parents arranged heritage language tutoring from across the globe for their children, and online language tutoring opportunities grew rapidly recruiting learners from across the globe. These changes were also evident in the space of heritage language education as schools shifted to online learning. Somewhat parallel with the feeling created by the media, where people and events are '*so far yet so close*', with local and regional news content becoming increasingly accessible from anywhere in the world (Wehden & Stoltenberg, 2019), heritage language schools opened up their doors to learners from distant geographical locations and heritage language teachers have increasingly accessed resources from other parts of the world.

Methodological insights

This Special Issue also brings a collection of innovative methods in LPP research in heritage language contexts. While early LPP studies focused on formal policies, researchers in this volume have brought together insights from the micro to the macro by mapping language planners' agentive responses during critical times of change. With some papers drawing on wide-scale surveys combined with interviews (see e.g. Hancock & Hancock (2024) and Nordstrom & Zhang (2023)), others focus on smaller-scale datasets prioritising qualitative methods (see e.g. Lytra's small-scale exploratory study of heritage language teachers in a Greek school in francophone Switzerland and Tse Crepaldi & Mirvahedi's case study of a bilingual family in Singapore). Regardless of the size and method, all papers recognise that language planners' actions are embedded in wider social, cultural and epistemological frames and the authors align with current definitions of policy as a situated sociocultural process, 'the complex of practices, ideologies, attitudes,

and formal and informal mechanisms that influence people's language choices in profound and pervasive everyday ways' (McCarty, 2010: xii).

Using diverse methodological approaches, the papers provide nuanced understandings of the coming together of macro and micro processes and the intersects between structure and agency in LPP contexts. Embeddedness and reflexivity are important research qualities for ethnographically oriented enquiries of LPP (Glasgow & Bouchard, 2019) and the authors in this volume have paid careful attention to both in their analysis of the LPP case studies. For example, the papers illustrate that LPP processes are embedded in broader structural and 'macro' conditions (e.g. national policy) and the way language planners (for example communities, families and schools) mobilised their agency to counter the constraints and leverage on affordances provided by the structural conditions conceptualized according to the scalar arrangements of time–space relations. Macleroy et al. discuss the importance of reflexivity in research methods and advocate for a research approach that 'embraces different ways of knowing and challenges the limitations of dominant cognitive, logocentric research methodologies and the artificial divide between knowing and doing, between research and practice, between the academic and the personal, between the visceral and the rational' (p. 5). Their Action Research project is a good example of how research is cyclic and does not stop at the point of discovery but continues to influence practices in language planning and policy. The papers overall provide rich insights from diverse learning and teaching contexts. For example, Tse Crepaldi & Mirvahedi provide much needed attention to temporality and use a longitudinal approach to highlight the dynamic changes in family language policy.

Overall, these papers call attention to teacher agency and pedagogical practices as an important part of language policy from bottom-up, which is often overlooked in LPP studies (Liddicoat, 2014). Finally, Wang & Hatoss's paper provides a scoping review of the field, highlighting terminological disparities in heritage language education. The paper provides a geographical summary of the most used terms (heritage language, home language, and others) and identifies gaps and imbalances of research representation, especially from contexts in the Global South. The paper also draws attention to methodological trends and preferences in the field and provides useful suggestions for scholars in the field who can increase the visibility of their papers by choosing the right terminology.

Conclusion

It is our hope that this Special Issue will inspire further scholarly work to bring heritage language LPP to the transnational space and to respond to the changes brought about by digital technology in LPP, both in family and school contexts. These papers add to the increasing body of work that investigates how heritage language schools and language planners outside the education system (e.g. parents and caregivers) develop learners' linguistic repertoires in the digital space and the way digital tools enable heritage language use and development in transnational families (Chik & Benson, 2021; Guskaroska & Elliott, 2021; Lamb, 2020; Lexander, 2021; Ó Murchú, 2015; Taipale, 2019). The papers in this volume illustrate the complexity of language planning practices in the translocal space. Families are shown in their 'multilingual manoeuvering' which is 'at once local and translocal' and requires 'the mobilization of complex repertoires made up of functionally

specialized resources' (Blommaert, 2018, p. 3). Such manoeuvering is best seen not as a low-scale activity but closely intertwined with actions in the communities and heritage language schools. However, the papers also demonstrate language planners' creative responses and their resourcefulness in deploying interventions towards heritage language development and maintenance in the family, school and community spaces. In so doing, they resist the homogenising macro-level policies and ideologies and fill the gaps in top-down support for heritage languages. It is our hope that these creative LPP practices will inspire further scholarship and pedagogical innovation to continue to make these actions more visible and recognised as an influential and essential part of LPP.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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