



**HAL**  
open science

## Decolonizing Family Language Policy, or reimagining family multilingualism as an inclusive field

Isabelle Léglise

► **To cite this version:**

Isabelle Léglise. Decolonizing Family Language Policy, or reimagining family multilingualism as an inclusive field. *Journal of Multilingual Theories and Practices*, 2023, 4 (2), pp.288-304. hal-04353179

**HAL Id: hal-04353179**

**<https://cnrs.hal.science/hal-04353179v1>**

Submitted on 23 Dec 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

## **Decolonizing Family Language Policy, or reimagining family multilingualism as an inclusive field**

Isabelle Léglise

### **Abstract**

As a commentary to a special issue dedicated to multilingualism within the family from Southern and decolonial approaches, this article examines what it could mean to ‘decolonize the field of Family Language Policy’ – or, rather, to reimagine this field in terms of the more all-encompassing label of family multilingualism. It draws on my own experience of the difficulty of fitting into a field configured in English, from my position as a French researcher working in the contexts of the so-called Global South and supervising students who come from backgrounds minoritized in France and who are personally involved in the subjects on which they work. This commentary has thus been written from relative marginality in this field and out of an experience of both familiarity and foreignness. By proposing four lateral moves, it adds to studies calling for viewpoints to be situated, for voices from the South to be included and for knowledge itself to be decolonized. These lateral moves form part of an attempt to decolonize this academic field if we are to take seriously the need to clean house within the academy itself so that knowledges rooted in Western/Northern experiences and traditions are simply part of the palette of knowledges.

Keywords: decolonial approaches; Family Language Policy; family multilingualism; multilingualism; Southern perspective

### **1. Introduction**

After Rafael Lomeu Gomes and Elizabeth Lanza invited me to write this commentary on their special issue on ‘Family multilingualism: Decolonial and Southern approaches’, I began to dream about what, from my point of view, it would mean to ‘decolonise the field of family language policy’, or, rather, to reimagine this field in terms of the more all-encompassing label of family multilingualism. Let me say first that I rarely let myself dream about what any particular field of research could be like. Most of the time we submit to the forms taken by scientific fields (locally, nationally, or internationally), accepting their configurations and the currents that influence them as givens (Bourdieu, 1984); we try to adapt ourselves to them, as the norms that we must conform to in order to become part of our chosen field. Taking on their baggage of quotations, keywords and references is compulsory if we are to get published, but to acquire these we must first be socialised appropriately. I will respond here by drawing on my own experience of the difficulty of fitting into a field configured in English, from my position as a French researcher, working in the contexts of the so-called Global South<sup>1</sup> and supervising doctoral students or postdocs who come from backgrounds minoritised in France and who are personally involved in the subjects they work on. My commentary, then, has been written from relative marginality in this field and out of an experience of both familiarity and foreignness.

The first conference on Family Language Policy (FLP) was held in France in 2016. Bernard Spolsky was to be one of the invited speakers, and Shahzaman Haque, who was among the first to engage with this field as it was understood in Anglophone research (Haque, 2008), invited me to give a plenary lecture. My initial response was to say that I was not competent to do this; I did not feel legitimate enough. A few months earlier, I had attended a presentation

by Liz Lanza, who had spoken of a sixth phase due to emerge in Anglophone research on FLP after the latest special issue of the journal she was preparing (Lanza and Wei, 2016). I asked myself what phase we had reached in France, where a special journal issue on ‘plurilingual families around the world’ had just come out, focusing on language transmission in mixed families (Deprez, Varro and Collet, 2014); although the issue mentioned family language policy, it did not engage directly with that field. At that time, I had been working on multilingualism in French Guiana for about fifteen years. In 2000 I had begun to conduct a major survey focusing on multilingualism among schoolchildren and on language practices in different domains (families, schools, hospitals, government departments and businesses), in response to a request from my colleagues who asked for the support of a sociolinguistic analysis to clarify their decisions about educational language policy and the implementation of innovative programmes (Goury et al., 2000). Among other questions fundamental to this research were: ‘How do families, communities, official institutions and businesses manage languages? What are their language practices and implicit or explicit language policies?’ I was interested ‘in the management of plurilingualism at both the individual and collective level, with respect both to the practices and attitudes of speakers and to the language policies adopted’. I had shown that the use of French in the village of Mana, and its important position in language repertoires, was the effect at once of educational language policies and family language policies (Léglise, 2004; 2005). While I was able to observe educational language policy in action in the village’s schools, including the middle school, my conclusions at the time – no doubt very hasty ones – about the favouring of French in family language policies were based on interviews with pupils, statements by various social actors and observation of a number of institutional contexts. These were accessible to a woman coming from metropolitan France; however, this did not extend to families, since at the time imposing my presence on them seemed inappropriate and too intrusive to me. It was only a decade later that, as part of a Franco-Brazilian team, I would conduct research with transnational families in Amazonia on the role of language as a trigger or facilitator in their plans for and experiences of international mobility (Léglise, 2019). But then, I was not interested in questions of ‘language policy’ as such within these families.

In France at that time, these questions were addressed under the heading of sociolinguistics ‘tout court’ – not within a field recognised as FLP, but in the form of a sociolinguistics of plurilingualism that was interested initially in the languages and ways of speaking of migrants and young people from immigrant backgrounds in mainland France (Dabène and Billiez, 1987), and later in the study of bilingualism within the family (Deprez, 1994) and the transmission of languages in a minority context (Héran, Filhon and Deprez, 2002; Matthey and Fibbi, 2010; Barontini, 2014). The expression ‘politique linguistique familiale’, widely used in the 1990s when I was a student of language sciences in Paris, had been used by Louis-Jean Calvet (1993) and then defined by Christine Deprez (1996) as a way of studying how people – women especially – implement bilingualism within the family: ‘It is thus possible to imagine, in comparison [with state policies], a “Family Language Policy” which would account for the way families manage their languages. Such language planning becomes apparent in the choice of languages and the use made of them in daily life. It also appears in the way people, especially parents, talk about language’ (Deprez, 1996: 35).<sup>2</sup>

Twenty years later I was discovering the English-language publications in this field, at the same time as one of my doctoral students was exploring language maintenance within

families in mainland France and in their plurilingual and necessarily heterogeneous family language practices (Istanbullu and Léglise, 2014). Reading research in English, we found a well-established field (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; 2013) in which one foundational question (among others) was ‘How is it that some children, growing up in a largely monolingual society, become bilinguals while other children, growing up in a bilingual environment, become monolinguals?’. This question seemed to me to be sociologically naïve, because it seemed to pay no attention to the power relationships in the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1982) among languages, varieties and ways of speaking, whether valued or not. Ways of speaking – what I call language practices and which can also be called ‘linguaging’ – are not all equal, meaning that they do not build up the same linguistic and cultural capital, and that by not knowing some of them – particularly those that are dominant or legitimate on a national level – speakers have less access not only to social mobility but also to education, health and citizenship, particularly in the Global South (Léglise, 2017). To put it another way, ‘despite the best efforts to treat languages as equal within the family, languages are not (and never have been or will be) equal in terms of their socioeconomic status and the cultural capital tied to their knowledge in a given society and in the global context’ (Sherman et al., 2016).

The discovery of this Anglophone perspective proved to be interesting for addressing the phenomena of resistance and maintenance of family languages in the context of French and German assimilation and integration policies (Istanbullu, 2017), as the article by King, Fogle and Terry-Logan (2008) indicated, but it did not match my experience in Amazonia (Léglise, 2019).<sup>3</sup> This mismatch and the resulting discomfort, which I will spell out further here, lead me to suggest four ‘lateral moves’ that are necessary if we are to address issues of multilingualism within families in a more inclusive and situated way, so as to encompass a multiplicity of experiences and voices that are generally invisibilised, excluded, marginalised or silenced (Kerfoot and Hyltenstam, 2017) because they are ‘on the other side of the line’ (Santos, 2007; Gomes, 2018) that has been drawn by our conceptualisations.

## **2. Broadening both the type of families studied and our conceptions of ‘what makes a family’**

One of the recurrent criticisms of work on FLP concerns the type of families studied. For a very long time, research on bilingualism within families never went beyond the study of ‘elite bilingualism’ (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981), in middle-class nuclear families located in large Western cities who spoke English but kept up an additional language, from an elitist perspective (Döpke, 1998). One exception was research on migrant families, which addresses specifically ‘non-middle-class, marginalised and under-studied transnational family types’ (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013: 2). However, the majority of work over the last fifteen years on the FLP of transnational families has tended to focus on heterosexual families living in the West, with two parents and usually not many siblings. Particular cases have been investigated, such as mixed families whose OPOL strategies have been studied, for instance families with one or more adopted children (Fogle and King, 2013), and families that can be described as cosmopolitan, ‘highly skilled’ or ‘middling transmigrant’ (Van Mensel, 2016); more recent work has focused on single-parent families (Vorobeveva, 2021). Although we may note a diversification of data collection sites and contexts in the literature in recent years – for example in post-genocide situations (Maseko, 2022) – North American and European contexts continue to dominate (Smith-Christmas, 2017; Gomes, 2018). Yet the proposed

Léglise, Isabelle, 2023, Decolonizing Family Language Policy, or reimagining family multilingualism as an inclusive field, *Journal of Multilingual Theories and Practices* 4 :2

theoretical framework is based on precisely these examples. We can conclude without a doubt that the field of FLP is no exception to the tendency to treat research on the WEIRD contexts (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic) as universal (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan, 2010) and to assume that the resulting theories can then be applied to many other contexts (in the same way Pennycook and Makoni (2020) have shown for the field of education).

One way of decolonizing the field would be to move beyond families from WEIRD contexts to examine other experiences and other constructions of reality, as Sarcinelli (2018) has done for LGBTQ families. Pia Lane's article proposes to do just that by looking at the experiences of Sámi parents who, as newsmakers, have decided to speak Sámi with their children. She shows that 'the challenges faced by these parents may be results of silences brought about by their colonial past', and concludes that 'language reclamation is a form of decolonisation because this may contribute to disrupting colonial heritage and heal hurts from the past'.

By looking at other families, particularly situated in the Global South, once we do the essential work of decentring relative to our own analytical frameworks we can question our conception of 'what makes a family' and move beyond the Western notion of the nuclear family to include all the people present (or not present) in the home with whom we communicate or develop strong ties, including aunts, cousins and grandparents as well as close friends or neighbours who may be responsible for the children. This is one of the lessons I learnt from my work with Brazilian families in French Guiana where, as in each generation successive unions produced children, we co-constructed genealogies to understand 'what makes a family' (Léglise, 2019). The family configurations could include children handed over at birth to an aunt or grandmother who declare them as their children, others in which children are sent to live with an acquaintance in the town to go to school for a few years or more, or situations, for example within indigenous families, where close friends must also be taken into account to understand the ties of interdependence that unite different individuals and define who is responsible for the children. This led me to conclude that to understand these transnational families, with their multiple citizenships, living across several different countries, we had to study family language practices that went beyond the traditional parent-child interaction, generally taking place in the parents' home, when the usual surveys dealing with FLP are conducted. While we want to explain the relationships between different languages within the family, we also need to look at interactions involving several generations and various members of what is conceived as the 'extended family' from a Western point of view, not only face-to-face but in telephone calls (Istanbullu, 2017; 2020) and other forms of on-line communication such as text messages and social networks, Snapchat and Facebook, for instance (Androutsopoulos and Lexander, 2021).

Understanding 'what makes a family' in each situation is important. Some studies of the educational practices of aboriginal families in Canada have emphasised how important it is for social workers to understand kinship systems and the notion of the 'extended family' (Grammond and Guay, 2016). Others have shown the importance of interdependence and the community in the conception of 'what makes a family' in South Africa (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998), which from a Western perspective we would call the 'extended family'. Babalwayashe Molate and Carolyn McKinney stress here that the term 'extended' is a colonial one, since it implies that 'nuclear' is the norm. They focus instead 'on local epistemes in understanding both the concept and organisation of family from a Southern perspective, particularly among

Léglise, Isabelle, 2023, Decolonizing Family Language Policy, or reimagining family multilingualism as an inclusive field, *Journal of Multilingual Theories and Practices* 4 :2

amaXhosa (isiXhosa speaking people) using the isiXhosa terminology *ikhaya* – signifying both “family” and “home”.’ They also make the argument that national household and social surveys should be designed in the same way rather than reproducing colonial constructs of language and family.

Another way of interrogating our conception of ‘what makes a family’ is to look at the obverse – ‘what doesn’t make a family’, in a Western society such as Norway. This is what Rafael Lomeu Gomes, Elizabeth Lanza, and Zahir Athari do here, through an analysis of the discourse on unaccompanied minors and ‘anchor children’, which reveals how the construction of cultural differences deprives racialised individuals of the capacity for reciprocity.

This discussion of what makes a family brings me directly to my second point.

### **3. Abandoning the depiction of the family as a place where rational decisions about language ‘management’ take place**

My discussions with transnational families in Amazonia indicated that the reason I did not take an interest in their FLPs was that, from the point of view of the families we worked with, the language question was far less important than economic, health and educational opportunities for their children (Léglise, 2019). There was thus no reason to explore their FLPs. The topic of languages and ways of speaking was a secondary one for them and was seen as simply a consequence of their social environment. For these families, who live or have been living in very precarious situations, economic survival and daily life depend on linguistic adaptation to their immediate environment – their neighbourhood and their work – and they have no particular thoughts or plans relative to the benefits of learning one language or another. I have shown that adults’ linguistic repertoires may expand or not depending on their environment and the needs that may happen to emerge: it is perfectly possible to live in French Guiana and speak only the Amazonian version of Portuguese, for example, both within the family and in the workplace, or alternatively to learn French or Creole because you work in an environment where these languages are present. Under these conditions, the question of what FLPs should be introduced does not arise, since the urgent issues are elsewhere – ensuring economic survival and good health, managing the family’s illegal presence in the country and relations with the police. In fact, no rational decisions are taken about languages.

So, while the question of language choice is a central one in the field of FLP for families (two-parent, heterosexual, Western) who are aware of the linguistic capital to be gained by the use of certain languages, this is not true of all families in all contexts. The very terms used – ‘policy’, ‘management’ and ‘choice’ – presuppose a conception of the family as a place where decisions are made, implicitly or explicitly, about which languages to favour. As King, Fogle and Terry-Logan (2008: 910) note, an important question is how to identify ‘Which *caretakers* attempt to influence what *behaviors* of which *family members* for what *ends* under what *conditions* by what *means* through what *decision-making process* with what *effect*’. We are in the presence of a behaviourist rhetoric, the influence of inputs on outputs, that is very far removed not only from my conception of relations among individuals but also from my experience with transnational families in French Guiana and in Amazonia more widely, and which does not seem to me to be compatible with the type of educational practices that adopt

Léglise, Isabelle, 2023, Decolonizing Family Language Policy, or reimagining family multilingualism as an inclusive field, *Journal of Multilingual Theories and Practices* 4 :2

indirect, non-coercive strategies like those of indigenous families, who view children as autonomous beings capable of acting for themselves (Grammond and Guay, 2016).

Moreover, drawing on the framework proposed by Spolsky (2004), FLPs allot a central role to ideologies (Haque, 2012), meaning primary, determining realities which give a rational explanation for the language practices performed. Yet as Rafael Lomeu Gomes (2018) points out, ‘the predominance of canonical epistemologies in FLP (e.g. the pervasiveness of Spolsky’s tripartite framework in which language policy is understood to be composed of language practices, language beliefs, and language management) obscures the lived experiences of people and theories from the global South’. Moreover, it implies a conception of language practices as controlled: the term ‘management’ in particular is drawn from managerial rhetoric.

However, research on language practices within families which adopts a more micro-level approach tends to reveal mutual adjustment and constant micro-alignment between speakers-social actors as they interact (Istanbullu, 2017; Sánchez Moreano, 2020). This mutual adjustment can, of course, result in the long run in recurring social practices and the establishing of habitual behaviour (Ghimenton and Costa, 2016; Van Mensel, 2018). These fluid, intrinsically heterogeneous, language practices employed within families, where the interlocutors, as ‘languagers’, draw on the diverse resources of their repertoires without setting boundaries (Léglise, 2017), thus escaping from the coloniality of language (Veronelli, 2015) and from ‘named-languages’, are invoked by most of the contributors to this issue.

This brings me to a third point: how to (re)frame the field of study concerned.

#### **4. Redefining the field by incorporating other approaches to family multilingualism**

After some years of reflecting on the circulation of knowledge and the mechanisms of peripheralisation and provincialisation in research (Mignolo, 2002; Keim, 2016; Léglise, 2022a), I can now recognise that the source of my feelings of discomfort and illegitimacy when it came to speaking on FLP at that conference, some ten years ago, was related to the framing of this Anglophone field: by drawing boundaries and establishing a field, the new Anglophone study of FLP was wiping out previous knowledge about these subjects, in particular that produced in languages other than English, while also rewriting history – a history that I had myself been part of up until then, but which I now felt I no longer owned, since it had been erased and excluded from this new field, due to being ‘on the other side of the line’.

In the two passages I quote below, for example, which identify Luykx as responsible for the ‘first introduction of the term’, and claim that ‘the name was originally coined by Luykx (2003)’, there is no room for my prior experience of years of familiarity with the French term ‘politique linguistique familiale’. It does not exist and seems never to have existed. In fact, for a while I forgot that I myself had dared to use this concept in my work. Yet when I reread my own texts from twenty years ago, I find traces of it. Looking back, I first thought that my use of the term was slightly shameful, not really legitimate: although I was using the term at the time, was I perhaps misusing it because I was not really a specialist in this field? The first quotation, which proposes to replace the notion of ‘transmission’ by ‘participation’, and the second, which stresses the number of publications using FLP in their title, convinced me, if I needed proof, that the works published in French had no place in this field.

In the first introduction of the term ‘Family Language Policy’ as such, Luykx (2003: 41) emphasises that ‘in the “language ecology” of the family, children are agents as much as objects. For this reason, socialization should be viewed in terms of “participation” rather than merely “transmission”.’ (Smith-Christmas, 2020: 218)

While the name was originally coined by Luykx (2003) in her study of family language policy and gender socialization in bilingual Aymara households, it was through the now classic article by King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry (2008) that it gained currency in the establishment of a key field of scholarship. This field did not evolve in a vacuum, yet its clear profile in scientific inquiry is witnessed by the myriad of publications bearing the title of family language policy. (Lanza and Gomes, 2020: 153)

Francophone sociolinguistics research has long focused on the family as a site of language transmission and practice (Tabouret-Keller, 1988; Leconte, 1997; Biichlé, 2015), as a site of reciprocal linguistic and cultural mediation by parents and children between the languages of the family and the language of the school (Lüdi and Py, 1995); at the same time it has addressed the meaning of the notions of transmission and generation (Barontini, 2014). I have argued (Léglise 2019) that within families, the description of linguistic repertoires, plurilingual language practices and language biographies (Lambert and Billiez, 2017) has focused on the individual, as subject or social actor, not on the level of the family as institution (de Singly, 2010) or research field (Bourdieu, 1993). The Francophone tradition is thus very remote from Anglophone work on FLP, which is generally more interested in revealing ideologies than in linguistic resources operating within language practices. This also seems to me to explain the paucity of work in France that claims to belong to the field of FLP as understood in the Anglophone sense, with a very few exceptions (Haque, 2012; Wang, 2019). In France, only eight PhD theses defended in the last twenty-five years use the expression ‘PLF’ in their titles or keywords – most of them with reference to Deprez’s work – whereas more than forty theses deal with the transmission of languages within the family.

All the same, all of this research deals with family multilingualism. There are undoubtedly discussions to be had and connections to be found between Francophone and Anglophone work in this field,<sup>4</sup> as in many other areas of sociolinguistics (Léglise, 2022b) and also of course beyond these two canons. In any case, if we were to reframe the field as that of the study of multilingualism within the family, with the FLP approach as one branch of this, alongside the study of family language practices and the study of the transmission of languages within the family, that would give everyone a legitimate, necessary place to express themselves, thus creating ‘a polyphony of multiple voices, academic traditions and discourses [that] can be heard by those who are eager to listen’ (Léglise, 2022a: 292).

This de-hegemonisation of the field also means changing our ways of working and our methods.

## **5. Changing our ways of exploring intimacy without studying the privacy of the Other**

In their discussion of research, Sherman et al. (2016: 215) claim that the family is an easy domain to access: ‘In comparison to other domains traditionally examined in these areas (schools, workplaces, official institutions, and the like), the family presents a highly



accessible research site which allows for the collection of multiple types of data – audio and video recordings, different types of interviews, and also for longitudinal examinations of members of a given family.’ Christine Deprez (1996: 36), in contrast, connected the multiplicity of approaches to the fact that ‘The family “as a fieldsite” is always difficult for researchers to access. This difficulty makes it necessary to multiply and combine approaches.’ In her case, data collection, begun ten years earlier with questionnaires administered to teenagers in Paris schools, was continued through lengthy interviews with adults and recordings of family conversations. Her work on bilingual practices in Paris families (Deprez, 1994) was also facilitated through recordings made by students who attended her courses.

My own case is different. For many years I confined myself to studying institutional domains in a post-colonial territory, French Guiana; as a woman from metropolitan France, to observe the French state’s language policy in action, in practice, specifically in schools and hospitals, seemed to me to be the best way to scrutinise the colonality of power relations. ‘Entering’ families and familial intimacy – particularly in post-colonial contexts – always seemed to me to be extremely intrusive. This may seem to contradict the first ‘lateral move’ I proposed – to look further afield. But why should we go and pester families living precarious lives, and intrude on their privacy? How can we adopt a non-extractivist research perspective, when exploring intimacy (as shown both by the anthropology of intimacy and by studies on the production of intimacy in the labour of research) requires both reflexivity, closeness and distance (Besnier 2015, Fraser and Puwar 2008, Cook and Alexy, 2018), and surely also legitimacy? One way to answer this question, once one has stepped through the front door, involves adopting and co-constructing their own interpretations, or practising ‘knowing-with’ rather than ‘knowing-about’, as Abraham Yeshalem, Tommaso M. Milani and Marie Rydenvald remind us in this very issue. Doing this, they adopt a variety of creative, biographical and speaker-centred approaches (Purkarthofer and Flubacher, 2022).

Another way of answering these questions is to pay attention to the limits imposed by one’s personal discomfort, being clear about one’s own positionality and try to move away from a voyeuristic gaze. When Syrian refugees and families arrived in France a few years ago, a lot of government funding was made available for research that involved working with/on these populations but I decided not to apply for funding. If, as a citizen, I wanted to help them, other ways of getting involved and participating were available. I felt that it would have been in a sense indecent of me to take an interest in their FLP. At the same time, I very much welcomed and supported research proposals from an ‘insider perspective’, which all the doctoral students and postdocs who have worked with me over the last fifteen years have possessed. Coming from backgrounds minoritised in the French academic world, seeking answers to questions arising from their own lives, in search of social and epistemic justice, working within their own community networks, they have successfully included voices usually pushed to the margins of the knowledge production system, ‘conducting research in such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalisation are given space to communicate from their frames of reference’ (Chilisa, 2012: 14). One example in this issue is the article by Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza, which presents his own family over three generations and four continents. In addition to the now standard interviews, biographies and recordings of language practices within families, different methodological approaches are being adopted while exploring one’s own network or familial intimacy, ranging from observant participation (Istanbullu, 2020) to auto-ethnography (Wang and Yang, 2022). For Menezes de Souza, drawing on the work of Bhabha, auto-

biographical narrative is a way of recovering ‘a previously silenced voice claiming and performing the right to dialogically address and be addressed in a colonial context typically marked by disturbed and interrupted dialogues’.

While these approaches are essential to the project of decoloni(al)izing scholarly methods (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Smith, 2012), they are sometimes considered too disruptive in academic circles, which are highly experienced at reproducing themselves (Bourdieu, 1984). This reaction finds expression through the ways their authors are marginalised and dismissed within universities when looking for a permanent position, and within the global publication economy, in which gatekeeping is a recognised phenomenon (Canagarajah, 2002; Piller, Zhang and Li, 2022). Gatekeeping operates by reminding and imposing on researchers the need to cite authors seen as essential in the field, and use keywords (such as FLP) that pre-categorise approaches and ways of thinking, and by imposing dominant norms through referees’ comments that sometimes seem to belong to another century.<sup>5</sup> So many reminders of order and coloniality, so many ways of ruling out change that is necessary and already underway: as we can see, the resistance is resolute. But the time has come to change the way we explore intimacy, without studying the privacy of the Other, letting many voices reclaim this research on their own lives.

## 6. Conclusion

Giving the label of FLP to research on the family, as Anglophone work has done, is the result of the practical identification of a field of study and its institutionalisation, which has been very successful over the last fifteen years. Starting from my own discomfort and feelings of illegitimacy, I have identified a series of discrepancies between my own experience – as a woman student and then as a researcher working in so-called Global South contexts, socialised in Francophone sociolinguistic frameworks but seeking to dialogue with works published in English – and what the field of FLP was actually proposing. I have shown that the very institutionalisation of the field, by drawing boundary lines, has produced the marginalisation and erasure of other experiences; and in a utopian moment, dreaming and reimagining, I have sought to undo this process.

By proposing four lateral moves, my text, which takes seriously what this special issue asks – that we look at multilingualism within the family ‘from southern and decolonial approaches’ – offers just one more voice, from my positionality, to add to those calling for viewpoints to be situated, for voices from the South to be included and for knowledge itself to be decoloni(al)ized. These lateral moves form part of an attempt to reimagine this academic field, if we are to take seriously the need to clean house within the academy itself, so that ‘knowledges rooted in western/northern experiences and traditions are simply part of the palette of knowledges’ (Léglise, Bagga-Gupta and Deumert, 2022: 275).

## References

- Androutsopoulos, J. and Lexander, K. V. (2021). Digital polycentricity and diasporic connectivity: a Norwegian-Senegalese case study. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 25(5), 720--36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12518>.
- Barontini, A. (2014). Approches théoriques du processus de transmission linguistique: questionner la terminologie des générations. *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociolinguistique*, 6(2), 39--60. <https://doi.org/10.3917/cisl.1402.0039>.

Léglise, Isabelle, 2023, Decolonizing Family Language Policy, or reimagining family multilingualism as an inclusive field, *Journal of Multilingual Theories and Practices* 4 :2

- Biichlé, L. (2015). Ces familles bilingues qui nous entourent. Des pratiques langagières et de la transmission des langues et identités dans des familles 'mixtes' plurilingues de France. *Cahiers internationaux de sociolinguistique*, 7(1), 39--56.  
<https://doi.org/10.3917/cisl.1501.0039>.
- Bourdieu, P. (1982). *Ce que parler veut dire*. Fayard.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Homo academicus*. Minuit.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). A propos de la famille comme catégorie réalisée. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 100, 32--36.
- Calvet, L. J. (1993). *La sociolinguistique*. Que sais-je? Presses Universitaires de France.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2002). *A geopolitics of academic writing*. University of Pittsburgh Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5hjn6c>.
- Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous research methodologies*. Sage.
- Connell, R. W. (2007). *Southern theory: Social science and the global dynamics of knowledge*. 1st ed. Polity Press.
- Cook, E. and Alexy, A. (2018). Reflections on fieldwork: exploring intimacy. In E. Cook and A. Alexy (eds.), *Intimate Japan: Ethnographies of closeness and conflict* (pp. 236--59). University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824877040-014>.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2009). Invisible and visible language planning: ideological factors in the family language policy of Chinese immigrant families in Quebec. *Language Policy*, 8(4), 351--75. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-009-9146-7>.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2013). Family language policy: sociopolitical reality versus linguistic continuity. *Language Policy*, 12(1), 1--6. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-012-9269-0>.
- Dabène, L. and Billiez, J. (1987). Le parler des jeunes issus de l'immigration. In G. Vermes and J. Boutet (eds.), *France, pays multilingue* (pp. 62--77). L'Harmattan.
- Deprez, C. (1994). *Les enfants bilingues: langues et familles*. Didier.
- Deprez, C. (1996). Une politique linguistique familiale: le rôle des femmes. *Education et sociétés plurilingues*, 1, 35--43.
- Deprez, C., Varro, G. and Collet, B. (2014). Familles plurilingues dans le monde: mixités conjugales et transmission des langues. Introduction. *Langage et société*, 147(1), 7--22. <https://doi.org/10.3917/lis.147.0007>.
- Döpke, S. (1998). Can the principle of 'One Person – One Language' be disregarded as unrealistically elitist? *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21(1), 41--56.
- Fogle, L. W. and King, K. A. (2013). Child agency and language policy in transnational families. *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 19(0), 1--25.
- Ghimenton, A. and Costa, L. (2016). Code-switching et socialisation plurilingue au sein de trois familles italophones en France. In M. Langner and V. Jovanovic (eds.), *Facetten der Mehrsprachigkeit / Reflets du plurilinguisme*, 10 (pp. 95--118). Peter Lang.
- Goury, L., Launey, M., Queixalós, F. and Renault-Lescure, O. (2000). Des médiateurs bilingues en Guyane française. *Revue française de linguistique appliquée*, 5 (1), 43--60.
- Grammond, S. and Guay, C. (2016). Les enjeux de la recherche concernant l'enfance et la famille autochtones. *Enfances, Familles, Générations*, 25.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1039496ar>.
- Haque, S. (2008). Différences de politiques linguistiques entre nation et famille: étude de cas de trois familles indiennes migrantes dans trois pays d'Europe. *Suvremena lingvistika*, 34(65), 57--72.
- Haque, S. (2012). Etude de cas sociolinguistique et ethnographique de quatre familles indiennes immigrantes en Europe: pratiques langagières et politiques linguistiques nationales et familiales. University of Grenoble 3. <http://www.theses.fr/170443930>.

Léglise, Isabelle, 2023, Decolonizing Family Language Policy, or reimagining family multilingualism as an inclusive field, *Journal of Multilingual Theories and Practices* 4 :2

- Henrich, J., Heine, S. J. and Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33(2--3), 61--83. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0999152X>.
- Héran, F., Filhon, A. and Deprez, C. (2002). La dynamique des langues en France au fil du XXe siècle. *Population et Sociétés*, 376, 1--4.
- Istanbullu, S. (2017). Pratiques langagières intergénérationnelles: le cas de familles transnationales plurilingues (Antioche, Île-de-France, Berlin). PhD thesis. INALCO.
- Istanbullu, S. (2020). The language policy of trilingual transnational families living between Antioch, Paris and Berlin. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 14(4), 459--81.
- Istanbullu, S. and Léglise, I. (2014). Transmission de langues minoritaires dans la migration: le cas de communautés arabo-turcophones. Rapport de recherche remis à la DGLFLF. SeDyL, CNRS, INALCO, IRD.
- Keim, W. (2016). La circulation internationale des savoirs en sciences sociales. Facteurs pertinents d'acceptation et de rejet des textes voyageurs. *Revue d'anthropologie des connaissances*, 10, online. <http://journals.openedition.org/rac/2855>.
- Kerfoot, C. and Hyltenstam, K. (2017). Introduction: Entanglement and orders of visibility. In C. Kerfoot and K. Hyltenstam (eds), *Entangled discourses: South-North orders of visibility* (pp. 1--15). Routledge.
- King, K. A., F., Lyn and Logan-Terry, A. (2008). Family language policy. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 2(5), 907--22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2008.00076.x>.
- Lambert, P. and Billiez, J. (2017). Mobilités et socialisation plurilingue: retour sur un mode de représentation 'bio-graphique'. In M. Auzanneau, M. Bento and M. Leclere (eds.) *Espaces, mobilités et éducation plurilingues, Eclairages d'Afrique ou d'ailleurs* (pp. 159--70). Editions des archives contemporaines.
- Lanza, Elizabeth and Lomeu Gomes, R. (2020). Family language policy: foundations, theoretical perspectives and critical approaches. In A. Schalley and S. Eisenchlas (eds.), *Handbook of home language maintenance and development* (pp. 153--73). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510175-008>.
- Lanza, E. and Wei, L. (2016). Multilingual encounters in transcultural families. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 37(7), 653--54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2016.1151198>.
- Leconte, F. (1997). *La famille et les langues. Une étude sociolinguistique de la deuxième génération de l'immigration africaine dans l'agglomération rouennaise*. Sémantiques. L'Harmattan.
- Léglise, I. (2004). Langues frontalières et langues d'immigration en Guyane française. *Glottopol*, 4 (Langues de frontières, frontières de langues, ed. M. L. Moreau), 108--24.
- Léglise, I. (2005). Contacts de créoles à Mana (Guyane française): répertoires, pratiques, attitudes et gestion du plurilinguisme. *Etudes créoles*, 28(1), 23--57.
- Léglise, I. (2017). Multilingualism and heterogeneous language practices: new research areas and issues in the Global South. *Langage et société*, 160--161(2), 251--66.
- Léglise, I. (2019). Documenter les parcours de familles transnationales: généalogies, biographies langagières et pratiques langagières familiales. In S. Haque and F. Lelièvre (eds.), *Politique linguistique familiale / Family language policy: Enjeux dynamiques de la transmission linguistique dans un contexte migratoire/ Dynamics in language transmission under a migratory context* (pp. 180--204). Lincom Europa.
- Léglise, I. (2022a). Circulation of concepts, compartmentalisation and erasures in Western academic circles: Sumak kawsay/buen vivir and translanguaging. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 17(4), 284--97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2023.2204840>.

Léglise, Isabelle, 2023, Decolonizing Family Language Policy, or reimagining family multilingualism as an inclusive field, *Journal of Multilingual Theories and Practices* 4 :2

- Léglise, I. (2022b). Géopolitique et circulation des savoirs en sociolinguistique du multilinguisme et de l'éducation au Nord et dans le Sud global. *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines*, 41 (December), 213--38. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rhsh.7720>.
- Léglise, I., Bagga-Gupta, S. and Deumert, A. (2022). Transcending circulations of southern and northern concepts: introducing mobile and dialogic perspectives on language. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 17(4), 273--83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2023.2206385>.
- Lomeu Gomes, R. (2018). Family language policy ten years on: a critical approach to family multilingualism. *Multilingual Margins: A Journal of Multilingualism from the Periphery*, 5(2), 51--51. <https://doi.org/10.14426/mm.v5i2.98>.
- Lüdi, G. and Py, B. (1995). *Changement de langage, langage du changement. Aspects linguistiques de la migration interne en Suisse*. L'Age d'Homme.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2--3), 240--70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>.
- Maseko, B. (2022). Family language policy in post-genocide Matabeleland: The case of a Ndebele family. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 40(1), 1--14. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2021.1990093>.
- Matthey, M. and Fibbi, R. (2010). La transmission intergénérationnelle des langues minoritaires. *Travaux neuchâtelois de linguistique*, 52(January), 1--7. <https://doi.org/10.26034/tranel.2010.2809>.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2002). The geopolitics of knowledge and the colonial difference. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101(1), 57--96. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-101-1-57>.
- Pennycook, A. and Makoni, S. (2020). *Innovations and challenges in applied linguistics from the Global South*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429489396>.
- Piller, I., Zhang, J. and Li, J. (2022). Peripheral multilingual scholars confronting epistemic exclusion in global academic knowledge production: a positive case study. *Multilingua*, 41(6), 639--62. <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2022-0034>.
- Purkarthofer, J. and Flubacher, M.C., (eds.) (2022). *Speaking subjects in multilingualism research*. Multilingual Matters. <https://www.multilingual-matters.com/page/detail/Speaking-Subjects-in-Multilingualism-Research/?k=9781800415713>.
- Sánchez Moreano, S. (2020). Análisis de la interacción social en contextos de movilidad transnacional y de superdiversidad. *Iberoromania*, 2020 (91), 28--51. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iber-2020-0005>.
- Santos, B. S. (ed.) (2007). *Another knowledge is possible: Beyond northern epistemologies*. Verso.
- Santos, B. S. (2011). Épistémologies du Sud. *Études rurales*, 187 (August), 21--49.
- Sarcinelli, A. S. (2018). Does love make a family? The politics and micro-politics of filiation among same-sex families. *L'Année sociologique*, 68(2), 367--92. <https://doi.org/10.3917/anso.182.0367>.
- Sherman, T., Hromadová, M.A., Özörencik, H., Zaepernicková, E. and Nekvapil, J. (2016). Two sociolinguistic perspectives on multilingual families. *Slovo a slovesnost*, 77, 202--18.
- Singly, F. (2010). *Sociologie de la famille contemporaine*. 4th ed. Armand Colin.
- Siqwana-Ndulo, N. (1998). Rural African family structure in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 29(2), 407--17. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.29.2.407>.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1981). *Bilingualism or not: The education of minorities*. Multilingual Matters.

Léglise, Isabelle, 2023, Decolonizing Family Language Policy, or reimagining family multilingualism as an inclusive field, *Journal of Multilingual Theories and Practices* 4 :2

- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. 2nd ed. Zed Books Ltd.
- Smith-Christmas, C. (2017). Family language policy: new directions. In J. Macalister and S. H. Mirvahedi (eds.) *Family language policies in a multilingual world: opportunities, challenges, and consequences*. Routledge.
- Smith-Christmas, C. (2020). Child agency and home language maintenance. In A. Schalley and S. Eisenclas (eds.), *Handbook of home language maintenance and development: Social and affective factors* (pp. 218--35). De Gruyter Mouton.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510175-011>.
- Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tabouret-Keller, A. (1988). La nocivité du bilinguisme, cent ans d'errance. In *Congrès de la langue basque*, III, 156--69. San Sebastian, 1987.
- Van Mensel, L. (2016). Children and choices: the effect of macro language policy on the individual agency of transnational parents in Brussels. *Language Policy*, 15(4), 547--60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-015-9391-x>.
- Van Mensel, L. (2018). 'Quiere koffie?' The multilingual familylect of transcultural families. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 15(3), 233--48.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2018.1477096>.
- Veronelli, G. A. (2015). The coloniality of language: race, expressivity, power, and the darker side of modernity. *Wagadu: a Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies*, 13 (July), 108--34.
- Vorobeva, P. (2021). Families in flux: at the nexus of fluid family configurations and language practices. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, online, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1979013>.
- Wang, G. and Yang, S. (2022). Socializing strategies, family language policies, and practices. *Identities, Practices and Education of Evolving Multicultural Families in Asia-Pacific*, 15.
- Wang, N. (2019). Les politiques linguistiques familiales dans les familles mixtes: études de cas sur la transmission et la non-transmission des langues chinoises dans trois familles franco-chinoises en France. PhD thesis, University of Paris Est.  
<https://www.theses.fr/2019PESC0097>.

---

<sup>1</sup> By 'Global South' I understand 'a metaphor for human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on a worldwide scale, and the resistance that seeks to overcome or weaken it' (Santos, 2011: 39), whatever the geographical location might be. On the necessity of decentring and of taking into account emic perspectives and alternative theoretical approaches (Connell, 2007), see Léglise (2017).

<sup>2</sup> This is the definition Deprez gives in the English abstract of the article. The French text in the body of the article reads: 'Cette politique linguistique familiale se concrétise dans les choix de langues et dans les pratiques langagières au quotidien, ainsi que dans les discours explicites qui sont tenus à leur propos, notamment par les parents' (pp. 35-36).

<sup>3</sup> On further reflection I finally accepted the invitation to speak at the conference, presenting a joint paper with Suat Istanbulu on methodological questions, based on our two approaches to the genealogies, language biographies and language practices over several generations within transnational families.

<sup>4</sup> This is why we have organised several workshops with Judith Purkarthofer, focusing in particular on comparing our research practice in Family Language Policy to Family Language Practices

<sup>5</sup> For example, 'Using the observant participant methodology is itself a weak point. This is an established method in ethnography, not very common with linguistics, though'; 'Were there any problems related to observer's paradox? why not?'