

Hearing Family Voices: Insights from Chinese Family Language Policies in Catalonia for Chinese Heritage Language Education

Escuchar las voces de las familias: perspectivas de las políticas lingüísticas familiares chinas en Cataluña para la educación del chino como lengua de herencia

倾听家庭的声音：加泰罗尼亚中国移民家庭语言政策对华语传承教育的启示

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Abstract: This study explores Chinese heritage language (CHL) education among immigrant families in Catalonia, Spain. Moving beyond a school-centered approach, it adopts a family language policy (FLP) perspective within a home-school ecological framework. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with seven families, it examines how FLP shapes children's CHL learning and parents' perceptions of CHL schools. The findings identify both driving and hindering forces: strong ideologies and effective management promote CHL learning, while conflicting ideologies and inconsistent practices constrain it. Parents' strong reliance on CHL schools reveals a mismatch between their expectations and the institutional capacity of CHL schooling. These challenges suggest that sustaining HL learning requires not only structural coordination between home and school but also greater attention to relational and motivational dimensions of language learning. Overall, this study contributes empirical insights into CHL education in Spain and extends FLP research by foregrounding the home-school dimension.

Key Words: Chinese heritage language education; family language policy; home-school ecology; Chinese immigrant families; Catalonia.

Resumen: Este estudio analiza la educación del chino como lengua de herencia (CHL) entre familias inmigrantes en Cataluña, España. Más allá del enfoque centrado en la escuela, adopta una perspectiva de política lingüística familiar (FLP) dentro de un marco ecológico hogar-escuela. A partir de entrevistas semiestructuradas con siete familias, examina cómo la FLP influye en el aprendizaje del CHL por parte de los niños y en las percepciones de los padres sobre las escuelas de CHL. Los resultados revelan tanto fuerzas impulsoras como limitantes: ideologías sólidas y una gestión eficaz favorecen el aprendizaje del CHL, mientras que ideologías conflictivas y prácticas incoherentes lo dificultan. La fuerte dependencia de las familias respecto a las escuelas de CHL pone de manifiesto un desajuste entre sus expectativas y la capacidad institucional de esta enseñanza. Estos retos sugieren que el mantenimiento del aprendizaje de la lengua de herencia requiere no solo la coordinación estructural entre hogar y escuela, sino también una mayor atención a las dimensiones relacionales y motivacionales del aprendizaje lingüístico. En conjunto, el estudio aporta nuevas evidencias empíricas sobre la educación en CHL en España y amplía la investigación sobre la FLP al destacar la dimensión hogar-escuela.

Palabras clave: educación del chino como lengua de herencia; política lingüística familiar; ecológico hogar-escuela; familias inmigrantes chinas; Cataluña.

摘要: 本研究探讨了西班牙加泰罗尼亚地区中国移民家庭的祖语教育。研究突破了以学校为中心的视角，在家校生态框架下借用了家庭语言政策视角。通过对七个家庭的半结构化访谈，研究考察了家庭语言政策是如何塑造孩子的祖语学习以及家长对华文学校的认知的，研究发现了推力和阻力：强烈的意识形态和有效的管理促进了祖语学习，而冲突的意识形态和不一致的实践则构成了制约。家庭对华文学校的高度依赖，解释了其期待与学校教育能力之间的错位。这些挑战表明，维持祖语学习不仅仅需要家校结构性协调，更需要关注语言学习中的关系和情感维度。总体而言，本研究为西班牙加泰罗尼亚地区的祖语教育提供了实践洞见，并通过凸显家校维度拓展了家庭语言政策的研究领域。

[关键词] 祖语教育；家庭语言政策；家校生态；中国移民家庭；加泰罗尼亚

1. Introduction

In China, Chinese heritage language (CHL) education targeted at Overseas Chinese communities is commonly referred to as Huawen Education (华文教育) (Guo, 2017). What precisely does this concept encompass? Widely recognized definitions, such as those by Jia (1998) and Guo (2015), point toward two main components: the target group (mainly children of Overseas Chinese families) and the teaching content (Chinese language and culture). Significantly, neither of these concepts explicitly specifies the settings or agents through which such education is implemented.

While Huawen Education is traditionally used in Chinese institutional and policy discourse to emphasize the cultural ties between the diaspora community and the homeland (Guo, 2017), CHL education carries significantly different connotations in the immigrant context. CHL situates Chinese as a heritage language (HL) within the dominant linguistic ecology of the host country (Li, 2008). Compared with Huawen Education, the CHL framework focuses more explicitly on issues of language maintenance, bilingual development, and linguistic adaptation in diaspora settings. Meanwhile, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), the term “education” refers to “the action or process of educating or of being educated.” Education is inherently broad in scope and may take the form of formal, non-formal, and informal education (Eshach, 2007). This conceptual openness offers theoretical space for an expanded interpretation of CHL education beyond the classroom. Therefore, to more accurately reflect the linguistic realities of Chinese immigrant communities in Catalonia, this study adopts the concept of CHL education.

Within this perspective, the family emerges as a critical domain (Spolsky, 2004, 2009), as it is often the first and most enduring site of language socialization (Schechter & Bayley, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In migration contexts, where HLs are often absent from mainstream environments, the family becomes a crucial site for children’s exposure to their HL and culture. It provides essential “affective, cognitive, and interactional scaffolding” for HL development (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015: 26). Correspondingly, this study adopts a broader conceptualization of CHL education through integrating the family as a key site of language learning. In particular, the framework of family language policy (FLP) offers a valuable lens for meaningfully incorporating families’ voices into this research.

While CHL education research in Asian countries, especially in Southeast Asia, has become relatively well established (Curdt-Christiansen & Hancock, 2014), due to historical origins, geographical contexts, and institutional

scales, empirical research focusing on Europe remains relatively limited (Extra & Yağmur, 2012). In addition, for a long time, much of the existing literature, especially in China, tends to focus primarily on institution-based domains (e.g., Li & Duff, 2008; Sai, 2006; Suryadinata, 1972), with comparatively less attention given to the perspectives and practices of families. Since Europe has become one of the main destinations for Chinese migration from the late 20th century onwards (Benton & Pieke, 1998), it is crucial to investigate HL education in this region while also incorporating the family dimension. To address these gaps, this study focuses on Spain, a European country with a relatively high concentration of Chinese immigrants, particularly in Catalonia, where this group is most densely settled. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How does the FLP of Chinese immigrant families influence HL education? (2) What insights can be drawn from family perspectives for HL schooling?

2. Analytical framework

2.1 Family language policy

Children's language development and acquisition are complex and dynamic processes that involve various domains, such as society (Hoff, 2006), school (Rosen & Rosen, 1973), and family (De Houwer, 2011). In the context of transnational migration, HLs are often marginalized due to the dominance of the mainstream languages. As a result, HL use is frequently confined to intra-family and intra-ethnic communication. The absence of HL support in mainstream education makes the family the primary site where HL use, maintenance, transmission, and loss take place.

FLP, which refers to the explicit or implicit decisions and practices regarding language use, choice, and planning among family members (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; King et al., 2008; Smith-Christmas, 2016), offers a uniquely situated theoretical lens for examining HL education. Spolsky (2004, 2009) conceptualized FLP as a framework comprising three interrelated components: language ideology, language practice, and language management. Most of the existing research on FLP has been conducted within this tripartite framework.

By shifting the focus of language policy and planning from the nation-state and public space to the private, micro-level space of the family, Spolsky's (2004, 2009) research initially developed FLP as a field. However, the understanding of FLP and its three core components has never been confined to the household alone. This is because the boundaries between

individuals, families, schools, and society are not impermeable; rather, they are fluid and constantly interacting. Scholars such as Curdt-Christiansen (2009), King & Fogle (2013), and others have investigated how macro-level sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors shape and influence FLPs.

Nevertheless, research that integrates perspectives across domains and examines their interactions remains relatively limited, particularly in the context of Chinese immigrants. Leung & Uchikoshi (2012) bridged the domains of home and school, demonstrating that parents' language ideologies and FLPs play an indispensable role in children's language achievement in bilingual classrooms. From the perspectives of both teachers and parents, Curdt-Christiansen (2020) analyzed a series of contrasting views shaped by the ideology of "language gap," revealing both alignment and misalignment between home and school educational practices. These studies offer valuable insights into cross-domain perspectives; however, to better understand how FLP operates beyond the household and intersects with educational institutions, it is necessary to move toward a broader analytical perspective that captures the dynamic interplay between home and school.

In view of this, it is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of the overall landscape of CHL schools in Catalonia, as well as the social context in which they have emerged and developed, to better explore their role in HL maintenance.

2.2 The conceptualization of home-school ecology

To better interpret the home-school dynamics in CHL education, this study conceptualizes a home-school ecology by synthesizing Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Schieffelin and Ochs's (1986) language socialization theory. This approach acknowledges that FLP is deeply embedded within a complex ecology of social, political, educational, and cultural factors (Spolsky, 2004; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009).

Within this ecological framework, home and school constitute two distinct but integrated systems for children's language socialization. At the family level, language socialization involves not only the acquisition of language skills but also a dynamic process through which children gain cultural identity, values, and customs through social interactions with family members (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011; Schecter & Bayley, 2004). Within this system, parents' language ideology and the home literacy environment lay the foundation for children's HL development (Chen et al., 2021; Li, 2008). Meanwhile, the interaction and collaboration between home and school constitute another crucial system in children's educational attainment

(Epstein et al., 2018). Ideally, families and CHL schools should form complementary relationships in children's HL socialization. Schools provide formal literacy instruction, while families offer immersive conversational environments and emotional support (Feiler et al., 2007). However, within the social realities of immigrant families, a widespread home-school mismatch often undermines the effectiveness of HL socialization. Research indicates that after enrolling children in CHL schools, many immigrant parents tend to outsource the task of HL maintenance. They often abandon regular family reading routines, reducing their involvement to merely supervising weekend Chinese homework (Shen & Jiang, 2023). This transition to dependency disrupts the continuous process of HL socialization. Furthermore, research highlights a disconnect between teaching methods and emotional engagement: while parents highly value the role of CHL schools, children often exhibit resistance (Hu & Yagmur, 2024; Liang & Shin, 2021). Thus, examining CHL education through this ecological lens reveals that the fragility of HL maintenance is closely tied to systemic friction between home and school. Achieving successful HL socialization requires overcoming this misalignment by establishing collaborative partnerships.

Therefore, this paper aims to explore, from the family dimension, how households perceive such collaborative relationships and the role of the school system in CHL education. At the same time, from an ecological perspective, the home-school dynamics cannot be understood in isolation from their broader sociolinguistic and institutional environments, which will be outlined in the following section.

3. Context of the study

3.1 Sociolinguistic setting of Catalonia, Spain

Catalonia, located in the northeastern part of the Iberian Peninsula, is one of Spain's autonomous communities and the most economically prosperous region. The *Spanish Constitution* (1978) establishes Castilian as the official language of the state, while other languages such as Basque or Catalan shall also be official in the respective Autonomous Communities in accordance with their statutes. In Catalonia, the Autonomous Government has made significant efforts to achieve linguistic autonomy. Since the end of the Franco era, Catalonia has pursued an educational policy of teaching Catalan to all children (Miller & Miller, 1996). The *Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia* (1979) describes Catalan as its own language, "la llengua pròpia", and declares that both Catalan and Castilian are official languages, stating:

The Generalitat shall guarantee the normal and official use of both languages, shall adopt the necessary measures to ensure their knowledge and shall create the conditions to achieve their equality in terms of the rights and duties of the citizens of Catalonia. (Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, 1979: 2)

In 1983, the Act on Language Normalization in Catalonia further reinforced the role of Catalan in education (Pujolar, 2010), stating that “Educational establishments at all levels shall make Catalan the vehicle of normal expression in their educational and administrative activities, both internally and externally” (p. 10). To this day, Castilian and Catalan constitute the region’s linguistic duality. This gives Catalonia a unique form of formal bilingualism compared with the “zonal monolingualism” that prevails in many multilingual Western countries (Shabad & Gunther, 1982).

However, with the influx of international immigrants, foreign-born residents have brought their own linguistic repertoires, making Catalonia a culturally and linguistically rich and diverse society (Vallejo & Tonioli, 2023). According to data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE, 2025), 21.9% of foreign residents in Spain live in Catalonia, making it the autonomous community with the largest foreign population in the country. Immigrants’ countries of origin are highly diverse, with Morocco, Romania, Italy, Colombia, and China accounting for the top five (Instituto de Estadística de Cataluña [Idescat], 2024).

While promoting the learning of Catalan, it is also vital to preserve HLs of linguistic minorities, which are usually immigrants (Villarroya, 2011). This effort is essential for supporting equity in education and ensuring equal opportunities (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013). In this context, at the close of the 2003-2004 school year, the government of Catalonia initiated the Language and Social Cohesion Plan (Costa, 2006). This plan recognizes the home languages of immigrant students and integrates them into teaching practices. By 2018, with the introduction of the Language Model of the Catalan Education System, multilingualism and multiculturalism became educational pillars in Catalonia (Riera-Gil, 2022). Under these policy initiatives, HLs and immigrants’ cultural knowledge gained support and protection.

3.2 Chinese communities and CHL education in Catalonia

The development of CHL education in Catalonia is closely linked to the growth of the Chinese immigrant population. Since the late twentieth

century, Catalonia has become one of the main destinations for Chinese immigrants in Spain (Beltrán Antolín, 1997).

As the Chinese immigrant population has grown, the need to provide HL education for younger generations has become increasingly urgent. The first CHL school, 巴塞罗那华侨子弟学校, was established in 1995 in response to this demand (Li, 1997). Since then, CHL schools in the region have grown in number and scale. As shown in Figure 1, CHL schools have spread from Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, to various other towns and municipalities across the region. This spatial distribution largely corresponds to the settlement patterns of Chinese immigrant communities in Catalonia. Many CHL schools are located in areas with relatively high concentrations of Chinese residents and active Chinese commercial networks, such as Barcelona and Mataró.

However, this trend also raises a key concern: how can effective CHL education be provided in areas where Chinese immigrants are scattered and small in number? In such contexts, families continue to play a crucial role in children's HL learning and intergenerational transmission. This is an issue that warrants careful consideration.

At the same time, many Chinese immigrants in Catalonia are engaged in retail, catering, or other service sectors (Beltrán Antolín & Sáiz López, 2001). These industries are particularly suited to self-employment under Spanish legal and economic structures. As Subarroca Ferrer (2020) points out, Chinese immigrants constitute the largest group of self-employed individuals among immigrant communities, with 53% of Chinese social security contributors self-employed. This model of small family-run businesses remains dominant among first- and second-generation Chinese immigrants. From the early stages of migration, when family networks supported newcomers, to the current economic and educational landscape, family continues to serve as the central pillar of immigrant life.

Therefore, any examination of CHL education in Catalonia must take into account the vital role of the family.

4. Methodology

This study is part of a doctoral ethnographic research project focusing on FLPs of Chinese immigrant families in Catalonia. By adopting a qualitative approach, this study aims to explore how FLP within households influences children's HL learning and how parental perspectives contribute to broader discussions on CHL education in diaspora contexts.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure they met several key inclusion criteria: all were first-generation Chinese immigrants, had been residents of Catalonia for a significant period, and were raising school-aged child(ren). During the period from September 2024 to March 2025, 10 families were selected through the researcher's social networks, primarily based on prior experience with a CHL school, and through field visits to neighborhoods to identify potential participants. Among them, seven families explicitly addressed school-related issues in their narratives, which were closely aligned with the focus of this research.

Although the study is based on a modest sample of seven families, this aligns with qualitative and ethnographic traditions in FLP research (e.g., Bai & Young, 2024; Tang & Zheng, 2023). The purpose of this sampling was not to ensure statistical generalizability of the results across all Chinese immigrant families in Catalonia. Instead, it was to provide a thick description of the nuanced language ideologies and practices related to CHL education within a specific subgroup. Furthermore, as first-generation immigrant families play a central role in HL transmission, their baseline FLP serves as an important point of entry for understanding the dynamics of the home-school ecosystem in diaspora contexts.

Table 1: The socio-demographic profiles of families

Code	Role	Nationality	Years of residence	Children's age(s)
F1	Mother	Chinese	20	17/16/14
F2	Mother	Chinese	13	16/11/7
F3	Mother	Chinese	20	22/11
F4	Mother	Chinese	18	11/8
F5	Father	Chinese	20	14/13/11
F6	Mother	Chinese	20	13/10
F7	Mother	Chinese	17	15/14

Data collection was primarily through semi-structured interviews, with at least one parent or caregiver per family interviewed. This methodological choice was intentional. As Spolsky (2009) and Curdt-Christiansen (2009) noted, parents act as the primary decision-makers and architects of FLP. Therefore, exploring parents' subjective perceptions and lived experiences provides critical, first-hand insights into the underlying ideologies driving their language practices and language management. While this parent-centric approach focuses on one side of the home-school ecology, it is an

essential first step to understanding how families navigate and respond to the broader educational environment.

The interviews were typically no more than 30 minutes long and held at times and locations convenient for participants to avoid causing them distress and encourage natural conversation. In carefully selected cases, home visits and observation sessions were also conducted to gain a richer understanding of language use in ordinary home environments. All interviews were transcribed and subsequently translated into English for publication purposes. Data were processed using NVivo and analyzed through a two-phase procedure. In the first phase, based on Spolsky's FLP framework, applicable statements on HL education regarding language ideology, language practice, and language management were coded and thematically grouped. Second, segments of the interviews during which parents expressed views, worries, or suggestions regarding CHL education were isolated and thematically classified to identify trends and implications relevant to CHL education.

The study adhered strictly to the Code of Good Conduct signed as part of the doctoral program in education at UAB. All participants were verbally informed of the study procedures and given written information sheets explaining details, such as the objectives, their rights, and so on. The ethical issues of the programme were reviewed and reaffirmed during the annual panel for doctoral years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025. All identifying information has been anonymized, and all data have been securely maintained by the researcher in line with institutional regulations in order to respect participants' confidentiality and anonymity.

5. Findings

This section is organized into two main parts, each addressing one of the two core research questions.

5.1 Research Question 1: How does the FLP of Chinese immigrant families influence HL education?

5.1.1 Driving forces: strong ideologies and effective management

(a) Strong and coherent HL ideologies

One of the most salient driving forces emerging from the interviews is the strong language ideologies parents hold regarding HL maintenance and education. When asked why learning Chinese matters, some parents responded:

Because we are Chinese, and his entire family is Chinese (F6)
 Of course, it's important; we are Chinese, so naturally it matters.
 (F5)

These statements treat Chinese as an inherent ethnic symbol of being Chinese, implying that language is an inseparable part of ethnic identity. This view, which directly links “learning Chinese” with “being Chinese,” exemplifies a typical essentialist conception of language. Beyond identity, parents also recognized Chinese for its instrumental value and future resource value. For instance, one parent explained:

Because first and foremost, I think it's fundamental for Chinese people to learn it. Moreover, Chinese is very important nowadays, like we are developing very well in China, I believe Chinese is crucial. You must learn it—not just speak it, but write it too. You need to master everything. (F4)

F4 values Chinese not only for its cultural relevance, but also situates HL learning within broader geopolitical and socioeconomic narratives by pointing to China's rapid development. Consequently, she emphasizes that children “need to master everything,” reflecting her belief that full linguistic competence, including literacy, is essential for meaningful participation in Chinese-speaking contexts. This necessity-oriented view of learning Chinese was also mentioned by other parents in the study.

Chinese, Chinese we must learn it; we really must learn Chinese. For us, at home, we all speak Chinese, and I feel Chinese is very important. And then when (we) back to China, last year I took the younger one back, she basically recognized all the characters, and she could understand all those newspapers and magazines. It was like that, yes, Chinese must be learned.
 (F3)

In F3's statement, she emphasized multiple times that “Chinese must be learned”, reflecting a normative stance positioning HL learning as a moral or familial obligation. Furthermore, her account of returning to China shows how transnational experiences serve as ideological reinforcement for HL learning.

(b) Effective and sustained HL management

The strong ideological foundation underpins parental support for HL. In turn, it further shapes their language management. Some families invest in

providing material resources and maintaining a Chinese-rich environment. As F7 described:

(We) buy books, yes, we buy books for them to read a lot, read extensively. She has to read articles with me every day... Sometimes it is idiom stories, sometimes “xiehoyu (Chinese two-part allegorical sayings)” stories, sometimes their Chinese textbooks, just reading these simple ones. (F2)

We always have Chinese books. We create this environment for her, and we also take her back to China. Because after all, if you’re learning it but have no real contact, it’s not the same. We do all of these things. They have a pretty good sense of their identity as Chinese. Her Chinese, Spanish, and Catalan have all reached native level. (F7)

F2 and F7 both described substantial efforts, including providing Chinese books and reading with the child. These efforts reflect a deliberate attempt to construct a micro-level Chinese linguistic environment within the family. However, not all parents can sustain such intensive efforts. For many families in this study, the more feasible and pragmatic strategy is to enroll their children in Chinese HL schools. As some parents noted:

(We) simply have to send (the children) to Chinese school. Occasionally push (them) to do Chinese homework... No Chinese television either, nothing else, absolutely nothing. (F1)

Take my eldest child, for example; she was born in 2009. I sent her to Chinese school at age four... Now she’s fifteen and has studied for eleven years. (F2)

We generally are very busy and do not have the time to teach them. (we) just send them to tutorial classes sometimes. (F5)

From parents’ discourses, it is evident that CHL schools are not only practical but, for many parents, constitute the sole consistent language management. Several parents described that they do not employ additional measures aside from weekend CHL schools. Consequently, weekend CHL schools in Catalonia serve as essential extensions of family language management. By offering a structured learning environment and opportunities to interact with other Chinese peers, these schools foster a shared Chinese cultural community. As such, they contribute significantly to sustaining HL development in contexts where home-based management is constrained.

5.1.2 Hindering forces: conflicting ideologies and inconsistent practices

(a) Conflicting ideologies: negotiating expectations and child agency

In contrast to the strong ideological drive toward HL education, several hindering forces also emerged. First, conflicting language ideologies often arise among family members. As F1 mentioned:

His father is also very casual, his father is more casual. (children's) Chinese is really not good. His father says it's okay, it's okay not to learn. It's like that. I would think that Chinese is very important, and his dad would think that it's okay.

This illustrates an intra-parental ideological divergence. Such differences weaken the coherence of family language expectations and complicate parental attempts to present a unified stance. However, this pattern is less visible in the dataset; a more prominent trend was tension between children and parents.

I'm quite accommodating towards the children. If they don't want to study (Chinese), I don't force them. It's not compulsory learning. (F1)

In F1's statement, she adopts an accommodating stance toward her children's preferences. For parents like F1, who adhere to child-centered parenting philosophies, HL learning is at risk of being postponed or interrupted. These tensions intensify during adolescence, when young people exercise greater agency. As F2 described:

Her father and I feel that her (the oldest child) Chinese is still insufficient, while we hope she would continue learning... Because she doesn't want to at all, she doesn't want to, so all we can do is respect her. (F2)

Here, the child places her sense of autonomy and personal preference above HL learning, and her unwillingness ultimately overrides parental aspirations, leaving the parents with no choice but to compromise. This illustrates how powerful children's linguistic agency can be; it is strong enough to reshape the family's HL trajectory. F7's account further reinforces this point, as she noted:

Children today possess strong individuality. "You cannot dictate what I do; I am an independent person and deserve respect." (F7)

Such assertions of autonomy indicate that children are no longer passive recipients of FLPs proposed by parents, but active agents who negotiate, reshape, and sometimes resist the linguistic ideologies imposed on them.

Another dimension of ideological tension arises from children's simultaneous recognition of the HL value and their refusal to engage in the learning process. As F1 described:

The children know now, and the teacher also will say, they also know that the Chinese is important, but they don't want to learn it. It's hard, it is too hard to learn Chinese. They know that Chinese is important, they can listen to what I say, but they think it's too hard. (F1)

This statement shows a subtle but significant form of ideological conflict: children agree with the value assigned to HL, but refuse to make efforts to achieve it. In other words, what they believe and what they are willing to attempt do not correspond.

(b) Inconsistent practices: everyday routines, and the fragility of HL maintenance

Aside from ideological conflicts, inconsistencies in everyday language practices constitute another hindering factor. Even if parents hold strong HL ideologies, it does not always mean that the daily implementation of these beliefs can proceed smoothly. As F1 noted:

We are Chinese, our roots are in China... but because his father is accustomed to it, he is the one who picks him up and drops him off. If his father consistently speaks Spanish, the child will naturally gravitate toward Spanish.... We all recognize the importance of Chinese culture, but his father simply can't break the habit. (F1)

This statement shows that although F1 emphasizes "roots in China" and values the Chinese language and culture, the family's internal language practices still deviate, reflecting members' linguistic habits, caregiving arrangements, and everyday interaction patterns. She further explained:

I didn't make much effort; we were just saying it with our mouths. And then the Chinese television I watched most, I would turn it on for them. If they didn't watch and walked away, I just let them. I sat there watching by myself, that's all.

Her remarks suggest that she is aware of what could benefit HL development, while maintaining consistent language practices is not easy. Parents often retreat in the face of children's engagement.

Of great relevance here is the fact that children's limited HL proficiency can trigger a self-reinforcing cycle that further weakens HL practices.

When we are at home, the basic situation is that I speak Chinese to the child, but the child may understand or sometimes can't understand, so we can only speak Spanish to him. So when we speak Chinese to him, he responds by speaking Spanish. Because we understand, we don't force him too much to speak and respond to you in Chinese, but this goes on to say that if a child responds to you in Chinese, then his language will definitely grow; it will get better. (F6)

This account shows typical practice-level constraints: the erosion of HL use arises not from ideological disagreement but from the practical need to maintain effective communication in everyday interactions. To keep conversations flowing smoothly, parents often have to compromise their commitment to using the HL. Meanwhile, the child naturally develops a habitual preference for responding in Spanish, further reinforcing this shift and reducing any motivation to persist with Chinese.

Taken together, these factors demonstrate that HL maintenance within the family is an ongoing process requiring negotiation, adjustment, and compromise rather than an outcome achievable through ideology alone.

5.2 Research Question 2: What insights can be drawn from family perspectives for HL schooling?

From the previous section, it becomes clear that Chinese HL schools are widely recognized by parents as the most effective language management and serve as essential partners in sustaining the continuity of HL learning. Many challenges within the family, such as limited Chinese input, inconsistent language practices, and children's resistance to learning, often require support from external educational institutions, such as Chinese HL schools.

Given this context, examining parents' perspectives on the aspects of Chinese HL schools that they value most becomes particularly important. These views not only reflect families' genuine needs in HL education but also offer practical insights for the further development of Chinese HL schools.

5.2.1 Ensuring stable and competent teaching

Across parents' discourse regarding CHL schools, teachers were the most frequently mentioned aspect. In parents' accounts, the quality of teaching emerged as a central concern, particularly the need for both stable and competent teachers. As F6 explained:

Previously, we had a Chinese school at X, but... the teachers seemed to change all the time. I didn't like it... Suddenly, at the next grade, the teacher changed again. I feel this is not good for the child. (F6)

When he was learning at X, he absorbed nothing... later, the teacher changed to a younger one. I can't even remember her name, but it still didn't work. He regressed, and he wouldn't even do the homework anymore. (F6)

These accounts reveal the mother's strong dissatisfaction with frequent teacher turnover. F6's experience shows that instability in teaching staff often leads to learning stagnation, students "absorb nothing", and negatively affects learning behavior, such as refusing to complete homework. Ultimately, this prevents children from developing a sense of trust and security with their teacher, which is crucial for sustaining their willingness to remain engaged in the HL schools.

Beyond stability, F6's comments also implicitly raise concerns about teacher competence, an issue echoed by other parents, such as F2.

We really need the teachers at CHL school to give us some help. Because we are not professionals in education, right? So all we can do is, what (the teacher) teaches at school, then when (the child) come back and we go through it with the child again, learning together. (F2)

This perspective highlights F2's reliance on and trust in teachers. By emphasizing that they are "not professionals in education," she implicitly acknowledges the teachers' professional competence. It also reveals how HL learning at home is organized around what the teacher delivers in class. This dynamic places considerable responsibility on teachers' pedagogical skills, as effective classroom instruction becomes the foundation for productive home-based learning. Only with stable and competent teaching can such a virtuous cycle be sustained.

5.2.2 Adopting motivational teaching strategies

Beyond teacher stability, parents also widely emphasize that motivational teaching plays a decisive role in enhancing children's interest and engagement in learning. For children studying Chinese on weekends,

learning motivation is particularly fragile, while parents have keenly observed the impact of school incentives on their children.

Actually, children who take the initiative to study are quite rare. My eldest is a bit better. Once she tasted the sweetness of learning, she became more driven. For example, I remember she was probably in the second grade when the (Chinese) school put out a call to write a poem for a competition... She won second prize, second prize, and the principal even gave her a set of calligraphy brushes. A whole set. From then on, whenever there were writing competitions or anything like that, we would participate. Basically, we took part in almost all of them. (F2)

In F2's description, the recognition her child received from the teacher and the school sparked her sense of achievement and affirmation, which in turn sustained her high level of engagement in subsequent activities. This complete chain clearly shows how positive experiences and external encouragement can significantly influence a child's intrinsic motivation. The fact that the mother can still recall this event, which happened a decade ago, suggests that it constituted an important turning point in the child's learning trajectory.

A similar emphasis on motivation appeared in other families' narratives, for example, F3 further highlights the importance of positive reinforcement in sustaining children's motivation, noting:

For children, there is another thing: you have to praise them. Really, this is very important. (F3)

This emphasis on encouragement is further illustrated in F6's account of how her child's learning motivation changed over time:

When he was in primary school, every teacher said he was lazy and didn't like studying. But in middle school, it changed, it changed. The teacher was willing to communicate with him, help him with extra study after class, give him tutoring, after-class tutoring, and then he started to understand more about learning and became interested. So, one day I asked him, "Why are you studying well now, but not before?" And his response was, "Because I am interested." (F6)

F6's narrative clearly shows how a child's intrinsic motivation can be awakened when teachers offer sustained support and relational teaching.

Such examples highlight parents' broader belief that children respond strongly to positive, supportive teaching practices. Consequently, CHL schools should provide more positive feedback and adopt more motivational pedagogical strategies to enhance students' self-efficacy and sense of achievement.

5.2.3 Strengthening home-school alignment

As shown in the earlier excerpts, parents generally regard CHL schools as the most important language management. F6 explicitly stated:

Schools are the most important, and Chinese schools are the most important. Because of the teacher, at least during those hours, the teacher speaks Chinese to him. (F6)

This statement indicates that, in parents' expectations and assumptions, CHL schools provide an immersive Chinese-speaking environment. However, given the peer effect and the author's prior part-time experience at one CHL school, the actual linguistic environment may not entirely align with parents' perceptions; the use of the mainstream dominant language, Spanish, is far from rare within the school.

This suggests that schools must recognize that, from a parental perspective, they are not merely supplementary educational institutions but the primary sites where many children learn and use Chinese. Therefore, it is essential for schools to explore how to increase the weight of Chinese input and output, create a fully Chinese environment, and make efficient use of the limited instructional time available.

At the same time, schools also need to recognize that parents' expectations of relying solely on CHL schools for language learning are somewhat utopian, reflecting an overemphasis on the role of schools and an underestimation of the importance of home practices. For example:

We only occasionally push them to do Chinese homework... we don't force them every day, so I won't force the child to study. (F1)

We don't really tutor her or anything. Because we work in the restaurant business and are very busy, I often end up neglecting her, to be honest. (F4)

Such statements indicate that many families engage in only minimal home-based language management and place most of the responsibility on the school. In F1's case, she does not consistently supervise the completion of Chinese homework. Since CHL schools are not part of the local formal education system, teachers and schools have limited regulatory authority.

It is therefore foreseeable that students' learning inertia will gradually increase under such circumstances. Meanwhile, F4 highlights a broader social reality: in Catalonia, many Chinese immigrant parents work in highly demanding sectors such as retail, fruit shops, bars, and restaurants, leaving them little time to monitor their children's academic progress. This concern is also noted by Shi (2024). As a result, learning often becomes a matter left primarily to the school and the children.

However, these perspectives overlook a critical fact: CHL schools operate only once a week. For most of the week, children spend far more time at home, where families bear greater responsibility for sustaining exposure to and practice in Chinese. The gap between parents' expectations and the actual limitations of HL schooling reveals a notable inconsistency in perceived school-family roles. This mismatch underscores the urgent need for stronger home-school collaboration in HL education.

For schools, this means they should clearly convey to parents that continued family language investment (such as accompanying students, creating a Chinese environment, etc.) is an indispensable part of improving HL proficiency; on the other hand, schools can also strengthen school-family cooperation through parent workshops, family language policy guidance, parent-child activities, etc. Such measures can help build a more coherent, mutually supportive language-learning ecosystem.

6. Discussion

This study, situated within the FLP framework, discusses the findings through the theoretical lens of "home-school ecology." By integrating Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory with Schieffelin and Ochs's (1986) language socialization theory, this study explores how FLP, children's agency, and families' dependence on CHL schools interact across different ecological levels to jointly shape pathways for HL education. The findings reveal that HL education is not only a school-based instructional activity but also a complex socio-cultural process shaped jointly by families and schools. This finding echoes prior research emphasizing the central role of families in children's language socialization (Schwartz, 2010; Smith-Christmas, 2016) while also revealing structural tensions within the home-school ecology.

From an ecological perspective, this study reveals significant vulnerability within the family in sustaining continuous HL socialization. First, findings indicate that Chinese immigrant parents hold highly consistent, strongly positive HL ideologies, viewing Chinese as both a core

identity symbol and a future-oriented asset. This is echoed in findings from other Chinese diasporic communities (e.g., Huang & Liao, 2024; Liang & Shin, 2021). Driven by such ideologies, some parents successfully translate their beliefs into long-term, sustained HL management, increasing the likelihood that their children achieve higher proficiency in HL.

However, this study also reveals that in practice, FLP can function as both a driving force and a hindering force. As Curdt-Christiansen (2016) has pointed out, linguistic ideology does not necessarily translate into effective language practices and management. Despite parents' strong commitment to CHL, maintaining consistent language norms in family interactions often proves challenging. Conflicting ideologies and inconsistent language practices within households further demonstrate that FLP is not static but is constantly negotiated, aligning with recent critical interpretations that highlight its dynamic and fluid nature (Curd-Christiansen & Lanza, 2018).

This instability at the practical level is further exacerbated by pressures from the sociolinguistic environment. Within a Catalan-Spanish-dominated context, the assimilative pressures of the local languages find their way into the home through children's language choices. Research indicates that children's language preferences and resistance behaviors play a significant role in family language negotiation. When confronted with children's refusal to use CHL or strong insistence on using the local languages, parents often adopt compromise strategies to avoid parent-child conflict (Wang, 2023; Wang & Hamid, 2024). Such compromises undermine the family's function as the core domain for language socialization (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011).

From a language socialization theory perspective, language acquisition relies on sustained, immersive social interaction (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011). When family language use fails to remain consistent, the language socialization process is disrupted. Therefore, this study suggests that the vulnerability of the family system stems not from inadequate ideology but from the structural gap between ideology and practice (Curd-Christiansen, Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Shen & Jiang, 2023), as well as the increasing salience of children's agency under macro-level assimilation pressures (Fogle & King, 2013; Revis, 2016). These findings indicate that FLP is not merely a matter of relations among ideology, practice, and management, but rather a dynamic negotiation process embedded within ecological structures (Spolsky, 2004; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009).

Against the backdrop of weakened HL education and socialization within families, parents increasingly enroll their children in CHL schools seeking assistance and support, thereby reinforcing the mediating system between home and school (Hu & Yagmur, 2024). However, this study finds that, in

practice, this strategy often gives rise to a phenomenon of “responsibility outsourcing”. Faced with time constraints, limited educational resources, and the frustration of children’s resistance to language learning, parents gradually shift the primary responsibility for HL maintenance to CHL schools (Shen & Jiang, 2023). However, this transfer of responsibility creates a mismatch between parents’ expectations and the institutional capacity of CHL schools. CHL schools in Catalonia predominantly operate on a weekend schedule, offering only a few hours of instruction per week (Beltrán Antolín & Sáiz López, 2001). Our research indicates that these schools often lack stable support and resources, making it difficult to fulfill comprehensive language socialization functions. When schools, as mediating systems, are burdened by expectations that exceed their institutional capacity, a structural imbalance emerges within the home-school ecology.

Despite these constraints, parents’ perspectives on CHL schools, whether emphasizing teacher stability, enhancing instructional capacity, or highlighting the positive impact of motivational strategies, reveal the regulatory role of emotional and relational factors within the ecosystem. Under the dual conditions of unstable home-language practices and limited classroom time, learning motivation emerges as a critical variable in maintaining the continuity of HL learning. These perspectives suggest that relational teaching in CHL schools fulfills functions beyond mere knowledge transmission. To some extent, teachers and CHL school instruction compensate for insufficient language socialization within the family (Huang & Liao, 2024). By establishing positive emotional connections, they enhance children’s identification with and engagement in language learning. In this sense, the findings extend existing FLP research by highlighting that HL maintenance is not only a structural or institutional issue but also an emotional and relational process embedded in everyday educational interactions (Curd-Christiansen & Iwaniec, 2023).

7. Conclusion

By taking Chinese immigrant families in Catalonia as the point of entry, this study addresses two central questions: how FLP shapes children’s HL learning, and what insights family perspectives offer for CHL schooling. While the findings confirm the pivotal role of families as both drivers and obstacles, they also show that HL education operates within a broader ecology in which home and school are deeply intertwined. In particular, the study reveals a structural gap between parents’ language ideology and everyday language practice, which weakens the continuity of family-

based language socialization. On this basis, the study extends FLP research into the schooling domain and highlights an underexplored phenomenon: parents' substantial dependence on CHL schools and the emerging trend to "outsource" HL education. This outsourcing tendency reflects a structural mismatch between parents' expectations and the institutional capacity of weekend CHL schools, calling for a re-examination of HL education through a collaborative home-school lens. These insights provide new empirical contributions to understanding CHL practices within the Spanish context.

Despite these contributions, the study has certain limitations. First, given the small sample size of seven first-generation families, the findings are context-specific and do not support statistical generalization to the broader Chinese immigrant population in Catalonia. Second, the current study relies predominantly on parental self-reports, which may not fully capture the complex dynamics of children's agency and their actual language practices. Furthermore, the absence of school-level data limits the ability to present a fully bidirectional view of the home-school ecology. Further research should incorporate school-side perspectives to more fully capture how families and schools negotiate responsibilities, allocate roles, and jointly undertake HL education.

Nevertheless, the study holds important practical implications for Chinese immigrant families, CHL schools, and practicing educators. The family-based insights set out here not only enrich our understanding of CHL education but also offer valuable guidance for improving instructional practices and strengthening models of home-school collaboration. In particular, the findings suggest that sustaining HL learning requires not only structural coordination between home and school, but also greater attention to relational and motivational dimensions of language learning, through which teachers and families jointly support children's CHL learning and maintenance.

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