

## ***Book Review***

**Successful Family Language Policy: Parents, Children and Educators in Interaction**, edited by **Mila Schwartz and Anna Verschik (2013)**. **Multilingual Matters, 295 pages. Hardcover 129,00 €, eBook 99,00 €, ISBN: 978-94-007-7753-8.**

*Francesca Walls*  
*Universitat de Barcelona, Spain*

*Review received 23 September 2015; accepted 28 September 2015, final version 30 September 2015*  
*DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.657>*

---

*Successful Family Language Policy* pays testimony to the recent upsurge in interest in the area of family language policy (FLP), also referred to as family language management. Employing King et al's definition of the field as "an integrated overview of research on how languages are managed, learned and negotiated within families" (King, Fogle, & Logan Terry, 2008: 907), in this volume Schwartz and Verschik compile contributions that reflect the broad scope that this research area covers. Following Spolsky's (2009) tripartite definition of language policy/management, the different contributors include analysis of family members' language use and interaction orders (language practices), discourses about language (language beliefs) and strategies for maintaining or developing particular language skills (language management strategies).

In fact, Schwartz and Verschik extend King et al's definition to reflect more recent developments in the field by including chapters that deal with the intersection between 'within family' management, learning and negotiation and external influences. Part 1 focusses on interactions between the family and school, assessing parental motivations for bilingual education programmes and the role of complementary classes in supporting additive bilingual development. Part 2 in particular includes an awareness of the impact of the discourses in circulation in the location in which the children are being brought up on shaping both FLP and bilingual identities and experience, whilst contributions in part 3 take external influences into account when describing the ongoing negotiations and adaptations of FLP over the course of the children's upbringing. As such, various perspectives on the phenomenon are incorporated in the volume, responding to calls to account for children's and educators' experiences as well as those of parents.

The common aim of all contributors is to answer one of the field's most crucial and frequently posed questions: what makes some families able to achieve bi- or multilingual linguistic goals successfully and what doesn't? Many different factors are called into account

for the different degrees of success between families, including family-internal language practices and interaction orders as well as the external affordances of the context, its socio-political backdrop and the perceived status, prestige and size of the different languages at stake. In addition, Schwartz and Verschik point out the many challenges often encountered by families endeavouring towards bi- or multilingual outcomes, including identity conflicts, temporal pressures, conflicting language and non-language related demands, and the potentially negative effects of state-level language policy.

In their aim to assess how different family typologies achieve success in such a wide variety of complex contexts, Schwartz and Verschik raise important questions as to how success should be defined. They ask if our understanding of the notion of success is only applicable to examples in which children are perceived to attain balanced bilingualism and whether more flexible approaches might be considered more achievable, appropriate and ultimately successful.

Whether successful or not, this volume and other work in the field (among others Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; King & Fogle, 2006) suggest that raising bi- or multilingual children is the conscious and explicit goal of increasing numbers of parents and is clearly considered to be an advantageous and desirable outcome for children. In their introduction, Schwartz and Verschik indicate a desire to apply findings related to this important question towards a better understanding of how to support others aiming to achieve this goal, giving voice to an emerging call from researchers in the field to provide practical advice that is readily applicable to different situations.

Part 1, entitled *Family Language Ideology, Practices and Management in Interaction with Mainstream Education and Bilingual Education*, focusses on three educational settings. As such, it does not correspond to a restricted definition of FLP and overlaps with the field of bilingual education.

Chapters 2 and 3 detail the results of a common research project looking at the motivations parents from monolingual families have for choosing bilingual educational options in Hebrew-Arabic kindergartens in Israel and Finnish-Russian pre-schools and kindergartens in a monolingual area of Finland. Two different profiles are identified, with speakers of the main societal language seeking to give their children a headstart in a foreign language, while those maintaining a home language hope for their children to become competent in the main societal language simultaneously. In the Israeli context, Schwartz,

Moin and Klayle explore further goals of mutual understanding and tolerance between groups as motivating factors for bilingualism among children.

Chapter 4 explores the contact of migrant populations with one school in the United Kingdom. Conteh, Riasat and Begum cite the reasons representatives of the school under study give to explain their difficulties in providing home language support. The necessity of improving students' English language skills in order to achieve attainment targets is cited as the main reason for this. The authors emphasise the value of complementary classes that draw on family-school-community "funds of knowledge" in supporting bilingual identity construction processes, calling for a greater link to be made between these domains.

The title of Part 2 refers to the multiplicity of actors and influences both within and outside of the home: *Family Language Policy as a Joint Social Venture*. The four chapters in this section focus on the experiences of migrant parents or their children, taking into account the socio-political context in which they find themselves.

Chapters 5 and 7 look at cases of exogamous couples (combined of a societal language speaker and migrant non-societal language speaker) raising children in Australia and Tallinn, Estonia respectively. In chapter 5 Yates and Terraschke report qualitative data from the second phase of a national survey, involving interviews with 13 migrant parents, and explore various possible factors that might account for their comparative degrees of success in transmitting the home language of the migrant parent. They conclude that the values attributed to the particular languages involved (both official and non-official in the migrants' home countries) in and outside of the home are important, highlighting the fact that all those who attained full success were those whose home language was the majority, official language of their home country. Also indicating a key role for the comparative status of the languages at stake, in chapter 7 Doyle reports all 11 case studies to be successful, citing the status of Estonian as a medium-sized language, coupled with the multilingual nature of the city of Tallinn, as significant motivating factors in promoting bilingualism.

Chapter 6 presents the situation of the Russian-speaking population in Lithuania. Ramonienė seeks a qualitative explanation of recent survey results that indicate an increase in the use of Lithuanian amongst both Lithuanians and the Russian-speaking population of Lithuania. Through interview analysis, Ramonienė explains an apparent change of attitudes towards bilingualism amongst Russian speakers and an increased willingness to send children to bilingual schools.

In chapter 8, Fogle focusses on the perceptions of adolescents who self-identify as bilinguals from the South of the United States. She notes how conceptualisations of place are important in the adolescents' constructions of their own bilingual identities. They reported little explicit awareness of the home language strategies enacted by parents during their childhood, instead focussing their accounts on their own social experience outside the home. The long-term perspective provided by the adolescents reflecting on their own experiences in hindsight allowed the informants to voice what they perceived to be most important in constructing not only their bilingual, but also their racial identity (which the author observes are often interconnected).

Finally Part 3, *The Interaction Patterns Between Parents & Their Children in their Shared Language and Literacy Practices*, focusses on interaction between family members as a reflection of FLP in constant negotiation and flux. In all of the chapters, children's agency in influencing family language practices is evident, as examples of real interaction point to departures from stated practices and plans in response to different challenges.

Chapter 9 is a welcome introduction to research on bilingual and bimodal language practices (in spoken and signed language) involving deaf parents and hearing children alongside studies on speaking families. Pizer observes that full fluency in ASL is perhaps not a realistic goal for hearing children of deaf parents, and argues that strategies allowing for unimpeded communication between all family members should be considered successful.

The same idea of flexibility in defining success appears in Kopeliovich's contribution in chapter 11. She describes the often psychological and emotional difficulties of raising children bilingually in challenging circumstances and the need for parents sometimes to adapt their ideals and plans to suit the individual needs or personalities of different children. In this rare account of a four children family over a long time span, several adaptations and adjustments can be appreciated.

Adaptations to parents' plans are also documented in chapter 10, where Palviainen and Boyd reaffirm the idea of FLP being in flux. Their reference to "unity in discourse" reveals the common motivations behind bilingual upbringing and employing the OPOL strategy that were voiced by the parents. However, adaptations of OPOL were observed in practice which challenge claims that FLP is entirely conscious, explicit and overt at all stages.

Interaction analysis is a valuable tool for capturing these changes and negotiations in interaction orders. All chapters include the analysis of participant observation, audio or video recordings. In-depth analysis of parent-child interaction in chapter 12 reveals the effects of

different approaches to negotiating homework with children. Curdt-Christiansen identifies three approaches: *highly organised FLP*, *unreflective adaptation* and *laissez-faire FLP*, only the first of which granted the necessary support to the maintenance of Chinese alongside English in bilingual families in Singapore.

As can be appreciated from the above summary, the volume reflects a multiplicity of approaches to the field of FLP and to the question of what makes some families successful. A wide variety of methodological tools are called upon including examples of mixed method survey and interview combination or purely ethnographic modes of enquiry involving interviews, observations, diaries and audio or video recordings. Accounts such as those in Chapter 1, 2, 5 and 6, which ground case studies in a wider sociolinguistic reality provide exemplary detail and contextualisation.

The data gathered ranges from the declared language use of different family members, to observed interactions and discourses in context. All of this data may indeed be necessary to successfully address the question, however some methodological consensus and a common theoretical framework would facilitate cross-contextual comparison, particularly in distinguishing between different profiles and circumstances.

This compilation is an important first step in a process of between-context comparison which will allow for important questions to be addressed, yet there is still plenty of scope for further research and collaboration in order to provide answers.

## References

- 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), 351-375. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10993-009-9146-7>
- King, K. A., & Fogle, L. W. (2006). Bilingual parenting as good parenting: Parents' perspectives on family language policy for additive bilingualism. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 9 (6), 695-712. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2167/beb362.0>
- King, K. A., Fogle, L. W., & Logan Terry, A. (2008). Family language policy. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 2 (5), 907-922. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818x.2008.00076.x>
- Spolsky, B. (2009). *Language management*. Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511626470>

---

## Author Information

**Francesca Walls** is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics at the University of Barcelona. Her thesis is centred on the language management of English-speaking families resident in Barcelona, aiming to describe the practices and profiles of such families.

**Email:** francescawalls1@gmail.com

**Francesca Walls** és doctoranda de Lingüística Aplicada a la Universitat de Barcelona. La seva tesi es centra en la gestió lingüística de famílies angloparlants residents a Barcelona. Té com a objectiu descriure les pràctiques i perfils d'aquesta població.

**Francesca Walls** es estudiante de doctorado de Lingüística Aplicada de la Universidad de Barcelona. Su tesi se centra en la gestión lingüística de familias de habla inglesa residentes en Barcelona. Tiene como objetivo describir las prácticas y perfiles de esta población.

---

To cite this article:

Walls, F. (2015). Review. Successful family language policy: Parents, children and educators in interaction, edited by Mila Schwartz and Anna Verschik. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 8(4), 82-87. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.657>

