



**SUCCESSFUL FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY**, edited by Mila Schwartz and Anna Verschik, New York and London, Springer, 2013, viii + 295 pp., ISBN 978-94-007-7752-1.

**BY DEBORAH DUBINER**

The late Professor Joshua Fishman, a renowned sociolinguist of Jewish descent, was a heritage language maintenance enthusiast and researcher. In one of his writings, he reported on a question directed by his father to his family at the dinner table: “What have you done for Yiddish today?” This question, posed by an immigrant determined to maintain his and his descendants’ ethnolinguistic identity, accurately reflects one family’s language policy, a topic that has only recently been given particular attention as a field of study. Mr. Fishman’s stance mirrors one component of the triad that constitutes the main focus of *Successful Family Language Policy*: the parental role in family language policy. This book effectively explores the interaction of the family, the school and the community, and how these powers unite towards heritage language maintenance endeavors. These main actors are examined from the perspective of communities or homes that provide a milieu conducive to bi- and multilingualism, but whose linguistic outcomes are not necessarily the same, even when similar circumstances are created.

The first chapter, by the editors, lays out a comprehensive survey of relevant theoretical background. This section sets the theoretical foundations upon which the chapters are built, and covers key models and concepts in bilingualism and multilingualism. It highlights the role of various performers in the manifestation of family language policies: adults and children, the group and the self, the family and the community, the school and the broader

environment. Aside from underlining the role of these actors, the present volume brings together discussions of cultural, ideological, emotional, and practical aspects of family life which takes place in more than one language. *Successful Family Language Policy* incorporates these issues and elucidates their impact on bilingualism and bilinguality in numerous communities across the globe, by showcasing a variety of intriguing theoretical discussions and empirical case studies.

One of these refers to the connection between parental ideology and the school. Chapter 2 by Schwartz, Moin and Klayle, for instance, provides a detailed description of motives behind parental choice of bilingual schools in Israel. They emphasize the participation in a bilingual Hebrew-Arabic school as the expression and materialization of the parents' ideological stances, which include bilinguality and coexistence. The following chapter, by Moin, Protassova, Lukkari and Schwartz, although also covering parental motivations behind bilingual education, stresses more pragmatic reasons than ideological considerations. Still, both show the role of the parents and the paramount effect of the school experience on children's "various trajectories" (p. 77) in regards to linguistic development.

A clear example of the connection between the home and the community is depicted in chapter 4 by Conteh, Riasat and Begum. Describing family language as agency and family members as agents of social change, the authors underline how encompassing family and community activities can be when it comes to setting a sociolinguistic agenda. This ecological outlook was previously documented in studies of the revitalization of Hawaiian, promoted by the actions taken by the families in conjunction with the school and the community (Luning & Yamauchi, 2010; No'eu Warner, 1999). In fact, chapters in Part II of the book look into varied "joint social ventures" (p. 103), thus demonstrating how crucial it is that raising bilingual families be undertaken as a combination of efforts by the parties involved, directly or tangentially, in a child's life.

There is a unique approach to language policy in this volume and, in this context, the discussion presented in it stimulates critical thinking and deepens our knowledge about social practices favorable to bilingual development. As such, the chapters in Part II point to familial effort and strategies employed when language maintenance is at stake. They describe different levels of child and parental agency in heritage language acquisition/maintenance. This section's focus on children's reflections is a striking addition to the book.

Parental participation in establishing their children's bilinguality (and the feasibility of its outcome) has been widely explored in recent research (King & Fogle, 2006; Torres, 2010; Wong-Fillmore, 2000). Amongst the considerations reported by parents, the question "How crucial is parental determination in speaking the heritage language?" is often brought to the fore. The chapters in Part III of the book focus on parental strategies and highlight bilingual parents' flexibility as a central factor in successful family language policy.

A refreshing approach to methodology is taken in this collection, as evidenced by the considerable diversity of methodologies utilized by the authors of the chapters. Departing from exclusively conventional procedures, studies in this volume are based on novel ways of collecting data as well: mixed methods, international studies comparing data from multiple linguistic and cultural settings, analyses of longitudinal data collected from linked case studies, traditional qualitative tools (interviews, observations, etc.), analyses of recordings of everyday family situations, journaling, ethnographic methodologies, and analyses of participants' reflections.

The collaboration of the family and its interaction with the school and the community at large is gradually gaining attention by bilingualism researchers, and this is skillfully illustrated in the studies presented in this book. As many other excellent collections, the value of Schwartz and Verschik's contribution would be enhanced if it ended with a concluding chapter by the editors underscoring the encompassing topics covered in the

individual chapters. Yet the significance of this volume to bilingualism research is evident. Overall, *Successful Family Language Policy* expands on extant research on language policies and makes a distinctive contribution to the field in that it underscores the dynamic context in which successful bilingual practices emerge. It is wary of attempting to establish an entirely uniform or prescriptive approach to effective bilingual development and upbringing. Through the description of a bevy of ethnolinguistic settings, the reader is able to appreciate the complexity and flexibility of the bilingual endeavor, as well as the versatility needed by both scholars and families when attempting to combine the family, the school and the community to thread the fabric of bilingual and multilingual development in assorted settings.

## References

- King, K., & Fogle, L. (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.
- Luning, R. J., & Yamauchi, L. A. (2010). The influences of indigenous heritage language education on students and families in a Hawaiian language immersion program. *Heritage Language Journal*, 7(2), 46-75.
- No'eau Warner, S. (1999) Hawaiian Language Regenesi: Planning for Intergenerational use of Hawaiian Beyond School. In Huebner, T., Davis, K.A., and Lo Bianco, J. (eds.) *Sociopolitical Perspectives on Language Policy and Planning in the USA*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, pages 313-332.
- Torres, J. S. (2010). Aspectos de la planificación lingüística de familias bilingües español/inglés en Sevilla. *Elia: Estudios de lingüística inglesa aplicada*, (10), 233-265.
- Wong-Fillmore, L. (2000). Loss of family languages: Should educators be concerned?. *Theory into practice*, 39(4), 203-210.