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Intergenerational transmission and multilingual dynamics: exploring language policies in Chaoshan families through a contextual lens

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ABSTRACT

Amidst the rapid processes of industrialization and globalization, the interplay between minority and majority languages has garnered increasing attention, highlighting concerns surrounding linguistic diversity and the efficacious enactment of language policies. This study delves into the intricacies of language planning within the familial domain, specifically scrutinizing Chaoshan families in the Chaoshan region as pivotal arenas for nurturing the enduring vitality of Teochew. Employing a methodological approach integrating family visits, interaction recordings, and interviews, this study probes the dynamics of family language policies and individuals' perceptions vis-à-vis the nexus between linguistic practices and identity formation, with particular emphasis on intergenerational transmission. The results highlight that although Teochew continues to be actively used in family conversations and is closely linked to local identity formation, it is gradually losing ground among younger generations. This decline in passing down the dialect from one generation to the next is noticeable and poses a challenge to its long-term continuity. These insights indicate potential challenges to the sustained perpetuation of Teochew, warranting concerted societal and individual endeavors to safeguard its status as a cherished linguistic asset. The study underscores the importance of societal and individual efforts in preserving Teochew as a valuable linguistic resource.

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Introduction

The Greater China region is home to over 290 languages and 2,000 dialects (known as fāngyán, 方言), reflecting its rich cultural and linguistic diversity (Li, 2006). These unique linguistic varieties have historically been preserved through family transmission and have served as regional lingua franca as well as symbols for specific ethnic groups (Chen, 1999). However, recent decades have seen significant changes in China's linguistic landscape due to mass migration and language policy reforms. Official policies

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promoting the national language, Putonghua, and the foreign language, English, in public and educational spheres have led to their rapid proliferation across the country (Gao & Zeng, 2021). While this has transformed individuals' language practices at the societal level, these languages have also permeated the microcosm of family life, influencing family language structures and interactions. Consequently, increasing attention is being paid to the development of family languages alongside top-down multilingual promotion and the sustainability of heritage dialects (Curdtt-Christiansen & Gao, 2021).

Research indicates that implicit language hierarchies and exposed language environments incentivize the use of dominant languages, thereby weakening intergenerational transmission of fangyans (Huang & Fang, 2024; Shan & Li, 2018). Numerous studies have focused on Chinese urban families, particularly migrant families, examining language features in intergenerational communication and corresponding language planning to understand language inheritance and socialization dynamics. For instance, Wang and Curdtt-Christiansen (2021) uncovered emotional detachment towards fangyans among internal migrant parents, leading to the implementation of family language policies (FLPs) favoring mainstream languages. Additionally, fangyans are seldom used by students in schools, even during recess, due to low willingness and a preference for Putonghua (Shen, 2016). While these studies shed light on language shift and fangyans' decline among younger generations and urban migrant families, the development of fangyans within local contexts remains relatively underexplored. Converging evidence suggests that family members' language practices and management are heavily influenced by the external environment and perceived language values, resulting in dialect shifts and discontinuity in transmission (Little, 2017; Macalister & Mirvahedi, 2017). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for understanding on dialect sustainability, as it highlights the factors that contribute to language preservation or decline within broader communities.

To comprehensively understand the sustainability of fangyans, investigations should focus on local communities, particularly families, where speakers congregate and intergenerational transmission occurs (Spolsky, 2012). Grounded in the FLP framework, this study, set in the Chaoshan region of China, explores the use of Teochew to highlight changes in family linguistic contexts influenced by macro-level language policies, meso-level family language management, and individual identity. The findings contribute to the field of language preservation and enrich the application of the FLP framework in diverse linguistic contexts.

Literature review

Language policy and FLP

Language policy (LP) is defined as 'a complex sociocultural process [and as] modes of human interaction, negotiation, and production mediated by relations of power' (McCarty, 2011, p. 8). According to Spolsky's classical framework (2004, 2012), it comprises three interrelated components: language practice (what languages people choose and for what purposes), language ideology (the values and beliefs attached to languages), and language management (the language planning interventions affecting language practices). As an interdisciplinary field, the development of LP can be traced back to the middle of the last century, during which the investigations were focused on deploying

national language systems and language globalization for emerging international organizations and newly independent countries (Spolsky, 2009). Therefore, it initially employed a top-down dimension, aiming to address the choices of public languages for various domains such as schools, public signage, and mass media (Bell, 1991; Corson, 1998; Landry & Bourhis, 1997). As macro planning and research progressed, the field uncovered a more comprehensive mechanism underlying the social language ecology. This mechanism encompassed policy adaptations across different contexts, reflecting their internal dynamic evolution, and delineated a collaborative language network (Macalister & Mirvahedi, 2017; Norton, 2013). Accordingly, the multilayered contextual structure emerged as an important framework for language policy research, emphasizing the autonomy and mutual reliance among the national, community, and family units from each level (Spolsky, 2009; 2012).

Starting in the 1990s, there was a growing body of research (e.g. Fishman, 1990, 1991; Saravanan & Hoon, 1997) focusing on the family domain and specifying various topics related to its language management, transmission, and their influence on social language development, which then converged to the overarching topic of FLP. Fishman (1991) introduced the Reversing Language Shift (RLS) model to analyze intergenerational language shift within multilingual environment, and applied the examples of preserving French in Quebec and Catalan in Autonomous Catalonia to highlight the critical effect of family management efforts in addressing language decline. Cooper (1989) advocated to include families in language planning research, arguing that their language management was essential for the mechanisms of language maintenance and shift. These early studies highlighted family's central role in language development, and fostered increased attention to the intricacies especially in multilingual environments. Eventually, the family domain was formally integrated into the language policy framework as the smallest unit and gave rise to the distinct FLP research field (Spolsky, 2004).

FLP, delineated as 'explicit and overt planning in relation to language use within the home among family members' (King et al., 2008, p. 907), encompasses what families do with language in day-to-day interactions, their beliefs and ideologies about language and language use, and their goals and efforts to shape language use and learning outcomes (King et al., 2008). Among existing studies, intergenerational language shift is one of the most discussed phenomena, especially within immigrant and ethnic minority contexts, as it provides a critical perspective for understanding members' differences in language choice and family language socialization (Smith-Christmas, 2016; Zhu & Li, 2016). Extended to private communications, such changes in language use would lead to members' translanguaging practices that they might maintain distinct language preferences, or combine various linguistic resources to satisfy different communicative functions (Abdullahi & Li, 2022; Hu & Ren, 2016). This process of mutual adaptation may not only affect the development of family language structure, but also implicitly reshape the power relations, identity, and cultural inheritance within the household through language power (Norton, 2013; Spolsky, 2009).

In particular, Wang and Curdt-Christiansen's study (2021) found that the older generation diminished the maintenance of their heritage language and shifted to the majority one spoken by the grandchildren, reflecting the weakening of the intergenerational transmission of language and culture. In light of the growing agency exhibited by children, the widely recognized role of grandparent's generation in family language management and

planning also needs to be further explored (Crump, 2017; Zhan, 2023). Relating to this, the examination of parents' language ideology revealed two main patterns that some of them experienced emotional detachment from their heritage languages (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018; Smith-Christmas, 2019), and some others, although reporting a positive multilingual attitude, had relatively low motivation for heritage language transmission (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Liang & Shin, 2021). Although the underlying mechanisms were different, these studies all further highlighted that minority languages were facing constant challenges from mainstream languages within various multilingual paradigms. Correspondingly, some studies have raised concerns about the negative impacts on the formation and maintenance of cultural identity. However, the multiple dimensions of identity within complex social structures seem to receive less attention, which is crucial for fully understanding members' language decisions and development (Little, 2017; Norton, 2013).

Teochew and the contextualization within the Chaoshan area

As one of the three major dialects in Guangdong Province, Teochew is a branch of the Min dialect primarily used in the Chaoshan area of southeastern China (Liang, 2015). It is one of the oldest and most unique dialects, often referred to as the living fossil of ancient Chinese (Liu & Li, 2020). Rooted in ancient Chinese, it evolved into an independent language system during the Ming Dynasty, inheriting distinctive traits not found in many other dialects, such as its complex tone system, which places it in a significant position within the Chinese language database (Huang & Fang, 2024). Moreover, due to waves of emigration, Teochew has spread to many other countries and is widely used, particularly in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand (Hua & Foong, 2020; Saravanan & Hoon, 1997). At the end of the last century, 78% of Singapore's population was Chinese, with 26% of them being Teochew speakers (Liang, 2015). Overall, with its long developmental history, Teochew has become a symbol of Chaoshan culture and an essential element of ethnic identity. However, despite its cultural significance, Teochew is experiencing varying degrees of decline both locally and abroad.

In recent decades, some studies of Teochew have focused on its usage in overseas and internally migrated families. For example, through observation and interview research, Saravanan and Hoon (1997) found that among families who migrated to Singapore, Teochew was predominantly replaced by official languages, especially English. Similarly, it was noted to be an extinct dialect within migrated families in Malaysia due to rejection by the younger generation and a lack of intergenerational transmission (Hua & Foong, 2020). Regarding the situation in domestically migrated families, Liang (2015) revealed that a participating child in Guangzhou switched from Teochew to Putonghua at home after attending primary school, where the use of Putonghua was required throughout the day. These previous studies have demonstrated a distinct decline of Teochew outside the local community due to language policies, shifting from the use of Teochew as a primary means of communication to its marginalization and decline as a fangyan, drawing attention to the importance of its preservation in the Chaoshan area.

With the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy and the development of urbanization, the Chaoshan area has experienced an influx of migrant populations in recent decades, gradually fostering a multilingual social environment. Broadly, the

language structure of the Chaoshan area comprises Putonghua, Teochew, Cantonese, English, Hakka, among others (Fang & Hu, 2022). Despite its long history of transmission, Teochew faces challenges from mainstream languages such as Putonghua and English within the local community (Huang & Fang, 2024; Liu & Li, 2020). On one hand, the top-down policy promoting Putonghua has been highly successful in the Chaoshan area, making it the dominant language in education and many public spaces (Huang & Fang, 2024). Moreover, English has become a compulsory subject for all students starting from third grade of primary school, with a high coverage rate of English education among teenagers (Liu & Li, 2020). English, as an international lingua franca, tends to garner more attention and positive evaluation. Fang and Hu's (2022) study found that, to some extent, local college students showed favorable attitudes towards English learning and English-medium instruction in their schools. On the other hand, without policy and institutional support, it is challenging for Teochew to maintain its vitality in the mainstream language context. Recent studies have shown that Teochew is marginalized by the younger generation. For example, a large-scale questionnaire survey conducted by Liu and Li (2020) revealed that the younger generation is less proficient in Teochew and they tended to integrate Putonghua linguistic resources to fulfill their communicative needs. Additionally, self-reported data indicated that the younger generation had lower usage frequency of Teochew (Huang & Fang, 2024). Collectively, studies have highlighted a downward trend in the development of Teochew in the local area. However, previous studies focusing on the Chaoshan area did not thoroughly explore natural interactions within the family sphere, particularly from the perspective of authentic intergenerational interactions.

To address these identified gaps, the current study recruited two families spanning three generations from the Chaoshan community as focal cases. It adopted Spolsky's (2004) family language policy theory to analyze three dimensions: language practice, management, and ideology. Seeking to elucidate the development of languages and underlying mechanisms within the local context, this study collected interaction recordings from families' daily activities to profile the generation's language use and potential management activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to uncover members' perceptions of different languages and triangulate their actual language practices. Two following research questions were proposed to guide the study:

RQ1: How are Teochew and other linguistic resources distributed and combined by the members in their daily interactions?

RQ2: What are individuals' perceptions of different accessible linguistic resources and their interrelationships?

Methodology

Setting and participants

This study focused on the Chaoshan area, home to the majority of Teochew speakers. Teochew, as a unique regional dialect, is spoken by approximately 10 million people in local cities such as Shantou, Shanwei, Chaozhou, and Jieyang, though it exhibits distinctive accents and vocabulary across different regions (Fang & Hu, 2022). Two families

Table 1. Profiles of the Two Family Members.

Family 1	Age	Education	Family 2	Age	Education
Grandfather	64	Primary School	Grandfather	61	Junior High School
Grandmother	61	Primary School	Grandmother	60	Primary School
Father (Yuan)	32	Junior high School	Father (Guo)	31	Junior High School
Mother (Jing)	31	Junior high School	Mother (Hui)	29	Associate Degree
Child1 (Hao)	7	Grade 1	Child1 (Miao)	7	Grade 1
Child 2 (Xin)	5	Kindergarten	Child 2 (Han)	5	Kindergarten
Aunt	28	Senior High School			

participated in the investigation as case studies, taking part in interaction recordings and semi-structured interviews. Both families followed the grandparents-parents-children family structure, with each family having two younger children as the third generation. It is crucial to include the grandparents' generation since, in China, they often play a key role in child-rearing and serve as important witnesses to social language shifts. The grandparents in this study never received Putonghua-medium instruction, which differs significantly from other family members.

All grandparents and parents were local residents who had lived in the Chaoshan region for most of their lives. Further demographic information is provided in Table 1. In Jing's family, an extended family member, Aunt, participated in data collection as she worked with other family members throughout the day at their family-owned factory.

Data collection

In the initial stage, a family visit was conducted to obtain consent and basic information about the families, while also introducing the purpose of the study. After confirming that family members were willing to participate, researchers provided audio recorders to the parents to collect their naturalistic family interactions independently, which helped to avoid researcher intrusion. Considering the family members' schedules, recordings were primarily collected during dinner time, playtime, and homework tutoring sessions. There was no time limit, and parents were encouraged to record for as long as participants felt comfortable.

After completing the initial transcription, researchers invited family members to participate in further interviews. Eventually, the mother of Family 1 (Jing) and the parents of Family 2 (Father: Guo; Mother: Hui) participated in the interviews. Parents were advised to choose their preferred interview language before the session started, and interviews were conducted in both Putonghua and Teochew so they could express ideas in more detail (Mann, 2011). With their permission, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The purpose of the interviews was to identify features of language use arising from interactions and to learn more about their perceptions of FLP, both implicit and explicit (see Table 2). Therefore, interview questions focused on parents' explanations of the reasons behind language phenomena and their opinions towards languages.

Data analysis

As for the interaction and interview data, all speakers' conversational turns were transcribed and coded for languages/fangyans: Teochew, Putonghua, mixed, and English.

Table 2. Data of Interaction Recordings and Interviews.

Family	Category	Length
Family 1	interactions at dinner time	30.2 hours
	interactions at play time	
	interactions at homework tutoring time	
	interviews with mother	
Family 2	interactions at dinner time	71 mins
	interactions at play time	41.5 hours
	interactions at homework tutoring time	65 mins
	interview with both parents	

Every transcript was read more than three times and those keywords or phrases related to the research questions were highlighted and reviewed. In addition, the interviews’ transcripts were further marked with content related to the three main themes (language ideologies, language management, and language practice), which facilitates subsequent in-depth exploration of these themes. In the end, the content of the same theme was colated in a new document for comparative research.

Findings

Jing’s family

Family bilingual practices and translanguaging dynamics

Delving into the discourse within Jing’s family, all members were found to be experienced Teochew-Putonghua bilingual speakers. The grandparents were the primary promoters of Teochew, who differentiated between these two varieties for internal (with family members) and external (with workers or customers) communications, thus establishing the habitual use of Teochew with the second and third generations. In the following excerpt, during a dinner with a worker at their family-owned factory, the grandfather did not deviate from the habit of communicating with family members in Teochew but instead alternated between the two varieties, making parallel moves¹.

Excerpt 1

1. Factory Worker：够了够了，太多了。	1. Factory Worker: Enough, enough! That’s too much.
2. Grandfather：你们一人分一点。	2. Grandfather: You two get a share.
3. Yuan：别烫到，别烫到！	3. Yuan: Don’t get burned. Don’t get burned.
4. Grandfather：还有点烫，你小孩刚才只吃了一	4. Grandfather: (to the worker) It’s still hot. Your child ate only
块。	one piece just now.
5. Grandfather：刚刚有添多点汤下去，有开	5. Grandfather: I just poured more soup. Has it boiled? Has the
吗，水有开吗？	water boiled?
6. Jing：有啊，开了，想下可以下。	6. Jing: Yeah, it has boiled. You can put the things you want.
7. Grandfather：下下去，把那个鱼头一起下。	7. Grandfather: Put it in, and put the fish head in together.
8. Jing：什么？完了已经。	8. Jing: What? The fish head had been eaten.
9. Grandfather：啊豪，你去跟小姑拿个碗来。	9. Grandfather: Ah Hao, you go to bring your aunt’s bowl.
10. Hao：好。	10. Hao: Okay.

During this conversation, the grandfather initially motivated the factory worker to eat more in Putonghua (Lines 2 and 4) but subsequently shifted to Teochew when speaking to Jing (Line 5). In fact, the Teochew dialect and Putonghua were distinctively used for communication with family members and the worker, respectively. As a result, the

parents and children responded to the grandfather in Teochew as their habitual mode of engagement, contributing to the creation of a Teochew-dominated environment and grandparent-centered dialect transmission within this focal family. Moving to the second generation, Teochew remained their dominant linguistic resource, covering almost all intergenerational discourses.

Excerpt 2

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- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Yuan: <u>快点, 吃多点然后回去了。</u> | 1. Yuan: <u>Hurry up, eat more and then go back.</u> |
| 2. Aunt: <u>我不要了, 吃饱了。</u> | 2. Aunt: <u>I don't want any more, I'm full.</u> |
| 3. Jing: <u>饱了啊? 补增营养啊。</u> | 3. Jing: <u>Are you feeling full? Do you want to add some nutrition?</u> |
| 4. Aunt: <u>不要, 让你们吃。</u> | 4. Aunt: <u>No, you go ahead and eat.</u> |
| 5. Jing: <u>不行, 你最近这样得补起来。</u> | 5. Jing: <u>No, you need to add more nutrition.</u> |
| 6. Yuan: <u>你昨天去看(医生)还是太早。</u> | 6. Yuan: <u>Wasn't it too early for you to see the doctor yesterday?</u> |
| 7. Aunt: <u>哎呀, 下次这样我就不去看了。</u> | 7. Aunt: <u>Oh, I won't go again next time if it's like this.</u> |
| 8. Hao: 妈咪, 你看这么多面包是谁要吃的? | 8. Hao: Mommy, who wants to eat so much bread? |
| 9. Jing: 小姑的, 买了还没拿去。 | 9. Jing: Your aunt does. She bought it but haven't taken it yet. |
-

As exemplified in the excerpt, Jing, Yuan, and the aunt exclusively conversed in Teochew about the aunt's diet and health issues. They maintained Teochew as their primary communicative tool in this circumstance, with Putonghua expressions seldom incorporated. However, Jing switched to Putonghua to reply to Hao's question (Line 9), corresponding to the noticeable language shift that occurred in conversations between the second generation and the children. A significant amount of Putonghua was employed by both parties. Specifically, the adults began incorporating Putonghua to engage with the children rather than insisting on Teochew, further promoting the family's linguistic dynamic by introducing two typical translinguaging modes: Putonghua-insertional and Putonghua-dominant.

Moreover, the use of Putonghua seemed to be further intensified during the children's interaction with their mother, Jing. As demonstrated, while making sweet dumplings, diverse linguistic resources of Teochew and Putonghua were seamlessly blended, thereby generating a Putonghua-dominant translinguaging mode in their private discussion.

Excerpt 3

-
- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Xin: 妈咪, 你看。 | 1. Xin: Mommy, look. |
| 2. Jing: 好, 乖, 你得搓一搓。 | 2. Jing: Okay, be good, you have to rub it. |
| 3. Hao: 我这个太小了, 皮肤很容易断就出来, 太小了。 | 3. Hao: This one is too small, the skin breaks easily and comes out, it's too small. |
| 4. Jing: 太小了它就容易裂开。 | 4. Jing: It's too small, so it's easy to crack. |
| 5. Hao: 对, 裂缝就很容易, 加点水进去就行了。 | 5. Hao: Yes, the crack is easy to fix, just add some water to it. |
| 6. Jing: 不行, 它就是这个馅太多水它老是流出来。 | 6. Jing: No, it's because the filling has too much water, so it keeps leaking out. |
| 7. Xin: 哥哥你看。 | 7. Xin: Brother, look at this. |
| 8. Jing: 搓圆圆, 搓圆圆。 | 8. Jing: Rub it round and round, rub it round and round. |
| 9. Jing: 我们等下就拿来煎。 | 9. Jing: We will fry it later. |
| 10. Hao: 不要再吃一顿了吧, 刚才都吃了一碗。 | 10. Hao: Don't eat another meal, you just had a bowl of food. |
| 11. Jing: 刚才是煮的, 等下我就拿来煎。 | 11. Jing: It was boiled just now. I will fry it later. |
| 12. Hao: 煎了酥酥的吗。 | 12. Hao: Is it crispy when you fry it? |
| 13. Jing: 对, 好不好。 | 13. Jing: Yes, is it good? |
| 14. Xin: 跟啊姑姑。 | 14. Xin: Eat with aunty. |
| 15. Hao: 我们一起吃。 | 15. Hao: Let's eat together. |
-

In this conversation, the main focus was Jing and Hao's negotiation about the ingredients (Lines 3, 4, 5, 6) and cooking (Lines 9, 10, 11) of the dumplings, all of which were conveyed in Putonghua. Several Teochew expressions were inserted into Xin's discourse (Lines 1, 7, 14) and Jing's responses (Lines 2 and 13). There was a convention that family members would use Teochew only when addressing others, such as '妈咪, 爸比, 啊欣, 豪哥'. Under this translanguaging mode, Hao exhibited a strong preference for Putonghua in his language practices when interacting with his parents, especially with the mother and the aunt (see also Excerpt 2). Similar to his tendency, the younger sister, Xin, had partially shifted to Putonghua while still retaining the Teochew foundation, thereby generating a wide range of translanguaging in her daily utterances. Overall, the language shift from Teochew to Putonghua had become quite evident among the younger generation, establishing the family's primary common language channel for interaction with others. Jing attributed her language shift to Putonghua to the influence of the children by stating:

Jing: I also use Putonghua when talking with him (Hao) – Putonghua for the studying issues, and also Putonghua at home.

Researchers: Why?

Jing: That is, he keeps talking to us in Putonghua.

Researchers: We have noticed that.

Jing: Yeah, he keeps speaking Putonghua when talking to me.

(Interview, Jing, 2022/04/10)

Family language practices and ideologies

In addition to explaining the language practices, Jing, together with Hao, clearly presented the differentiation of their family linguistic use across diverse contexts in the discussion and she conveyed the complex dynamics of how their linguistic resources and their multidimensional identity are co-constructed.

First of all, both Teochew and Putonghua were proposed to be the fundamental for family interactions and supported by the parents as well as grandparents. Nevertheless, consistent with the aforementioned Putonghua preference in parent-child communications, their values and functional positions were assessed differently, as shown in the excerpts:

Jing: Do you know what your hometown dialect is?

Hao: Hometown dialect, I know, that's Teochew!

Jing: Yes, that's correct. That's our root.

Hao: Mommy, but last time I heard Ah Yong mentioned another dialect – it's different from ours.

Jing: That's their hometown dialect. Teochew is the one used in our own community.

Now Putonghua is the dominant language for the whole society, so we still need to take it as the standard. If you can't speak Putonghua well, people will laugh at you, so we still need to teach them to use Putonghua. (Interview, Jing, 2022/04/10)

According to the dialogue, Teochew held strong symbolic and cultural significance, viewed as 'our root' and 'hometown dialect'. Jing saw it not just as a communicative tool but as a connection to their traditional culture and shared identity. She emphasized that learning

the dialect was essential to fostering her children's sense of belonging. However, Jing also advocated for integrating Putonghua, recognizing its status as the majority language and 'standard'. Language socialization was seen as crucial for helping the children acquire this lingua franca for social identification. Additionally, school policies motivated the use of Putonghua for homework, preparing the children for academic expectations. Despite positive attitudes towards both languages, Putonghua was given higher practical value, while Teochew was underused in her communication with the children.

Jing's family linguistic structure was further complicated by the hope of incorporating English in their children's language use in the future. Although communication in English was not captured in the recorded interactions, Jing explicated her positive attitude towards it and its learning, accompanied by an expectation that the children would at least be able to simply communicate with others in the future.

Hao: Why should we learn English if we're not going to travel abroad?

Jing: You now go to the mall and people ask you where the restroom is. You can just say I don't know. After you learn it, it is a skill, a kind of competence.

Hao: But we're not going to a foreign country.

Jing: Foreigners are also coming to China. Our city also has many foreigners. (Interview, Jing, 2022/04/10)

This dialogue revealed an intergenerational difference, with Hao opposing Jing's view on the necessity of learning English, seeing it as 'the language for other countries'. Jing countered by highlighting the growing demand for English in their community and Chinese society due to globalization, affirming that English 'has to be learned' for its practical value and social capital. However, she distinguished its role, supporting English for social interaction but opposing English-medium instruction, believing it could burden children's subject learning. Despite this, Jing actively managed her children's basic English learning, starting with vocabulary in kindergarten and using online resources to improve pronunciation.

Hui's family

The parallel Teochew and Putonghua practices

According to the family visit, it was found that both Teochew and Putonghua were primary elements of Hui's family linguistic resources, as they had been widely employed and blended for internal communications. One of the most salient features during intergenerational communication was the parents' translanguaging between Teochew and Putonghua. They spoke Teochew with the grandparents and Putonghua with the children, even in the same conversation.

Excerpt 4

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grandmother: <u>现在读一年级了，大家都有作业了。</u> 2. Hui: <u>她就只想着玩。</u> 3. Grandmother: <u>你还不快点去写? 以前啊可...</u> 4. Miao: <u>啊可她也在楼下。</u> 5. Grandmother: <u>她在楼下玩，她现在一要写作业她妈妈就叫她。</u> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grandmother: <u>Now you are in first grade, everyone has homework.</u> 2. Hui: <u>She only thinks about playing.</u> 3. Grandmother: <u>Don't you hurry up to write? In the past, Keke ...</u> 4. Miao: <u>Keke is downstairs too.</u> 5. Grandmother: <u>She's playing downstairs but her mother will call her when she has to do her homework.</u> |
|--|---|

6. Hui: 你看, 啊姐姐自从读一年级开始就从来没有在楼下看到过她。
7. Grandmother: 对啊, 不然以前她经常在下楼的。
8. Hui: 自从读了一年级开始就没下去过。
9. Grandmother: 嗯, 现在很少看到。
10. Miao: 为什么?
11. Hui: 她爸爸妈妈不肯啊, 她也要学习啊, 你看你玩也玩了。
6. Hui: You see, I have never seen Sister Niu downstairs since she was in first grade.
7. Grandmother: Yes, otherwise she used to play downstairs.
8. Hui: She hasn't been down since the first grade.
9. Grandmother: Yeah, I rarely see her now.
10. Miao: Why?
11. Hui: Her parents do not allow it, and she has to study too. Look at you, you have played for so long.

In this example, the grandmother initiated the topic of doing homework in Teochew and continued this choice throughout the whole discussion, whereas the elder child, Miao, kept replying in Putonghua. Hui firstly followed the grandmother's choice when responding to her opinions (Lines 2 and 8), while instantly shifting to Putonghua in the embedded part of the conversation (Lines 6 and 11), because they were directly conveyed to Miao. It was obvious that Miao had acquired the dialect and understood the meaning according to her reactions, but her conversion to Putonghua was accepted by others. In other words, Teochew and Putonghua were respectively adopted by the elder generation and the children, creating separate communication channels, which were further reinforced by the parents' mediation. Without the parents' engagement, language shift and generational agency differences became increasingly apparent in the grandparent-child interactions. As shown in the conversation:

Excerpt 5

1. Grandfather: 好不好吃?
2. Han: 好吃。
3. Grandfather: 那个饭先给关了。
4. Grandmother: 等一下吧。
5. Han: 爷爷, 以后你带阿全去潜水的地方, 必须得提醒他摘下, 不能戴眼镜, 因为眼镜总是掉进水里面。
6. Grandfather: 嗯, 好好好, Han你想得太周到了。
7. Grandmother: 他在说什么?
8. Grandfather: 他说他的眼镜掉进水里。
9. Grandmother: 谁?
10. Grandfather: 阿全, 说以后不能带他去泳池, 去游泳的地方眼镜不小心掉里面了。
1. Grandfather: Is it delicious?
2. Han: Delicious!
3. Grandfather: Turn off that stove.
4. Grandmother: Wait a minute.
5. Han: Grandpa. If you take Ah Quan to the place for diving, you have to remind him to take off... he cannot wear the glasses because they always fall into the water.
6. Grandfather: Mmm, ok, ok, ok. Han, you are so considerate.
7. Grandmother: What's he saying?
8. Grandfather: He said his glasses fell into the water.
9. Grandmother: Who?
10. Grandfather: Ah Quan, that we cannot take him to the swimming pool, that the glasses may fall into the water by accident.

It is clear that the grandfather switched from his familiar dialect to the child's preferred choice to accomplish their interaction, while the child maintained the use of Putonghua actually throughout the whole conversation. More importantly, there seemed to be an intergenerational conflict that the grandmother did not understand the point, for which the grandfather did a complete translation from Putonghua to Teochew. In Hui's interview, she clarified that the grandparents 'were forced' to adapt since 'now the children all speak Putonghua, so they have no other choices'. Indeed, multiple data have indicated the marginalization of Teochew in children's discourses across all internal contexts. Correspondingly, the parents' active participation and greater

agentive role in using Putonghua were relevant to this notable family language socialization. As indicated below:

Excerpt 6

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guo: 以前的学校就是这样。 2. Miao: 哪个, 是这个呀? 3. Guo: 这栋楼啊。 4. Hui: 看起来应该是。 5. Miao: 好老啊, 一点也不好看。 6. Guo: 所以你们现在是, 这个时代是很幸福的。 7. Miao: 那用颜色把它染上呗。 8. Hui: 太老了, 那个已经是危房。 9. Guo: 就算染上去它就变成了‘假老道’。 10. Guo: 那辆车它的车头瘪进去了。 11. Han: 为什么它还开, 不会坏掉了吗? 12. Guo: 不会啊, 就只是瘪进去而已啊。 13. Han: 那个车头还可以打开吧。 14. Guo: 可以啊, 它是下面, 不是车盖。 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guo: That's how schools used to be in the past. 2. Miao: Which one, is this one? 3. Guo: This building. 4. Hui: It looks so. 5. Miao: So old, not good looking at all. 6. Guo: So you guys are living in a very fortunate era now. 7. Miao: Then dye it with color. 8. Hui: Too old, that's already a dangerous building. 9. Guo: Even if you dye it, it is still fake and has poor quality. 10. Guo: The front of the car is dented. 11. Han: Why is it still running? Won't it break down? 12. Guo: No, it's just dented. 13. Han: Can the front of that car be opened? 14. Guo: Sure, it's underneath, not on the car hood. |
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In this conversation, Hui and Guo primally adopted the mainstream variety for their intra – and intergenerational responses. Only two Teochew phrases were inserted by Guo, yet they were the extremely unique local expressions. ‘假老道’ is a Teochew colloquialism used to describe something that is dressed up to look good but is actually of poor quality. ‘瘪进去’ is a common saying in Teochew that shares the same meaning as ‘cave in’. This echoed Hui’s inclusion that ‘We also speak Putonghua ourselves.’ and ‘some are unique to Teochew’.

On the whole, Putonghua was incorporated into the family domain through the parents’ proactive application, conveying to the children that it was a major tool for their intimate conversations. This could explain the children’s preference for Putonghua, as evidenced in the recorded dialogues. Although Teochew still existed in parent–child interactions, Putonghua had clearly become the dominant language for both parties.

Parental language ideologies and management

When discussing perceptions of the family languages, both Hui and Guo firstly connected them to the external context and focused on languages’ utility and functional values, which then informed their prioritization within the home setting. From this practical perspective, they explicitly revealed the social hierarchy among Teochew and the other majority languages that further influenced the ideology of language management.

I think it is necessary because Teochew is our mother tongue. (Guo, Interview, 2022/04/01)

After all, it’s a dialect. If you tell others that you are from Chaoshan but you can’t speak Teochew, it might seem a bit strange. (Hui, Interview, 2022/04/01)

Putonghua is a must-learn language and is widely used, so it is much more important to learn Mandarin than to learn Teochew. It’s enough to just be able to understand Teochew, as its usage is relatively limited. (Guo, Interview, 2022/04/01)

If we consider future development, English is definitely more important. Teochew can only be regarded as a dialect. I really hope my children study English well, but they just don’t take it seriously now. (Hui, Interview, 2022/04/01)

As shown in the excerpts, the parents expressed a positive attitude towards the inheritance of Teochew, seeing it as key to identity recognition and community belonging. Guo highlighted its role in reinforcing their connection to the local group. However, Putonghua was prioritized for its greater communicative value and use in education, while English, as an international lingua franca, was viewed as potential capital for the children's development. Consequently, Teochew has become marginalized, primarily spoken by the grandparents. Hui noted that while she had multilingual aspirations, Putonghua dominated interactions with the children, and English was taught through after-school programs.

As a result of imbalanced language exposure, the children's proficiency in Teochew was commented on as 'may not be as fluent as Putonghua' and 'can understand but not sure how to express in Teochew'. This has led to conflicts between parents and grandparents regarding family language management, as demonstrated below:

Hui: Particularly, the elder generation is now very dissatisfied with the fact that the children cannot speak Teochew.

Researchers: The grandparents?

Hui: Yeah, they think Teochew also needs to be used.

Researchers: Did they ever give you some advice?

Hui: Yeah. They were saying that we needed to teach the kids to speak more Teochew and not always speak Putonghua.

Researchers: Then have you made any adjustments?

Hui: I'm totally ok with that. The children can speak whatever they want. I just leave them alone, so they speak whatever they want.

(Interview, Hui, 2022/04/01)

This interview excerpt indicated the different perceptions of Hui and the grandparents about the family's Teochew instruction and the children's dialect development. Although the grandparents proposed a direct requirement, Hui insisted on taking a loose and liberal approach to the children's linguistic practices. In another interview with Guo, his feedback on the issue was similar: 'I think understanding is good enough; there is no need to be a master'.

From the naturalistic observations, it was found that, compared to their non-interfering attitude towards other languages, more resources and deliberate activities were provided for the children's early exposure to English. These included English storytelling practices, participation in host training through English, and English online courses. Therefore, the parents (i.e. Hui and Guo) played a more prominent agentive role in directing the family's language planning, specifically to fulfill their own language expectations.

Discussion and implications

Concentrated on the language policies within Chaoshan families, this study investigates the members' practices, agency, and their ideologies about different linguistic resources, so as to reveal how the local families shape their own language structure and inheritance strategies with the joint influence of the external dynamic social system. The findings reveal that Teochew still serves as a vibrant family linguistic resource, and its usage is closely connected to the construction of local identity, leading to parents' complicated

attitudes towards its transmission. However, due to the socialization of family language practices, its sustainable development has been further affected within this private domain. Specifically, Putonghua and English are involved in the linguistic structure, and translanguaging performances have become increasingly common during intergenerational communications (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2021; Yang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2021).

In order to answer the first research question regarding ‘how Teochew and other linguistic resources are distributed and combined by members in their daily interactions’, the findings revealed that Teochew is most frequently used for family interactions by the elder generations, while Putonghua dominates the usage among younger generations, accompanied by various translanguaging practices among the second and third generations. Furthermore, there is a discontinuity in Teochew transmission across generations, especially from the second generation to the youngest.

To begin with, the vitality of Teochew in the family domain is primarily led by the preservation efforts of the elders and their interaction demands. As speakers who regard Teochew as their primary linguistic resource, the elders influence other family members’ linguistic choices and create conducive conditions for transmitting Teochew (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2021). Moreover, the grandparents are found to have stronger motivation and sense of responsibility for dialect transmission due to cultural and emotional connections, and are therefore considered by parents to be the primary instructors of the children, echoing the positive perceptions of grandparents as the center of cultural transmission and language education within the family as demonstrated in some previous studies (Abdullahi & Li, 2022).

However, the grandparents’ language efforts do not reverse the language shift, as the children still develop a preference for Putonghua. Unlike previous study’s findings where grandmothers successfully change children’s language habits (Smith-Christmas, 2017), the children in this research continued to use more Putonghua, regardless of whom they were communicating with, leading to frequent switching and mixing of languages in family interactions. Although the youngest generation might speak Teochew with some of the family members, they mainly used Putonghua with their parents and in educational settings. Therefore, from the grandparents’ generation to the children, the frequency of using Teochew is declining, and Teochew is even marginalized among the children (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018; Huang & Fang, 2024).

According to the findings, the weakening trend of speaking Teochew across generations mainly results from the popularization of mainstream languages and the inclusion of translanguaging performance in family interactions (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018; Fang & Hu, 2022). With demographic diversity and the support of top-down language policy, Putonghua and English have dominated major public domains (Fang & Hu, 2022), such as schools and workplaces. Despite the fact that educational language policy only restricts the language used in classes, it has significantly contributed to the development of a pro-Putonghua school environment and the young generation’s habit of using Putonghua. They choose to communicate with their teachers and peers in Putonghua even after class. Their preference for this mainstream variety in family interactions is an extension of their language habits in schools, as parents emphasized by referring to the children’s use of Putonghua with teachers and classmates (see interviews from Jing and Hui). Align with the findings of Fang and Huang (2023), media

activities (e.g. TV program, online courses, and intelligent assistant) have also created a language environment centered on Putonghua and English for the younger generation. Children are most exposed to the mainstream language context when engaging in these activities. In brief, the prevalence of mainstream languages reduces the opportunity for speaking Teochew and immerses the younger generation in a mainstream language context, significantly affecting the development of their language habits.

Furthermore, in terms of language management within the family, translanguaging performance has reshaped the family's linguistic structure and the approach to Teochew inheritance (Fang & Huang, 2023). The parents adopted an integrated approach to teach the children both Putonghua and Teochew from the outset, with some efforts for their children to learn English, shifting the family context from monolingual to multilingual and providing a foundation for translanguaging practices (e.g. Excerpt 2, Excerpt 3, Excerpt 6). Although the grandparents participated in childrearing, the children were mainly instructed by the parents. Therefore, when the parents employed different communication strategies within a single conversation, they did not reinforce Teochew with the children but rather disrupted the Teochew context created by the grandparents, directing the children towards a Putonghua-centered environment (e.g. Excerpt 3 and Excerpt 6). Regarding translanguaging practices, while the parents provided some Teochew input to the children, they also implied that the children could respond in Putonghua. Overall, the parents' translanguaging strategy has an impact on both the children's input and output of Teochew, which may contribute to their lower proficiency levels.

In response to the second question about the relationship between identity and linguistic use, it is found that local identity construction is closely connected to people's Teochew practices and serves as the primary motivation for its intergenerational transmission (Huang & Fang, 2024). Firstly, all participating parents expressed their loyalty to their local identity. The term 'Chaoshan people' was emphasized several times in the interviews. Their use of the word 'Chaoshan' not only refers to the geographical location but also represents the unique ethnic group in the area. With its long-term inheritance, Teochew has become a distinctive feature of the people from this area. Thus, it is considered an external manifestation of their ethnic descent and identity construction (Bamberg et al., 2011) (see Interviews of Hui & Guo). Therefore, the use of Teochew is a key condition for achieving a sense of belonging and local identity construction. In turn, the atmosphere and communicative demands of Teochew within the community may contribute to the dialect application to a certain extent (see Interviews of Jing).

In general, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between language use and local identity construction, for which the parents all expressed their willingness to pass on Teochew to the younger generation. They expected their children to learn Teochew since it is beneficial for them to recognize their local identity and engage in the community group (Norton, 2013). However, it is worth noting that with the influence of linguistic hierarchy, parents' willingness to transmit Teochew did not necessarily lead to corresponding language practices. In contrast, parents were stricter with children's Putonghua or English, as they attached higher importance to them in terms of functional value and range of applications. In short, while local identity construction prompts parents to develop positive attitudes towards Teochew practices and transmission, it is still marginalized due to its lower value assessment, potentially leading to a greater

development crisis in the future. In the context of China's broader language policies, which promote a unified linguistic identity for nation-building purposes, the preservation of fangyans and minority languages is not only a matter of cultural heritage but also a reflection of the challenges faced by these fangyans and minority languages within a rapidly modernizing society.

Efforts to support the vitality of Teochew must therefore account for these socio-political dynamics. Understanding Teochew's position within the framework of national identity and language policy can provide valuable insights into the complexities of language preservation in a context where dominant languages are prioritized. By framing the discussion in this wider socio-political context, we move beyond idealistic propositions and address the real-world implications of language policy on the sustainability of fangyans such as Teochew. On the macro-level, top-down language policies should be adjusted in accordance with the actual situation of language development. While the promotion of Putonghua aims to provide people with a more unified and effective communication channel based on the development of heritage languages (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2021), ideally, Putonghua and Teochew would establish their independent functions and coexist harmoniously within the community context. However, the present study reveals that the interlinguistic balance between Putonghua and Teochew is not achieved, even in the family domain (Fang & Hu, 2022). The promotion of Putonghua has had a profound impact on the preservation of Teochew, as evidenced by the language habits of the participating children. Therefore, it is essential to focus on the dissemination of Teochew and protect this unique linguistic resource while promoting Putonghua. For example, activities can be held in communities based on Chaoshan customs or foods to spread more knowledge about Teochew, particularly among the younger generation. For instance, hosting Teochew storytelling sessions and cooking classes can immerse children in the language through engaging, culturally relevant experiences. Additionally, organizing Teochew festivals and immersion camps will provide practical opportunities for the use of Teochew, fostering a deeper connection to the community's traditions and enhancing the overall preservation efforts. Considering that current TV programs or radio broadcasts in Teochew are not popular among teenagers, schools can leverage their broadcasting stations and invite students to create their own Teochew medium programs. As discussed by Fang and Huang (2023), the TV program *Cháoxué táng* (潮学堂), which features prominent Teochew-speaking scholars interacting actively with primary and middle school students, is viewed as a crucial channel for integrating local culture into education and promoting the inheritance and popularization of Teochew. Expanding such programs could further stimulate the interest and motivation of the younger generation in learning Teochew.

At the micro-level, it is crucial for individual speakers to develop a proper understanding of the value of Teochew. Teochew is not only beneficial for maintaining kinship and building identity but also serves as an important channel for acquiring new knowledge and engaging in intercultural communication. With the worldwide popularity of cultural preservation activities, the Internet and national cultural festivals have created more space for the use of fangyans. The Chaoshan region holds a crucial place in the field of cultural preservation due to its long history and abundant cultural treasures.

Therefore, learning Teochew is also a process of expanding knowledge of Chaoshan culture, which is necessary for developing speakers' intercultural communication competence. Overall, promoting a deeper awareness of Teochew's values among parents and the younger generation may contribute to alleviating the marginalization of Teochew in the family context.

Conclusion

The study investigates the sustainability of Teochew, a fangyan spoken in the Chaoshan area, with a focus on family contexts and intergenerational transmission. Despite the dominance of Putonghua, Teochew persists in limited settings, reflecting its significance for local identity and community belonging. While parents recognize the cultural value of Teochew, they prioritize Putonghua and English for their children's educational and developmental opportunities, aligning with broader national language policies. The study highlights Teochew's critical role in shaping local identity, while also placing its transmission challenges within the wider socio-political context of China's nation-building efforts, where language unification is seen as a tool for promoting national cohesion. Preserving Teochew requires navigating these dynamics, understanding how the perceived utility of dominant languages interacts with community efforts to maintain linguistic diversity.

There are, of course, certain limitations to this study. Admittedly, the data covers only limited types of family interactions, and more studies involving different activities and families are needed in the future to fully understand language dynamics in multilingual contexts. Additionally, while the study aims to understand intergenerational transmission of Teochew, the methodology relies on naturalistic observations and interviews, which may not fully capture the subtleties of language use and management within the family domain. Further studies could adopt a longitudinal approach, observing the same families over time to uncover changes and trends in language use that may not be evident from a one-time analysis. This would be particularly useful for exploring the role of English in FLP as children grow older and begin formal English education in primary school. It would help further unpack the complexities of intergenerational language ideologies. Given the complexity of FLP, further studies could also consider additional factors that may influence family language policies and practices in multilingual contexts.

Note

1. In the transcripts of family interactions, communication through Teochew was underlined.

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