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Tamleh, H.; Rutten, G.J.; Parafita Couto, M.

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Language ideologies guiding language practices and management strategies: a study of family language policy among Iranian families in The Netherlands

Hadis Tamleh, Gijsbert Rutten and Maria del Carmen Parafita Couto

Leiden University Center for Linguistics (LUCL), Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore the Family language policy (FLP) of Iranian migrant families in the Netherlands, with a particular focus on those who preserve and use Persian as their heritage language. Drawing on [Spolsky, B. 2004. *Language Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.] tripartite language policy model, the study looks into the language ideologies, language practices, and language management strategies adopted by nine families, who were recruited through snowball sampling. Semi-structured interviews were used to compile the data. The findings indicate that the home sphere plays a pivotal role in the continued use of Persian. As for parental language ideologies, all respondents shared a longing to uphold Persian and cited an array of cultural, emotional, practical, and cognitive reasons for embracing Persian as their heritage language. The studied parents reported that Persian is the constant choice of communication within their households and employed deliberate strategies to ensure the sustainability of Persian within the home setting. The findings of this study bear important implications for understanding the dynamics of language maintenance within the Iranian diaspora and contribute to the scholarly discourse on FLP and heritage language maintenance.

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Introduction

Throughout its history, Iran has witnessed multiple waves of both coerced and voluntary emigration. A notable wave unfolded following the 1979 Revolution and the subsequent demise of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's regime. Over 3.1 million individuals from Iran have migrated, with over 2.6 million of them departed since 1979 (Bavili 2022). In 2022, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in the Netherlands conducted an official census of 52,099 Iranians, encompassing both first-generation residents born in Iran and second-generation citizens born in the Netherlands with at least one immigrant parent (AlleCijfers 2022). The census excludes Iranians living illegally in the country and those awaiting admission to refugee facilities. Iranians represent a relatively small community compared to the largest migrant groups in the Netherlands, such as Turks (429,978), Moroccans (419, 272), and Surinamese (359,814) (AlleCijfers 2022). Hence, the focus of this study is to explain the heritage language maintenance and practices of Iranian families, an area that has received limited research attention likely due to the community's smaller demographic size in contrast to other migrant cohorts in the Netherlands, alongside other contributing factors.

Research on language use and maintenance in the Iranian diaspora

There is a mounting focus in research on heritage language maintenance among immigrant families, as evidenced by Turkish families in the Netherlands (Bezioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur 2018), Polish community in Australia (Romanowski 2021), Chinese-speaking migrants in Canada (Curdt-Christiansen 2009), and Bangladeshi expatriates in Australia (Chowdhury and Rojas-Lizana 2021). Simultaneously, a growing number of scholarly studies have probed into language preservation within Iranian households across diverse sociolinguistic contexts, typically emphasising the significance of Persian (Bozorgmehr and Meybodi 2016; Gharibi and Mirvahedi 2021; Gharibi and Seals 2020). This line of language behaviour research implies that there are varied motivations behind observed Persian language practices within Iranian families. Focusing on Iranian-American families in the U.S., Bozorgmehr and Meybodi (2016) noticed two contrasting strategies that families adopted to incorporate Persian with their children, one was sentimental, and the other was instrumental. Parents perceived Persian as a means to bridge children with the heritage culture, to support self-directed engagement with the Iranian community, and to promote children's Iranian identity development. Additionally, Parents endorsed bilingualism and held the belief that acquiring a second language like Persian would benefit their children's cognitive abilities and future potential. Gharibi and Mirvahedi (2021) studied how parental beliefs, daily language interactions, and household initiatives contribute to the Persian language development and maintenance among Iranian families residing in the UK. Through interviews with eighteen mothers, the study showcased how intergenerational transmission of Persian plays is paramount to cultivating cultural identity, sustaining ties with the homeland, and preserving family cohesion. Certain interviewed mothers opted for a 'Persian-only policy' while also seeking external support like visits to Iran and interaction with the Iranian community in the UK to stimulate their children's Persian language development and use.

Empirical studies of language maintenance among Iranian migrant families provide evidence that the interplay between parents' beliefs and their actual language practices is not always straightforward or linear (Pillai, Soh, and Kajita 2014; Schwartz 2008). In their study, Gharibi and Seals (2020) scrutinised language policies practiced by Iranian parents living in New Zealand and how these policies shape the development and sustainability of children's heritage language. The study revealed a disparity between the parents' views on maintaining the Persian language maintenance and their everyday language behaviours. The informants admitted the importance of using Persian at home and passing it on to their children driven by considerations like cultural identity, intergenerational communication, and the benefits of bilingualism, Yet, they encountered difficulties in consistently incorporating Persian in their interactions with their children.

Research further evinced how the broader sociocultural setting affects familial language practices (Canagarajah 2008; Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020). Kaveh (2018) pointed out the influence of contextual factors such as extended family, Persian-speaking communities, school and peers, and the sociopolitical context in moulding language choices and the maintenance of Persian among second-generation Iranian migrant children in the U.S.

Theoretical framework

A heritage language is a non-mainstream language that carries emotional and cultural significance for its individuals, favouring personal and historical links over competency, and features speakers ranging from fluent native speakers to those with cultural ties (Eisenclas and Schalley 2020; Valdés 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl 2003). In recent decades, extensive research has been undertaken on the language practices of migrant families and their impact on language maintenance and loss. Family language policy (FLP) emerged in the field of language policy in the early 2000s (Gharibi and Mirvahedi 2021) and scholars have notably applied FLP as a lens to describe the dynamics of language use and the complexities of language maintenance within immigrant families in diverse sociocultural contexts. FLP is fundamentally defined as 'explicit and overt planning about language use

within the home among family members' (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry 2008, 907). FLP lays great importance on understanding how families actively shape language practices and the resulting impact on children's language development. Initially, FLP research centred on deliberate and explicit language planning. As the field has evolved, there has been a growing recognition of the weight of implicit and covert language practices. (Curd-Christiansen 2009, 2016). This stance has been backed by King and Fogle (2017), who described FLP as typically implicit, unarticulated, dynamic, and constantly negotiated. They pointed out that language practices within families are more flexible and subject to real-time negotiation rather than being explicitly discussed or planned. FLP research recognises the critical role that families hold in the preservation and potential decline of heritage languages (Schwartz 2010). Nevertheless, it extends beyond the confines of home-based parenting and also explores how broader social, economic, and political forces interfere with family language practices (Curd-Christiansen and Wang 2018; Lanza and Curd-Christiansen 2018; Revis 2019; Smith-Christmas 2016). Informed by Spolsky's (2004) framework for language policy, plenty of FLP studies have stretched its use to micro-level settings to address family language practices. This tripartite model is comprised of a) *language ideologies* (beliefs about language and language use), b) *language practices* (actual language use), and c) *language management* (decisions and strategies to influence language practice) (Spolsky 2004). Building upon Spolsky's (2004) language policy theory, this study aims to explain the heritage language practices of Iranian families in the Netherlands, an often-overlooked migrant community, thereby enriching the existing FLP literature.

This study

Drawing on Spolsky's (2004) theory of language policy, the current study provides a comprehensive understanding of the FLP of Iranian families in the Netherlands, an often-overlooked migrant community, thereby enriching the existing FLP literature. King and Fogle (2006) noted family language policies resemble all language policies and thus encompass language ideologies, language practices, and language management (Spolsky 2004). Therefore, the aim of this study is threefold. First, it examines parents' language attitudes and beliefs towards the Persian language. Furthermore, the study explores whether the day-to-day language practices within households reflect these language ideologies. The study also seeks to outline the various language management strategies used by parents to maintain or develop their heritage language among their children amidst navigating a new linguistic and cultural milieu.

Participants

Nine parents (eight families) from different regions in the Netherlands were recruited via snowball sampling (Table 1). Initial recruitment entailed five families from a Persian community Sunday school. Subsequent families were referred by friends or through the extended social circles of the initial participants. The interviewees consisted of seven mothers and two fathers, all having at least one school-aged child. All were first-generation migrants from Iran who had later arrived in the Netherlands, with their stays spanning from four and a half years to 28 years. Their primary motives for migration were pursuing higher education or career opportunities. Parent's ages fell between 42–55 and they held various educational backgrounds, from bachelor's to doctoral degrees. The parents were selected based on the criterion of speaking Persian as their first language. These parents worked either full-time or part-time in English – or Dutch-speaking environments, which provided regular exposure to and use of English and/or Dutch in their professional spheres.

Data collection

Preliminary observations of family interactions were undertaken to help the researchers draft interview questions and gain a better grasp of the setting. However, this study focuses largely

Table 1. Demographic information of the Iranian parents¹.

Parents (pseudonyms)	Age	Level of education	Children's age and gender	Length of residency	Immigration motivation
Soheila	42	BA	Girl (6)	25	Career advancement
Maryam	38	BA	Girl (10)	12	Career advancement
Nazanin	43	PhD	Boy (6)		
Hamed	55	BA	Girl (10)	5	Academic pursuit
Zohreh	53	BA	Boy (12)	28	Career advancement
Afsaneh	54	PhD	Boy (12)	28	Career advancement
			Girl (17)	17	Academic pursuit
Faranak	46	BA	Girl (24)		
			Girl (6)	8	Career advancement
			Girl (11)		
Simin	43	MA	Boy (9)	5.5	Career advancement
			Girl (5)		
Mohsen	46	BA	Girl (13)	4.5	Career advancement
			Girl (7)		

on the detailed accounts from the interviews, which provide rich insights into parents' perspectives on the Persian language maintenance and their strategies for supporting the use of this language in the family. Semi-structured interviews were performed between September 2022 and March 2024 centred on the three main components of FLP – language ideologies, language practices, and language management (Spolsky 2004) – alongside gathering demographic details about the families. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 to 60 min. All interviews were conducted in Persian and recorded with the full permission of the participants. The semi-structured method allowed for flexibility so participants could share their experiences and views in great detail while also tackling the research questions of the study.

Data analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed manually, in a non-verbatim manner, i.e. excluding filler words, interjections, self-corrections, self-repetitions, and any other content not relevant to the present purposes. Next, the interviews were translated into English. Following data transcription, a qualitative analytical method known as the thematic approach was implemented.

This approach involves discovering, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes embedded within interview data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis commences with a comprehensive data review, which then generates codes to capture key features. The codes are systematically grouped into themes, reviewed, and refined to ensure they properly reflect the data. Finally, a report is developed that links the themes to the research question and substantiates them with relevant data extracts (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Findings

This section discusses the semi-structured interview data on the language policy of Iranian migrant parents. It begins by examining how the studied Iranian parents perceive the significance of the Persian language. It further explores how and to what extent these families incorporate their heritage language in the domiciles.

Language ideologies

The remarks '*Persian is my mother language*' or '*Persian is my first language*' were common threads among all informants, indicating a shared sentiment about the significance of Persian in their lives.

Although there is a strong collective appreciation for the Persian language, the specific explanations for it vary among these parents and extend from cultural, emotional, and practical to cognitive considerations.

(a) Cultural identity

The results of the study support the premise that cultural identity is primarily handed down through heritage language (Cavallaro 2005; Clyne 2005; Fishman 2001). Within these families, Persian is more than just a language proficiency; it is pivotal in upholding cultural heritage and fostering a sense of belonging. Tseng (2020) notes how language choices, practices, and a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group contribute to the formation and negotiation of identities. Research on heritage language maintenance consistently shows that when language is intricately intertwined with cultural identity, families often have an incentive to preserve and transmit their heritage language to future generations (Lee 2012; Özkaynak 2023; Park and Sarkar 2007; Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe 2009).

- (1) (Soheila) *Ramak was born here and has never been to Iran, but it's very important to me that she learns Persian well. Her father and I are Iranian, and I want her to know where she originally comes from.*

Soheila is a 42-year-old mother who moved to the Netherlands over twenty years ago and has one daughter named Ramak who is six years old. Despite Ramak being born outside Iran, Soheila believes that her daughter ought to have a good command of Persian, the language of her parents' origin (1). She intends Ramak to understand and cherish her cultural background. Soheila's sentiment points to the centrality of Persian in maintaining cultural continuity across the diaspora.

- (2) (Maryam) *Personally, I think language is a completely identity-related issue. It's about who you are! And I didn't want my children to be detached from their true identity. I truly believe that you can live in a new country with a different culture and language, yet remain true to your Iranian roots.*

Maryam, a 38-year-old mother with children aged six and ten, has lived in the Netherlands for 12 years, following her husband's pursuit of a Ph.D. Despite being born in the Netherlands, her children were fluent in Persian since it remains the family's preferred mode of communication. Maryam considers that her children's Iranian cultural identity is closely tied to fluency in Persian, and she raises concerns that losing the language would potentially diminish their 'true identity'. For her, linguistic and cultural integration with Dutch society can coexist with a steadfast connection to Persian heritage. By defining her children's identity as inherently Iranian and upholding a strict language ideology centred on Persian, Maryam's approach preserves her family's cultural integrity and subtly resists the dominance of Dutch culture in their lives. This unrelenting commitment to Persian, consciously or unconsciously, influences her children's self-sense to perceive their identity through the prism of their Iranian roots.

(b) Emotional connection

For many parents raising children in bilingual settings, the sense of emotion of maintaining the home language becomes highly significant (De Houwer 2020). Immigrant parents consciously maintain their heritage language to authentically communicate their innermost thoughts, emotions, and experiences to their children (Kopeliovich 2010), thereby feeling more genuinely connected when communicating in their own language (Tannenbaum 2005). Contributing to this viewpoint, the present study uncovers numerous instances where interviewees exhibit a favourable connection

to Persian which arises from a deep sentimental resonance it carries for these parents. These Iranian parents describe how speaking Persian evokes a range of emotions, including comfort and intimacy.

- (3) (Hamed) *Persian is not just our first language; it's the language through which we truly express ourselves, especially when it comes to our emotions. I can connect better emotionally with my son in the Persian language.*

Hamed and his wife Zohreh relocated to the Netherlands 28 years ago. They have a 12-year-old son. Hamed explains that Persian holds a deeper meaning beyond just being his native language; it is the most authentic way for him to articulate his emotions (3). Hamed believes he can help a more profound mutual understanding and strengthen their bond through emotional exchange in Persian with his son.

- (4) (Afsaneh) *The language of emotions in Persian is much more powerful than in other languages. For example, 'Qorbun Sadegh-e Raftan' in Persian can't be fully said in said in English or Dutch. Our inner emotions toward others come across more deeply through the Persian language.*

Fifty-four-year-old Afsaneh, mother of two daughters aged 17 and 24 she cherishes Persian for its unparalleled ability to communicate emotions with a depth and authenticity that transcends other languages. She cites the phrase 'Qorbun Sadegh-e Raftan' as an example, noting how it is used frequently in Persian to convey intense emotions and affection for family and friends. Afsaneh argues such expressions carry profound affective connotations in Persian and cannot be fully translated into English or Dutch. Observationally, even though Afsaneh's daughters often speak English among themselves they naturally switch to Persian during moments of emotional expression or when showing affection – whether speaking to their mother or even their family pets. This consistent code-switching illustrates how Persian is ingrained in their emotional bonding and affection.

(c) Intergenerational family connections

Another commonly declared drive among Iranian parents in this study for prioritising their children's Persian language learning is to enhance improved communication with grandparents and other relatives (Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur 2018; Chowdhury and Rojas-Lizana 2021; Romanowski 2021). The potential loss of family connections looms when language differences impede successful intergenerational communication (Fillmore 2000; Zhang 2008). Likewise, the interviewees consistently discuss the importance of maintaining meaningful relationships with extended family members while also addressing language barriers that could hurdle these bonds.

Example (5) sheds light on this notion:

- (5) (Maryam) *We travel to Iran yearly, and I didn't want my children to have difficulties connecting with their grandparents and relatives. Because I see that some Iranian children who are growing up here are having a hard time speaking with their grandparents because their Persian skills are limited. But it was important to me that my children could comfortably talk to their grandparents and build a connection with them.*

In the above excerpt, Maryam's account indicates the importance of her children mastering Persian to establish meaningful connections with their grandparents and extended family in Iran. She further discusses the difficulties some Iranian diaspora children face in connecting with their grandparents due to language barriers. This observation likely influenced her decision to prioritise Persian learning for her children. This observation likely influenced her decision to pursue Persian learning for her children. Maryam comprehends that proficiency in Persian is crucial for communication and the continuation of familial bonds and ties across generations.

- (6) (Nazanin) *My parents are in Iran, but we stay in constant contact with them through WhatsApp. Every time they call, they always talk to Noor. She needs to be able to talk with her grandparents in Persian.*

Nazanin, a 43-year-old mother, resides in Amsterdam with her family. Noor, her ten-year-old daughter, was born in Germany but they moved to the Netherlands when Noor was 5 years old. Nazanin's remarks on her daughter's ability to comfortably engage in talks with her grandparents (6) reflect the high value she places on maintaining close-knit family bonds that span generations. In addition, the use of WhatsApp draws attention to how technology helps families stay connected with extended family in Iran and overcome physical distance.

(d) Cultural and linguistic literacy

Multiple studied parents praised the richness of Iranian literature, history, and culture and voiced their hope for their children to acquire Persian to explore and appreciate these resources. This is illustrated in the subsequent interview excerpts.

- (7) (Soheila) *Iranian history, literature, and culture are very rich. If Ramak can speak, read, and write Persian well, she can easily connect with that cultural heritage.*

Soheila proposes that honing Persian language skills, encompassing speaking, reading, and writing, including speaking, reading, and writing, paves the way for a deeper understanding and engagement of Iran's cultural heritage (7). She asserts that learning Persian allows individuals like Ramak to immerse themselves in Iranian history, literature, and culture.

- (8) (Nazanin) *I hope Noor's Persian skill reaches a level where she can even read the poems of renowned Iranian poets like Hafez, Saadi, and Molana. These poets are the heart and soul of our Persian culture and literature. This way, she can better understand the cultural roots of her parents.*

Similarly, Nazanin shares her hope for her daughter to attain a high level of proficiency in Persian so that she can read the works of esteemed Iranian poets (8). She views these poets as central figures embodying the core of Persian culture and literature. Nazanin is convinced that Noor will better understand her parents' cultural background if she delves into the works of Iranian poets.

(e) Travelling to Iran

Some parents reported that their children learning Persian could prove advantageous for future travels to Iran. For example, Faranak, a 46-year-old mother of two girls aged six and eleven, maintains her children would be able to interact with locals, understand signs, and navigate the country confidently if they achieve proficiency in the Persian language (9).

- (9) (Faranak) *I encourage my children to learn Persian so that if they want to travel to Iran on their own someday, it will be easier for them. By knowing the Persian language, they can talk with locals, read signs, and find their way around the country.*
- (10) (Zohreh) *We travel to Iran once or twice a year. It's important for me and his father that Reza doesn't face any language difficulties or feel stressed during these visits. We want him to feel comfortable and relaxed, able to talk with our relatives, join in conversations, and truly enjoy his time in Iran.*

Zohreh notes the significance of ensuring a comfortable and confident experience for her son, Reza, during her family's annual visits to Iran. She aims to eliminate any potential language

obstacles or discomfort Reza might face while visiting the country. Zohreh and her husband place importance on Reza's seamless communication with relatives, active participation in conversations, and overall enjoyment of his time in Iran.

(f) Perceived benefits of multilingualism

An additional key argument put forth by the Iranian parents in advocating for the preservation of the Persian language was the perceived benefits of multilingualism. They considered it as a pathway to personal and professional growth, as well as cognitive development for their children.

- (11) (Afsaneh) *I truly believe that learning different languages is like an investment in our children's future. The more languages they can speak, the more doors will open for them in terms of jobs and education. Bilingual or multilingual children are often smart and sharp because their brains are trained to think in different ways.*

Afsaneh sees learning Persian and other languages as a strategic investment in her children's future that will unlock doors to a plethora of career prospects and educational opportunities (11). Besides, she discusses the cognitive advantages that come with multilingualism, such as enhanced problem-solving skills and cognitive flexibility found in bilingual or multilingual children.

- (12) (Hamed) *I've noticed something interesting. The more languages a child learns, the easier it becomes for them to pick up new languages. It's like a domino effect. For example, if a child starts with, let's say, Persian, and then learns Dutch, it becomes easier for them to learn other languages like English or French.*

Hamed highlights an intriguing feature of language acquisition in children, which he describes as a 'domino effect' that is associated with multilingualism (12). He proposes that if children grow up learning multiple languages, it is easier for them to learn a new language in the future. Considering the case of having the Persian language first and later learning the Dutch language, Hamed explains how this initial language foundation can streamline the process of acquiring additional languages like English or French. Hamed's insight suggests the interconnected nature of language learning and the role one language can play in accelerating the mastery of others.

Language practices and management

Regarding language practices and strategies for language management, the study revealed that parents bear practical language orientation in the form of translating their language beliefs into actions. In this sense, they not only hold positive attitudes towards their heritage language, but they also make sure to practice Persian consistently and engage in language use that aligns with these beliefs. The succeeding sections elaborate on these families' specific attempts to promote the Persian language within their households.

(a) Home sitting and parental involvement

The interviews confirmed that parents are aware of the significance of the home domain in preserving heritage language (Chowdhury and Rojas-Lizana 2021; Fishman 1991; King and Fogle 2006). They also acknowledged their role in ensuring Persian's continuity and creating a language-rich environment.

- (13) (Faranak) *The home environment and the role of parents, especially the parent who spends the most time with the child, which is usually the mother in about 90% of cases, play a crucial role in*

saving Persian. The time that parents and the child spend together, and even how they manage their time, is very important. There is a big difference between simply speaking Persian to the child for basic communication and having a close and intimate relationship, spending meaningful time together. It's also important to use the Persian language during activities and playtime with children. If that happens, the child will definitely learn Persian. Speaking Persian shouldn't be limited to regular conversations only. Parents should focus on their children's language development and ensure they spend dedicated time with them consistently.

Faranak points out the crucial role of the home setting and the primary caregiver, often mothers, in safeguarding the heritage language (13). Even though her daughters were not born in Iran, they have achieved fluency in Persian due to their parents' dedicated efforts to preserve the language. Faranak particularly refers to the time parents spend with their children and the quality of that time in upholding the language. There is a difference, she argues, in using Persian for casual and ordinary interaction to fulfil daily needs and using it to build an intimate relationship through meaningful shared experiences. In addition to that, Faranak recommends incorporating the Persian language into different facets of children's activities and playtime, which enhances language exposure, promotes language use and practice, and improves chances of Persian language learning by children.

- (14) (Hamed) *I think parents play a very important part. I've got some Iranian friends here, and their children don't speak Persian well at all. That's because the parents just didn't put in the time and effort to keep the language alive with their children.*

In alignment with Faranak's view, Hamed elaborates on the important role that parents play in their children learning Persian (14). He recounts instances of Iranian acquaintances whose children struggle with the Persian language due to limited parenting concerning efforts and time in preserving the language. This implies that children may find it extremely difficult to develop fluency in Persian if their parents do not show this kind of commitment and dedication.

(b) Consistent use of Persian

Pauwels (2005) argues successful language maintenance begins with the consistency in language choice of parents. Likewise, observational notes reveal that focus group parents use Persian throughout their household routines and interactions and create an environment where children are constantly exposed to and regularly practice the language. As a result, the children have become competent in the language, and Persian as their primary means of communication with their parents.

- (15) (Faranak): *We have been speaking Persian with our children from the very beginning, they also got used to it and they know that they should speak Persian with me and their father at home. It's not like I constantly dictate to them that they must use Persian. Sometimes, they talk to each other in Dutch at home, but they talk in Persian with me and their father.*

Faranak explains that Persian has always been the primary language for communication in her family (15). By consistently speaking Persian with their children, she and her husband have established an unspoken expectation that this is the preferred language for parent-child interactions. While they don't set strict rules requiring their children to speak only in Persian, they allow some use of Dutch. However, the main communication between parents and children continues to be in Persian. This division between languages signifies a clear separation where Persian is reserved for familial interactions at home and Dutch is used outside the home.

- (16) (Maryam) *We have been speaking Persian with our children since they were born. They speak Persian with me and their father. Even after they started going to school here and began learning Dutch, they still speak Persian with us at home. It's like they have formed a habit and they know that they should speak Persian at home. Sometimes, they use some Dutch words or speak Dutch with their friends, but mostly they speak Persian with me and their father.*

Maryam also argues the early introduction of Persian to their children and how they continue using the language with them even after they start going to school and learning Dutch (16). Although her children occasionally mix in Dutch words or speak with friends in Dutch, they generally talk to their parents in Persian. This showcases the family's great dedication to preserving their linguistic heritage maintenance as the main language spoken at home since Persian continues to be the language most often used at home.

(c) Enrolling children in Persian language classes

Some informants are dedicated to improving their children's Persian language skills in both conversational and literacy aspects, reflecting a well-rounded approach to learning their heritage language. This commitment is also shown by their decision to enrol their children in Sunday Persian language classes. In these organised settings, children can develop their listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills in Persian while interacting with peers who share similar language goals.

- (17) Simin: *Both Arsham and Artemis go Persian language classes every Sunday. Artemis is still quite young, so she's focusing more on speaking and listening for now. But Arsham is starting to learn some reading and writing as well. I'm really hopeful that as the kids get older, they'll be able to dive deeper into Iranian literature and really develop that cultural connection through the language.*

Simin explains that she has enrolled her children, Arsham (9) and Artemis (7), in Persian language classes to support their Persian language skills. This strategy reflects a deliberate FLP focused on strengthening their linguistic development. Both children regularly attend these Sunday classes, and Simin hopes that, as they grow older, they will be able to read Iranian literature and form a deep connection with it.

- (18) Mohsen: *The children already speak Persian, but the main reason I send them to school is for them to learn reading and writing. The Persian alphabet is completely different from Dutch and English, and the writing system is also right-to-left. If they ever travel to Iran in the future, I want them to be able to read street signs and not have any difficulties.*

Mohsen and his wife have been living in the Netherlands for four and a half years after moving from Ukraine, and they have two daughters, aged 13 and 7, both born in Ukraine. He points out the differences between the Persian alphabet and script and those of Dutch and English. He seeks to ensure his children develop sufficient language skills to handle potential trips to Iran in the future. Unlike other parents who may prioritise cultural preservation or a love for Persian literature, Mohsen's decision to enrol his daughters in Persian Sunday classes is driven by practical concerns. This highlights the diversity in parents' reasons for encouraging their children's Persian language skills.

(d) Storytelling and reading in Persian

Some parents in the study have embraced storytelling and reading in Persian as effective strategies to involve their children in the language. They obtain Persian books either directly from Iran or with assistance from family members and relatives who bring these books for their kids. Soheila

exemplifies this proactive approach by establishing a routine of reading bedtime stories to her daughter, Ramak.

- (19) Soheila: *Every night, I make it a point to read storybooks to Ramak, and it brings her so much joy. We receive these books from our family and friends in Iran, or occasionally we manage to find them here. we don't have a big collection of Iranian storybooks. I sometimes translate Dutch stories into Persian while reading them to Ramak.*

Due to the limited access to Iranian storybooks, Soheila's practice of translating Dutch stories into Persian for bedtime reading implies the innovative strategies parents employ to instil language proficiency in their children.

(e) Providing language feedback and correction

An emerging theme from both the interviews and observational notes was parents' active role in addressing children's language mistakes and mispronunciations. For instance, Maryam demonstrated a consistent and gentle approach in guiding her children's language use.

- (20) Maryam: *It often happens that children mispronounce words or don't say a sentence correctly, and I try to correct them gently by calmly explaining the correct way. Instead of directly pointing out their mistakes, which might discourage them, I provide explanations or offer alternative words and phrases to help them learn the correct usage.*

Maryam observes that it is rather typical for children to mispronounce words or grapple with sentence construction. To address this issue, she employs a gentle corrective approach. Her technique includes providing clear explanations and the suggestion of alternative phrasing, which aids children in comprehending proper usage. This method builds a positive learning environment where children can strengthen their language skills while feeling supported and encouraged.

(f) Engaging in traditions, cuisine, and crafts

Participating Iranian parents reports that traditional Iranian celebrations like Nowruz, Chaharshanbe Suri, and Yalda hold great importance for Iranians. Simin, a mother of two who arrived in the Netherlands five years ago, comments that her family actively celebrates these events, and her children take great delight in these occasions. She posits that such cultural practices largely contribute to immersing her children in Iranian customs and traditions.

- (21) Simin: *Celebrations like Nowruz, Chaharshanbe Suri, or Yalda, are deeply important for all Iranians. Every year, we celebrate these ceremonies, and well, the children also love them. It helps them become more familiar with Iranian traditions.*

Observations revealed that several families deepen their connection to their cultural roots by preparing Iranian cuisine and incorporating traditional Iranian arts and crafts into their home decor. Elements such as carpets, pottery, calligraphy, and miniature paintings serve as tangible representations of their Iranian culture and roots within their home.

(g) Supporting home language advice from school teachers and healthcare centre professionals

The interviewed parents also acknowledge a crucial role for schoolteachers and professionals working in healthcare centres. These individuals encourage parents to continue using Persian while interacting with in interaction with children while allowing children to learn Dutch at school.

- (22) Faranak: *For many years, my daughters' teachers and healthcare professionals have advised me to speak Persian with the children at home, letting them learn Dutch within the educational system here. Just a few weeks ago, during a meeting with Dorsa's teacher, she asked if we read books to her at home. Dorsa mentioned that I always read to her in Persian. The teacher firmly supported this method and said that it is the right thing to do to communicate with children in our language at home and completely leave children's learning of Dutch to the school.*

Faranak reports that her daughters' teachers and healthcare providers have frequently advised her to speak Persian as the main language at home and let the school system manage her children's Dutch language acquisition. She recalls a recent conversation with her daughter's teacher, who strongly approved her reading Persian-language books at home and encouraged her to continue engaging her daughter in Persian.

This example shows how support from school teachers and healthcare centre professionals builds up parents' determination to maintain their heritage language. Faranak's encounters with teachers and healthcare providers who encourage the use of Persian at home have reinforced her confidence that her children's Dutch skills will develop naturally at school. Similarly, Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur (2018) found second-generation Turkish families in the Netherlands feel more assured in preserving Turkish, when teachers and healthcare providers support the use of Turkish at home.

Discussion

With a focus on Persian language maintenance, the current study delved into the language ideologies, practices, and management strategies employed by a specific cohort of Iranian migrant families residing in the Netherlands. Upon examining parental language ideologies, the results reveal a diverse range of perspectives among Iranian parents. The studied Iranian parents conveyed a common sentiment of deep appreciation for the Persian language; however, their motivations for valuing it differed significantly. Parents' attitudes toward Persian are influenced by a combination of cultural, emotional, practical, and cognitive factors, thus revealing multi-layered parental language ideologies.

For certain parents, their appreciation for Persian arises from a deep cultural bond and a desire to uphold their heritage and identity. They perceive the language as integral to their cultural heritage and wish to transmit it to their children to maintain their roots and traditions. Studies conducted on Iranian families in the United States (Gharibi and Mirvahedi 2021) and New Zealand (Gharibi and Seals 2020) have discovered parallel concerns and beliefs, indicating the shared recognition of the importance of heritage language development in expressing cultural identity within the Iranian diaspora. Others have emotional motivations, viewing Persian as a language that holds sentimental value and serves as a source of comfort and intimacy. They have an emotional attachment to it and find it easier to articulate their emotions in Persian. Practical considerations also play a role in parents' motivations for valuing Persian: proficiency in Persian facilitates communication with family members, connections with their ethnic community, and opportunities for travel and engagement with cultural resources like literature and history. Gharibi and Seals' study (2020) yielded comparable results, with Iranian parents articulating the need for their children to learn and maintain Persian language skills to communicate effectively with family in Iran. Furthermore, cognitive considerations are influential, given that parents are aware of the cognitive development associated with multilingualism, including its potential to enhance their children's educational performance and future employment prospects. Although the parents thus expressed different motivations for prioritising Persian, they all shared the common goal of preserving their cultural heritage and ensuring that their children had a strong connection to their roots.

In FLP scholarship, language ideology is frequently recognised as a driving force that influences the decisions of family members regarding whether to uphold or abandon their heritage language

(Curdt-Christiansen 2009, 2018). The successful intergenerational language transmission noted in this research can, be predominantly ascribed to the parents' robustly positive attitudes towards their heritage language (e.g. Gharibi and Mirvahedi 2021; Gharibi and Seals 2020). Parents' shared goal of Persian transmission, along with the emotional, practical, and cognitive beliefs, give the impression of a language ideology strongly focused on language maintenance. The present study shows that this translates into explicit ideas about language practices and management. The explicit nature of these beliefs and their translation into tangible practices indicates the remarkable coherence between ideology and implementation within Iranian households. It is noteworthy that the attitudes immigrants maintain regarding their heritage language and culture may undergo changes throughout their period of emigration (Gharibi and Seals 2020). However, this study reveals that even among parents with extended immigration histories, FLPs remain consistent from the outset. From this investigation, it can be inferred that for these Iranian parents, their beliefs are notably shaped by their determination to pass on the heritage language to their children. The parents were well aware of their crucial role in promoting Persian within their families and of the home setting in achieving this. The present research demonstrated that Persian formed an integral part of the daily routines, events, and interactions of these families, thus offering their children constant exposure to the language as well as plenty of opportunities to make use of it. These Iranian parents actively took further tangible steps to support language continuity by enrolling their children in Sunday Persian classes, storytelling and reading books in the heritage language, offering feedback on their children's language use, engaging in cultural traditions, preparing and enjoying traditional cuisine, and participating in crafts and artistic activities. The findings demonstrate that these families adhere to a robust FLP, which extends beyond mere positive language attitudes and includes a range of initiatives to support heritage language development and cultural preservation. It seems remarkable how systematic the parents' views are, and how consistently they try to implement their views in their interactions with the children. Whether this is related to parents' high-skilled backgrounds or to more widespread Iranian language ideologies and policies is an important consideration. Additionally, how this connects with the language policies advocated in Dutch educational and healthcare institutions warrants further investigation.

FLP views the family as a dynamic entity that adapts its language use and practices in response to changes in the sociolinguistic context (Sharbawi and Hassan 2024). This study then enriches the FLP scholarship by examining the language dynamics of Iranian families in the Netherlands, an understudied migrant community. The in-depth exploration of the experiences of the studied families provides valuable insights into the complexities of the use and transmission of heritage languages and creates opportunities for transferability. Researchers and practitioners can leverage these insights to draw connections to other sociolinguistic and cultural contexts. It thus acts as a starting point for further research to gain a more inclusive representation of the Iranian community in the Netherlands and beyond.

Conclusion

This study investigated the FLP of eight Iranian families in the Netherlands with regard to parents' language ideologies, practices, and management strategies. Findings indicate that Persian is highly esteemed in these households, shaped by cultural, emotional, practical, and cognitive influences. Parents exhibited a strong commitment to preserving Persian and making concerted efforts to ensure their children learn it. The alignment between parents' language beliefs and practices underscores their active role in promoting language continuity and showcases a resilient approach to heritage language maintenance across generations, even for long-term immigrants. This research enhances our understanding of language dynamics in diasporic contexts and illuminates the intricate relationship between beliefs, practices, and cultural preservation within Iranian migrant families.

Note

1. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of participants.

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