Language Practices in Multilingual Ghanaian Nuclear Families: Exploring Mother-Child Interaction and L1 Transmission

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ABSTRACT

Ghana is a country with about 79 indigenous languages. Some of these languages have become endangered through the phenomenon of language shift. This study explored the multilingual situation of homes of Ghanaian nuclear families, seeking to understand how the language practices of nuclear families impact language endangerment in the country. The study employed a qualitative approach to analyze two nuclear families as a sociolinguistic domain where members of the families make choices regarding language use and practices. Data for the study were obtained via participant observation of two nuclear families and interviews with the spouses of both families. The findings showed that in multilingual families, the language the children acquire as their L1 is often the language of mother-child interaction. The study showed further that fathers' L1 becomes endangered when that is not the language of interaction between mother and children. The findings revealed that even though parents wish to preserve their L1 and culture by passing on their L1 to their children, this goal becomes threatened when their L1 is not the language of mother-child interaction in the home. The findings reinforce the idea that language maintenance is not just an individual choice but broader sociolinguistic and cultural forces shape it. The endangered status of the parents' L1 in nuclear families demonstrates how family language policies, gendered linguistic roles, and societal pressure interact in influencing language endangerment. The study recommended that parents need to put in the effort to ensure that their L1 is used at home to help their children develop competence in it.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ghana is a linguistically diverse country with a rich tapestry of languages spoken across its regions. The linguistic landscape of the country is characterized by a multitude of indigenous languages, each with its own cultural and historical significance. Research has shown that there are approximately 80 indigenous languages in the country (Nyamekye & Uwen, 2024; Soma & Zuberu, 2021). This language diversity reflects the country's ethnic multiplicity and the historical influences that have shaped its sociolinguistic environment. Unfortunately, a lot of indigenous languages are struggling to gain nationwide recognition and relevance. Out of these many Indigenous languages in the country, only 11 are sponsored by the government to be officially taught as subjects of study in various

educational institutions (Nyamekye, 2022; Nyamekye et al., 2023; Nyamekye & Baffour-Koduah, 2021; Owu-Ewie, 2017). These major Indigenous languages include Ga, Ewe, Dagaare, Kasem, Gonja, Nzema, Dangme, Twi, Mfantse, Gurune, and Dagbani, with English serving as the official language (Nyamekye et al., 2023; Owu-Ewie, 2017). Soma and Zuberu (2021) report that Ghana's language and literacy policies throughout the years have been focused on only five (5) of these indigenous languages spoken by major ethnic groups who represent 90.7% of Ghana's population, namely Akan (49.1%), Mole-Dagbani (16.5%), Ewe (12.7%), Ga-Adangbe (8%) and Guan (4.4%).

Despite the role indigenous Ghanaian languages play in cultural expression and communication, those that are not used in education, as subjects that are taught, face the threat of extinction due to language shift and the dominance of English. Nyamekye and Uwen (2024) explain that the overwhelming emphasis on English and the undying desire for Eurocentric thoughts, coupled with efforts toward the promotion of English expansionism, has made the study of the local languages, as well as their use as media of instruction at the primary level of education, unpopular. This observation aligns with the argument that African countries, including Ghana, "need to pay attention to language practices beyond the education sector, and put in deliberate measures to manage multilingualism in other formal as well as semi-formal spaces" (Amfo & Anderson, 2019:334). Unfortunately, many of the studies have generalized the situation of multilingualism without paying critical attention to the contribution of multilingual nuclear homes in fuelling language shifts and rendering minority languages endangered in Ghana. The current research, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by considering the homes of multilingual nuclear families as a sociolinguistic domain.

In the rich tapestry of multilingual settings, sociolinguistic domains serve as theoretical constructs that intricately shape the dynamic interplay of languages within diverse social contexts (Amfo & Omoniyi, 2019). These domains are conceptual frameworks that encapsulate specific spheres of human interaction, each governing its unique language choices and practices. In exploring the multifaceted nature of multilingualism within the home as a domain, this research delves into the intricate ways in which individuals navigate linguistic diversity in Ghanaian nuclear homes. The research focuses on the domain of home communication, examining the nuanced ways in which multilingualism is employed within the realm of interaction between couples who speak different Ghanaian languages as their L1 and between these couples and their children. The study is also interested in the language of communication among siblings whose parents speak different languages, such as L1. This research seeks to unravel the complexities of language use in this evolving sociolinguistic domain, the home of multilingual nuclear family members. Through this exploration, the research aims to shed light on the dynamic and adaptive nature of multilingual practices within the landscape of multilingual nuclear homes. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

i. What language do couples with different languages, such as L1, use at home?

ii. What language do couples with different languages, such as L1, use with their children?

iii. What language do children of couples with different languages, such as L1, use among themselves?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1 Multilingualism

Language contact leads to various linguistic phenomena, including borrowing of words (speakers may borrow words or phrases from other languages, integrating them into their linguistic repertoire), code-switching (speakers switch between languages in a single conversation or even within a sentence), and multilingualism (Coulmas, 1998). As language contact creates multilingualism, it becomes apparent that different language speakers come into contact and interact with one another (Peleman et al., 2022). In such sociolinguistic situations, there are typically multiple languages in use within a social group, sometimes with each language assigned a specific function. Research has shown that this scenario, which has become apparent in multicultural cities, regions with historical language diversity, or areas where migration and globalization bring people with different linguistic backgrounds together, has become the norm (Holmes, 2013; Meyerhoff, 2006). Understanding and navigating a multilingual setting in the context of language contact requires linguistic flexibility and an appreciation of the diverse linguistic backgrounds within the community. It also highlights the dynamic nature of languages as they adapt and evolve in response to social interactions and cultural exchange.

Individual multilingualism may result from factors such as bilingual upbringing, education in multiple languages, or exposure to different linguistic environments (Hudson, 2001; Meyerhoff, 2006; Stavans & Hoffmann, 2015). As multiple languages are used in the same community, a fertile language learning environment is created for other members of the community to learn other languages in addition to their L1. Multilingual communities, therefore, create multilingual individuals (Hudson, 2001; Stavans & Hoffmann, 2015).

Multilingualism has several advantages, including enhanced communication skills, cultural understanding, and flexibility in different social and professional contexts (Sigman, 2017). It also reflects the diversity and interconnectedness of languages in our globalized world. However, managing multilingualism can pose challenges, such as language policy decisions, the maintenance of linguistic diversity, and addressing issues related to language proficiency and equity within a community (Stavans & Hoffmann, 2015; Sigman, 2017). Accordingly, research has shown that efforts to promote multilingualism often focus on language education, cultural exchange programs, and the development of inclusive language policies to ensure that individuals and communities can navigate and benefit from linguistic diversity (Stavans & Hoffmann, 2015). None of the studies that have been conducted centered on how multilingual nuclear families maneuver the multilingual situation in the family, especially in terms of the L1 acquisition of Ghanaian children with parents who speak different languages as L1 and live in a multilingual community.

Research has shown that couples with different first languages (L1) are often confronted with the challenge of choosing a language for communication at home. The choice of language practice in the home is influenced by various factors, including cultural identity, practicality, and the desire to maintain linguistic heritage (Anto et al., 2024). Accordingly, the language choice can vary significantly depending on the couple's context, such as their location, the languages they speak, and their social environment (Anto et al.,

2024; Sorokina & Mugno, 2024; Beraud, 2016; Aziz et al., 2015). For Norwegian-Ukrainian couples, English often serves as a lingua franca due to its status as a global language, facilitating communication and cultural exchange (Beraud, 2016). Acehnese intermarriage couples in Indonesia frequently choose Bahasa Indonesia for home communication. This choice is driven by its status as the national language and its role as a neutral and dominant language in the community (Aziz et al., 2015). Language choice can be influenced by ethnic pride, where couples may prefer a language that represents their cultural identity. It can lead to a hierarchical ranking of languages based on perceived cultural superiority (Beraud, 2016). Research indicates that L1 retention is possible even as individuals acquire a second language (L2). It, however, is dependent on the frequency of L1 use, which plays a crucial role in maintaining proficiency in the native language (Sorokina & Mugno, 2024). With these findings in the literature, it would be revealing to understand the context of Ghana and how the situation could contribute to the global discussion.

2. 2 The Concept of Domains

In sociolinguistics, the concept of domains is used as a theoretical framework to analyze and comprehend how specific social contexts or situations influence language choices in multilingual settings. Domains are social spaces with activities associated with them (Amfo & Omoniyi, 2019; Fishman, 2006). In multilingual contexts, one may decipher a domain by considering the different languages that are used in the transactions and activities that take place. Even though there are language policies that assign languages to specific domains, this is not always the case, as language practices in certain domains simply emerge from conventional practice (Markowska-Manista et al., 2020). The primary function of the domain as a theoretical construct is to explain the motivation or what influences specific language choices within multilingual settings. This is because, in multilingual environments, individuals may choose to use different languages or language varieties depending on the social context or domain in which they find themselves. Domains, therefore, help explain and predict these language choices based on the particular social context. In this regard, the concept of sociolinguistic domain serves as a theoretical framework to understand how social contexts influence language choices, particularly in the complex and dynamic environments of multilingual settings (Amfo & Omoniyi, 2019).

As an analytical concept, domains are not given; they are constructed. They, therefore, vary based on each multilingual group and are constructed because of careful observation (Cremin et al., 2015). Researchers employ sociolinguistic domains to analyze and understand language use in different social contexts. It helps in studying how specific situations or environments influence language choices. Different communities or settings may have distinct domains based on their unique social structures, cultural practices, and linguistic interactions. It acknowledges the diversity and complexity of multilingualism, emphasizing that the construction of domains is context-specific (Amfo & Omoniyi, 2019). With the language choices of multilingual speakers being domain-dependent, research is necessary to observe and understand linguistic behaviors within a particular multilingual domain (Raikes et al., 2019).

Holmes (2013:22) argues that the family constitutes a sociolinguistic domain by explaining that "a domain involves typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings." In this regard, the family comprising parents and their children is a domain because the things that are often talked about are typical. Additionally, the members of the family are the same people who often engage in the interactions in the home. The home where the nuclear family lives is also typical as it serves as the place of interaction among the family members. As children engage with the different languages of their parents and the lingua franca of the community, they are also expected to grasp the cultural norms and social structures associated with the many languages they are exposed to (Belinskaya et al., 2020; Junghare, 2012).

The family is an important sociolinguistic domain that shapes language practices, policies, and identity formation. It is a domain that exhibits a microcosm where language has a dual function: as a means of communication and as a marker of cultural and social identity. The family thus provides a context of wide relevance that can help understand how language policies are enacted and negotiated, particularly in multilingual and multicultural contexts. It involves an exploration of dynamics related to language maintenance and shift and the socio-political process shaping such phenomena. Family language policy (FLP). It is an emerging area of research that considers how families maintain or lose languages intergenerationally. It looks at the strategies families use to promote or hinder language use, which in turn is influenced by larger societal ideology and policy (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013). In the current study, therefore, two nuclear families have been adopted as a sociolinguistic domain for examining language practices with a focus on L1 acquisition of the children and its implication on the endangerment of native languages of the parents in multilingual nuclear homes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted an ethnographic approach, which provides insight into how families negotiate their multilingual repertoires and, therefore, family language practices in multilingual settings (Lanza, 2021). Research has shown that family relations serve as a sociolinguistic variable that sets markers on speech etiquette and, therefore, social class and cultural identity (Hristova, 2021). Different cultural contexts examine the family as a regime of language policy. It brings attention to the role of the family in maintaining languages and cultures within global multilingualism (Nandi & Zabrodskaja, 2024). Whereas the family is a core site for language policy and practice, it is also driven externally through social expectations, political imposition, and educational pressures that work in tension with each other, between the desires to maintain linguistic continuity and the need to give in to sociopolitical demands (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013).

Regarding this background, the current research is conducted qualitatively with two families used as case studies. The use of a case study to research language practice in the home is justified by its ability to provide in-depth, nuanced insights into the complex and dynamic nature of language use within familial settings (Palojärvi et al., 2023). Case studies allow researchers to explore the intricate interactions and contextual factors that influence language practices, offering a rich, detailed understanding that other

methodologies may not capture (Nunez, 2019). The researcher acknowledges that everyone's experience is unique and shaped by the individual's personal history, cultural background, and social context (De Vost et al., 2011; Mackay & Gass, 2012). Hence, this approach is particularly valuable in examining the diverse and culturally specific language practices of nuclear families, as it accommodates the exploration of individual language experiences and the sociocultural contexts that shape them (Machata, 2023).

As a case study, the researcher employs only two families to allow for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon, with a focus on understanding the intricacies of individual experiences of language practice in the home among multilingual nuclear family members (Duff, 2010; De Vost et al., 2011). The families were purposively selected because of the language situation the researcher observed in the homes of these families. Concerning data collection, an interview guide was designed based on research objectives 1 and 2. The interview guide was tested to ensure that the questions were not ambiguous. The testing of the interview guide also allowed the researcher to identify questions that were not going to elicit the required responses for revision. The participating families were given consent forms to sign before the commencement of the study. In addition to the interview, the researcher also employed observation as a data collection strategy. The researcher visited each of the families twice on different occasions. The researcher spent approximately two hours with each family member during each visit. The visitations were made on weekends and on days when all the members of the families were in the house. The researcher made notes on the observations and recorded the responses of the interviews conducted with an interview guide (Creeswell & Poth, 2018). To validate the responses of the participants, the researcher, after the transcription of the audio, visited the families, played the recorded audio, and provided the transcriptions to a couple of each family to ensure that the data adequately reflected their views on the phenomenon. The observation note is used together with the transcribed interview for the analysis. The transcribed data were grouped and analyzed thematically according to the research questions.

4. FINDINGS
4.1 Data

The study data were analyzed based on the research questions. It begins with a description of the biographic characteristics of the participants and linguistic information of the families.

1. Family 1

Mr Mawuli (not real name), husband, is a typical Ewe with both parents being indigenes of Aflao, a typical Ewe town in the Volta Region of Ghana. He was raised in Aflao and obtained basic and secondary education in the Volta Region of Ghana, with the schools situated in typical Ewe communities of Aflao. The L1 of Mr Mawuli is Ewe, as his parents are both native speakers of Ewe. Through education, he has acquired English as his second language. Mrs Mawuli (wife of this man) hailed from Akpafu in the Oti region of Ghana. She was born to parents who were natives of Akpafu. Siwu, the native language of the people of Akpafu-Lolobi, is her L1. Due to the status of Ewe as a language of wider communication in Jasikan, Mrs Mawuli is fluent in Ewe. Unlike her husband, Mrs Mawuli

speaks Akan as well. It makes her multilingual: she speaks Siwu, Ewe, Akan, and English, while her husband only speaks Ewe and English. This couple has four children, boys, and they live together in Jasikan, in the Oti region of Ghana. The children of this nuclear family speak English and Ewe, but they are more fluent in English than Ewe. Table 1 represents the biographic and language information of the members of Family 1.

Table 1. Biographic and linguistic information of family 1

Family member	L1	L2	Level of Education	Occupation	No. of lang.
Father	Ewe	English	Postgraduate	Lecturer	2
Mother	Siwu	English/Ewe/Akan	Undergraduate	Teacher	4
Children	English	Ewe	Primary	-	2

2. Family 2

Mr Narh (not real name), husband, comes from Odumase-Krobo in the Eastern Region of Ghana. His parents were both speakers of the Klo dialect of Dangme and were born in a community where Dangme was the language of interaction in most domains, excluding the school and other official settings like the court and government administrative offices where English dominates. Dangme is, therefore, the L1 of Mr Narh. Due to education, Mr Narh stayed at Nsawam, a typical Akan-speaking town, and has developed competence in the Akan language. Mr Narh has a master's in three languages: Dangme, Akan, and English. Mrs Narh has her parents as Ewes. She was born, raised, and educated in Ho, where Ewe is the main language of interaction in most domains. Apart from English, Mrs Narh does not have competence in any other indigenous language aside from Ewe. However, through education, she learned French. This couple is blessed with four children, and they live together in Ho, where the couple works.

Table 2. Biographic and linguistic information of family 2

Family member	L1	L2	Level of Education	Occupation	No. of lang.
Father	Dangme	English/Akan	Postgraduate	Lecturer	3
Mother	Ewe	English/French	Postgraduate	Teacher	3
Children	Ewe	English	Primary	-	2

4.2 Language of interaction between couples with different L1

The analysis of the data shows that in both families, English language is the language that is often used for interaction between the couples. The observatory note revealed that in Family 1, the couple sometimes uses Ewe, even though in most of their interactions, English is used more. To confirm this observation, both husband and wife of family 1 were interviewed differently on their preferred language of interaction with their spouse. The following were the responses:

Husband 1: *Ewe is my first language and feel comfortable using it. Fortunately, my wife understands it; so, I do use it when I want to communicate with my wife. However, I think in most of our conversational engagements, we use English. We use English more often than Ewe.*

Wife 1: *My husband does not speak my language. So, we use English. Even though I can speak Ewe, we don't use it often. We speak English most of the times.*

Husband 2: *I always speak English with my wife. I don't understand Ewe and she could speak neither Dangme nor Akan. So, the only language I speak with her is English.*

Wife 2: *I speak English only with him. He does not understand Ewe, which is my L1 and I also don't understand both Dangme and Akan, so I always use English with him.*

In Family 1, both spouses are revealed to be bilingual in Ewe and English, as they can use either of the two. Husband 1 mentions that he feels comfortable using Ewe, especially when communicating with his wife. It suggests that, within the intimate domain of spousal communication, there is a preference for Ewe. Despite the comfort of using Ewe with the spouse, the husband notes that English is used more often in conversational engagements. It indicates that, in broader or more general communicative contexts between the couple in Family 1, English takes precedence over Ewe. Wife 1 emphasizes the predominant use of English in her interactions with her husband. The wife's statement highlights the role of English as the dominant language in their shared communication despite her proficiency in Ewe. The fact that both spouses can use Ewe introduces a shared language element within the family. However, the dominant use of English suggests that sociolinguistic domains within the family are shaped by external factors, possibly influenced by societal, educational, or situational considerations.

Concerning Family 2, the data shows that English is the sole mode of communication; neither of the couples understands the other's L1. Both Husband 2 and Wife 2 engage in monolingual communication within their marital domain, exclusively using English. It suggests a shared linguistic domain in their spousal interactions. Wife 2 mentions not understanding either Dangme or Akan, which are the husband's primary languages. This language barrier leads to the adoption of English as the sole means of communication between them. Wife 2 assertion corroborates this, emphasizing that the husband does not understand her L1 (Ewe), and she, in turn, does not comprehend Dangme or Akan. Consequently, English becomes the linguistic bridge that facilitates communication. The dominance of English in their communication highlights its role as the default and possibly more proficient language for both spouses, despite the linguistic diversity in their backgrounds. Both spouses do not have proficiency in each other's L1 (Ewe for the wife and Dangme for the husband). This shared limitation in proficiency reinforces the necessity for using English as the common language for effective communication. The data reflects a sociolinguistic domain within the marital relationship characterized by cultural and linguistic homogeneity. The couple relies on a shared language (English) due to a lack of mutual understanding of primary languages.

The sociolinguistic analysis of this data underscores the impact of shared linguistic limitations and the need for effective communication within the marital domain. The dominant use of English reflects a pragmatic communication strategy in response to a shared lack of proficiency in each other's native language, highlighting the dynamic interplay of language choice within the context of a marital relationship. The data from both families hint at a possible language shift within the families, where English becomes the default language for most conversational engagements.

4.3 Language choice for parent-child interaction in multilingual nuclear homes

Regarding the language of interaction between the couples and their children, the data reveal that for Family 1, English is the main language of communication between both parents and their children. While wife 1 always uses English to interact with the children, husband 1 occasionally uses Ewe to interact with the children, even though English is the default language used for interaction with the children. For Family 2, the data shows that Husband 2 uses English to interact with the children, while Wife 2 uses Ewe with the children.

Husband 1: *I wish to use Ewe to interact with my children, but even though they understand it to some extent, they become slow as they need time to process it. It is not everything that they can express in Ewe. So, I occasionally speak Ewe with them.*

Wife 1: *I always speak English with them. Even though I understand Ewe, it is not my mother tongue, so I don't crave speaking it with them. Their father sometimes speaks it with them. But I always speak English with them.*

The data from Family 1 offers insights into language choices and practices within this familial setting. The family operates in a multilingual context where both Ewe and English are present. Husband 1 expresses a preference for using Ewe with the children, emphasizing a desire to connect with them through his native language. However, he notes the children's slower processing and occasional challenges in expressing things in Ewe. Husband 1's observation that the children become slow in processing Ewe indicates a potential lack of competence in speaking Ewe among the children, a situation *Meyerhoff* (2006) describes as passive knowledge. It makes him use English most of the time. Husband 1 occasionally speaks Ewe with the children, suggesting a flexible approach to language use based on the context. Wife 1, on the other hand, consistently chooses English for communication with the children. Despite her fluency in Ewe and the fact that it is the L1 of her husband, she does not speak it with children, citing it not being her mother tongue as a reason for not craving to speak it with the children. The desire of Husband 1 to use Ewe with the children reflects an intention to pass on cultural and linguistic identity to his children. The choice of language is intertwined with cultural connections, highlighting the role of language in preserving heritage within the family.

Concerning Family 2, the parent-child interaction is purely multilingual. While Wife 2 uses Ewe solely, Husband 2 uses English, with occasional Dangme. The data reveals a nuanced interplay of language choices influenced by cultural identity, linguistic preferences, and considerations for effective communication. The family serves as a dynamic sociolinguistic domain where language practices are shaped by individual backgrounds and the desire to maintain cultural connections within the familial context. The data below corroborate this finding.

Husband 2: *I speak English with the children. However, I want my children to know how to speak their native language, Dangme. So, I speak it with them sometimes. But they are not yet competent in using Dangme. So, English is the default language I use with them. They can speak their mother's language Ewe, so I am also trying to teach them Dangme. Just that I also want to learn Ewe, and they are my Ewe teachers. So, I am often confronted*

with conflicting desires: to make them speak Ewe with me so that I can learn Ewe, and to speak Dangme with them so that they can learn Dangme.

Wife 2: *I am a Voltarian, so an Ewe. I speak my L1 and Ewe with my children. They can speak it very well, and I am very happy about it. That is their default language; they speak it among themselves. I am happy they use Ewe to interact with one another instead of English. I wish they could speak their dad's language, but he does not have time to teach them.*

Family 2 operates in a multilingual environment where English, Dangme, and Ewe are present. Both Husband 2 and Wife 2 express a desire for their children to know Dangme, the native language of the husband, in addition to their proficiency in Ewe, the native language of the wife, and English. Husband 2 adopts a multilingual approach with his children, primarily using English as the default language. However, he also incorporates Dangme, recognizing the importance of preserving their native language. It introduces a language-learning dynamic within the family. Husband 2 acknowledges that the children are not yet competent in using Dangme. It may be due to factors such as a lack of exposure to Dangme and the dominance of English in their interactions. Husband 2 experiences conflicting desires: the desire to speak Ewe with the children for his language, the desire to learn Ewe, and the wish to teach them Dangme, his native language. It highlights the intricate balance between personal language goals and the desire to pass on native language proficiency to the next generation.

Wife 2, as a Voltarian with Ewe as her L1, consistently speaks Ewe with the children. Ewe is the default language in their family interactions, and she expresses satisfaction that the children use Ewe among themselves. Wife 2's emphasis on Ewe as the default language expresses her commitment to preserving cultural identity within the family. The use of Ewe among the children reflects a sense of cultural continuity and heritage. Wife 2 wishes that her children could speak their dad's language (Dangme) but notes that he does not have time to teach them. It points to the challenges families may face in transmitting multiple languages, especially when time constraints are present. Family 2 exhibits a teaching and learning dynamic, with Husband 2 learning Ewe from his children and Wife 2 teaching Ewe to her children. This reciprocal process underscores the interactive and dynamic nature of language learning within the family.

The findings from the sociolinguistic analysis of the data within the family domain reveal a multilingual and dynamic language landscape. The family members negotiate language choices based on individual desires, language learning goals, and the preservation of cultural identity. Considerations of communication efficiency could influence this negotiation, children's language development, and individual language preferences. The interplay of English, Dangme, and Ewe within Family 2 and English and Ewe in Family 1 reflects the complexities of language transmission and acquisition in a multilingual context. The findings of the sociolinguistic analysis of the data within the family domain reveal a nuanced interplay of language choices influenced by cultural identity, linguistic preferences, and considerations for effective communication.

4.4 Child-to-child interaction in the multilingual home of parents with different L1

The analysis of the data reveals that in both families, the language of child-to-child interaction in multilingual nuclear homes is the language the mothers use to interact with the children. In families where the mother uses her L1 with the children, that language becomes the language of child-to-child interaction. On the other hand, when it occurs that the mother uses a language different from her L1 when interacting with the children, that language will become the language of child-to-child interaction in the home. The observatory notes from both Family 1 and Family 2 reveal that English, being the language of Mother-child interaction in Family 1, is also the language of child-to-child interaction. At the same time, Ewe, which is the language of mother-child interaction in Family 2, is also the language of child-to-child interaction in Family 2. It needs to be mentioned that even though English is the language of father-to-child interaction in Family 2, English is never used as the language of interaction among the children, even though they have competence in speaking it.

The findings demonstrate consistency in mother-child interaction and child-child interaction. In Family 1, English serves as the language for both mother-child and child-to-child communication, while in Family 2, Ewe is used in both contexts. The language used in mother-child interactions extends to child-to-child interactions, creating a linguistic continuity and shared communication pattern among siblings. The use of Ewe as the language for mother-child and child-to-child interactions in Family 2 suggests a deliberate effort to reinforce the cultural and linguistic identity of Ewe within the family. The consistent use of Ewe among family members contributes to a shared linguistic and cultural environment. The language choices made by parents, particularly mothers, appear to influence the language practices among siblings. If the mother-child interaction is in English (Family 1) or Ewe (Family 2), it sets a precedent for child-to-child communication to follow the same linguistic pattern. In Family 2, even though English is the language of father-to-child interaction, it is not used among the children themselves. It suggests a distinction in the language dynamics between parent-child and child-to-child interactions. The choice of language in the father-child interaction does not extend to sibling communication unless that same language coincides with the language of Mother-child interaction, as observable in Family 1.

The findings further reveal that being competent in speaking a language does not mean that language could function as a language of interaction in the home environment. It is observed that in Family 2, where English is the language of father-to-child interaction, the children are competent in speaking it. However, they do not use English as the language of interaction among themselves. It underscores the distinction between language competence and the language chosen for specific interactional domains within the family. The findings illustrate the dynamic and context-specific nature of language practices within the family. It influences language choices in the family context by various factors, including parental language use, cultural considerations, and the specific interactional context. The findings of the study highlight the interconnectedness of language use within the family domain. Language choices in parent-child interactions extend to child-to-child interactions, reinforcing cultural identity and creating a shared linguistic environment

among siblings. However, the distinction in language use between father-child and child-to-child interactions indicates the nuanced and dynamic nature of language practices within the family as a sociolinguistic domain.

5. DISCUSSION

In Family 1, the bilingual nature of both spouses in Ewe and English creates a hybrid communicative space. Husband 1's preference for Ewe within intimate settings aligns with linguistic hybridity (Klötzl, 2013, 2014), where couples adapt language use to foster intimacy. However, the wife's predominant use of English suggests a dynamic where English assumes a practical role in broader domains, reflecting a blend of cultural and linguistic norms. It supports the argument of Nyamekye and Uwen (2024) that indigenous Ghanaian languages, despite their cultural significance, face endangerment due to language shift and English dominance. For Family 2, the exclusive use of English highlights ELF as both a necessity and a unifying medium in the absence of mutual L1 proficiency. It corroborates Taglialatela's (2024) findings that ELF in multilingual nuclear families extends beyond communication, fostering intimacy and connection across linguistic and cultural divides. Similarly, the findings align with the findings of Lomeu (2022) and Klötzl (2014) that English in such homes creates a shared intercultural space, transcending traditional linguistic norms.

Family 1's use of English for broader conversations aligns with Lanza and Wei's (2016) assertion that family language policies reflect external influences. While the presence of Ewe allows for moments of cultural preservation, English dominance suggests a potential language shift driven by perceived social and economic utility (Adjei et al., 2022). In Family 2, the absence of a shared L1 reinforces English as a practical necessity, confirming Lanza and Wei's (2016) view that household linguistic realities shape language policies. Both families illustrate strategies for navigating linguistic diversity in marriage. Family 1 balances bilingualism, with Ewe signifying heritage and English functioning as a lingua franca. It aligns with Klerk's (2001) observations on how attitudes, utility, and heritage influence language choices. In contrast, Family 2's exclusive reliance on English demonstrates its role as a neutral, pragmatic choice in overcoming linguistic barriers (Lomeu, 2022; Klötzl, 2014).

Husband 1's preference for Ewe underscores the link between language and identity, aligning with Piller's (2002) assertion that language use reflects identity negotiations. The wife's emphasis on English suggests that gender and societal norms influence linguistic choices. In Family 2, English bridges linguistic gaps, serving as a shared identity marker (Lomeu, 2022; Klötzl, 2014). The dominance of English in both homes affects L1 transmission, reducing children's retention of Indigenous languages (Bromham et al., 2019). Both families exhibit trends of language shift toward English. In Family 1, this shift is gradual, with Ewe retained for specific domains, whereas in Family 2, English is firmly established as the default language. It aligns with broader sociolinguistic trends where societal pressures and educational backgrounds influence language practices (Bromham et al., 2019). The findings highlight how couples navigate language, identity, and intimacy

within ELF interactions, shaped by linguistic hybridity, cultural exchange, and necessity (Lomeu, 2022; Klötzl, 2014).

The study further sheds light on cultural identity and practicality in language use. Husband 1's efforts to use Ewe with the children reflect a commitment to preserving linguistic heritage, aligning with Bellón et al.'s (2024) assertion that language maintains cultural ties. However, the children's limited competence in Ewe exemplifies Meyerhoff's (2006) concept of "passive knowledge," where comprehension exists, but active use is limited. Consequently, Husband 1 defaults to English, balancing effective communication with cultural retention. Wife 1's preference for English aligns with Quirk et al. (2024), highlighting how personal identity influences language choice. The divergence in parental language preferences creates a multilingual environment but also signals a potential shift toward English, reinforcing Facciani's (2024) findings on heritage language maintenance challenges.

In Family 2, the interplay of Ewe, English, and Dangme illustrates a dynamic multilingual landscape. Wife 2's commitment to Ewe aligns with Bellón et al.'s (2024) emphasis on language in identity formation. The children's use of Ewe among themselves suggests some cultural continuity, yet the limited proficiency in Dangme highlights the challenges of transmitting less-dominant languages in English-prevalent contexts. These difficulties, exacerbated by time constraints, align with Tziampiri et al.'s (2024) findings on practical limitations in heritage language transmission. Family 2 also exhibits reciprocal language learning. Husband 2 learns Ewe from his children, while Wife 2 teaches them Ewe, reflecting interactive family language practices. It supports Facciani's (2024) view that collaborative language exposure enhances linguistic diversity. However, the lack of structured support for Dangme learning suggests potential linguistic loss, indicating gaps that may hinder the preservation of the father's heritage language.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has looked at the family as a sociolinguistic domain where different factors influence language choices and practices. The findings of the study have revealed a nuanced language dynamic within the families. While there is a shared proficiency in Ewe among one set of parents, their interactions are often dominated by the use of English in broader communicative contexts. It suggests a sociolinguistic shift that external factors could influence, although multilingual parents can be considered the experts on the cultural background of their home languages (Schwartz, 2018). The study concludes that in Family 1, where English is the primary language of communication, reflected in child-to-child interaction, the native language of Wife 1 will be abandoned completely and may gradually become highly endangered if other native speakers also shift from speaking it to their children as demonstrated by Wife 1 (Batibo, 2005). In the case of Family 2, the father's native language is threatened as the children still cannot speak it and do not use it for child-to-child interaction. If Husband 2 does not intensify his action to ensure that children develop competence in Dangme, the children will grow to become culturally and linguistically aligned with only Ewe.

The study underscores the importance of actively preserving native languages within the family setting. In the case of Family 1, the potential abandonment of Wife 1's native language (Siwu) and the threat to the father's native language (Dangme) in Family 2 suggest the need for intentional efforts to maintain and transmit these languages to the next generation. The observed sociolinguistic shift towards English in broader communicative contexts in Family 1 and, to some extent, Family 2 implies that external factors might be influencing language choices. This shift could be driven by societal trends, educational influences, or the perceived prestige associated with English. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of González et al. (2023), in which the English language dominates the homes of multilingual families in Norway. Recognizing and understanding triggers that influence the domination of the English language in the domain of multilingual families is crucial for addressing language shifts within families. The study indicates that Wife 1's native language may face complete abandonment and become highly endangered if the current language use patterns persist. It highlights the vulnerability of minority languages within the family context and emphasizes the urgent need for language revitalization efforts (Lomeu, 2022; Klötzl, 2014).

The findings suggest a potential threat to the fathers' native languages in families, as children are not likely to use the L1 of their fathers but the language their mothers speak with them. This situation calls for proactive measures by fathers to ensure the transmission of their L1 to their children. It emphasizes the critical role of intergenerational language transmission. Encouraging native language use in parent-child and child-to-child interactions is crucial for language sustainability. The potential loss or endangerment of native languages can impact not only linguistic diversity but also the preservation of cultural identity within the family unit. It highlights the importance of language policy and planning within families. Families should consider adopting language policies that prioritize the maintenance of native languages. It may involve creating environments conducive to multilingualism and fostering positive attitudes toward linguistic diversity. The implications of the study's conclusions emphasize the need for proactive measures to preserve and transmit native languages within the family context. Addressing sociolinguistic shifts, supporting intergenerational language transmission, and recognizing the cultural significance of language is essential for the maintenance of linguistic diversity and cultural identity within families.

The study's findings imply cultural identity and heritage preservation as both families reflect the critical role of language in maintaining cultural identity. However, the degree of success in transmitting heritage languages varies based on parental strategies and external constraints (Bellón et al., 2024). Another implication of the study is that parents' beliefs and personal connections to languages significantly shape family language policies and practices, as in both families, individual language preferences influence the linguistic landscape (Tziampiri et al., 2024). The limited proficiency of children in heritage languages, such as Ewe in Family 1 and Dangme in Family 2, highlights the ongoing challenge of sustaining multilingualism amidst the dominance of English. It reflects broader sociolinguistic trends of language shift in multilingual settings. The findings and implications of the study, therefore, reinforce Facciani's (2024) call for the integration of

multilingual pedagogies into home and school environments to foster heritage language development.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that families adopt explicit language policies that prioritize the transmission of native languages alongside the dominant language of the community and English. Parents should ensure consistent practice of L1 use in the home to reinforce L1 acquisition. The study highlights the tendency of children to adopt the language their mothers speak with them; therefore, fathers should increase their efforts to communicate in their L1, making it a natural part of daily interactions with their children. To counteract the nonuse of the L1 of parents by the children, parents should create immersive environments where siblings are encouraged to interact in their heritage languages through play, storytelling, and cultural activities. Future research should explore the long-term effects of family language policies on language maintenance across multiple generations. Longitudinal studies tracking language transmission patterns in multilingual families should be conducted to provide deeper insights into the sustainability of heritage languages. Additionally, future research should examine the role of external institutions, such as schools and religious organizations, in either supporting or hindering family language planning efforts. A comparative study across different multilingual contexts would also help to identify best practices for language preservation in diverse sociolinguistic environments.

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