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Coping with National Language Policy Shift: Voices of Chinese Immigrant Parents in an Irish County Town

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ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the diaspora Chinese community in Limerick – an Irish county town in the southwest of the Republic of Ireland – and examines how Chinese parents have responded to the education policy shift resulting from the 2017 Irish foreign language strategy, which added Chinese to the official educational curriculum. A semi-structured group interview was conducted with four Chinese-speaking parents. Analysis of the data revealed that identity preservation and maintaining bonds with extended family are the predominant expressed reasons for parents to cultivate their children's Chinese proficiency. English and Irish are prioritized over Chinese. Though the parents hold positive attitudes towards the inclusion of Chinese as a school subject in Ireland, they are disempowered from taking advantage of participating in the implementation of this national language shift due to a lack of access to social, cultural, and economic capital. Analysed through a Bourdieuian lens, the findings further expose the limitations or constraints placed on family language policy and the discrepancy between macro- and micro-level language policies. The paper is intended to shed light on education, social justice, and equality, bridging the gap between micro-level family language practices and macro-level language policy.

Keywords: family language policy, heritage language maintenance, Chinese immigrant parents, education justice and equality

1. INTRODUCTION

Family language policy (FLP) plays a critical role in heritage language (HL) maintenance in ethnic minority contexts (Curdt-Christiansen and Wang, 2018; Spolsky, 2004, 2012b; Wei *et al*., 2022). However, limited attention has been given to FLP in the Chinese diaspora situated in the context of the ten-year Foreign Language Strategy launched by the Republic of Ireland's Department of Education and Skills (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). As part of the

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ten-year foreign language strategy (FLS), the Chinese language along with Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese, has been added to the Leaving Certificate curriculum (a two-year senior cycle programme that prepares students for higher education and employment) in the Republic of Ireland as of 2020. Language policy is utilized to legitimize certain ideological preferences about language, and is 'about people and about the sites where underlying language ideologies are constructed, reproduced and challenged' (Pulinx and Van Avermaet, 2014, p. 29). This study explores whether the inclusion of Chinese in the national curriculum and the changing status of the Chinese in the Irish context will have an impact on Chinese parents' language perceptions, practice, and management at the micro level.

Language policy researchers have long called for bridging the gap between top-down (macro-level) and bottom-up (micro-level) language policies and for a more holistic approach and a less binary view of the process (Kelly-Holmes *et al*., 2009; Shohamy, 2006). Micro planning (driven by bottom-up influences) involves small organizations such as supplementary schools, family units, and individuals, while the macro-level components of Language Policy and Planning (LPP) normally include large-scale, national-level government activities. FLP is generally seen as an example of bottom-up or grassroots language policy. Meanwhile, national foreign language policy, such as Languages Connect – Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017–2026 (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) – is seen as a top-down approach. In general, the two do not meet, a situation that has drawn criticism from researchers (e.g., Hutchings and Matras, 2017; Maylor *et al*., 2010). Under the Irish foreign language strategy, the teaching and learning of the Chinese language and culture became the shared aim and goal of the top-down government language policy and the family units.

Family language policies are based on individual choices and decisions influenced by sociocultural, historical, political, and economic realities (Lanza, 2021). The formation of FLP is a complex negotiation closely influenced by 'the changing socio-cultural and political contexts at the macro-level and the personal beliefs and encounters at the micro-level' (Wei *et al*., 2022, p. 5). With the release of the Republic of Ireland's first national language strategy, it is crucial to examine FLP at the micro level under the influence of this changing social reality at the macro level (Liu, 2022). Meanwhile, with the increasing value of Chinese in the Irish linguistic market, this study explores Chinese migrant parents' language ideologies regarding Chinese learning and the practices they have adopted in response to this national language shift. It is worth noting that Mandarin (also called Putonghua), as the standard language for the Chinese government, education and national official media, is specifically promoted by Irish government foreign language policies (Department of Education and Skills, 2017; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

[NCCA], 2016). Given the status of Mandarin as the Chinese government's promoted national language and the rise of China as an economic and geopolitical power, Mandarin may well become a lingua franca dialect in mainland China (Plumb, 2016). It can thus be argued that the promotion of Mandarin Chinese by the Irish government can be seen as a movement towards the commodification of Chinese language (Liu, 2022; Liu and Gao, 2020).

An additional motivation for this study is the need for more research to be carried out with immigrant communities outside major urban areas. Research has shown that the demographic concentration of a community in a given area affects language maintenance (Abdelhadi, 2017; Fishman, 1991; Holmes, 2013). In other words, 'The smaller the size of a community, the stronger the threat of language shift and death' (Mesthrie *et al*., 2009, p. 250). Geographical concentration helps to create social networks and institutions such as schools within the community (Harte, 2010) which can better facilitate the maintenance of community language. Furthermore, inequity between urban and rural allocation of education resources is observed in many countries. This includes inequalities related to educational outcomes, such as graduation rates and test scores, as well as inequalities in educational opportunities and experiences in schools (Sullivan *et al*., 2018). Despite these important contextual differences, heritage language maintenance (HLM) in smaller cities or remote/rural areas has not received sufficient attention in research.

The majority of existing studies on heritage language maintenance amongst Chinese immigrant communities have been conducted in the context of major metropolitan cities with large Chinese immigrant populations, including Vancouver, Houston, and San Francisco (Liang and Shin, 2021). In order to bridge this research gap, Liang and Shin (2021) carried out a case study to investigate attitudes and practices regarding heritage language maintenance among Chinese immigrant families in a mid-sized midwestern American city. Similarly, in the Irish context, Diskin (2019) investigated heritage language maintenance in the Polish and Chinese communities, focusing only on the capital city, Dublin.

The present study further addresses this research gap by exploring the responses of Chinese immigrant parents outside major urban areas to the national education policy shift brought about by the Irish foreign language strategy. Situated within the context of a top-down national language policy, this study aims to enhance, through a Bourdieuian lens (Bourdieu, 1989), our understanding of FLP at the micro level, where it is associated with broader processes of socio-political movements insofar as parental agency 'gives priority to social prestige, educational empowerment and socioeconomic gains' (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016, p. 695). Bourdieu's concept of social capital allows us to examine how the availability of support, information, and advice from parents' networks of friends and extended family can shape their FLP. More specifically, this study addresses the following questions:

(1) What are parents' ideological beliefs on Chinese heritage language maintenance in the context of the Irish national language policy shift?
(2) What kinds of practices are implemented to encourage children to maintain their HL in the context of the Irish foreign language strategy?

2. Parents' Responses to Policy Change: Family Language Policy

Family language policy exists at the micro level of language management and is regulated by parents and caregivers, who choose the language(s) to be spoken at home (Spolsky, 2009). The theoretical framework of family language policy addresses language practices, language beliefs, and language management in conceptualizing the language choices and practices of family members (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). Language beliefs involve the attitudes, values, and perceptions that family members hold about languages. These beliefs influence language choices and practices (Curdt-Christiansen, 2014, 2018). Parents' views constitute an important dimension of LPP and FLP (Curdt-Christiansen and Wang, 2018; Spolsky, 2012b) as parents make many decisions about language use and provide language exposure within the family. Parents are crucial in implementing bilingual or multilingual policies in family domains by actively investing in children's language development; parents not only provide explicit, planned activities but also engage in implicit socialization (Curdt-Christiansen and Wang, 2018). While personal motivation and determination, ethnic pride, and the availability of heritage language education in the community and public educational systems are important factors contributing to successful heritage language maintenance (Brown, 2011), parental support and involvement are identified as the most significant factor influencing the their level of acculturation in the host country, and their perceptions of the language's value for their children's future influence these attitudes (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; McCollum and Hernández, 2015).

Parents' motivations for maintaining heritage languages within their families are diverse. Preservation of cultural identity and heritage is a primary motivation, as maintaining heritage languages can support children to connect with their roots and maintain intergenerational communication (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Smith-Christmas, 2019). Furthermore, parents often perceive the heritage language as an asset that provides cognitive, educational, and economic advantages for their children (Leung *et al*., 2019; Li, 2017; Smith-Christmas, 2020). Belief in the benefits of bilingualism further drives parents to prioritize the maintenance of the heritage language. Despite the importance attributed to heritage language maintenance, however, parents face numerous challenges and barriers. Limited resources, such as access to formal education or support materials in the heritage language, can impede their efforts (Cho, 2016; Davis, 2012; Smith-Christmas, 2020).

Dominance of the majority language in the host society, along with societal pressures to assimilate, can also reduce heritage language use within the family (García, 2009; McCollum and Hernández, 2015). Additionally, conflicting demands on parents' time and limited exposure to the heritage language community pose challenges in providing consistent language input (Leung *et al*., 2019; Smith-Christmas, 2019).

Though FLP operates at the micro level of language management, it also represents a microcosm of macro level language policy in society, as family language policy is intertwined with sociocultural, socio-economic, and socio-political realities (Curdt-Christiansen and Huang, 2020). Family language decisions are often made based on parents' perceptions of the social utility, power, and value of a language in the given socio-political context, rather than being informed by the need for minority and indigenous language maintenance (Curdt-Christiansen and Wang, 2018; Schwartz, 2010). The socio-cultural and political Individuals, communities, and societies 'constantly evaluate the value of language in the society, which exerts influence on its practice and ideology and can further engender conflicting beliefs, inconsistencies and incongruent implementation and expectations' (Wei *et al*., 2022). This investigation of FLP will 'reveal the conflicts that families negotiate between the realities of social pressure, education demands, and the desire for cultural-linguistic continuity', illustrating the relationships between private domains and the public sphere (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013, p. 8).

3. A Bourdieuian Lens on Family Language Policy

Family language policy is a concept incorporating the language choices and practices of family members (Curdt-Christiansen, 2014, 2018). In this paper, three interrelated conceptual tools developed by Bourdieu – capital, habitus, and field – and their interplay are examined as structuring elements of language choices made within families of the Chinese diaspora. These conceptual tools offer a lens to understand how migrant families' FLP is structured as a result of the mediation of the migrant parents' 'subjective experience (and available resources) and the objective linguistic norms, habitus in education and the wider society' (Savikj, 2017, p. 35).

'Habitus' refers to the internalized preferences or dispositions that guide individuals' daily practices. It is a system of 'schemata or structures of perception, conception and action' (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 27) that is rooted and cultivated in socialization within the family (family upbring) and conditioned by the individual's position in the stratified society (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014). In Bourdieuian theory, an individual's past experience is an important contributing factor that shapes that individual's practice. In the study of FLP, this manifests as the influence of parents' past experiences, including family upbringing,

schooling, peer socialization, and employment as migrants' (habitus), on their perceptions of the heritage language, and by extension on their FLP.

'Capital' is used by Bourdieu to refer to the resources, tools, and skills in diverse forms (economic, cultural, or social) that enable agents to engage in social interactions. Economic capital is portrayed as the basis of all other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 252), and refers to material resources such as income or property. Social capital includes resources linked to the 'possession of a durable network of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Cultural capital or 'cultural competences' can be understood as internalized and intangible skills and knowledge, objectivised in cultural products (i.e., books or tools), or institutionalised as officially accredited degrees or certificates. The conceptual tool of symbolic capital is also employed to analyse FLP in the heritage language maintenance context (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Wei *et al*., 2022). Based on Bourdieu's (1986) framework, language is an asset and a form of linguistic capital that can be translated into other forms of capital. The possession of capital (cultural, social, or economic) influences the power and privileges the individual is equipped with in a specific context, which affects the choices that individual makes. As argued by Wei *et al*. (2022), Chinese immigrant parents overseas who support multilingual education share the belief that language is a useful asset for enabling their children to earn economic and social-political-linguistic capital for their social advancement. The cultural, linguistic, social, and economic resources they are able or unable to draw on will shape how they structure FLP for their migrant families.

Bourdieu's third concept, the field, refers to the surrounding environment (e.g., family, educational field, economic field) in which social practices and interactions occur. Individuals' positions within a particular field depend on 'the interrelation of their habitus and the capital they can mobilize in that field' (Edgerton and Roberts 2014, p. 195). Individuals' practices or behaviours are the consequences of their habitus and cultural capital interacting within the context of a given field. Bourdieu (1984, p. 101) presented a formula representing the interplay of habitus, capital and field: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice. The Bourdieuian constructs of field and capital have been used in the analysis of educational issues regarding 'social inequality, cultural capital, educational attainment and parental involvement in schooling' (Savikj, 2017, p. 55). The national or local field in which language education policies and practices are situated is also an important factor in shaping parents' FLP. Languages are perceived as instruments of power by Bourdieu (1989). In the context of heritage language maintenance, there are symbolic power relations between HLs and the dominant language in the home country at the macro level, and power relations within the migrant families are at stake given the different language skills and entitlements that the parents bring. These symbolic power relations at both macro and micro levels may consequently influence FLP in the heritage learning context.

By focusing on the Chinese diaspora families through the Bourdieuian lens in the Irish context, this study contributes to understanding how they cope with and react to shifts in national language policies, thus helping to broaden the study of FLP and shed light on policy and practice for social justice in education.

4. The Study

This study was conducted in Limerick, an Irish county town in the southwest of Ireland. The Chinese population in Limerick is small compared to those in major cities worldwide. The Republic of Ireland had a low rate of immigration until the 1990s. The last twenty-five years have seen an increase in the immigrant population as a result of the economic boom in the late 1990s. The first wave of Chinese immigrants to Ireland came from Hong Kong in the late 1950s and 1960s. Members of this group tended to be business owners, mostly in the food and catering sector. The second wave began in the late 1990s, and consisted primarily of students. The 2016 census recorded 19,447 residents from Chinese ethnicities living in Ireland, accounting for just 0.4% of the national population (Central Statistics Office, 2016).

As the contextual background of this study, Limerick seems to stand in a traditional point for immigrant community. McGinnity *et al*. (2018) produced a detailed overview of attitudes to diversity and immigration in Ireland, situated within an international context. Perceptions of diversity were more negative in Ireland than the Western European average prior to 2010. The report noted the impact of economic conditions on people's attitudes to diversity and immigration in Ireland, and found that 'Between 2010 and 2014 perceptions of immigration converged towards the EU10 average, but were still somewhat lower in Ireland by 2014' (p. 49). In addition, attitudes to immigration and diversity were found to differ across social groups, with disadvantaged groups showing more consistently negative attitudes. Limerick has a relatively recent immigrant history and less diverse immigrant communities compared to the larger city Dublin and the Western European average. Understanding the contextual background of this study in relation to immigration history and attitudes will help to better posit the Chinese diaspora community within the local society. This awareness significantly contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the attitudes and practices of Chinese parents have towards the Chinese heritage language maintenance and the Irish government FLS.

As researchers, we have lived in limerick for a considerable period of time. In our fieldwork, most of the local Chinese immigrants we have encountered came from the southern region of China, where Cantonese, Minnan, and other variations of Chinese are their heritage languages.

Participants

The participants comprised four mothers from families who were from mainland China and currently living in Limerick, where their families owned businesses (see Table 1 for more details on participants' and their families' backgrounds). The oldest children of Parents 1 and 4 in this study were defined as 'satellite babies'. This term refers to immigrant children who are temporarily sent back to their country of origin to be raised by members of their extended families.

All four mothers accompanied their children to the Chinese heritage language school and supervised their language study regularly, and all agreed to become parent participants in this study. It is important to note, however, that fathers also play a significant role in HLM.

Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured group interview was conducted to probe the parents' attitudes and beliefs about HL maintenance and transmission in Chinese.

The group interview, which lasted for a total of 45 minutes, was conducted in Chinese, and was audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Despite the limitation of a small-scale study, the interviews do reveal the complexity of parental roles in family HL maintenance among these four Chinese parents living in an Irish county town. The interview transcript was translated from Chinese to English, and the translations were verified by another researcher. The data were then coded using NVivo 10 and analysed using the thematic analysis framework, which is a method for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within the data set' (Braun and Clark, 2006, p. 35). The coding processes also reflected the three dimensions of Fairclough's view of critical discourse analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation (Fairclough, 1995).

The initial coding process was an open coding of the interview transcript, staying close to the data as we made a note of possible codes and categories that might describe the information provided by the respondents. After open coding, we recoded the transcript in a recursive manner, based on the FLP framework (Curdt-Christiansen, 2014, 2018) viewed through a Bourdieuian lens, aiming to develop and test more analytical categories and recurring themes relating to motivations for HL maintenance and identity. All the codes were checked and examined by another Chinese researcher who has high competency in English. Our intent was to develop a conversation with the research questions and theoretical framework of the study – what Fairclough (1992) terms 'interpretation and explanation'.

The codes generated from the following paragraph include, for example, instrumental value, social advancement, intergenerational transmission, Chinese identity, language, and identity.

Table 1: Participant information

Name	Migration history	Languages spoken	Number of children	Children's language learning and migration history	Children speak heritage language
P1	1st generation	English Mandarin Chinese dialect	2	'I have two children. The eldest daughter came to Ireland when she finishe[d] her Year Five study at the primary school in China. My son is 15 years old, and he came to Ireland when he [was] four years old. Before arrival, he had attended the Chinese language school here, but not anymore. I am home-schooling his Chinese.'	Yes
P2	1st generation	English Mandarin Chinese dialect	2	'My two kids are all born and raised here. They are under five years old and have not attended a Chinese school yet.'	Yes
P3	1st generation	English Mandarin Chinese dialect	4	'All my four children [were] born and raised here. The eldest is 17 years old; he has attended the church-run Chinese school and can speak and write Chinese. The second one is 16 years [old], and she can speak and write. The third is attending the church Chinese school and can speak and write as well. The fourth one is a bit weak in Chinese.'	Yes
P4	1st generation	English Mandarin Chinese dialect	3	'I have three children, with the eldest being 15 years old. He lived in China for two or three years as a child, so his Chinese is better. He has no problems with writing and communication. The others are 10 and eight years [old], and they [have] just started to learn Chinese. They cannot express themselves in Chinese, and [that's] not even talking about writing. They have been taught by the church.'	Yes

> (Learning the Chinese language) Definitely gonna be helpful (for the future development of the children), no matter they have the capacity or not, or have the opportunity to go back to China to develop their career. I think as a Chinese descendant, for our next generation and their next generation, they cannot forget their mother tongue. (P1) [肯定有帮助，可能最后不管他们有没有能力，有没有机会回国发展，我觉得华人嘛，我们的下代，他们的下代，我觉得母语不能忘掉]

This excerpt from the interview illustrates the complex interplay of field, capital, and habitus from the perspective of the Chinese mother P1. She notes the instrumental value of the Chinese language, saying that learning Chinese equips an individual with power and privileges. According to P1: '(Learning the Chinese language) [is] definitely gonna be helpful (for the future development of the children)...'. As Bourdieu (1986) notes, language is an asset and a form of linguistic capital that can be transformed into other forms of capital. In addition, the parents' habitus, in the form of past experiences such as family upbringing, schooling, peer socialization, and employment as migrants, influences their perceptions of the heritage language. As a first-generation Chinese immigrant in Ireland, P1 strongly identifies with her Chinese heritage, which explains her affirmative and positive attitudes and practices towards learning Chinese as a heritage language. Further, it is interesting to see that P1 believes the Chinese language as the linguistic capital can provide benefits in various fields, including in China and in the global context.

5. Findings: Parents' Ideologies and Practices in Coping With the National Language Policy Shift

Why Maintain Chinese?

Under the Irish foreign language strategy, Chinese as a 'global language' is articulated as a desirable commodity with market value (Erdocia *et al*., 2020; Liu and Gao, 2020). The promotion of Mandarin Chinese in the Irish education system is explicitly linked to the acknowledgement of China as one of the largest export markets for Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). The Chinese parents who took part in this study were aware of the increasing instrumental value of the Chinese language. According to P2, 'The Chinese language has become much more useful nowadays. There is Chinese signposting everywhere in countries like Japan and Korea.'

However, the Chinese parents' motivation to preserve the Chinese language for their children in this study are driven by beliefs embedded in the wider sociopolitical context, as 1) maintaining Chinese identity was claimed to be the main driver of HLM for all parents in this study amongst other factors, including 2) career prospects or social mobility (including the opportunity for further education in China) and 3) connection with parents and extended family. Maintaining Chinese identity was the main driver of the parents' HLM in this study. Chinese

language proficiency is strongly associated with Chinese identity and cultural preservation among Chinese diaspora (Li, 2017). Our findings are consistent with this viewpoint. Unsurprisingly, all Chinese parents in this study made statements which further illustrate this point. As an example, P1 stated, 'I think as a Chinese descendant, for our next generation and their next generation, they cannot forget their mother tongue'. It is very interesting to see that P1 used the term 'mother tongue' to describe the Chinese language for her children and further descendants. This term has been used synonymously with 'heritage language', 'community language', and 'native language' to refer to an immigrant, indigenous, or ancestral language that a speaker finds personally relevant and desires to (re)connect with (Wiley and Lee, 2009). This suggests P1's strong desire to pass on Chinese identity within the family. P1 also expected her children to carry forward this obligation to transmit Chinese language and culture to the next generation. The effort dedicated to the maintenance of the Chinese language on the part of Chinese parents and children is often more about 'remaining' or 'returning' by holding onto language, culture, and custom than it is about 'becoming' (Mu, 2014). P2 also emphasized the importance of retaining the Chinese identity for her children, saying, 'I also hope the child can speak Chinese well. Because we are Chinese, after all'. An individual's past experience is an important contributing factor that shapes that individual's practice (Bourdieu, 2002). In family language policy, the influence of parents' past experiences, including family upbringing, schooling, peer socialization, and employment as migrants' (habitus), shape their perceptions of the heritage language, and by extension, their FLP (Savikj, 2017). The parents' past experiences, including family upbringing, schooling, peer socialization, and employment as migrants (habitus), influence their perceptions and ideologies of the heritage language and thus play an important role in shaping their FLP. The positive attitude towards Chinese by all the participants in this study is believed to be associated with the parents' own past experience (habitus). The participants in this study are all first-generation immigrants in Ireland and are all Chinese restaurant owners who gained economic success through Chinese food, which is one of the most visible aspects of Chinese culture by the Chinese people. The Chinese restaurant is a place where Chinese identity is constructed, negotiated, and presented within the local community (Lu and Fine, 1995; Semple, 2021).

Little's (2020) classified of motivations for heritage language learning as (1) either central or peripheral and (2) either emotional or pragmatic. Apart from identity preservation (a peripheral/emotional motive), P4 described multiple layers of motivation that also fall into both the peripheral/pragmatic (career prospects or social mobility) and peripheral/emotional categories (communicate with extended family) (Little, 2020). P4 emphasized that Chinese was her children's mother tongue, used for connecting with parents and extended family. However, it is worth noting that all the children in this study were learning Mandarin, rather than other dialects spoken by their parents. When asked

reasons for choosing Mandarin, all parents in this study expressed it is a common decision. Mandarin is the standard variation of Chinese in mainland China, and it is also an emerging lingua franca within the East Asian region (Plumb, 2016) and in overseas Chinese communities. Mandarin has 'privileged status as the official national language of mainland China' (Teo Jia Min, 2015, p. 123). Its' increasing importance as a trade language because of China's expanding economic market is also recognised by researchers (Kuo and Jernudd, 2003). Though local dialects in China were necessary for intergenerational communication with grandparents amongst the families in this study, and though the parents were seeking to maintain their Chinese bonds and ties, these parents did not intend to pass their local dialects on to their children. It seems that this decision was a compromise between identity and the instrumental value of the Mandarin Chinese language. This is an example of how the context of language education policies and practices at the national or local level (i.e., the field) shapes FLP. Mandarin Chinese is promoted as the official and standard language by the Chinese government, despite it being one among thousands of Chinese dialects spoken by Chinese people.

Language is commodified as a technical, universally available skill, standardized and invented for industrialization (Duchêne, 2009; Heller, 2003), commerce, and trade. This commodification is driven by the understanding that the standard language, associated with prestige and authority, requires individuals to possess and accumulate linguistic capital to benefit from the market. As Bourdieu (1997) argued, competence in the legitimate language constitutes the most valuable linguistic capital on the standard linguistic market.

The promotion of Standard Chinese (Mandarin) 'represents China's attempt at establishing linguistic hegemony on the global stage, particularly through the establishment of Confucian Institutes (CIs) worldwide' (Gao, 2017, p. 35). To benefit from the market, language speakers must possess and accumulate linguistic capital. As argued by Bourdieu (1997), competence in the legitimate language constitutes the most valuable linguistic capital on the standard linguistic market. The parents in this study emphasize the commodified value of the Mandarin Chinese, as indicated by the choice of their children to learn Mandarin instead of their local dialects. This observation is similar to the situation in their homeland China where 'ethnic minority languages and fangyans (also known as dialects or regionalects) are challenged by the official Chinese language, Putonghua' (Curdt-Christiansen and Gao, 2021).

Regarding career prospects and social mobility, only P4 expressed the expectation that her children would return to China to develop their careers and an interest in their pursuing a university education in China. According to P4, returning to China for a university education can equip a person with cultural competence or capital in the Chinese context. Other parents expressed their willingness to leave the consideration of career development in China to their children in the future. For example, P1 said, 'I have not really expected

this [developing their career in China or attending the university in China]. It depends on their own choice'. In addition, P4 mentioned that her daughter was interested in studying for an undergraduate degree in China but was also concerned about her Chinese proficiency level, as Chinese proficiency is an entry requirement. P1 also acknowledged the importance of Chinese proficiency in getting the opportunity to enter Chinese university and also the Chinese job market. According to P1: 'Yes, you need to pass the Chinese language test to apply for the Chinese university. Obviously, it would be a huge advantage if our kids can speak Chinese well. That can help them to open the door for work and other opportunities in China in the future.' Both P1 and P4's statements highlight the instrumental value of languages, which provide opportunities for jobs and personal further development in a specific context. The parents' (P1 and P4) perceptions in this study correlate with the concept of language as a form of linguistic capital proposed by Bourdieu (1986). Language is perceived as a form of linguistic capital, which equips an individual with power and privileges the individual, thus affecting the choices that individual makes (Bourdieu, 1986). However, P4 thought that her daughter might be motivated by emotional attachment to China resulting from having lived there in her earlier years. In comparison, she believed that her two younger children, who had not lived in China earlier in their lives, did not have an emotional attachment to China. This is in alignment with findings from Ferenczi *et al*.'s (2013) study investigating attachment to the 'homeland' (one's nation of origin) and its association with heritage culture identification. Ferenczi *et al*. (2013, p. 2) found that 'secure-preoccupied nation attachment was a significant predictor of increased heritage culture identification for participants residing in their country of birth, whilst dismissive nation attachment was a significant predictor of decreased heritage culture identification for international migrants'.

The oldest children of Parents 1 and 4 in this study were 'satellite babies'. According to Bohr and Tse's (2009) study of the decision by Chinese parents living in Canada to send their infants back to China for a time, the major motivation is Chinese heritage language and culture preservation. It also aligns with the parents' economic and professional imperatives as they endeavour to establish a career and lifestyle in a new country (Bohr and Tse, 2009). The phenomenon of 'satellite babies' gives parents a way to draw upon the social capital they have in their home country as a substitute for the social and cultural capital they lack in the foreign country where they are trying to settle, which showcases a limitation of FLP, especially for immigrant parents who have limited access to Chinese language resources or face financial limitations.

Language Priority: English, Irish or Chinese Languages?

The Chinese parents in this study did not consider multilingualism a burden on their children's heritage language maintenance and did not perceive the

trilingual environment as overwhelming. In the Republic of Ireland, Chinese-Irish children are exposed to at least three languages, i.e., English, Irish, and their Chinese heritage language. English is offered as a first (L1) language, with Irish being taught as a second language (L2). The Irish language is 'unique to Ireland and is, therefore, of crucial importance to the identity of the Irish people, to Irish culture and to world heritage' (Ceallaigh and Dhonnabhain, 2015, p. 178). It is taught as a compulsory subject from primary to Leaving Certificate level in the education system, though the majority of the Irish population do not speak the language in their daily personal lives (Ceallaigh and Dhonnabhain, 2015). The overall number of daily speakers of Irish outside the education system nationally was 71,968 (less than 2% of the population) in 2022, according to Central Statistics Office.

All parents in this study did not perceive the trilingual environment as overwhelming. P4 said, 'All the language subjects offered in the school are important. English should be ranked the first I think. They need English to understand all the subjects here. It is a practical tool'. 'I agree totally. English is like a key for the kids. They live in Ireland. Also the Irish language is important and compulsory at school. But I think the kids can handle all these' responded by P1.P1 said, 'I think for the Chinese language, the schooling programme here (in Ireland) is not heavily loaded [too challenging and demanding for the children], so I think if time allows, I hope [for] them to study Chinese [as] well'. All parents in this study did not perceive the trilingual environment as overwhelming. P1's statement reflects a perspective shaped by her cultural background and upbringing in China, where the academic burden is contextualised as a product of globalisation and neoliberalism (Jiang and Saito, 2022). This outlook is influenced by her habitus, encompassing beliefs about education and language acquisition.

All four interviewees agreed that the language-learning priority was English, followed by Irish, with Chinese listed in third place. English was prioritized mainly because of its practicality or instrumental value – as a main subject in the Irish school curriculum, as a medium language for knowledge learning, and as a language for integrating into the local community. The linguistic capital they gain by speaking English as well as their native Chinese has helped them to set up businesses and settle in Ireland. Irish was listed as the second most important language for their children, also as a result of its importance as a main school subject based on the top-down government educational policy. Along with meeting the compulsory requirements for English and Irish study, all the Chinese parents in this study hoped that their children could maintain their Chinese language proficiency.

However, none of their children's mainstream school offer Chinese classes by the time of data collection. When asked if the parents in this study have considered to liaise with the schools, the parents all said no. According to P3: 'The schools have different committees for the parents, and we never participate

in that'. None of the Chinese parents considered negotiating with local mainstream schools or other macro-level government entities regarding the policies; instead, they made use of the local Chinese diaspora community and hoped for the local development of further resources like the Confucius Institute. 'We really hope there is a Confucius Institute in Limerick and if we have the capacity to move things forward, we would love to do so' (P2). P1 also expressed that having a Chinese community school in Limerick will help both the Chinese diaspora and those who are interested in learning Chinese in the wider community under the FLP: 'If there is one Chinese school purely focusing on language teaching in Limerick, I would really like my kids to attend it. I will not be surprised if some of the locals want to study Chinese there as well, especially now the Chinese is introduced in the national curriculum'. P3 agreed and added: 'Actually, we do have one local student learning Chinese in the church-based Chinese school.' The Chinese parents in this study seem to turn their hope fully to the local development of further resources like the Confucius Institute.

The Chinese parents in Ireland, as discussed in the interviews, prioritize English, followed by Irish and then Chinese for their children's language learning (capital). The parents express a reluctance to negotiate with local schools, a tendency aligned with their habitus formed in China. Instead, they rely on the churched-based school and hope for the development of resources like the Confucius Institute to address the absence of Chinese language programs in mainstream schools. In summary, Bourdieu's theory helps interpret the parents' language priorities, negotiation hesitancy, and their desire to give more assignment for children within the Irish linguistic landscape.

What Kinds of Practices are Implemented to Encourage Children to Maintain Their HL and Why?

Every parent in this study is knowledgeable about the Irish Foreign Language Strategy, and without exception, they express a positive stance toward the FLS. However, these parents stated that the released national language policy had not significantly impacted their or their children's HLM practices. One participant mentioned that her daughter is not currently planning to take Chinese as a subject for the Leaving Certificate programme due to the limited information available on the exams, preferring to wait until more detailed information is available on the curriculum, standards, and assessment. This indicates that gaps exist between the national top-down language policy and its implementation. There is no Chinese provision in the participants' children's mainstream school in Limerick. The lack of information on the curriculum and on the level of difficulty of the Chinese exam for the Leaving Certificate inhibits the participants' children from choosing Chinese as a subject for their Leaving Certificate.

The participants reported that they implement various practices for Chinese heritage language maintenance (see Table 2). At the time the data were collected, church-based Chinese language school was the only accessible language-learning organization for the Chinese diaspora in Limerick. However, the school was believed to be 'not professional' by the parents in this study, and their concerns were resulted from this school's motives/incentives, management issues, and lack of qualified teaching resources and materials.

P1 said that she was teaching her son Chinese at home as she suspected that the true motive of the only Chinese school in Limerick was promoting religion rather than improving the students' language skills. As explained by [P1]: 'The church-based Chinese school is mainly set up to attract the Chinese parents to the religious community, rather than teaching the children Chinese language. Basically, they teach Bible using the Chinese language. I have friends in Dublin and their children go to the Confucius Institute. They are aiming to help the children to communicate daily and in the workplace using Chinese, which I think is professional, not like the church-based school in Limerick'.

P2 and P4 shared similar attitudes towards the church. Additionally, the participants perceived the teaching methods and materials to be inappropriate for the students' level, leading the children in this study to resist attending the Chinese classes.

P1 possessed the financial resources, knowledge, and skills to enable her to teach her Children Chinese at home. Other parents, in contrast, reported a lack of capital for implementing home-schooling practices. P2 said, 'You have the time to teach, but we are too busy ourselves'. P4 commented, 'I have the time, but I do not have the patience and skills [for] teaching'.

Intergenerational communication is another way for children to learn Chinese. According to the parents in this study, the majority of the input comes from parents rather than grandparents, even though being able to communicate with grandparents is one of the participants' expressed motivations for heritage language maintenance. For all the families in this study, the grandparents are living in China and do not have many opportunities to see the grandchildren. For example, P4 reported that '[t]he grandparents live far away in China, and [we] seldom get the chance to see each other; they seldom come

Table 2: Practices implemented to maintain HL

Practices	Participants
(1) Attending Chinese-language school	P1,2,3,4
(2) Intergenerational communication at home	P1,2,3,4
(3) Teaching Chinese at home by parents	P1
(4) Watching Chinese entertainment shows at home	P1,2,3,4
(5) Living in China for a time in earlier childhood as a 'satellite baby'	P1,4

to Ireland, and we don't go back that often. Even when doing video chat with us, they only ask briefly how everything isis going with the children, and they do not keep the children on the phone.' acknowledged by saying 'Yes, the grandparents seldom chat with the children over the phone'. Another key challenge for the intergenerational communication with the grandparents is language barriers. Most grandparents in this study can only speak their dialects, but the children are all learning Mandarin Chinese. P1 said 'We do have language barriers at home. The grandparents cannot speak Mandarin well and speaking English is impossible for them. My son speaks Mandarin and does not know the dialect'.

Some parents in this study expressed frustration regarding their limited access to educational resources, especially as compared with their peers in Dublin. P1 pointed out that the Chinese community in Dublin has organizations like the Confucius Institute, and indicated she would be willing to sacrifice other (non-Chinese-language) extracurricular activities her children enjoy if such an institute were present in Limerick: 'If there [were] an institute [here] like Confucius Institute that truly promotes the Chinese language and culture . . . I could even give up the football training sessions.'

The findings in this study illustrate that limited Chinese language learning resources are available to these Chinese families living outside major urban areas in Ireland. As a small Chinese community, the parents in this study do not have access to support from extended families as all their relatives live in China. The only way they can draw support from extended families is to send their children back to China to attend Chinese school. Some children in the study (P1 and P4) had the experience of attending Chinese schools in China in their earlier childhood as 'satellite babies', which contributed to their language development. Additionally, the only accessible language-learning organization in Limerick by the time of data collection caused a lot of concerns for the parents regarding the management issues, and the lack of qualified teaching resources and materials.

6. Discussion

Under the contextual background of the Irish government FLS at the macro-level, this study explored the perspectives of family language policy at the micro level from a bottom-up approach, focusing on the Chinese diaspora community outside of major urban areas. It seems that the parents in this study were aware of this top-down government language strategy in the inclusion of Chinese in the national curriculum, and they perceived this as an encouraging development resulting from the economic development of China. The Chinese parents in this study acknowledged the increasing instrumental value of the Chinese language, which researchers have highlighted as the main driver of the inclusion of Chinese in Ireland's foreign language strategy (FLS), in particular with regard

to its value as a trade language for Irish export (Erdocia, Nocchi and Ruane, 2020).

Despite their positive attitude towards the FLS, however, the Chinese parents in this study stated that it had not significantly impacted their or their children's HLM practices. In addition, findings in this study shows that gaps exist between the national top-down language policy and its implementation. Due to the lack of information on the new Chinese curriculum and on the level of difficulty of the Chinese exam for the Leaving Certificate, the parents feel discouraged for their children to choose Chinese as a subject for their Leaving Certificate. The lack of engagement by the Chinese parents in this national language shift highlights the marginalization and disempowerment of the Chinese diaspora community in negotiating the macro-level government policies. The Chinese parents' ideological beliefs about the responsibility for heritage language maintenance still place that responsibility on the community itself. Though Chinese is included as a subject for the Leaving Certificate based on the FLS, the Chinese parents in this study do not appear to consider their heritage language as an educational subject. This corroborates Weekly's (2018) description of 'the ideological construction of heritage languages as being primarily a community and parental responsibility' (p. 45). None of the Chinese parents considered negotiating with local mainstream schools or other macro-level government entities regarding the policies; instead, they made use of the local Chinese diaspora community and hoped for the local development of further resources like the Confucius Institute. Their tendency to rely on the Chinese community for language preservation and maintenance lead to the disengagement of the Chinese parents with local official educational agencies, including mainstream schools. This reflects the lack of social capital experienced by the Chinese parents in this study; that is to say, the Chinese parents are not equipped with 'a durable network of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248) to engage with and influence the local school's language policy and management under the context of the national Irish Foreign language strategy.

Findings in this study indicate the limitations of what the Chinese parents can do in the face of their limited social, cultural, and economic capital. The oldest children of Parents 1 and 4 were 'satellite babies', and the parents utilized their social capital in China to substitute for the social capital they lacked in Ireland earlier in their immigration experiences. A church-based Chinese language school became the only accessible language-learning organization for the Chinese diaspora in Limerick. The lack of support and resources for diaspora communities outside of major urban areas resulted in further marginalization and disempowerment with respect to heritage language maintenance. It is interesting to see how the availability of support, information, and advice from the parents' networks of friends and extended family can shape their FLP.

From a Bourdieuian theoretical perspective, language policies are shaped by the social capital attached to various linguistic norms. In this case, educational policymakers in Ireland incorporated the standard variant of Chinese into the curriculum due to China's economic growth and the increasing social capital associated with Mandarin Chinese as a result of that growth. However, this decision exacerbates the current status quo of linguistic capital inequality between different variants of Chinese. Although many Chinese families in Limerick regard their regional dialects as part of their cultural heritage, the 2017 policy decision to incorporate Mandarin into secondary school education has given it more educational resources and a competitive edge. As a result, children of immigrant Chinese families are facing the challenge of a second marginalisation. In the English-medium education system, they have to speak English as a second language, while in the Chinese classroom, having potentially learned a different dialect as a family heritage language, they have to speak Mandarin as a third language.

7. Conclusion and Implications

This study drew on data from an interview with four Chinese parents living in an Irish county town, and its findings only directly reflect the experiences and views of this limited sample. Nevertheless, the study does reveal the complexity of parental roles in family HL maintenance. Employing Bourdieu's theory of social practice and a language policy framework, the research offers a micro-level examination of family language policy through a bottom-up approach. It emphasizes the perspective of the Chinese diaspora community outside major urban centres in the Irish context. Policy engagement is a process through which various policy actors/agents at different levels 'appropriate, interpret, negotiate, and (re)construct a language policy' (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018, p. 391). It is interesting to see how parents as agents and policy actors at the micro level perceive macro-level policies and manifest or recontextualize these policies based on their own socio-political and educational contexts (Johnson and Johnson, 2015; Menken and Garcia, 2010).

Despite the increasing commodification of the Chinese language in the Irish social and political context (Liu, 2022; Liu and Gao, 2020), maintaining Chinese identity and bonds and ties with extended family, rather than the instrumental value of the Chinese language, is what parents named as the key driver of their efforts at Chinese language maintenance and preservation. Though intending to maintain bonds and ties with China, however, the parents did not take steps to pass on their local dialects to their children, despite the necessity of these local dialects for direct intergenerational communication with grandparents in families in this study. The inconsistency between parents' stated attitudes and their real efforts towards HL learning is not a new finding; it reflects known conflicts between macro- and

micro-level motivations. In this case, the learning of Mandarin is perceived as a trade-off between identity and the instrumental value of the Chinese language for children with Chinese heritage backgrounds. In contrast to their parents' dialects, Mandarin is a possible lingua franca within the East Asian region and overseas Chinese communities (Plumb, 2016). Here we can see how the formation of FLP involves a complex negotiation between macro-level values and external social norms on the one hand and micro-level individual considerations on the other, intertwined in turn with socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political realities (Curdt-Christiansen and Huang, 2020).

The findings in this study indicate the limitations of overemphasizing the importance of FLP and the disempowerment of Chinese parents with respect to the implementation of this national language shift in Ireland. Though the parents held positive attitudes towards the inclusion of Chinese as a school subject, a lack of information and support prevented them from implementing this policy at their micro level. The only Chinese school operating in Limerick was perceived as problematic by the parents. Virtual learning might be a remedy for the lack of teaching and learning resources available to the Chinese diaspora in small cities, especially during the post-pandemic era.

The findings of this study also indicate that none of the Chinese parents in this study considered negotiating with local mainstream schools or other macro-level government entities regarding the policies; instead, they made use of the local Chinese diaspora community and hoped for the local development of further resources like the Confucius Institute. Under the FLS, it is recommended that Chinese parents express their interest in and need for more educational support from mainstream schools, especially for communities outside major urban areas. Heritage languages are normally treated as an additional subject, not part of formal education, with the responsibility lying with the parents and community (Weekly, 2018). It is important for parents to change this attitude in order to negotiate with government agents for more support, especially given the FLS context in Ireland.

The implications of this study point to the need for collaboration between families, schools, and language education policy to reconceptualize the role of heritage languages in education and to empower under-resourced families. Social justice challenges in education cannot be resolved at the family level, relying purely on the parents' practices and management of the heritage language. Without national support at the macro level to facilitate the implementation of the national language policy, the importance of family language policy is overstated, especially for socially and politically marginalized communities. It is hoped that the findings in this study can shed light on multi-dimensional aspects of the parental role in HL maintenance and the need for multi-level support.

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