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# Seeing from the North: a Critical Family Language Policy study of a peripheral European minority community

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## ABSTRACT

Family language policy research has been focused on migrants from the Global South, their linguistic resources and challenges in the Global North target countries. There has been less research on the countries of origin and of those staying behind. To fill this gap, we investigate a minority speaker community touched by intensive labour migration. The participants ( $n=12$ ) of this research were interviewed in Romanian-Hungarian bilingual villages in the Moldavian province of Romania. We investigate interviews with mothers through methods of interactional discourse analysis. The interviews include recurring narratives of language shift from Hungarian to Romanian and stories about migration as well as more recent narratives about participating in Hungarian language education. Our research questions are based on the Critical Family Language Policy framework: What is a family? what counts as a language? and how to define policy in this context? We conclude that the role and definition of family, the interpretations of what constitutes a language, and most significantly the role of community in discourses about language management are different from those typical in the Global North.

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Critical family language policy; named languages; Global South; Moldavian Csángó; community; interview

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, we study members of globally separated multilingual families touched by migration, who stay in the region of origin (cf. Lee 2021). We address those multilinguals staying behind in the Global South, aiming to fill a gap in Family Language Policy (henceforth: FLP) research, which has been focused on Global North contexts and ideas (Lomeu Gomes 2018; Luykx 2021).

Previously we have been engaged in sociolinguistic research on a language minority called the Moldavian Csángó and its revitalisation programme aimed at teaching the Hungarian language in the Moldavian province of Romania (see Laihonon et al. 2020). For this study, we have interviewed twelve parents connected to the Moldavian Csángó Hungarian Educational Program. Analysing the interviews, we have recognised that the norms about family, language and policy were different from our own. Coming from societies of the Global North we have contrasted our own norms, ideas and practices with those we encountered in our research, with the aim of understanding

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FLP from a self-reflective and critical perspective (cf. Pennycook and Makoni 2020, 12; Lanza and Lomeu Gomes 2020; Luykx 2021).

With regards to *language* we analyse discourses about local language use, ‘the Csángó mode of speaking’ (see Bodó, Fazakas, and Heltai 2017) and its relationship to named languages such as Hungarian and Romanian as well as the role of mothers in language shift and revitalisation (cf. Bull, Huss, and Lindgren 2023; Lane 2010). The *policy* aspect in the present study is approached from a perspective that differs from the one typical in the Global North, which often entails an individualistic perspective where parents engage in explicit decision making, take discursive effort and make tangible sacrifices to determine their offspring’s future language repertoire (cf. Hiratsuka and Pennycook 2020, 750–751). In comparison to mothers in the Global North, who often describe themselves as active and aspirational (Seals and Beliaeva 2023) language policy agents (see Gogonas and Maligkoudi 2022; Piller and Gerber 2021; Torsh 2022; Vorobeva 2021), the Moldavian Csángó mothers appear reluctant to position themselves as aspirational language managers.

Our empirical aim is to gain insights into FLP within the Moldavian Csángó community, drawing from the narratives provided during the interviews. These interviews function as collaborative engagements in which knowledge is co-constructed, with the process being notably influenced by the interviewer’s viewpoints and expectations. The data has led us to question our basic assumptions about family, language and policy. With the backdrop of recent developments in Critical FLP Studies, where critical means focusing on the ideas and contexts of the Global South (see Chimbutane and Gonçalves 2023; Lanza and Lomeu Gomes 2020; Lomeu Gomes 2018), our *research questions* are the following: What is a family? what counts as a language? and how to define policy in this context?

## 2. Critical family language policy framework

The *critical* approach to FLP is aimed at contextualising and scrutinising the basic concepts of FLP, with a focus on diversifying our understanding of family configurations, language resources and policies (Higgins and Wright 2021). Seminal works promoting a critical turn in FLP studies (Lanza and Lomeu Gomes 2020; Lomeu Gomes 2018; Luykx 2021) have stressed the need to expand and diversify the concepts and research sites beyond Western epistemologies and Global North ‘modern’ (Pennycook and Makoni 2020, 1), nation state, capitalist socio-economic contexts. For example, the perhaps most widely spread and still highly popular FLP principle of One-Parent-One-Language (OPOL), is based on the modern European nationalist idea of keeping named languages separate (Pennycook and Makoni 2020, 53; Danjo 2021). The OPOL principle has been recommended for the neo-liberal Global Northern middle class (Lomeu Gomes 2018, 53), as a FLP recipe for their children to thrive socio-economically as ‘balanced’ bilinguals (Piller and Gerber 2021, 623–624) and at the same time to avoid any mixing of the languages and the mind (see Lanza and Lomeu Gomes 2020). The reinterpretation of concepts has gained inspiration from very recent research on peripheral sites and marginalised groups of people beyond the privileged middle class of the Global North. Critical perspectives can help us understand how interpretations of family, language and politics are varied (Hiratsuka and Pennycook 2020). In our case, we explore how families staying behind in marginalised regions of the geopolitical Global South (Pennycook and Makoni 2020) relate to the multilingualism that is inherent in minority situations and migration.

Spolsky’s recent language policy handbook distinguishes *family* as a unit above the individual, in his view (2021, 24): ‘Whatever other influences there may be, it is the language policy of the family and home that sets the basis for an individual’s linguistic repertoire’. What is more, the diversity of family configurations is a phenomenon that has not yet been fully explored by empirical research on FLP (Luykx 2021). Initial efforts to understand the language policies of Western, educated, heteronormative, biparental and bilingual families living together have been slow to extend to various families involved in transnational migration (e.g. Lee 2021; Takeuchi 2016) and to single-parent and divorced families (e.g. Vorobeva 2021).

The conceptualisation of transnational families draws on the dynamism and temporariness present in the family practices, so their 'home becomes a relational concept rather than connected with a fixed physical or geographical place' (Palviainen 2021, 129). Little attention has been paid to families, such as in our case, where one parent migrates abroad for work while the other parent, typically the mother, stays at home and raises their children (but see Lee 2021). In these transnational families, the evolution of parenting roles, language repertoires, and relationships introduces novel and divergent configurations, practices, and interpretations that challenge the conventional models of the nuclear family, traditionally viewed as stable entities. Our analysis will show how a critical approach to FLP highlights the power inequalities embedded in these structures that affect the unfolding of individual agency, or the lack of it, for the stay-at-home members of families touched by labour migration.

The critical reconceptualisation of *language* as a central tenet in current sociolinguistics is scarcely represented in past FLP scholarship (but see Van Mensel 2018), whether it is concepts such as *translanguaging* (Danjo 2021; Hiratsuka and Pennycook 2020), or *multilanguaging* (Pennycook and Makoni 2020). These concepts propose an alternative to viewing languages as static entities, traditionally seen as intrinsically linked with the community or nation that speaks a language associated with an imagined national community (Anderson 1991). Named languages are often connected with feelings of nationalist or ethnic pride in the parent interviews, too (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen, Wei, and Hua 2023). The lived multilingual experiences of families can challenge the canonical Western social constructions of what counts as a language (Lanza and Lomeu Gomes 2020) and raise the question of how to develop a policy whose object is a 'messy' concept (Hiratsuka and Pennycook 2020) such as a 'non-language' (Lane 2023, 837) connected to a peripheral minority such as the Moldavian Csángó.

Critical studies in the field of *language policy* have already pointed at the contradictions between macro-sociologically oriented accounts of language policy and the context dependency of local language practices as well as the language ideologies connected to such practices (Hiratsuka and Pennycook 2020). Agency is a central question; whether it is about explicit or implicit language policymaking activities of a mother (Gogonas and Maligkoudi 2022; Piller and Gerber 2021), or both parents (Lee 2021), or children (Revis 2019), it cannot be separated from issues of power and inequality (e.g. Lomeu Gomes 2018). In other words, agency in a speaker's language choices at home is according to Mirvahedi (2021, 129) 'emergent in and from larger social, political, and cultural structures'.

By taking a realist social theoretical stance (Mirvahedi 2021), which emphasises multiple determination of social factors, agency is in a dynamic relationship with the social and cultural structures, of which language practices are part, but also contribute to their (re)construction. Family members are influenced by the structural constraints of their agentive potential as language policymakers, for example, by stigmatising language practices within the family itself, in its surroundings, or in macro-societal systems. Agency in the Global South can be different from the linguistic agency of people in the Global North, where according to Canagarajah (2022, 3), it serves as 'the threshold capacity for inclusive citizenship and rights'. As Luykx (2021, 302) has pointed out, there is a great divide between those who have abundant material (for example, access to digital communication and mobility) and knowledge resources (for example availability of school choice) and are thus capable for aspirations in FLP and those families that lack such capital and background, or in short, between the Global North and Global South families.

### 3. The Moldavian Csángó

The Moldavian Csángó represent the Global South in different understandings of the concept. The Global South refers not only to the geographical South, which has been dominated by the global North through different forms of colonisation. Pennycook and Makoni (2020, 1) define the Global South as referring to 'people, places, and ideas that have been left out of the grand narrative of modernity' and also use it as a synonym for *marginality* or *marginalisation* (2020, 35), which often coincide with geographical notions of east or south or with political notions of centres and



**Figure 1.** Map with the c. 30 Teaching Sites (2020) in the Moldavian Csángó Educational Program. Copyright Agreed with Lehel Peti and Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities.

peripheries. At the same time, Pennycook and Makoni (2020, 7–8) recognise the flaws and contradictions around employing the Global North/South terminology, noticed among others by Lajos (2015) on the issue of modernisation in the Csángó villages, too. Against the backdrop of such complexities, Moldavia is the most eastern part of Romania, where the level of income and education is the lowest in the country. A religious minority, the Roman Catholic Csángó are among the poorest and least educated groups in Moldavia itself (for a statistical view, see Peti 2017). What is more, they are a contested linguistic minority, residing mainly in villages and many of them work in manual labour, either in Moldavia or in Western Europe, where they have migrated in recent decades. As Peti (2017; 2022) has shown, the Csángó migrants typically lack the resources and affordances needed in Western European economies and thus end up in precarious and unstable positions in the target countries.

An estimated 50,000 persons, one fourth of the Catholic population in Moldavia, are bilingual in Romanian and the ‘Csángó mode of speaking’ (a contested variety of Hungarian, see Bodó, Fazakas, and Heltai 2017). In 2001, the teaching of Hungarian was launched in Moldavia. In 2020, an educational programme, with the goal of teaching Hungarian ‘mother tongue’ among the Csángó operated in c. 30 villages (see Figure 1) with c. 2000 children (Laihonen et al. 2020). Besides this programme, Romanian is the medium of education in all schools in Moldavia. Csángó has not been recognised as a language by general reference sources. It has most often been classified as an ‘ancient’, i.e. authentic dialect of Hungarian, or in other accounts as a ‘corrupt’ vernacular, a ‘mixture’ of ‘dialectal’ Hungarian and Romanian. The Csángó does not have activists claiming for autonomous status as a language or attempts to standardise the Csángó ‘language’ are not known (see Laihonen et al. 2020 for details). As Heltai (2012) pointed out, language shift and its local reception in Moldavia, is not an individual choice, but a community norm to which everyone adheres. Unlike the imagined ethnolinguistic communities of the Global North, the local Csángó community is not organised on the basis of a separate language with clear-cut boundaries. In other words, language is not seen as major factor in

maintaining the local community by the Csángó. As a token of this, the Csángó often argue, what they speak is not a language, but a mode of speaking (Bodó, Fazakas, and Heltai 2017). This has been analysed as a part of their lack of connection to available imagined communities (e.g. Hungarians and Romanians, see Cotoi 2013) which identify with named languages and thus attach ethnic or national pride to such symbolic constructions (Curd-Christiansen, Wei, and Hua 2023).

The Csángó have been working mainly in agriculture. Typically, men worked on the fields, whereas women took care of children and the household. Since the change of system in Romania (1989–1990), the few factories were closed, and subsistence agriculture lost its meaning, too. It appears that the main reason for the *mobility imperative* (Farrugia 2016) became the lack of meaningful work in rural Moldavia for the traditional breadwinners. The Moldavian region has been most affected by migration in Romania. Especially since Romania joined the EU in 2007, the opportunities for mobility increased and it became a widespread practice to work abroad in South and West European countries (Peti 2022). The tendencies present in the Csángó families' work-related migration reflect on the changes in the political and economic situations globally. Part of the young women still stay in the villages to raise the children there, however the number of 20-year-olds, and thus small children has dwindled in the Moldavian villages year by year. As we will show, the experience of large scale migration has transformed the concept of the family in Moldavian villages.

#### 4. Data & method of analysis

Our data is based on four one-month fieldwork trips by Laihonen and Fazakas-Timaru in 2017–2019. The database contains research diaries, teacher interviews, 40 h of classroom recordings, iPad movies recorded and edited together with pupils, over thousand photographs, and a wealth of visual and multimodal products by the children and other materials (see Laihonen et al. 2020 for details and examples). This data serves as background material, it was generated to shed light on the Educational Programme, on its language practices, participants and teachers. For the needs to study FLP among the Csángó, new data was gathered in the form of 12 interviews. The twelve participants of this research were reached through the networks of active parents met in the events of the Educational Programme. It was our goal to interview the fathers, too. However, we failed to find any volunteers among the few local men.

We investigate the narratives in semi-structured interviews with mothers (c. 30 mins to 1 h each). Our method of analysis is interactional discourse analysis. We stress that the interviews as well as the analysis are a joint product constructed as much by the participants and the interviewers and analysts. Our researcher positionalities contain grossly three profiles. Laihonen has been educated and is affiliated with a university in the Global North, he has learned Hungarian at adult age, and has been engaged in research on the multilingualisms of Hungarian speaking minorities for two decades. Bodó, Gaspár and Jani-Demetriou hold a position in a Hungarian university in Budapest. The position of Hungary can be seen as a transitory territory, moving back and forth between East and West, North and South. In any case, the epistemologies of Northern centres are well known and institutionally embedded in universities there as well. Through education in Hungary, Bodó, Gaspár and Jani-Demetriou have also been socialised to ideas about the standard form of the Hungarian language as the essence of Hungarian imagined nationhood and of intellectuality (cf. Pennycook and Makoni 2020, 79). As social scientists and sociolinguists they have deconstructed such language ideologies. Fazakas-Timaru is a Moldavian born researcher, who worked also as a local fieldworker. She has experience and knowledge of both local ideas about language and due to her studies in Hungarian medium education in Transylvania and Hungary and work in Western Europe on the concepts and language ideologies in the Global North.

The mothers were chosen from those with whom Laihonen or Fazakas-Timaru had established trust during previous fieldwork on the Education Programme and its events. The issues of language shift (see Heltai 2012) and questions of connections to the imagined Hungarian community are often contested and disturbing issues when brought into the local context (see Sándor 2000), thus trust in

researchers and anonymity of the participants constituted a crucial issue for us. Despite focusing on stories and accounts that are shared by all the participants, our intention is not to homogenise the group of Csángó mothers we interviewed. However, in order not to compromise their anonymity in the local community, we can offer only general information about the participants: Their ages were from 23 to 42, the number of children varied from 1 to 5, most having at least two by the age of 30. Most of the interviewed had a secondary level education, some had attended secondary level schooling in a Hungarian medium institution in Transylvania (Western part of Romania). None had a higher education degree. Some had personal experience of working in Western Europe, all had visited their husbands there at least once.

Our study began with listening to the interviews and analysing the discourses together. We discovered that certain issues were challenging to comprehend due to the conceptual and experiential distance between our own lived experiences and the ideas and concepts related to family, language, and policy that we encountered. We thus decided to follow Pennycook and Makoni's (2020, 12) approach to focus on the perceived differences, which appeared to stem from our position in the Global North epistemologies.

A characteristic feature of qualitative research with a critical approach is its emphasis on being reflexive (Patiño-Santos 2020). Reflexivity is the process of assessment in which the observed is calibrated with the researcher's sense of the situation (Rampton, Maybin, and Roberts 2015, 25). Reflexivity played a pivotal role in the analysis of the interviews, as the process hinged on the researchers' acknowledgement of the disparities between their own norms regarding family, language, and policy and those of the Csángó mothers. Recognising our positionality as researchers within this study, and juxtaposing our norms, ideas, and practices against those encountered in our research, enables us to explore the intricacies of family, language, and policy in a manner that avoids implying a hierarchy among them.

In the analysis section we provide examples in the original local vernacular with translation in English. The transcripts were prepared by Fazakas-Timaru, who was raised in a Csángó community and thus is fully competent in the local Csángó mode of speaking. Her interpretations were considered decisive also for the English translations. The pseudonyms used for participants have been intentionally chosen not to resemble names of the participants to avoid any coincidental reference to Csángó mothers in Moldavia.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Family

Many of the Csángó fathers work abroad while the mother stays at home in the village raising children. It appeared striking, how the nuclear family had seldom been physically together, since the everyday life of the family takes place without the father (cf. Lee 2021). The task of running a household and taking care of the children is 'the woman's job', as one of the interviewees said. This evokes a concept Hochschild (2012) has termed *emotion work*, a form of interactional inequality, which puts the moral burden of child-rearing on the mother. Such habitual systems shared within a community delimit choices of family members (Torsh 2022). In the interviews with the Csángó women, there is evidence indicating the influence of the community's expectations on the formation of the women's role in the villages and motherhood and taking care of the home as their main responsibilities (cf. Bull, Huss, and Lindgren 2023).

In the discourses of the mothers there is no room for individual agency, aspirations or accounts of self-fulfilment typical for Global North women's discourses (see Gogonas and Maligkoudi 2022; Seals and Beliaeva 2023; Torsh 2022; Vorobeva 2021). Among the Csángó the community's expectations have a great impact on the way women speak about their roles as mothers in the family, silencing their own agency or aspirations. The following interview excerpt demonstrates the difference

between discourses of family decisions between the Global North and the Global South. Kathie's husband works abroad; her sons have also joined the father for some time:

Excerpt 1:

P: És van, ahol mindenki kiment az egész család, vagy?

*And there are cases where the whole family migrates, aren't there?*

Kathie: Vannak. Igen. Vannak.

*There are, yes, there are.*

P: Maguk nem akarták, hogy kimenjenek.

*Didn't you want to migrate?*

Kathie: Nem gondoltuk.

*we did not think so*

P: Szóval, mert a fiuk kint volt kint Magyarországon, ugye?

*Well, your sons have been there in Hungary, haven't they?*

Kathie: Ó, fiúk.

*yeah sons*

P: Igen? Voltak Magyarországra. De nem hosszú időre vagy.

*Yes? They have been in Hungary. But not for a long time or.*

Kathie: Nem. Nem.

*No no*

P: Iskolába nem jártak ott.

*They have not done school there.*

Kathie: Nem, nem.

*No no.*

P: Azt nem szeretnének, vagy máshol?

*You wouldn't like that, or elsewhere?*

Kathie: Nem gondoltuk.

*we did not think so*

From the repeating answer of the mother, 'we did not think so' it seems that this family is not considering joining her husband in the West. The interviewer (Laihonen) is almost cross-examining the mother, as he is persistently asking questions such as: 'you did not want to go abroad [as a family]?' and 'have you been to Hungary?' Here the researchers' Global North ideas about the family kept together are confronted with the local norms, where it is neither ideal nor aspired by the mothers to go with the father and leave their home village in Moldavia. Furthermore, the interviewer appears to be presuming a sort of strategic plan for the family. However, in the interviewee's answers, the decision-making process is not presented as explicit. That is, the Csángó mothers and children may visit the fathers abroad, but the local community norms prefer staying behind.



## 5.2. Language

In the three villages, where we carried out the interviews, it was common to address children in the Csángó mode of speaking still in the 1990s (see Heltai 2012). The next generation of parents followed the norm of other villages, where the local vernacular was used with youngsters only after they had finished education. Without exception all the interviewed twelve mothers mentioned this change of language practices in their own lives. In their recurring words 'At home we spoke in the Csángó mode with our mothers'. Their own parenting practices, in turn, were described as 'At home we talked in Romanian with our children'.

Language is a contested issue in Moldavian multilingual communities. Local speech modes, or multilingualisms in the Global South (Pennycook and Makoni 2020), such as the 'Csángó mode of speaking', are defined by blurred boundaries and they are in constant flux. They are often valued unfavourable by language policy makers from the Global North according to the construct of named standard languages, such as Hungarian in our case. Thus, from a Hungarian perspective, these idioms are archaic or pre-modern dialects of the Hungarian language, 'mixed' with modern loan words and structures from Romanian.

The contested status of these speech modes is also reflected in local practices of naming languages. In the interviews, different names for the local idiom are used: some speakers prefer the *Hungarian* glottonym, others use the *Hungarian* and *Csángó* glottonyms interchangeably. In excerpt 2, Hanna discusses her childhood experiences, indicating the local use of glottonyms.

### Excerpt 2

P: Ezek akkor milyen nyelven beszélgettek otthon?

*What language did they [the family members] speak at home then?*

Hanna: Magyarul. Magyarul beszéltünk.

*In Hungarian. We spoke Hungarian.*

P: Csak ezt, magyarul?

*Only that, in Hungarian?*

Hanna: Csángómagyarul, így.

*In Csángó-Hungarian, in this mode.*

P: Értem.

*I see.*

Hanna: Igen, csángósan, és akkor még jobban édesanyám is úgy beszélt velünk örökké.

*Yes, in the Csángó mode, then also more, my mother spoke like that with us always.*

The interviewee describes her way of speaking in three different forms: as Hungarian, Csángó-Hungarian and as the 'Csángó mode'. First, the interviewer asks 'in which language', introducing the category of *a language*. This is answered as 'in Hungarian'. When the interviewer asks a verifying question 'Only in Hungarian'? Recycling the term 'Hungarian', the interviewee changes the category Hungarian to 'Csángó-Hungarian, in this mode'. Finally, she continues by 'in the Csángó mode', turning the category of *a language*, to a mode of speaking. In general, the interviewer uses the term Hungarian (language), whereas Csángó (mode of speaking) appears as an interpretation for the Hungarian glottonym by the interviewed. These mode of speaking are also indicated by the direct indexical term 'így', meaning 'in this mode'. The last glottonym follows a similar logic: they speak *csángósan*: 'the way the

Csángó speak'. In this manner, the local concept of Csángó mode of speaking is contrasted with Global North ideas about named languages referred to as 'Hungarian' by the interviewer here.

The way language shift has proceeded towards Romanian as the default language in families can be demonstrated by the fact that new 'Hungarian houses' have been established by the educational programme to have spaces where Hungarian is used. There, the choice of languages can be connected to spatial politics of separating named languages. In narratives about the past the school and the church are often mentioned as the only places where Romanian was used at the time the Csángó mode of speaking was still dominant in the villages. In the following excerpt the 'Hungarian house' is co-constructed as the site of Hungarian language use today.

### Excerpt 3

P: És volt-e olyan hely, ahol inkább magyarul beszélgettetek, mondjuk a Magyar Házban?

*And was there a place, where you spoke more Hungarian, let say in the Hungarian House?*

Bianca: Igen, a magyar házban. Így a menyecskék közt. Nagymamáméktól, néniékkal. Édesapámmal.

*Yes, in the Hungarian House. With other mothers. With my grandparents, aunts. With my father.*

P: A Magyar Házban?

*In the Hungarian House*

Bianca: Igen. Igen. Magyar Házban magyarul lesz meg volt is, mert mondtam, a Magyar Házban, hogy magyarul beszéljünk, nem mondták, hogy Román Ház, vagy mit tudom én, milyen ház. Azért Magyar Ház, hogy magyarul beszéljünk.

*Yes. Yes. It was and will be Hungarian in the Hungarian House, as I said, the Hungarian House is there for us to speak Hungarian, they did not name it Romanian House or whatdolknow House. It is the Hungarian House so that we can speak Hungarian.*

The interviewer asks about places where Hungarian was dominant in the past. He suggests that a Hungarian house could have been such a place. The interviewee agrees and adds that she learnt Hungarian from older family members, indicating that in the past the home and the family was the prime place for Hungarian use. Then the interviewer makes the Hungarian house a topic again. The interviewee, an employee of the educational programme, sharply contrasts the language policy of an imagined Romanian institution with that of a community space run by the minority group through connecting people with a language. At the same time, this brief expert indicates that now the primary language of other spaces, including homes might be Romanian.

The mechanisms of differentiation between languages typical in the Global North, create linguistic hierarchies often in contradictory ways. Such hierarchies and practices of language separation are also apparent in the interviewees' narratives and answers. The separation of languages may include Csángó as a named language, too; as one interviewee puts it about the linguistic repertoire of her village: 'Itt három nyelv van: a magyar, a csángó és a román', 'There are three languages here: Hungarian, Csángó and Romanian'. Another interviewee refers to Hungarian as her first language: 'Így nyílt ki a szemem, magyarul' 'in this way my eyes opened in Hungarian'; while others distinguish between 'Hungarian' at school or Csángó mode at home.

### 5.3. Policy

Within the Csángó families the mother appears to be in the centre; she is the one who manages the family and the home on an everyday level, including decisions on language policy. To understand contemporary FLP, it is necessary to look at how similar decisions were made in the past (see also Chimbutane and Gonçalves 2023). Many of the interviewed Moldavian multilingual mothers

mention negative memories of school language policies from the times when they were students in the 1970s and 1980s.

#### Excerpt 4

Mária: Nagyon csúnyán viselkedtek az első osztály s a másodikba, mer nem tudtunk románul.

*The teachers behaved very badly in the first class and the second class because we did not know Romanian*

P: És mit csináltak akkor?

*And what did they do then?*

Mária: Hát olyan is volt, hogy az ajtó sarkára izélték az ujjainkat, mer nem tudunk románul, nem tudtuk. Ő leadta a leckét, münk- mondom, bólogattunk, mer más egyebet se tudtunk. Na úgy aztán csak megtanultunk románul, mer muszáj volt. Tíz osztályt végzettem románul.

*Well there was such that they pressed our fingers against the corner of the door, because we didn't know Romanian, we did not know- She taught us, we- I tell you, we were just nodding, because we couldn't do anything else. And so we learnt Romanian anyway, because we had to. I finished ten classes in Romanian.*

Similar to other minority contexts (see e.g. Lane 2010, 65), the local speech mode was banned from the schools and children could be punished for its use. As 'Mária' states, their generation learnt Romanian by attending school for a longer period than their parents ('I did 10 classes in Romanian'). This external influence led to a family language policy principle, where the minority language mothers, 'did not wish to place the same burden on their children as the one they had to carry' (Lane 2010, 65) and therefore they chose to speak only the majority language of schooling to their children (see also Chimbutane and Gonçalves 2023). In excerpt 4, the interviewee uses a plural 'we', which indicates that it was not a personal experience, but the traumatic events happened to a community and thus the shift to Romanian constitutes a shared generational experience by all the interviewees (cf. Bull, Huss, and Lindgren 2023).

The change in family language is illustrated in the following excerpt, which relates the parent's experience of schooling to the language policy of speaking with children at home.

#### Excerpt 5

P: Nektek nehéz volt az iskolában?

*Was it difficult for you in the school?*

Antonia: Nehéz volt. Nehéz volt.

*It was difficult. It was difficult.*

P: Miért volt nehéz? Vagy mi volt nehezebb?

*Why was it difficult? Or what was more difficult?*

Antonia: Azért, mer otthon édesanyáékval csak magyarul beszélgettünk, és a tanárokkal kellett románul. És akkor nehezen jött. Azt mondtuk, hogy mert itt nálunk csak tanárok románul beszélnek, nem értnek ők magyarul. S akkor beszélgettünk a gyerekekkel es románul, hogy izé, legyen könnyebb. Itthon a zembervel beszélgettünk magyarul, és akkor a gyerekek értettek.

*At home we only spoke Hungarian with our parents, and we had to speak Romanian with the teachers. And it was hard. We said that is because teachers here speak only Romanian, they don't understand Hungarian. And then we talked to the children in Romanian, too, so that they would have it easier. At home, we talked Hungarian with the husband, and then the children understood.*

Antonia recalls her own difficulties at school as a reason for changing the language policy in the family. She evokes her own experience as a shared experience with others, just like Mária in the previous

extract. Several people were involved in the decision (see the plural form of the verb *beszélgettünk* 'we talked'), even if she does not specify who is included in the interactions during which they started speaking Romanian to her children. Such a relevant person could be her spouse, whom she later mentions, but the interview reveals that Antonia's husband has been working abroad since they got married and only spends his holidays in Moldavia. In an explicit way, she links the children's Hungarian language exposure to her husband, the other adult in the family, with whom she spoke that language at home. This reflects the wider gender asymmetry between the Hungarian language practices of men working abroad (mostly communicating with adults) and the Romanian language practices of women (mostly communicating with children) who remain in Moldavia.

In the discourses there is little room for individual agency or aspirations for the mothers. Beyond the external influence of the Romanian medium school, the change of language practices is not connected to individual agency:

#### Excerpt 6

P: Nem mondtad, hogy a te szüleid, anyukád még magyarul beszélt hosszú távon?

*Didn't you say that your parents and your mother spoke Hungarian for a long time?*

Agnes: Nem tudom, hogy volt, hogy mikor változott ez. Gondolom, ez úgy jött magától, hogy nem mondta senki, nem kötelezett senki, nem tudom, hogy. Nem is tudom, hogy mondtam, mi magyarázza.

*I don't know how or when that changed. I guess it came naturally without anyone saying it, nobody forcing it, I don't know how. I don't know how to explain it.*

Excerpt 6 indicates that, there was an unspoken community agreement to change the language used with children, which just happened somehow from the perspective of the interviewed mothers. This understanding of changing language practices is not aspirational or pragmatic in the way migrant parents in the Global North might argue about the linguistic conditions for their child's success in school (e.g. Piller and Gerber 2021), or for constructing national or ethnic pride through language identification (Curdt-Christiansen, Wei, and Hua 2023), but relies on community adaptation, which the participant terms as 'natural' resulting in Romanian monolingual practices in addressing children.

At the community level, as already noticed by Heltai (2012), it is also unclear how parents relate to the Hungarian language teaching introduced in recent decades and whether they would like to send their children to these optional classes. In response to this question, one parent whose children attend Hungarian lessons said:

#### Excerpt 7

P: Szerinted mér jó, ha járnak oda?

*Why is it good that they go there [to the Hungarian classes]?*

Magdalena: Mért jó, hogy járnak a magyarba?

*Why is it good that they go to Hungarian classes?*

P: Igen, igen.

*Yes, yes*

Magdalena: Ők szeretik amiatt, hogy még elviszik valahova őket táborba. Azért is szeretik. Szeretik, mert valamiket csinálnak a magyarba, tanulnak, írnak, mindig szeretik. Én gyermekeim, gondolom, hogy nincs nap, hogy ne menjenek a magyarba. Minden nap, minden nap mennek.

*They love it because they also take them somewhere to camp. They love it also because of that. They love it because they do something in Hungarian, study, write, they always love it. My children, I don't think there is a day when they don't go to Hungarian classes. They go every day, every day.*

What is telling in this extract is that the mother does not give an account of her own approach to Hungarian language education but interprets the attitudes of her children as to why they attend classes regularly. In the absence of a clear community decision on attending Hungarian classes, the parent implies that it is the children's choice (cf. Revis 2019).

Mothers of language minority communities often work hard to teach their children the majority language, but at the same time, once the majority language is mastered by the community, mothers also typically take active roles in language revitalising programmes (see Bull, Huss, and Lindgren 2023). The teaching of Hungarian as an (extra)curricular subject through a special educational programme has been maintained in the Moldavian villages for two decades. The educational programme is funded by the Hungarian state, and it is managed by Hungarians with a Hungarian medium education from Transylvania and Hungary. All the interviewed had a connection with the programme, either as parents, adult language learners or in the case of three of the interviewed as hired (kindergarten or after school) teachers for the programme. In the interviews, we could trace the influence and impact of the programme to some extent, mainly in the swift of the previously negative ideologies on addressing children in the Csángó mode of speaking by adults towards a more bilingual stance among most of the interviewed and even to a pro-Hungarian ideology among those who were employed by the programme. For example, 'Elisabeth' said that she has changed her language habits at home. She stated in the interview, that at home, she now speaks Hungarian to the kids: 'És akkor jöjjenek haza, és akkor már magyarul beszélgetek. Én most. Legalábbis most, ahogy az oktatásban vagyok. Ritkán fordul elő románul beszélgessek velük' ('When they come home, then I speak Hungarian. Now I speak. At least now, since I work in the Educational Programme, I rarely speak Romanian with them.') In sum, the programme has not changed the normative pattern of addressing children in Romanian, however there were some signs of change in language ideologies in favour of using Hungarian with children especially among those mothers that were employed by the Educational Programme.

## 6. Conclusion

This article contributes to the scarce body of Critical Family Language Policy empirical studies which are situated in the geopolitical Global South. In the critical FLP analysis, we decided to focus on what we as analysts found different from our own experience and thinking, which we recognised as reflecting ideas and practices typical of the Global North. We chose this analytical strategy once we realised, that some cornerstones of FLP in the Global North were absent. For instance, the highly popular OPOL (One Parent One Language) principle (e.g. Piller and Gerber 2021), was never mentioned in the interviews by the Moldavian Csángó mothers.

The narratives and the community norms presented in this paper are known to most of the Csángó, however already the interviewed mothers have individual life histories not fitting the picture we have presented. In addition, we also know that the younger generations are leaving these community patterns of life and taking *detraditionalized* (Higgins 2021, 104) paths of life more familiar to the researchers from the Global North (see Peti 2022 for a more diversified description of migration patterns among the Csángó). That is, our focus resulted in side-lining the individual histories and narratives for the sake of highlighting the shared narratives of this generation of mothers that fall into our focus of differences between the Global North (the researchers' ideas about FLP) and the Global South (the Moldavian Csángó mothers' ideas about FLP).

As a main difference in the concept of a *family* we recognised that family is not geographically bounded, it was a local social norm for the fathers to leave the village for work in Western Europe. We can compare this to South Korean 'kirogi' families, where fathers stay behind in Korea to work, and mothers migrate with children for English medium education (Lee 2021). The 'kirogi' families are the result of explicit family language management decisions and aspirations typical in the neoliberal Global North (to educate children in English), whereas the Csángó fathers follow the community based mobility imperative (Farrugia 2016), that could be formulated as the lack of

meaningful employment in the village or the region for the fathers. In this manner, the interviewed mothers did not in general question or aspire to abandon the local norms of cultural heritage maintenance. Already here we noticed that the community was a strong factor in keeping the mothers and children in these villages, where they could continue their lives as members of an emotionally safe, close-knit, religiously and geographically defined small groups with a distinct identity based on local norms and values.

In the case of *language*, the interviewed refer to their language practices as ‘Csángó mode of speaking’ (referring to everyday situations) or as ‘Hungarian’ (referring to the Hungarian educational programme). For the Csángó mothers, the Csángó mode of speaking is not treated as a fundamental element of identification with their community. This is different from the Global North ideas of belonging to an imagined national community through attachment to a (named) language. With regards to *policy*, it appears that Moldavian Csángó family members follow principles set by their local community to make their decisions and do not argue for individual solutions or aspirations. This discursively constructed Csángó identity is similar to what Higgins (2021) has described as the model for traditional Hawaiian community (‘ohana’) as ‘connections with people who share a worldview’ (Higgins 2021, 110).

To summarise the overall picture of language policy in families, the interviewed mothers’ agency is limited in their own accounts. It was striking how little talk there is in the interviews about mothering, i.e. about being a mother and taking responsibility of child’s development in all areas, which according to Torsh (2022, 612) forms the expectation and burden of being a mother in the Global North. While non-migrating mothers take on a new identity as heads of household, they do not take on the role of developing their own FLP, which they then would impose on their children’s linguistic socialisation. Instead, family language policies are discursively controlled by the community, especially by external authorities: the teachers who require children to be proficient in Romanian by the time they enter school, or the Hungarian Csángó educational programme managers who expect the local language to be used with the local educators’ own children. This delegation of FLP agency to the community level can help Csángó mothers share the moral burden of raising children, which in their case would include emotional language work to maintain local speech modes as well.

From the perspective of researchers in the Global North, discourses on language-related family issues among Moldavian mothers’ challenge what are seen as universal ideas about FLP (see also Chimbutane and Gonçalves 2023). Most importantly, Csángó mothers are more likely to refer to local community practices in their discourses on language shift and revitalisation than to their own agency. A critical FLP must be able to account for local processes that are organised at the intersection of community, family, language and policy in ways that are different from the Global North. In the meantime, it should also be kept in mind that the FLP described in our study also maintains and reproduces these differences, either in response to or independently of efforts to promote Global North initiated language revitalisation.

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## Ethics statement

The data collection and management for the article was approved by the ethical committee of the University of Jyväskylä on 2017 March 8.

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