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Family language policy tensions in Ndebele-Shona intermarriages

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic intermarriages are now a common feature of contemporary societies as a consequence of migration and globalisation. In some contexts, intermarriages contribute to the creation of bilingual families because of children's exposure to the different languages of their parents. In these families, tensions around bilingual child-rearing and language socialisation often arise from mismatched parents' ideologies about what languages represent and their subjective dispositions towards each other's language, particularly in the context of historical conflicts. This study presents part findings of a larger study investigating the emotional dimensions of family language policy in a post-conflict context. It reports on how parents' language practices and negotiations within selected Ndebele-Shona intermarried families reveal underlying tensions which reproduce the prevailing socio-political order. The study deploys in-depth interviews with parents from each family to understand their language socialisation preferences for their children in the context of family bilingualism. Using the concept of family language policy, we argue that parents' language practices and negotiations in each of the families are products of historical Ndebele-Shona tensions, and the family becomes a site of conflictual bilingualism, resulting in the re-negotiation of family linguistic identities.

1. Introduction

Linguistic intermarriages have become a common feature of most societies as a result of mass migration and other processes associated with globalisation (Irving Torsh, 2020). In some cases, intermarriages contribute to the creation of bilingual families as children are exposed to different languages of their parents. Such bilingualism is not always harmonious, and the existence of these languages may be characterised by tensions of different kinds (De Houwer, 2015; Jackson, 2007). Tensions around bilingual child-rearing and language socialisation often arise from parents' ideologies about what languages represent and their subjective evaluations of each other's language (Jackson, 2007; Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Daly, 2023). In societies emerging from conflict, these tensions often reproduce broader socio-political and sociolinguistic dimensions of conflict, particularly where such conflict remains unresolved (Maseko, 2022b; Tannenbaum, 2012). This study examines tensions in family language policies of selected Ndebele-Shona intermarried families in the post-Gukurahundi genocide context in Zimbabwe. Gukurahundi is a codename for a violent military operation that led to mass killings of over 20000 Ndebele-speaking citizens in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces by the 5th Brigade unit of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) between 1983 and 1987 (Alexander,

2021; Kriger, 2005; Sibanda, 2021). Discourses on the linguistic dimensions of Gukurahundi have tended to frame Shona as the language of genocide from how it was weaponised to identify and torture Gukurahundi victims (Maseko & Nkomo, 2022; Sibanda, 2021). Although the Zimbabwean government has begun to facilitate discussions on how to resolve the Gukurahundi issue through the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), simmering tensions between Ndebele and Shona speakers remain. They are also inflamed by the perception of the Ndebele that all Shona speakers are collectively liable for acting in concert with the state in the execution of Gukurahundi (Mpfu, 2015). This notwithstanding, inter-ethnic marriages between the Ndebele and the Shona are increasing. In these resultant families, Family Language Policy (FLP), that is; decisions on how languages are used, managed and negotiated in such families (King et al., 2008) tend to reproduce the extant cultural, ideological and political contestations. The question of language choice for children's socialisation often ignites emotional reactions (Offiong & Mensah, 2012).

Ethnic tensions are a feature of many countries in Africa because of ethnic-based political mobilisation and contestations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). These tensions are reproduced at the macro, meso and micro levels of society. While there has been considerable attention to macro issues, a lot remains to be known regarding the micro dimensions of

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these tensions in the family domain. However, FLP studies are generally rare in Africa (Maseko & Mutasa, 2018) while available literature seldom broaches the theme of ethnic tensions and how they shape language choice in intermarried families. In Zimbabwe, pioneering research has been concerned with the role of FLP in the intergenerational transmission of minority languages within endogamous families (e.g., Maseko & Mutasa, 2018, 2019). This article presents part findings of a larger study investigating the emotional dimensions of FLP in a post-conflict context. It reports on how parents' language practices and negotiations within purposively selected Ndebele-Shona intermarried families reveal underlying tensions which reproduce the prevailing socio-political order. In this discussion, we view these FLP tensions as oppositional to the notion of harmonious bilingualism (De Houwer, 2015; Wenhan et al., 2022), which is often touted as an important aspect of bilingual child-rearing and general family well-being in bilingual contexts (De Houwer, 2015). This study therefore sought to answer the following research questions.

- a. What is the nature of FLP tensions in intermarried families?
- b. How do parents negotiate these tensions?

2. Research context

Zimbabwe is a multilingual and multi-ethnic country. The Constitution adopted in 2013 officially recognises 16 languages, including English and Sign Language. In Zimbabwe, language is an important symbol of ethnic identity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). For this reason, the terms 'linguistic intermarriages' and 'intermarriages' are used in this study as synonyms for inter-ethnic marriages, also termed intercultural, exogamous, cross-cultural, bilingual or simply, mixed marriages (Irving Torsh, 2020). Before the 2013 Constitution, Shona and Ndebele were the only recognised national languages. This fed perceptions of Zimbabwe as a bimodal and bicultural state (Ndlovu, 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). This enduring picture was originally painted by a colonial-era linguist, Professor Clement Doke, who was commissioned by the Rhodesian government to research and advise on how to handle linguistic variation in Zimbabwe (Ndlovu, 2006). His report on the unification of the Shona dialects (Doke & Chimhundu, 2006) included recommendations for language use throughout the country, albeit without sufficient sociolinguistic investigations, leading to 'linguistic chaos' (Ndlovu, 2006). Particularly pertinent was the recommendation that Shona and Ndebele be the only African languages used in education throughout the country, depending on which one was predominant in a given area. Although the 'amelioration' of Shona and Ndebele created a perception of equality between the two, the reality is that Shona profited from its numerical and political superiority to hegemonically dominate the Zimbabwean linguistic and cultural milieu (Ndlovu, 2006). While English has retained its unassailable position as the country's *lingua franca*, a contest between Shona and Ndebele to approximate the status of English is visible at all levels of the Zimbabwean Society (Maseko & Nkomo, 2022).

Since the country's independence in 1980, the pinnacle of Ndebele-Shona ethnic contestations was the Gukurahundi genocide of 1983–1987. Zimbabwe's first democratic elections were contested by the Shona-dominated Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) led by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo led Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU) – viewed by those in ZANU as being 'a Ndebele party' (Sibanda, 2021). Therefore, ZANU's election triumph was perceived as a victory by Shona elites over Ndebele politicians in PF-ZAPU (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). Robert Mugabe's quest to consolidate power by turning the country into a one-party state required him to eliminate the opposition PF-ZAPU. In February 1982, there was a 'discovery' of arms cache in PF-ZAPU-owned farms by state intelligence. This thickened Mugabe's plot. He accused Nkomo and ZAPU of plotting a coup (Alexander, 2021). Nkomo and several PF-ZAPU ministers were then fired from the government. In solidarity with their former

comrades, Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) ex-combatants withdrew from the ZNA to which they had been attested at independence. This aided Mugabe's justification of a military response. The army deserters, together with other ex-ZIPRA combatants were accused by the state of planning an insurgency and taking part in sabotage activities in various parts of the country (Alexander, 2021). This led to the deployment of the 5th Brigade – a North Korean-trained army unit, to Matabeleland and parts of Midlands provinces to extinguish the 'dissident' threat (Phimister, 2009). In its operations, the 5th Brigade, comprising mainly Shona speakers (Sibanda, 2021) targeted, killed, raped and maimed thousands of Ndebele-speaking civilians, some of whom were accused of cooperating and collaborating with the dissidents, an accusation that was thoroughly discredited by Nkomo (Alexander, 2021). Some studies have shown how the Shona language was weaponised by the 5th Brigade as a language of genocide and was used to identify and torture victims. They have also revealed how victims were killed for failing to speak or heed soldiers' commands given in Shona while others were forced to sing self-demeaning and dehumanising Shona songs (see Maseko & Nkomo, 2022; Sibanda, 2021). The 5th Brigade also used derogatory, hateful and overtly tribalistic language, claiming to be on a retribution mission to avenge their forefathers who were killed by the Ndebele during pre-colonial raids of Shona communities (Alexander, 2021). The language used by government officials at the time was similarly tribalistic, polarising and dehumanising. The then Minister of State Security, who is the current president's equation of 'dissidents' to bugs and cockroaches who had to be exterminated using deadly pesticides (Sibanda, 2021) animates this point. Tellingly, the name Gukurahundi derives from a Shona word which translates to "the rain that washes away the chaff before the summer rains" (Phimister, 2009, p. 471). By implication, the 'chaff' referred to Ndebele people in general, who were often conflated with dissidents and supporters of Nkomo and PF-ZAPU (Sibanda, 2021).

Since the end of Gukurahundi, Ndebele-Shona relations have remained strained, exacerbated in part, by the state's denial and lack of acknowledgement of its role in the genocide, despite acknowledgement being pivotal to healing, reconciliation and closure for victims and survivors (King, 2010). Contemporary language practices also point to the symbolic reproductions of Gukurahundi, punctuated by the stifling of the Ndebele language in public and official spaces (Maseko & Nkomo, 2022) and the projection of Shona as the uncontested symbol of Zimbabwean-ness (Ncube & Siziba, 2017). Contestations between Shona and Ndebele tend to be read within the context of Gukurahundi as a synonym for Ndebele ethnic cleansing (Ncube & Siziba, 2017).

3. Conceptual framework

Family language policy is a concept that straddles three previously disconnected fields of bilingualism, language acquisition and language policy (King et al., 2008). It refers to explicit and implicit, conscious and unconscious (Seals & Beliaeva, 2023) decisions that families of diverse types – traditional nuclear families, extended families, single-parent families and foster or adoptive families (Macalister & Mirvahedi, 2017; Purkharthofer et al., 2021; Smith-Christmas, 2014) make regarding language use at home. It is thus concerned with how families in bilingual and multilingual contexts manage and negotiate their language transactions. In line with Spolsky's tripartite model of language policy (Spolsky, 2009, 2012) deploying FLP as a conceptual lens facilitates an explanation of what families do with language, also known as language practices, their beliefs about language, also known as language ideologies and their efforts to shape and influence children's language use and learning outcomes (King et al., 2008; Schwartz & Verschik, 2013). Accordingly, FLP inquiries differ markedly from psycholinguistically inclined studies of bilingualism because they do not focus on the individual but are concerned with how overall language and literacy decisions interact with the sociocultural context of the family (King & Fogle, 2013). For the most part, decisions on bilingual child upbringing

rest with parents, whose language ideologies are also central (Soler & Roberts, 2019). However, parents' language ideologies may not only conflict with each other's, but also with children's ideologies imported from extra-familial spaces such as schools (Curd-Christiansen, 2016; Said & Zhu, 2019). The concept of FLP also places the family as an important frontier in the conservation of minoritised and threatened languages because of its association with intimacy and impenetrability. As Schwartz and Verschik (2013:2) write, the family is "the most common and inescapable basis of mother tongue transmission, bonding, use and stabilisation." Similarly, Fishman (1991) has emphasised the use of the threatened language among all the three generations in the family as the core ingredient of language conservation.

In linguistically intermarried families, however, decisions on children's language socialisation are often compounded by parents' ideologies about each other's heritage language. They are frequently confronted with the question of whose language should be acquired by children and for what reasons (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Daly, 2023). While the family is often associated with intimacy and privacy which serves as a boundary and a bulwark against outside influences (Schwartz, 2010), FLP cannot be insulated from language ideologies circulating in public and extra-familial spaces — some of which are products of socio-historical and political contexts (Maseko, 2022b; Mirvahedi, 2021; Tannenbaum, 2012). Research has shown that where FLP is concerned, this private-public dichotomy has become blurred, thus casting the family as a space along the private-public continuum (Purkarthofer et al., 2021). This implies that decisions on bilingualism and bilingual child upbringing are seldom harmonious, but they reproduce contestations of various kinds. The concept of harmonious bilingualism was propounded by Annick De Houwer to denote positive experiences associated with bilingual child upbringing, often linked to parents' interpersonal relations and emotional dispositions towards languages in their immediate sociolinguistic environment (De Houwer, 2015). In opposition, the absence of harmonious bilingualism leads to conflicts and tensions in FLP. This is mainly a result of negative experiences involving language(s). Harmonious and conflictual bilingualism are therefore two ends of a continuum (De Houwer, 2015). For this study, deploying this conceptual lens facilitates an understanding of linguistic intermarriage as a site of conflict, where language ideologies foster diverse linguistic practices and the negotiation and renegotiation of social boundaries (Irving Torsh, 2020).

4. Literature review

Studies on FLP are increasing globally, particularly with the proliferation of transnational families, a consequence of globalisation and associated people mobility across national and continental boundaries. Predictably, much FLP work is concerned with how immigrant and transnational families negotiate the new linguistic environment to strike a balance between heritage language maintenance and acquisition of the host country's majority language for children's education and assimilation into the new linguistic and cultural milieu (e.g., Seals & Beliaeva, 2023; Soler & Roberts, 2019). Notably, most of these studies are concentrated in the American, European and Asian diasporic contexts. FLP tensions discussed by these studies are linked to intricacies and contradictions which often exist between homeland and hostland language ideologies, thus increasing the dilemma of which language to socialise their children (Bui et al., 2022; Seals & Beliaeva, 2023). Some FLP tensions also result from the mismatch between parents and children's language beliefs, as was the case in two Vietnamese immigrant families in Australia where children's pro-monolingual practices contradicted their mothers' pro-bilingual language ideologies (Bui et al., 2022). The significance of the heritage language to parents does not always resonate with children, especially those born outside their parents' countries of origin (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Daly, 2023).

In both diasporic and indigenous contexts, much research spotlights the role of parental agency to show how parents' language ideologies are

an important factor in the articulation of FLP (e.g., Ahooja et al., 2022; Maseko & Mutasa, 2018; Soler & Roberts, 2019). However, there is a growing strand of research that acknowledges children's agency in shaping FLP in a variety of contexts (Fogle & King, 2013; Gyogi, 2015; Maseko, 2022a; Said & Zhu, 2019). Previous studies have also tended to focus on FLP in the contexts of endogamous families, characterised by relative degrees of harmonious bilingualism (De Houwer, 2015) where parents' language concordance coincides with their aspirations for children's language development trajectories for reasons related to imagined future identities and general well-being (Seals & Beliaeva, 2023). These studies tend to project bilingual development as a "rigid, formulaic process" (Jackson, n.d., p. 340). In language-concordant families, it is thus common for studies to rely on one of the parents' FLP perspectives (e.g., Park, 2023; Romanowski, 2022).

However, studies have begun to show that in intermarried families, FLPs are punctuated by tensions and conflictual bilingualism and that in such families, FLP is emotionally laden (Tannenbaum, 2012) and often punctuated by contestations regarding the language to pass on to children as their Home Language (HL). In immigrant contexts, the emotional aspects of FLP may be linked with feelings of incomplete integration because of a lack of proficiency in the majority language of the host country (Karpava, 2022), or parents' disappointments in their failure to reproduce in their children, levels of bilingualism consistent with their investment and commitment (Irving Torsh, 2020). Findings from other studies also show that children's mere exposure to their parents' languages will not always translate to desired bilingual development (Jackson, 2007). Some studies have thus characterised FLP as 'invisible work' (Jackson, 2007; Sims et al., 2019) as it demands parents to transcend parent/teacher roles at home. However, there remains a paucity of studies that examine FLP tensions within linguistic intermarriages in post-conflict contexts.

Linking FLP with its ethnic dimensions, (Ong et al., 2022) demonstrate that maintaining ethnic identity is not always an important consideration in the articulation of FLP. Focusing on the link between the intergenerational transmission of Chinese Foochow in Sarawak, Malaysia, they showed how younger speakers of the Chinese Foochow dialect exhibit a propensity to shift to Mandarin or English. Some of the study's findings reveal that families who believe in ethnicity as a fixed and unchanging biological endowment do not consider language as a critical factor in expressing their identity. While families held strong beliefs about their identity, they also believed that the inability to speak the Chinese Foochow dialect did not diminish their ethnic legitimacy since they could easily compensate for this deficiency with other ethnic markers such as practising Foochow customs and partaking in Foochow dishes (Ong et al., 2022). In the African context, however, language is an important symbol of ethnicity. Accordingly, FLPs in inter-ethnic families are less likely to reflect this dimension, especially in the context of enduring historical tensions pitting fathers' and mothers' ethnic groups. The focus on post-genocide reification of FLP is only gaining momentum. Maseko (2022b) examined how FLP is deployed as a coping and defence mechanism by a Ndebele language concordant family in post-genocide Matabeleland. The study showed how the focal family's harmonious FLP is shaped by the parents' negative attitudes towards the Shona language, which reminds them of the genocide. The study reinforces the view of FLPs as products of past linguistic experiences. While contributing to the literature on the emotional aspects of FLP, the present study departs from this literature by focusing on families built on a backdrop of historical tensions between the parents' ethnic groups in an indigenous context. As the review has shown, previous studies have mainly concentrated on endogamous families in diasporic and transnational contexts.

5. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Research participants consist of parents (mothers and fathers)

from four purposively selected Ndebele-Shona intermarried families in Bulawayo. Bulawayo is Zimbabwe's second largest city which is historically associated with the Ndebele people and the Ndebele language. Lately, Bulawayo has increasingly become the most cosmopolitan region of Matabeleland which has witnessed an influx of Shona speakers in recent times. The families were purposively sampled using the following criteria: One parent had to self-identify as an L1 Ndebele speaker and the other as an L1 Shona speaker. Within each focal family, there had to be at least one child attending school. Taking a cue from Finnas (2003), we ensured that parents had a reasonable possibility of choice since our study also has an interest in parental language choices. Although our study is not about the politics of ethnicity *per se*, we depart from the view that broader societal ethnic relations potentially influence language choice and transactions within these families. In the study, the four focal families are designated Family A, B, C and D. Table 1 Below summarises the sociolinguistic profiles of the participating parents' families.

Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews conducted by the first author with both parents from each family at a time and place chosen by participants. In FLP studies, parents are considered 'authorities' whose language ideologies are key in the articulation and negotiation of family language policies. All interviews ($n=8$) were conducted in the families' homes on weekends. Each interview lasted between 45 min to an hour. Parents were allowed to choose the language of the interview. Most parents ($n=6$) opted for English while some ($n=2$) opted for Ndebele. This meant that the pre-designed interview guide which was originally in English had to be simultaneously translated to Ndebele for the two participants. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the commencement of the interviews. This involved the researcher explaining in detail the purpose and nature of the study and participants' rights. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the interview at any point if they wished to.

Apart from gathering demographic and family sociolinguistic information, interview questions generally sought to elicit parents' language ideologies, practices and preferences for their children's language socialisation and the reasons behind their preferences. Other questions sought to find out the nature of support or contradictions that parents exhibited towards each other's FLP preferences. Although interviews were based on a set of predetermined open-ended questions, follow-up questions were asked to further probe interesting lines and to allow interviewees to clarify certain issues and provide more detailed responses (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Daly, 2023). These questions allowed participants to talk about their personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions, emotions and beliefs (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Daly, 2023) about their children's language socialisation in the context of Ndebele-Shona intermarriage. Interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. Those in Ndebele were also translated into English. The transcription was done in dialogue by both authors. Interview recordings were partially transcribed as linguistically meaningless fillers, pauses and other cues were omitted. Interview data was subjected to thematic content analysis guided by Spolsky's tripartite model of language policy to identify parents' language practices, ideologies and management (Spolsky, 2004, 2009) and how they conformed or contradicted each other. To conform to the ethic of confidentiality, the names of families and parents are not used in the presentation of findings.

Table 1
Sociolinguistic profiles of participants' families.

Family	Father's L1	Mother's L1	No. of children	Other languages
A	Ndebele	Shona	2	English
B	Ndebele	Shona	3	English
C	Shona	Ndebele	4	English
D	Shona	Ndebele	2	English

6. Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study. FLPs of each family are presented individually to show how parents' language ideologies influence their preferences for children's language socialisation and use.

6.1. Family A

Family A is a family of four, consisting of parents and their two children — a boy and a girl, aged eleven and seven respectively. The father is a 42-year-old motor mechanic working in the city. The mother is a 38-year-old accounts clerk at a private college. The boy child is in grade five while the girl is doing grade two at a local school. The father is an L1 Ndebele speaker while the mother is an L1 Shona speaker. Both parents can speak and understand each other's L1 as well as English. Parents' reports also indicate that both children are competent in Ndebele and English. According to the father, both children can also understand "a bit of Shona although they are not keen to speak it." By this token, Family A can be described as a multilingual family because there are more than two languages in its linguistic repertoire.

In terms of their language practices, the father is keen for his children to use Ndebele more often at home. This is informed by his desire to cultivate within the children a Ndebele-centred identity. The father thus believes that Ndebele is important for children's socialisation into a Ndebele linguistic and cultural heritage. Although he is aware of the benefits of multilingualism, his wish is that everyone in the family, including the mother use Ndebele when they are at home. The following father's response corroborates this point:

I know it is important for people to learn as many languages as they can, but in our home, I emphasise Ndebele to the children. Yes, the mother is Shona, but she can also speak Ndebele and my wish is that she uses it all the time. These children have my surname, and they should carry the father's heritage. Their mother also changed her surname to mine, so she also has to assimilate into a Ndebele identity.

Although the mother has "no reservations with speaking Ndebele at home", she feels that she should also be allowed to use her native Shona with the children and the father as part of her heritage. As a "cultured woman" she explained that she however respects her husband's desire for children to learn Ndebele and does not want to "disturb the peace at home" by going against her husband's preferences. She however admits that she sometimes uses Shona with the children when the father is not around:

Our culture demands that we respect the head of the house. This includes respecting his choices about language. I am a cultured woman, so I follow his lead. I would love to use Shona with my children without any sanctions, but my husband prefers Ndebele. The little Shona they know is from playing with friends next door. I also speak to them in Shona when my husband is not around.

Although the mother would like to use Shona with the children as evident in the excerpt above, there is no support from the father, whose preferences for children's home language socialisation reifies a desire for cultivating an essentialist Ndebele identity. This could explain why the children are not keen to speak Shona. They may be aware of the lack of father's support to their mother's attempts to use Shona with them. The father seems to place more importance on his Ndebele language and the mother's capitulation to the father's language preferences is a source of tension for FLP.

Although the father does not explicitly prohibit the use of Shona by children, the mother feels that he does not want the children to exhibit any Shona traits. On the other hand, the mother would want the children to learn Shona so they can use it to interact with her relatives when they visit her village of origin. She explains that while she does not mind

children sticking to Ndebele at home, it embarrasses her when they fail to interact with their maternal grandparents who themselves are not conversant in Ndebele since they have never lived anywhere else besides Mashonaland. This is evident in the following excerpt:

I think, one thing my husband does not like is when our kids identify themselves as Shona to their friends. He has not said it to my face, but you can tell he is not comfortable when children speak Shona with friends from next door. At the same time, I want them to be able to interact with my parents when we visit the village. I get embarrassed when they fail to effectively interact with their grandparents in Shona. What can I do? It's worse when it's my parents' turn to visit. They have to communicate in English with their grandparents.

From the above, it is evident that the father's unofficial 'proscription' of Shona is a source of anxiety and shame for the mother, especially when the children fail to effectively interact with their Shona-speaking maternal grandparents.

6.2. Family B

Like A, Family B also consists of an L1 Ndebele father and an L1 Shona mother, and three children — two boys aged fourteen and nine, and a girl aged eleven. The father is a 51-year-old ambulance driver while the mother is a 48-year-old self-employed shop owner who sells children's clothing in the city centre. The older boy is in form three, while the younger boy is in grade four. The girl is in grade six. Both parents can speak and understand each other's language, and both speak English well. The children speak Ndebele and English, but they cannot speak Shona. According to the mother, this is a direct consequence of the father's explicit and strong stance against the use of Shona in the home, which he feels has a privileged status beyond the family sphere. The father feels that Ndebele has "a lot of catching up to do" because it has long been marginalised. When asked about his FLP preferences and the language he considers important for the family, he responded:

This is a no-brainer. As the head of the family, I decide what language is used in the family. That will be Ndebele. In this house, once you enter the gate you have to speak in Ndebele. My wife has also assimilated so she knows that in this house we use Ndebele. The children know this as well. It is a matter of identity. Their mother has a Shona background, but she is Ndebele now because she married into a Ndebele family. Remember *umfazi kalahole* (a woman will always bear a child who carries the father's identity). In any case, Shona is spoken everywhere out there where Ndebele is oppressed.

The mother also concurs that Shona is almost a non-existent language in the family. She is only allowed to use it when her relatives visit:

If you want to put my husband off, just use Shona in his presence. He can even go to the extent of chasing you out of the house. Sometimes I even forget that I am Shona[...]. I only use it when my relatives visit. When he is around, you can tell that he is not comfortable. Sometimes I wonder if he did not know that I am Shona when he married me[...]

The above sentiments suggest that the father has reservations about the Shona language such that he initiates deliberate interventions to discourage its use. The mother's prediction of her husband's likely reaction to somebody who speaks Shona in the home and his exhibited discomfort around her wife's Shona-speaking relatives also confirms his negative attitude and indifference. That the mother even ponders if her husband was not aware of her Shona ethnicity before marrying her is an affirmation of his disposition. As a result, the mother has simply decided not to contest her husband's preferences to 'keep the peace'. There is therefore a tendency within Family B to conform to Ndebele monolingualism. The father simply does not like the mother's L1. Apart from his desire to transmit an essentialist Ndebele identity to the children, part of the reason for this 'dislike' of the Shona language is that he views

it as a hegemonic oppressor language.

6.3. Family C

As opposed to Family A and B, Family C consists of a 59-year-old L1 Shona father and a 48-year-old L1 Ndebele mother. The couple has four children in total. However, their first and second-born daughters have since gotten married and moved to their own homes, leaving the family with two boys aged 14 and 11. They are in form two and grade six respectively. The father is a civil engineer at a local construction company while the mother is a 'stay-at-home mum.' Just like Family A and B, parents in this family can also speak and understand each other's language well. Parents' reports also indicate that the two children can speak and understand both Shona and Ndebele well. Both parents and the children can also speak and understand English. While there is no explicitly articulated family language policy as is the case in Family B, results from interviews with both parents reveal an ongoing contest by parents to assert each own's language on the children. As it is in Family A and B, the father feels that children have to assimilate into a Shona identity and align with their paternal heritage. He indicates how he always addresses the children in Shona to cultivate competence in the language. However, there is no deliberate intervention from him to discourage their use of Ndebele. The mother also reported how she always strives to speak Ndebele with her children to cultivate their proficiency in Ndebele, a language that she holds dear and is proud of. This suggests that although not an explicitly articulated FLP, parents in Family C tend to adhere to a "One Parent One Language" (OPOL) strategy (Döpke, 1992). This entails that each parent uses only their L1 with the children. The following responses from both parents reveal their default FLP stances:

I always ensure that I use Shona when I address the children. Even when they address me in another language like Ndebele or English, I always respond in Shona. They should learn Shona because that's the language of their heritage (Father's interview).

I am a proud Ndebele and I have a lot of passion for my language. It is good for the children to learn and understand their mother's heritage and culture. Ndebele culture is very rich and interesting. It's good for them to speak Ndebele (Mother's interview).

For parents in Family C, OPOL becomes a default strategy that accommodates each parent's preferences and thus thaws tensions about language choice. Interview data suggests that this is a result of a contest between the parents regarding what language should be acquired by the children and for what reason (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Daly, 2023). The father feels that the children should take on a Shona identity while the mother also feels the need for the children to learn her language. As a stay-at-home mother, she spends ample time with the children to assert her FLP. There are however no protestations from the father. This could be an accommodation strategy and a veiled acknowledgement of the marginality of Ndebele in Zimbabwe. A positive outcome of this contest however is the resultant children's bilingualism.

6.4. Family D

Family D is a young couple with two children — a boy aged six and a girl aged four. The father is a 34-year-old graphic designer with a local advertising agency while the mother is a 30-year-old pharmaceutical assistant. The boy is in grade one at a private school in the city, while the girl attends pre-school. Like Family C, the father is L1 Shona, while the mother is L1 Ndebele. Both parents and the two children can speak and understand English. Although the parents can speak and understand each other's language, they do not agree on which of the two languages should be passed on to the children. As a result, they resort to speaking English with their children. Parents' reports indicate that both children mainly speak English and hardly any Shona or Ndebele. According to the father:

When we had our first child, we failed to agree on what language we would want him to acquire as his first language. I wanted to teach him Shona first as the language of his ancestors, but each time I spoke to him in Shona, his mother would frown at me. She seemed to prefer that we speak to him in Ndebele. So, there was always this tension around which language to use. I preferred Shona, she preferred Ndebele.

The mother also indicated that:

When my husband and I were dating, the language issue was never a problem. We could address each other in Shona, Ndebele or English. The problem started when we had our first-born son. It was now a question of whose language should be used with him. I love my Ndebele language and we stay in Bulawayo, so I thought Ndebele would be more useful to him. But my husband seemed to prefer Shona. In Bulawayo, Shona is not taught at school anyway.

The two excerpts above reveal the conflicting ideologies behind the parents' preferences. While the father's preference is inspired by identity considerations, the mother's preference is linked to linguistic pride as well as her perceived utility of Ndebele in the educational sphere and her lack of awareness that some schools have begun to teach Shona in Bulawayo. As a compromise, the parents have since settled for an English-centred FLP and have agreed to address the children using English. Parents consider English as a 'neutral language' that also offers economic and educational incentives. They had to give the children English names as "we could not even agree on whether to give them Shona or Ndebele names" (Mother's interview). The FLP reified by parents in Family D typically precipitates into the neglect of native languages and occasions a shift to English monolingualism since children's language proficiency is cultivated and fostered in English rather than in the parents' native languages. The preference for an English-dominant FLP is also justified in terms of the utility of the language beyond the home. Children's competence in English "will come in handy as this is the main language used in schools and there are economic benefits that are associated with it" (Father's interview). In this family, therefore, the dominant language ideology prevails over the ideology of language as a carrier and marker of identity, and language as a source of pride. This perceived status and utility of English thus lighten the burden of choice for parents. However, their negotiated FLP foregrounding English is detrimental to the intergenerational transmission of their L1s.

7. Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study reveal the complex nature of FLP within the studied Ndebele-Shona intermarried families. These complexities are linked to the dispositions and ideologies of parents towards their own, and their partner's language. Although FLPs of the studied families are not uniform, the findings generally align with previous studies by confirming that "language ideologies, practices, and management in families do not take place in a social vacuum; rather, they interact with the socio-political, historical, and economic realities in which families find themselves" (Mirvahedi, 2021). The historical context of Ndebele-Shona potentially plays a role in parents' language socialisation preferences for their children. However, it is ironic that despite these historic tensions, Ndebele-Shona intermarriages still happen.

Findings also suggest that the Shona mothers in Family A and Family B are more malleable to accommodate the language socialisation preferences of their husbands which range from a strong Ndebele-centred FLP, punctuated by an expressed indifference towards Shona by the father in Family B. While it is difficult to explain why the father in Family B would marry a Shona speaker and still harbour an indifferent attitude towards the Shona language, as also confirmed by his wife, one can speculate that considerations other than language were made in his choice of a marriage partner. The visible discomfort observed by the mother when her Shona-speaking relatives visit her family also reifies

her husband's indifference. There is also a lack of support for the mother's desire to transmit her Shona language to the children in Family A. Although parents' proficiencies in each other's languages do not immediately present problems in their communication, they do not agree on the language socialisation trajectories for their children. In both cases, the Shona mothers are accommodative of their husbands' FLPs. Capitulation to the father's preference by the mother in Family A is also linked to her beliefs about what is permissible in the African culture. As a 'cultured woman' her obligation to respect her husband's preferences as the head of the family overruns her language loyalty. This is one way that the mother avoids confrontations with the father regarding FLP. The Ndebele ideology that a woman's ethnicity is never fixed but is changeable by marriage also inspires Ndebele fathers' articulation of Ndebele-centred FLPs that do not support nor accommodate the mothers' language, despite mothers' expressed desire to pass it to their children for various reasons. Particularly for the father in family A, the mother should assimilate into the Ndebele identity as symbolised by her change of surname upon marriage. By that token, the mother's identity has no place in the home. The father's stance and interpretation of her wife's official change of surname upon marriage however contradicts what normally applies in Ndebele culture. This stance is perhaps to emphasise his view that it would rather be his wife who adopts the husband's language than the opposite.

On the other hand, Ndebele mothers in Families C and D are less likely to easily give in to their Shona husband's FLP preferences. While both fathers in Family C and D express their desire for children's acquisition of Shona as a symbol of their identity, the mothers also wish to assert their identity and use Ndebele with their children. Because of her linguistic and ethnic pride, the mother in Family C would rather pursue a parallel FLP to the Shona father by using Ndebele with the children at every opportunity. As a stay-at-home mother, she has more contact with the children to achieve this. The law of unintended consequences comes into play as the OPOL strategy becomes the default FLP. The importance of language as an ethnic marker in Zimbabwe is most likely a contributing factor in the disagreements on FLP since choosing one language is taken to be an act of choosing an ethnic identity. These findings contrast with findings from other contexts where language is not considered an essential aspect of ethnicity and families do not fuss about what language their children are socialised into (e.g., Ong et al., 2022).

A major finding of the study suggests that disagreements regarding which language to use as the default home language may be detrimental to both parents' languages and harmonious bilingualism, particularly for Family D. Some FLP decisions detrimental to the intergenerational transmission of native languages include foregrounding a non-native language as a negotiated FLP. Although not explicitly reported in the interviews, one could infer that some FLPs could be linked to what parents think of each other's ethnic identity. This is also confirmed by the preference to give children English names showing that these disagreements run deeper than can be explained in terms of language. Neglecting native languages could also result in children dropping other cultural behaviours associated with Shona or Ndebele ethnic identity, as was the case with ethnically Chinese Foochow children who were socialised into Mandarin and English in Malaysia (Ong et al., 2022). Not surprisingly for Family D, parents' preference for English to defuse tensions about language choice is also facilitated by the status of English in the Zimbabwean educational, social and economic milieu. As a language of education and economic success, previous studies have also shown how English tends to be privileged even in FLPs of endogamous families in Zimbabwe (e.g., Maseko, 2022a; Maseko & Mutasa, 2019). Overall, the study's findings have shown that language choice and FLP in the studied Ndebele-Shona intermarried families is a complex issue that reproduces identity, power and ideological contestations circulating at the macro level. As some studies have shown, FLP cannot be divorced from the ideological climate that influences specific regimes of language use within the society at large. The FLP stance of the father in

Family B seems to reproduce the Ndebele-Shona tensions in Zimbabwe, where the Ndebele view Shona as an oppressor language whose power is linked to the hegemonic dominance of the Shona violently established during Gukurahundi. Although none of the participants mentions Gukurahundi due to its sensitive nature, it can be inferred especially from the father in Family B's reaction towards the use of the language in his home.

This study only focused on parental reports of their language practices, ideologies and socialisation preferences for children. However, some studies have shown that parents' self-reported language ideologies and FLPs often contradict their actual practices (Maseko, 2022a). As one of the pioneering studies focusing on FLP in post-conflict contexts, the findings of this study are important to inspire further research based on other methodologies. For example, future studies could rely on ethnographic approaches by observing family language practices to reconcile parents' reports with their actual practices. A further methodological innovation could be the inclusion of children's perspectives to understand their contribution to tensions or their resolution in FLP, given that studies have shown that children can also assert agency in FLP (Bui et al., 2022; Gyogi, 2015). As a final remark, this study has contributed to the burgeoning literature on FLP. In particular, it has shown that where parents come from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds, their FLP can be a site where ethnic tensions play out. Although participants do not explicitly relate their language ideologies and FLP preferences to the historical Ndebele-Shona tensions partly exacerbated by the Gukurahundi legacy, it can be inferred from the findings that FLPs within the participants' families reproduce the macro contestations attributable to these historical tensions. This aligns with the view that family language policies can be both explicit and overt, or implicit and covert (Seals & Beliaeva, 2023), and that FLPs are nuanced and vary from one family to the other.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Busani Maseko: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Liqhwa Siziba:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

We would like to declare that we have no conflict of interest regarding our article entitled 'Family language policy tensions in Ndebele-Shona intermarriages' which we have submitted to *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* journal.

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