



Article

Translanguaging as a Dynamic Strategy for Heritage Language Transmission

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Abstract: This study explores translanguaging as a flexible and adaptive strategy for heritage language transmission within multilingual families residing in Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden. Using a qualitative approach, the research examines family language policies, parental beliefs, and the linguistic practices of bilingual and multilingual families, where one parent speaks Russian. The findings reveal how translanguaging supports bilingual development by fostering linguistic adaptability, bridging heritage and societal languages, and accommodating diverse sociolinguistic contexts. Parents in each country implement unique strategies, influenced by local linguistic landscapes, educational systems, and resource availability. In Cyprus, some families strictly adhered to structured methods like the One Parent–One Language strategy, while others adopted a more integrative multilingual approach, seamlessly translanguaging between Russian, Greek, and English in their daily interactions. Estonian and Swedish families display pragmatic adaptations, emphasizing translanguaging’s role in promoting the emotional well-being and linguistic identity of family members. However, certain challenges persist, including societal language dominance, literacy and educational resource scarcity, and the potential overuse of translanguaging in formal communication. By comparing these contexts, the study underscores the need for flexible yet deliberate family language policies, institutional support, and community resources to sustain bilingualism in bilingual and multilingual families. This research contributes to understanding translanguaging’s implications for intergenerational language transmission in minority and immigrant settings, offering insights for educators, linguists, and policymakers on fostering linguistic diversity and equity in globalized societies.

Keywords: family language policy; heritage language; transmission; translanguaging; minority; immigrant; Russian



Academic Editor:

Jeanine Treffers-Daller

Received: 18 August 2024

Revised: 17 January 2025

Accepted: 18 January 2025

Published: 23 January 2025

Citation: Karpava, S., Ringblom, N., & Zabrodskaia, A. (2025).

Translanguaging as a Dynamic Strategy for Heritage Language Transmission. *Languages*, *10*(2), 19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages10020019>

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1. Introduction

Global migration and the forces of globalization have transformed classrooms into linguistically and culturally diverse spaces. This shift has fostered an increasing awareness among educators and students of the value of multilingualism, encouraging the recognition of home languages as assets for learning rather than barriers to success (Duarte, 2019; Leung & Valdés, 2019; Lin, 2019; Chalmers & Murphy, 2022). However, the integration of multilingual strategies, such as translanguaging, into educational settings has sparked ongoing debates regarding its theoretical foundations and practical implications.

Translanguaging has been proposed as a conceptual and practical framework to address the challenges of teaching in diverse classrooms (Wei, 2018; Anderson, 2022a; Huang & Chalmers, 2023). In her early work, García (2009) suggested that translanguaging

is an umbrella term for multilingual discourse practices and pedagogy, which includes code-switching but goes beyond it. According to [Vogel and García \(2017\)](#), multilingual individuals possess a unified linguistic system, enabling them to draw upon various linguistic and semiotic resources for dynamic communication. A heteroglossic ideology ([Bakhtin, 1981](#); [Bailey, 2007](#); [García, 2009](#)) has been applied to pedagogy by supporters of translanguaging, which is reflected in the dynamic and interactive use of multiple languages in classroom settings ([Martin-Beltrán, 2014](#); [Palmer et al., 2014](#); [Soltero-González et al., 2016](#)).

The concept of translanguaging underscores the fluidity of multilingual communication, integrating individuals' linguistic repertoires into a unified system for dynamic interaction ([García, 2009](#); [García et al., 2017a](#)). Pedagogically, it seeks to validate linguistic diversity, foster inclusivity, and promote equitable learning opportunities, particularly for marginalized students ([Conteh, 2018](#); [Cenoz & Gorter, 2021](#)). However, debates persist regarding its implications for language revitalization and identity formation, especially in minority settings ([Martínez-Roldán, 2015](#); [McPake & Tedick, 2022](#)). While translanguaging de-emphasizes the distinctions between named languages, it advocates for social justice by validating the linguistic and cultural identities of minority and immigrant students and supporting effective language learning through inclusive pedagogical practices ([García, 2009](#); [García & Wei, 2014](#); [Conteh, 2018](#); [Cenoz & Gorter, 2021](#)).

[García and Lin \(2017\)](#) distinguished between a strong and weak version of translanguaging, while [Cummins \(2021\)](#) proposed the Unitary Translanguaging Theory (UTT) and the Crosslinguistic Translanguaging Theory (CTT), which supports a general multilingual perspective. Recent research suggests that translanguaging extends beyond classrooms to encompass individuals' entire linguistic repertoires, enabling multimodal communication ([García, 2012](#); [Lewis et al., 2012](#); [Cummins, 2019](#); [Prilutskaya, 2021](#)). Translanguaging practices are typically categorized as either pedagogical translanguaging, which involves deliberate instructional strategies ([Williams, 1994, 1996](#); [Cenoz, 2017](#); [Andrei et al., 2020](#); [Cummins, 2019](#); [Galante, 2020](#)), or spontaneous translanguaging, which occurs naturally in multilingual interactions ([Cenoz & Gorter, 2017](#)).

[Prilutskaya's \(2021\)](#) systematic review of translanguaging research highlights its prominence in primary, middle, and higher education, particularly in North America and Europe. However, most studies focus on students rather than teachers and rely on qualitative methods, such as linguistic ethnographies and case studies with small participant samples ([Copland & Creese, 2015](#)). These studies explore diverse topics, including interactions between peers and teachers, language ideologies, and the impact of translanguaging on assessment and content learning ([Costley & Leung, 2020](#); [Hansen-Thomas et al., 2021](#)). Additionally, translanguaging has been examined for its potential to enhance emotional well-being, reduce language anxiety, and promote equity in education ([Abourehab & Azaz, 2020](#); [Axelrod, 2017](#)).

Despite its growing adoption, translanguaging has faced criticism. Scholars in the field of linguistics and psycholinguistics have questioned its theoretical assumptions, arguing that distinct internal and external representations of multilingual languages challenge the notion of a unified system ([MacSwan, 2017, 2022](#); [Auer, 2022](#); [Genesee, 2022](#)). Furthermore, empirical evidence supporting the pedagogical benefits of translanguaging remains limited and warrants further investigation ([Macaro, 2022](#); [Chalmers & Murphy, 2022](#); [Huang & Chalmers, 2023](#)). [MacSwan \(2022\)](#) supported a multilingual perspective on translanguaging, according to which multilingualism is psychologically real and has social significance, affirming translanguaging at both conceptual and pedagogical levels. [MacSwan \(2017\)](#) and [Shi and MacSwan \(2019\)](#) asserted that translanguaging is multifaceted. Numerous researchers have explored translanguaging through conceptual, pedagogical, and theoretical

lenses. The conceptual framework of translanguaging views multilingualism holistically and positively, as it enables multilingual individuals to communicate naturally and legitimately at home and in society, thereby being perceived as linguistically unique language users (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011).

Recently, the translanguaging framework has been influenced by deconstructivism, which has triggered the development of a unitary perspective on multilingualism that does not perceive the languages of multilinguals as distinct systems (Pennycook, 2005; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Otheguy et al., 2015; García et al., 2017b). Translanguaging has been perceived as a critical perspective on pedagogy in multilingualism (Jaspers, 2017; Poza, 2017). MacSwan (2017, 2022) opposed the deconstructivist perspective, which advocates for a unitary view of bilingualism and multilingualism, and the non-existence of discrete language communities.

Due to a great increase in the number of transnational families who raise bilingual children (Wilson, 2021), it is important to continue investigating the strategies employed by parents to promote harmonious bilingualism in their children (Braun & Cline, 2014; De Houwer, 2009; Lanza, 2007), their family language policy (hereafter FLP), language practice, and ideologies (Smith-Christmas, 2016). The main aim of this study is to find out whether flexible language practices such as translanguaging (Soler & Zabrodska, 2017) are beneficial for heritage language maintenance and transmission in bilingual and multilingual families, based on reported parental language beliefs and language strategies.

In our previous studies, we have shown how translanguaging affects the development of home language literacies among children in immigrant and minority settings (Karpava et al., 2019, 2021) and found that translanguaging was used to increase the children's educational opportunities and to improve their chances for future careers (Karpava et al., 2020), among other reasons. However, despite the strategy being widely used in multilingual settings (Karpava et al., 2024), its implications for intergenerational language transmission are still not properly understood. Furthermore, the role of translanguaging in FLPs and intergenerational transmission remains underexplored, particularly in transnational families raising bilingual and multilingual children. Parental language choices, strategies such as the One Parent–One Language strategy (OPOL), and children's agency significantly influence language maintenance and transmission (Lanza, 2007; Karpava, 2022b). According to De Houwer (2007), a strategy where the home language is the minority language (not OPOL) is the most successful one. Families often adapt their practices to accommodate children's preferences, raising questions about how translanguaging shapes these dynamics. We aim to explore the dynamic nature of translanguaging as it manifests in immigrant and minority families with heritage speakers. This phenomenon is influenced by contextual factors, individual differences, and FLPs, among others.

This study explores the role of flexible language practices, such as translanguaging, in heritage language maintenance and intergenerational transmission within bilingual and multilingual families. By examining diverse sociolinguistic contexts, the research provides a comparative perspective on translanguaging's impact on the preservation and development of heritage language(s), focusing on families in Northern and Southern Europe. Specifically, it investigates how parental language management and beliefs influence language transmission among Cypriot–Greek (CG)–Russian, Estonian–Russian, and Swedish–Russian bilingual and multilingual families in Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden.

The study addresses two key research questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences among bilingual and multilingual families in Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden regarding their FLPs?
2. How do parents' beliefs about and attitudes towards translanguaging relate to their language management strategies and practices?

2. Translanguaging and Parental Strategies of Language Transmission

According to [Treffers-Daller \(2024\)](#), more research is needed that focuses on translanguaging, including the identification of its theoretical conceptualization and practical implementation in research and education as well as clear diagnostic criteria of translanguaging practices. The term “translanguaging” was introduced by [Williams \(1994, 1996\)](#) to describe the alternation between Welsh and English in the educational context of Wales, where these two languages were considered separate yet interdependent ([Baker, 2011](#); [Cummins, 2008, 2021](#)). For Williams, translanguaging was regarded as an effective, deliberately planned teaching strategy that promotes the development of both languages in bilingual classrooms. This perspective contrasts with the views presented by [García et al. \(2017b, 2021\)](#). According to [García \(2009, p. 45\)](#), translanguaging is “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds”. Since then, various researchers have investigated translanguaging as a new theory of language ([García & Wei, 2014](#); [Wei, 2018](#)), teaching and educational approaches ([Prilutskaya, 2021](#); [Anderson, 2024](#)), and multilingual practices outside pedagogical contexts ([Poza, 2017](#)).

Translanguaging has been operationalized in various ways, particularly in educational contexts—such as pedagogical translanguaging (e.g., [García & Kleyn, 2016](#); [Hopp et al., 2021](#); [Cenoz & Gorter, 2022](#); [Nicolarakis & Mitchell, 2023](#))—as well as outside the classroom, for example, in the field of linguistic landscaping ([Gorter & Cenoz, 2015](#)). Translanguaging emphasizes the use of multimodal resources, including textual, auditory, linguistic, spatial, and visual modes ([Wei, 2018, p. 21](#)). In 2011, Li Wei introduced the concept of “translanguaging space”, which is described as “space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging” ([Wei, 2011, p. 1223](#)). The translanguaging framework prioritizes the unique idiolects and linguistic repertoires of speakers rather than focusing on socially and politically defined languages. Bilingual individuals possess a unitary repertoire, while languages are understood as socially constructed phenomena ([Otheguy et al., 2015, 2019](#); [Wei, 2018](#); [García & Otheguy, 2020](#); [García et al., 2021](#)).

The emphasis on the uniqueness of idiolects in translanguaging, along with a focus on the individual at the expense of social context, has been criticized by [Cook \(2022\)](#) and [Slembrouck \(2022\)](#). As noted by [Treffers-Daller \(2024\)](#), earlier research on language processing, bilingual first language acquisition, and code-switching ([Auer, 2022](#); [Genesee, 2022](#); [MacSwan, 2022](#)) provides counterevidence against the claim that bilinguals possess a unitary repertoire of features ([Otheguy et al., 2015, 2019](#)). In classrooms employing the Direct Method, the Natural Method, or the Berlitz Method, the use of the first language (L1) and translation in second language (L2) instruction was prohibited ([Howatt & Smith, 2014](#)). Nevertheless, previous research on second language acquisition (SLA) has demonstrated a positive impact of L1 on L2 learning ([Cook, 2001](#); [Treffers-Daller, 2024](#)). A strictly monolingual approach to L2 learning may not be the most effective for students. Psycholinguistic studies indicate that language systems can function independently during processing, with both L1 and L2 being activated during learning, albeit to varying extents ([Soares & Grosjean, 1984](#); [Sanoudaki & Thierry, 2015](#); [Wu & Thierry, 2017](#)). Pedagogical translanguaging considers educational contexts alongside the needs of students and their communicative repertoires and practices ([García & Otheguy, 2020](#); [García, 2023](#)). As noted by [Baker \(2011, p. 288\)](#), “translanguaging is the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages”.

According to [Treffers-Daller \(2024\)](#), translanguaging practices ([García et al., 2017a](#); [García, 2023](#)) are comparable with code-mixing. The practical application of translanguaging has raised concerns among researchers and educators regarding the use of L1 in the classroom, the implementation of translation ([Heugh et al., 2019](#); [Anderson, 2022b](#)), and factors such as the amount of L2 input, the type of learners, and educational levels ([Hopp](#)

et al., 2021; Treffers-Daller, 2024). Systematic review studies by Prilutskaya (2021) and Huang and Chalmers (2023) revealed that most research on translanguaging is qualitative, with only a few quantitative studies.

The recent translanguaging turn in sociolinguistics (Reichmuth, 2024) has significantly influenced the field of FLP, shifting its focus toward the multilingual repertoires of families and flexible, heteroglossic communicative practices. Previous research has addressed the complexity of FLP (Hirsch & Lee, 2018), including explicit and implicit language choices made by parents and their children at home and in society (Hiratsuka & Pennycook, 2020), intergenerational language maintenance and transmission (Lanza & Gomes, 2020), child agency (Paulsrud & Straszer, 2018), as well as language ideologies, language management, and language practices (Spolsky, 2012; Pennycook, 2017). As suggested by previous research, language separation or the OPOL approach (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004; Leopold, 1939; Romaine, 1995; Ronjat, 1913) is one of the dominant patterns in FLP for immigrant, transnational, and transcultural families (Piller & Gerber, 2021). OPOL is based on a monolingual ideology, which views languages as distinct linguistic modes, positing that communication can occur only through one language at a time. Additionally, OPOL is considered efficient for heritage language transmission, as each parent, being an expert and authority in his or her L1, should use only L1 with the child (Reichmuth, 2020; Soler & Roberts, 2019).

The OPOL approach is not in line with heteroglossic ideologies, which view language as a singular linguistic mode (e.g., García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014; Grosjean, 1982). In contrast, the translanguaging approach perceives the language system of a multilingual individual as a whole and dynamic system (García, 2009; García & Kleifgen, 2019). Creativity, as well as fluid language experiences across linguistic features, symbols, and modes, is recognized by the concept of translanguaging (Wei, 2011, 2018). Previous research has shown that many transcultural families choose the OPOL strategy based on monolingual language policies (Sevinç, 2020; Soler & Zabrodska, 2017; Wilson, 2020). The partial or non-implementation of the OPOL strategy may result in negative experiences, including anxiety and social distress, as some children and families struggle to achieve native-like proficiency in their heritage language or face challenges related to language mixing (De Houwer, 2006; Sevinç, 2020; Müller et al., 2020). Flexible language practices and translanguaging in the home context were observed by Song (2016), Paulsrud and Straszer (2018), and Kwon (2019), who revealed both parental and child agency with respect to FLP and the positive effects of their translanguaging practices on intergenerational language transmission (Said & Zhu, 2017; Soler & Zabrodska, 2017), multilingual identities, emotional well-being, and relationships with family (Reichmuth, 2024).

According to Lanza (2007), there are five parental language strategies, specifically, (1) minimal grasp, when the adult explains to the child that they do not understand what the child says based on the child's language choice, which is considered to be the most effective in terms of minority language and heritage language support and development; (2) expressed guess, when the adult uses another language for asking questions; (3) adult repetition, when the adult uses repetition and translation of the child's utterance in another language; (4) move-on, when the adult does not attempt to intervene in conversation; and (5) adult code-switching, when the adult uses both languages of their linguistic repertoire. As suggested by Curdt-Christiansen (2013), FLPs lie on a continuum from highly controlled to unintended, with three main types of parental language strategies. Thus, some parents can closely monitor a child's bilingual development; others can adapt or have a laissez-faire approach, which presupposes flexibility and translanguaging in parent-child interactions. Parental strategies depend on FLP and parental decisions (Fogle, 2012; Fogle & King, 2013).

Various researchers, such as [Arriagada \(2005\)](#), [Takeuchi \(2006\)](#), and [Yates and Terraschke \(2013\)](#), support the idea that a low tolerance for translanguaging leads to more successful bilingual child development. Thus, language separation strategies, such as the OPOL strategy, that maximize the heritage language input and create monolingual environments for each language have favorable results for the bilingual development of a child ([Smith-Christmas, 2016](#); [Unsworth, 2013](#)). However, the efficacy of language separation in bilingual homes has also been questioned ([Gafaranga, 2010](#); [Little, 2017](#)), highlighting the dynamic nature of FLP and children's agency in their feelings, beliefs, and language preferences ([Kopeliovich, 2013](#); [Palviainen & Boyd, 2013](#)).

Previous research has revealed that, very often, the OPOL strategy could be an unrealistic language management method ([De Houwer & Bornstein, 2016](#); [Smith-Christmas, 2016](#); [Wilson, 2021](#)). It requires consistent parental commitment, and downsides for the parent include emotional load, pressure, a high expectation for language development, and the weight of responsibility for the minority language transmission and good parenting, especially on the mother's part ([Okita, 2002](#); [De Houwer, 2013](#); [Yates & Terraschke, 2013](#)). [García \(2009\)](#) proposed a more contemporary approach to bilingualism: the idea of heteroglossia, in opposition to the language separation strategies. Thus, parents need to be flexible in terms of their FLP ([García & Wei, 2014](#); [Smith-Christmas, 2016](#); [Purkarthofer, 2019](#); [Soler & Zabrodskaja, 2017](#)), without pressure and linguistic purism and with a positive view on language mixing and translanguaging ([Kopeliovich, 2013](#); [Smith-Christmas et al., 2019](#); [Wilson, 2020](#)).

In this study, we aim to compare bilingual and multilingual families across three countries—Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden—focusing on their FLPs and the role of translanguaging in their language management strategies and practices, as well as its impact on the use, maintenance, and transmission of heritage languages. This qualitative study specifically addresses the non-English context and contrasts three geographical settings that differ in economic conditions, sociopolitical situations, migration trends, and language policies pertaining to migrant and immigrant communities.

Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden vary in terms of population size and the size of their immigrant and minority Russian-speaking communities. Members of these communities migrate to these countries for different reasons, see [Table 1](#).

Prior to the war in Ukraine, Russian was viewed as a valuable asset in Cyprus, fueled by tourism, immigration, international marriages, cultural and religious connections, political partnerships, investments, and the presence of transnational corporations, which is reflected in the linguistic landscape of Cyprus. As a result, Russian has emerged as a new lingua franca in the country, alongside being a heritage and immigrant language, as even Cypriots are showing interest in learning it as a foreign language to enhance their employment prospects ([Karpava, 2022a](#)).

In Estonia, Russian serves as both a heritage language for the significant Russian-speaking minority and a politically sensitive language due to post-Soviet policies favoring Estonian, but still a language for interethnic communication ([Zabrodskaja, 2009, 2015](#)). State language policy of the country reflects the changes toward promoting Estonian as a single official language after the restoration of independence in 1991 ([Ivanova & Zabrodskaja, 2021](#)). The shift to Estonian-language education further shapes the attitudes of Russian speakers, requiring strategies to maintain Russian while aligning with official policy changes.

In Sweden, Russian-speaking families, part of a diverse immigrant population, benefit from the country's multiculturalism and institutional support for mother-tongue instruction. Multilingual Russian-speaking families often incorporate translanguaging practices, blending Swedish, English, and Russian in daily interactions, reflecting the broader societal

embrace of linguistic diversity. Russian in Sweden carried no significant political connotations at the time of our research, allowing Russian speakers to adopt more pragmatic and inclusive language management strategies. These strategies emphasize bilingualism or multilingualism, supporting integration into Swedish society while maintaining ties to their cultural and linguistic heritage.

Table 1. Sociolinguistic situation in the countries.

Country	Cyprus	Estonia	Sweden
Population size *	1.2 million	1.3 million	10.4 million
Geographical location	Island	Mainland	Mainland
	Eastern Mediterranean	Baltic	Nordic (Scandinavian)
	South-East Europe	North-East Europe	North-West Europe
Russian-speaking community *	40,000	374,038	22,774
Reasons for migration	International marriage Climate Business Education Religion Political reasons	Country of birth International marriage Political reasons Education	International marriage Education Work Political reasons Business
Russian: Status in the country	Lingua franca Immigrant language Heritage language Foreign language	Heritage language Foreign language Language for interethnic communication Minority language	Immigrant language Heritage language Mother tongue instruction
Russian: Linguistic landscape	Present all over the island	Present in the capital and Russian-speaking county Ida-Viru	Single occurrences
Russian: History and politics	Former British colony Offshore business Tourism Russian church	Former Soviet Union country	Former neutral European country

* Population and housing census 2021.

By comparing these three countries, this study explores the intersections of language policies, sociopolitical contexts, and individual family strategies in shaping FLPs and the outcomes for heritage language use, maintenance, and transmission in minority and migrant settings.

3. Methodological Background

This study investigated FLPs and translanguaging strategies within multilingual families across three countries—Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden. Ten families from each country were selected for an in-depth examination, focusing on families where the father spoke the official state language, the mother was a native Russian speaker, and both lived together with their child(ren). This composition was chosen to explore linguistic dynamics in families balancing heritage and official languages, as such configurations are prevalent among immigrant and minority communities. Translanguaging helps multilingual families negotiate linguistic boundaries, fostering bilingualism to enhance children’s adaptability.

In addition to the linguistic composition of the parents, families were selected to ensure diversity in socioeconomic status (low, middle, high), educational background (primary school completed/secondary school completed/technical or vocational training completed/college or university undergraduate studies completed, master’s degree in progress or completed/doctorate degree in progress or completed/other), and urban/rural

residency. These factors were considered to reflect the variety of sociocultural and economic contexts that influence language practices. While the sample size was relatively small (30 families), it allowed for an in-depth qualitative analysis that prioritized depth over breadth. The FLPs of the families under investigation are influenced by a range of factors, including individual differences, linguistic and cultural identities, as well as aspirations and motivations related to their desire to remain in the host country and integrate into its society.

In Cyprus, 10 families were mixed-marriage families (or exogamous), with Russian-speaking mothers and (Cypriot)Greek-speaking fathers. In mixed-marriage families, both partners used English as a mediating language for their communication until the Russian-speaking partner learned Greek. Thus, children can hear Russian, Greek, and English from their parents at home. English, Greek, and Russian can be used for communication outside their home environment depending on the situation, context, and the interlocutor. Thus, in Cyprus, such factors as the family constitution as well as the sociolinguistic situation in the country are important factors that might affect FLPs and language management strategies of bilingual and multilingual families.

The study employed a combination of qualitative methods to gather rich and comprehensive data. Semi-structured interviews in Russian were the primary tool for data collection, allowing participants to articulate their language practices, attitudes, and strategies. Detailed case studies and observations were conducted within family homes to capture authentic interactions and linguistic behaviors. Observations were recorded via field notes and, with consent, audio recordings to ensure accuracy in capturing turn-taking sequences and language use patterns. These methodologies were guided by prior research (see [Karpava et al., 2019, 2020, 2021](#)).

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis ([Castleberry & Nolen, 2018](#)), which involved several stages to ensure rigor and reliability. Researchers independently coded the interview transcripts at the level of phrases, sentences, or paragraphs to extract key content and meanings. Intercoder reliability was established through a review process, achieving consensus on final codes and themes. The themes identified in interview data were cross-validated with observational data to ensure consistency and depth. Observations were analyzed through the lens of FLP theory, with specific attention to turn-taking sequences, attitudes toward translanguaging, and metalinguistic commentary. Themes were substantiated with examples drawn from both interviews and observations, providing a robust basis for interpreting bilingual and translanguaging practices.

The study adhered to stringent ethical protocols. Families were informed of the study's objectives and methods. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing data and securely storing recordings. Informed consent was sought from all participants, including assent from children where applicable.

While the study offers valuable insights into FLPs and translanguaging strategies, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The relatively small sample may limit the generalizability of findings, though it enables in-depth exploration of individual cases. The presence of researchers during observations may have influenced participants' behavior, despite efforts to create a natural setting.

By combining interviews, case studies, and observations, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how linguistic and cultural dynamics unfold within bilingual, multilingual families in minority and immigrant settings. The findings underscore the interplay between heritage and official languages in fostering bilingualism among children, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and linguists.

4. Findings

Our study addresses translanguaging as a dynamic strategy for heritage language transmission. It explores the diverse FLPs and language management strategies adopted by multilingual Russian-speaking parents in Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden to preserve their heritage language while promoting bilingualism and multilingualism with the societal language(s). These practices reflect parents' strategic approaches and adaptive methods to manage language development within minority and immigrant contexts.

4.1. Similarities and Differences in FLPs Across Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden

Section 4.1 addresses research question 1 by highlighting the shared strategies and contextual variations in FLPs across the three countries.

4.1.1. Parental Beliefs and Approaches to Language Transmission

Parental beliefs play a crucial role in shaping language management strategies. They are closely linked to deliberate efforts to support children's bilingual and multilingual development, emphasizing the importance of nurturing linguistic skills in both the heritage and societal language(s) from an early age. Parents in all three countries prioritize early bilingual or multilingual development through strategies like OPOL and meaning-focused activities such as reading and play.

Our findings reveal that parents in minority and immigrant contexts do recognize the value of early childhood literacy experiences at home. To enhance these experiences, they engage in meaning-focused literacy and cultural activities such as shared reading, play, and vocabulary building. These efforts often combine direct teaching methods with indirect approaches to foster language development in both Russian and the target language of the host country.

In Cyprus, parents often adhere strictly to the OPOL approach to ensure the parallel development of both the heritage and societal languages, see example (1). This method reflects a commitment to maintaining clear linguistic boundaries to promote balanced bilingualism. In Estonia, parents tend to adapt their language and literacy strategies to suit the local context and quite often implement translanguaging, as shown in example (2). For example, some parents shift their reading practices from Russian to Estonian when relocating within the country, reflecting a pragmatic response to the linguistic environment while striving to maintain heritage language use alongside societal language acquisition. In Sweden, parents face challenges in accessing Russian-language resources but demonstrate creativity in overcoming these obstacles, as indicated in example (3). Many participate in book exchanges or utilize online platforms to acquire Russian-language materials, ensuring their children's exposure to the heritage language despite limited availability. This cross-country comparison illustrates how parents in different contexts tailor their FLP approaches to meet the unique demands of their sociolinguistic environments while pursuing the shared goal of fostering bilingualism and multilingualism. This provides some evidence in support of translanguaging as a dynamic phenomenon, as FLPs and the home literacy environment (HLE) of minority and immigrant families depend on parental and child agency as well as contextual factors.

(1) Cyprus: One parent explains that: *There is a rule—one parent—one language—which should be strictly followed from birth, so that both languages develop in the child's head in parallel and equally, and each parent, respectively, should take care of his or her own language and develop it in the child, talking, reading, playing, and teaching words.*

(2) Estonia: A parent reflects on adapting their strategy when moving to a new city: *When he started to read children's books, in Narva he read in Russian, and when we came to live in*

Tallinn, only in Estonian. We realized we needed to make an effort so that he would read in both languages.

(3) Sweden: Access to Russian-language resources is a challenge, but parents adopt creative solutions. As one parent noted: *I am subscribed to Goboken and we get a new book every month. About a forest, about planets. . . it's in Swedish". . . "We buy Russian books whenever we have a chance. There are many Facebook groups where we can exchange books or get them for free, so I usually check what is available there.*

4.1.2. Challenges in Balancing Heritage and Societal Language(s) Proficiency

However, despite trying to provide sufficient input in both Russian and the majority language(s), the parents mention that many words are lacking in communicative practice, especially when the child is talking about school- or preschool-related activities. Parents across contexts struggle to maintain balanced bilingualism or even multilingualism due to societal language dominance and educational demands. The parents may introduce a word in two languages or provide an immediate Russian translation when doing homework or introducing a new concept to the child at the beginning of doing homework. However, some parents may find this difficult after spending many years in the country of residence, especially when talking to an older child about topics in which the child's vocabulary is already advanced in the mainstream language. Moreover, the parents admit that it is easier to use terminology in the majority language when they do homework because then they are sure that the child understands the content. Parents face barriers in maintaining balanced bilingual or multilingual development. Educational contexts often favor the societal language(s), which affects children's vocabulary in the heritage language.

Across the three contexts, parents face distinct challenges in balancing the heritage and societal language(s), often shaped by local conditions. In Cyprus, despite parents' efforts to promote Russian at home, the societal language inevitably prevails over time, reflecting its dominant role in daily life and education, as evidenced in example (4). In Estonia, the demands of the school system often prompt parents to use Estonian for academic tasks, prioritizing educational success over maintaining the heritage language, as illustrated in example (5). This approach, while practical, can risk the gradual erosion of Russian vocabulary and usage in more formal or specialized domains. In Sweden, some parents warn that if translanguaging becomes habitual, children may struggle to separate languages when required in educational contexts, as demonstrated in example (6). Parents often find it difficult to provide equivalent Russian terms for concepts their children encounter in the societal language, highlighting the challenges of maintaining balanced bilingualism and multilingualism in an environment where resources for the heritage language are limited. These challenges underscore the complex interplay between societal pressures and parental aspirations to preserve linguistic heritage within diverse cultural and educational settings:

(4) Cyprus: One parent notes the inevitability of societal language dominance: *Over time, no matter how hard you try, the language of society will prevail.*

(5) Estonia: Parents prioritize educational success, often defaulting to Estonian for schoolwork. A mother explains that: *If the learning tasks are discussed in Russian, they won't be done. I always say to them [children]: "You have to do everything from the textbook, hence in Estonian". I feel that Russian is disappearing, but anyway they will enter university in Estonian.*

(6) Sweden: One Swedish mother reflected, *"If it is not explained at home that this practice might not always be understood outside, a child may become so accustomed to speaking in a creative variety that they are not able to separate the languages even when needed".*

4.1.3. Translanguaging Practices in Family Communication

Translanguaging emerges as a frequent practice in daily interactions. While it facilitates adaptability, it can create challenges in formal communication. Most parents notice that their children use translanguaging in the same situations in which the parents themselves do so, often without paying any attention but later discovering that they are not understood outside their family circle.

In Cyprus, families often cope with a complex linguistic landscape, juggling three languages—Greek, Russian, and English—in their daily interactions, see example (7). This multilingual environment reflects both the cultural diversity of the country and the parents' commitment to maintaining multilingualism alongside adapting to societal demands. In Estonia, the frequent translanguaging between Russian and Estonian within families can lead to occasional misunderstandings outside the home, consider example (8). This blending of languages, while practical for family communication, sometimes creates challenges in external contexts, where clear linguistic boundaries are expected. In Sweden, the prevalence of translanguaging in family interactions can leave children questioning their linguistic identity, as presented in example (9). The seamless blending of Russian and Swedish at home may lead to confusion about language use in broader social or educational settings, prompting children to reflect on which language truly represents their identity. These observations highlight how families in different contexts adapt to multilingual realities, balancing linguistic fluidity with the need for clarity and identity within their communities. In their home environment, multilingual Russian-speaking families in Cyprus and Estonia adopt translanguaging as a dynamic language practice, by blending their heritage language with the societal language(s). However, outside the home, they tend to conform to societal norms, by separating languages due to external pressures and expectations.

(7) Cyprus: *We have three languages in our family at the same time: Greek—my husband speaks it with the children; English mainly between him and me; I use Russian with the children... Sometimes my head is spinning, but they [my children] are fine... We have a hodgepodge of three languages at home.*

(8) Estonia: *We are used to talking like this at home and somewhere else the two languages are sometimes so intertwined that you can only tell by the reaction that something is wrong. (laughs)*

(9) Sweden: *My daughter once asked "What language do I actually speak? Nobody understands me!" She spoke in Russian, but inserted Swedish words, because there were sometimes a lot of Swedish words, and it was a language that was only spoken in our family.*

4.2. Parental Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Translanguaging in Language Management Strategies

Section 4.2 addresses research question 2 by examining how parental beliefs shape their approaches to translanguaging and bilingual practices.

4.2.1. Children's Positive Attitudes and Active Roles in Language Use

Across all contexts, children demonstrate a strong interest in engaging with both languages, actively participating in language learning activities, and requesting language-specific support. The extent of children's positive attitudes towards the heritage language and their motivation to learn it appear to be important additional factors. Children might express the (conscious) desire to know a word in both languages and want their parents to provide the necessary equivalents or to speak their native languages with them. Several parents noted that they would often introduce the word in two languages, either intentionally or unintentionally. The parents find different strategies, implementing either OPOL or translanguaging strategies, sometimes very time-consuming, but they understand their importance. Children often demonstrate active participation in their bilingual develop-

ment, showing awareness of linguistic differences and expressing a desire to engage with both languages.

In Cyprus, children often demonstrate early awareness of language differences, even correcting their parents when languages are “misused”, as illustrated in example (10). This early sensitivity highlights the strong linguistic boundaries children perceive in their multilingual environment. In Estonia, children actively engage with bilingualism by requesting translations and participating in activities that incorporate both languages, such as singing songs or discussing fishing experiences, which are integral to Estonian culture and traditions, as evidenced in example (11). These interactions reflect their conscious efforts to navigate and embrace both their heritage and societal languages. In Sweden, children show remarkable creativity in integrating both languages into personal projects. For instance, they may write bilingual diaries, combining Russian and Swedish to document their daily experiences, as demonstrated in example (12). This approach not only fosters linguistic skills but also deepens their connection to both languages. These examples illustrate how children across different contexts take an active role in their bilingual and multilingual development, adapting to their linguistic environments with curiosity and creativity. Consequently, child agency plays a crucial role in shaping FLPs, manifesting either through dynamic translanguaging or the OPOL approach.

(10) Cyprus: A mother recalls her daughter’s early language awareness: *“She [my daughter] didn’t speak properly yet, but she understood that I spoke to her in one language and her father in another. Moreover, if sometimes I spoke to her in Greek, she would correct me without understanding the differences. “That’s Daddy’s language, don’t say that”. Then it all blurred and understandably split up in her perception, but I can still remember how surprised I was that she was so little and understood the difference between daddy’s speech and mummy’s”.*

(11) Estonia: Parents share instances of children requesting specific language activities: *He [my son] could already say to me as a little boy: “Sing a song in Russian! Dad in his language, mum in hers!” That is how it went with us... When my husband and he started going fishing, they spoke only Estonian there, and then I had to translate the words into Russian to understand what he was telling me afterwards. Sometimes I used a dictionary to translate the words about fishing tackle (smiles). And then he even started asking me to translate news words into Russian!*

(12) Sweden: Children engage in bilingual literacy by blending personal interests with language learning. One parent describes that: *He [my son] wants me to write [in Russian] that today my dad and I went to Haninge centrum and had ice cream. In addition, he wants me to write it in Swedish too: glass, choklad-vanilj [in Swedish, Eng. ‘ice cream’, ‘chocolate-vanilla’] ... Then he flips through it all and reads it himself. This is how I show him how to form words. How to formulate one’s thoughts.*

4.2.2. Practical Constraints in Implementing Explicit and Implicit FLPs

Parents balance aspirations for multilingualism, heritage language support, and development with time limitations and competing responsibilities, often resulting in compromises. In Cyprus, parents emphasize the importance of establishing a strong foundation in their heritage language from birth, even as they navigate time constraints that can limit their ability to consistently engage in language-focused activities, see example (13). In Estonia, parents often encourage their children to take a more independent approach to bilingual learning by using tools such as dictionaries, thereby placing greater emphasis on child agency, consider example (14). This strategy fosters self-reliance and helps children expand their vocabulary in both the heritage and societal languages. In Sweden, families adopt innovative methods to support bilingual development, such as reading the same book in both Russian and Swedish, see example (15). This practice allows children to strengthen their proficiency in both languages while enhancing their comprehension and linguistic

flexibility. These strategies reflect how parents in different contexts creatively address the challenges of fostering bilingualism and multilingualism, adapting their approaches to align with their unique circumstances and resources, which leads to either OPOL or dynamic translanguaging practices:

(13) Cyprus: A mother stresses the importance of starting early but acknowledges limitations: *It is important to establish a language base from birth and speak the native language consistently.*

(14) Estonia: Parents struggle to monitor dual-language proficiency. One explains that: *I don't have enough time to constantly check his knowledge of both languages. I just reminded him to use a dictionary and learn new words.*

(15) Sweden: Families employ creative strategies, such as *reading the same book in both languages, to make the most of limited time.*

4.2.3. Parental Compromises and the Impact on Heritage Language Transmission

While many parents aim for consistent and balanced bilingual or multilingual education for their children, real-world challenges often necessitate compromises. Parents frequently find themselves relying more on the societal language(s) for efficiency, especially when their children struggle to express themselves in the heritage language, as illustrated in examples (16) and (17). In such moments, they prioritize communication over language preservation, allowing the child to use the majority language to articulate important thoughts, as presented in examples (17) and (18).

Parents acknowledge that they, too, often translanguage into the societal language(s) for convenience, appreciating the ease of being understood regardless of their language choice, as indicated in examples (17) and (18). While they strongly value the preservation of Russian and its transmission to their children, practical constraints sometimes lead them to prioritize the ease of using the language most accessible at the moment. This pragmatic approach, while helpful in the short term, raises concerns about the long-term impact on the heritage language.

Dynamic translanguaging emerges as a valuable tool for fostering bilingualism and multilingualism. However, it can be a potential barrier when overused. While it can help children navigate between languages, depending too much on translanguaging may hinder their ability to communicate clearly in formal settings. Parents' reflections illustrate these challenges:

(16) Cyprus: A mother observes that: *"I have heard many Russian mothers speaking Cypriot Greek with a horrible accent, simply because they lack the patience and time to explain words in Russian to their children".*

(17) Estonia: One parent admits that: *"He switches to Estonian because it's easier for everyone to understand. We do the same ourselves".*

(18) Sweden: A parent shares that: *"Sometimes I wrote in Swedish myself, simply because it was quicker, and I wanted to make a point".*

These examples highlight the compromises parents make in their efforts to support their children's bilingual and multilingual development while managing the demands of daily life. The balancing act between maintaining heritage language proficiency and embracing the societal language(s) underscores the complexities of raising bilingual and multilingual children in diverse linguistic contexts.

4.3. Balancing Bilingualism: Parental Challenges and Strategies

Parents across all contexts share the aspiration for their children to achieve proficiency in both the heritage and societal language(s), including mastery of terminology in both. However, they acknowledge that this ideal is challenging to attain due to competing re-

sponsibilities and time constraints. In Cyprus, parents stress the importance of establishing a strong linguistic foundation from birth, advocating for consistent use of their native language at home despite their busy schedules. Similarly, in Estonia, parents highlight the difficulty of actively monitoring dual-language proficiency while managing daily responsibilities. One mother in Estonia noted, *“I just sometimes do not have the free time needed to watch something together or talk about what and in which language my son currently reads. I just remind him to use a dictionary and learn new words, whether in Russian or Estonian”*. In Sweden, families adopt creative linguistic and literacy strategies, such as reading the same book in both Russian and Swedish, which helps reinforce vocabulary and improve comprehension.

Although translanguaging can promote bilingualism and multilingualism by allowing children to familiarize themselves with words in both languages, parents express concerns about its frequent use. A dependence on translanguaging may impair effective communication in formal environments, like schools, where language distinctions are more strictly maintained.

This balancing act—between fostering linguistic flexibility and ensuring clarity—underscores the complexity of parental strategies in supporting bilingualism and multilingualism. While dynamic translanguaging is recognized as an essential tool for enriching vocabulary and enhancing language adaptability, parents emphasize the need for careful guidance to prevent its overuse from impeding formal communication skills.

5. Discussion

The study offers valuable insights into the FLPs implemented in minority and immigrant families in Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden, either OPOL or dynamic translanguaging, for heritage language use, maintenance, and transmission. It sheds light on how contextual factors, parental beliefs, and strategies shape bilingual and multilingual language management. Across these diverse settings, parents share a common goal: fostering balanced bi-/multilingualism by developing proficiency in both heritage and societal languages. Meaning-focused linguistic and literacy activities such as reading, play, and vocabulary building feature prominently in their strategies, underscoring their importance in early bilingual development. Translanguaging emerges as a practical and dynamic tool for bridging linguistic gaps, although concerns about its overuse—particularly in formal settings—underline the complexities of managing two languages effectively.

The study reveals notable differences in how FLPs are implemented across contexts. In Cyprus, the OPOL approach is a widely favored strategy, reflecting parents' emphasis on maintaining distinct linguistic boundaries to foster balanced bilingual development. However, the dominance of (Cypriot)Greek in education and daily life gradually supersedes Russian, demonstrating the societal language's pervasive influence. The multilingual environment in Cyprus, with Russian, Greek, and English in frequent interaction, presents an additional challenge for parents navigating a dynamic linguistic landscape.

In Estonia, the tension between heritage language maintenance and the demands of the educational system is particularly pronounced. Parents often prioritize Estonian for school-related tasks, acknowledging its critical role in academic success. This pragmatic decision, however, risks diminishing Russian vocabulary, particularly in specialized or formal domains. The institutional emphasis on the societal language further reinforces this shift, making it difficult for families to balance both languages.

In Sweden, parents face a different set of challenges. The limited availability of Russian-language resources necessitates innovative approaches, such as book exchanges, online platforms, and bilingual materials, to maintain heritage language proficiency. Despite these efforts, gaps in Russian vocabulary, especially for academic or technical topics, persist,

highlighting the challenges of sustaining minority language use in an overwhelmingly Swedish-speaking environment.

Dynamic translanguaging plays a significant role across all three contexts. Parents often employ it to facilitate comprehension and adapt to children's linguistic needs, introducing words or concepts in both languages, which fosters adaptability. However, some families consider that overreliance on translanguaging can hinder children's ability to clearly separate languages in formal or specialized contexts. Thus, the parents, especially those with younger children, emphasize the OPOL strategy, aiming to establish clear linguistic boundaries early on—a perspective supported by studies such as [Arriagada \(2005\)](#), [Takeuchi \(2006\)](#), and [Yates and Terraschke \(2013\)](#), and in line with the theoretical framework developed by [MacSwan \(2017, 2022\)](#) and [Treffers-Daller \(2024\)](#). In contrast, parents of older children often adopt a more relaxed approach, reflecting the dynamic translanguaging and evolving nature of FLPs as children grow and their linguistic domains expand, supporting earlier research by [García \(2009\)](#) and [García and Wei \(2014\)](#).

Parental beliefs strongly influence these language policies, reflecting both a commitment to heritage language preservation and the practical constraints of daily life. Parents universally regard the heritage language as a critical marker of cultural identity, aligning with findings by [Lanza \(2007\)](#) and [Curdts-Christiansen \(2013\)](#). However, practical challenges such as time constraints, competing responsibilities, and the dominance of the societal language often necessitate compromises. Many parents report defaulting to the societal language for efficiency or clarity, particularly when children struggle to express themselves in the heritage language.

Our findings show that half of our families implement the OPOL strategy for successful heritage language transmission, which corroborates the findings by [De Houwer and Bornstein \(2016\)](#), [Smith-Christmas \(2016\)](#), and [Wilson \(2021\)](#) and support the discrete separation of the languages ([MacSwan, 2017, 2022](#); [Treffers-Daller, 2024](#)). However, the other half of our participants support dynamic translanguaging ([García, 2009](#); [García & Wei, 2014](#)).

As children grow older and encounter more diverse linguistic domains, including education, their vocabulary demands increase, particularly in technical or formal contexts. This places additional pressure on parents to introduce heritage language terminology systematically. Without sustained efforts, the majority language risks encroaching on more domains, leading to a gradual language shift. The dynamic and interactive nature of FLPs, along with the child's agency, underscores the importance of a flexible yet structured approach, as highlighted in studies by [Kopeliovich \(2013\)](#) and [Little \(2017\)](#).

The findings highlight the importance of institutional and community support in fostering bilingual and multilingual development. Access to heritage language resources—such as books, online tools, and community programs—is critical, particularly in resource-scarce contexts like Sweden. Additionally, schools play a vital role in supporting bilingualism by accommodating dynamic translanguaging practices and promoting the value of minority languages, thus countering the dominance of the societal language.

Overall, the study emphasizes the complexity of raising bilingual and multilingual children in diverse sociolinguistic contexts. While dynamic translanguaging can be both a facilitator and an obstacle, its effective management is key to balancing linguistic flexibility with clarity. By addressing these challenges through supportive policies, resources, and institutional engagement, families can more effectively nurture bilingualism and multilingualism, ensuring both heritage and societal language(s) remain vital components of children's identities. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of various FLP strategies such as OPOL or dynamic translanguaging on linguistic proficiency and

cultural integration, as well as the role of broader social structures in shaping bilingual and multilingual outcomes.

6. Conclusions

This study examined the FLPs and language management strategies of Russian-speaking immigrant and minority families in Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden, offering a comparative perspective on how parents navigate the dual challenges of maintaining heritage language proficiency and fostering societal language competence. The findings highlight both shared aspirations and context-specific strategies, providing valuable insights into the complexities of raising multilingual children in diverse sociolinguistic settings.

Across all three countries, families demonstrated a strong commitment to bilingual and multilingual development, employing literacy activities and meaning-focused interactions as core strategies. However, the approaches varied significantly. In Cyprus, families adhered strictly to structured methods such as the OPOL strategy, while there were also families who embraced a more integrative multilingual approach, translanguaging between Russian, Greek, and English in daily life. Estonian families balanced the demands of the societal language-dominated education system with efforts to reinforce heritage language through shared hobbies and translanguaging practices. In Sweden, families displayed creativity in addressing the scarcity of Russian-language resources by participating in online exchanges and using bilingual materials, while simultaneously leveraging translanguaging to maximize linguistic exposure.

Dynamic translanguaging emerged as a significant, albeit ambivalent, feature across the contexts. For some families, structured language practices or OPOL FLP were prioritized to prevent confusion and maintain clear linguistic boundaries, particularly in formal settings. Other families viewed translanguaging as a pragmatic tool, especially for informal interactions and introducing complex concepts. These differing attitudes underscore the dual role of translanguaging: as a flexible strategy that fosters bilingualism and multilingualism and as a potential source of challenges in maintaining distinct language identities.

The study also highlighted shared challenges, including the dominance of societal language(s) and gaps in heritage language vocabulary, which were amplified by country-specific dynamics. Swedish families often struggled with resource limitations, while Cypriot families navigated the complexities of managing multilingual households. In Estonia, the educational system's emphasis on the societal language influenced family practices, underscoring the significant impact of external pressures on FLPs.

These findings emphasize the importance of viewing FLPs through both family-level practices and broader societal influences. The study supports the value of structured approaches, such as the OPOL strategy, for heritage language maintenance, while recognizing that family adaptations and their use of dynamic translanguaging often reflect pragmatic responses to time constraints and competing demands. Consistent with [Wagner et al. \(2022\)](#), a potential limitation lies in the reliance on self-reported data, which may not always align with actual language use. Future research should explore real-life language practices and management strategies in bilingual and multilingual families, incorporating longitudinal methodologies to assess long-term outcomes for bilingual and multilingual development and identity.

In conclusion, this study highlights the adaptability and resourcefulness of families navigating bilingualism and multilingualism within diverse sociolinguistic contexts. It underscores the need for tailored support, including access to heritage language resources, community initiatives, and institutional recognition of dynamic translanguaging practices. By addressing these challenges and supporting families through targeted in-

interventions, bilingualism and multilingualism can be sustained as a vital aspect of both individual identity and cultural heritage. Expanding research to include broader participant pools and diverse geographical contexts will further enhance our understanding of FLPs, such as OPOL and dynamic translanguaging, and their impact on bilingual and multilingual families, their language and literacy practices, heritage language use, maintenance, and transmission.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.Z., S.K. and N.R.; methodology, A.Z., S.K. and N.R.; software, A.Z., S.K. and N.R.; validation, A.Z., S.K. and N.R.; formal analysis, A.Z., S.K. and N.R.; investigation, A.Z., S.K. and N.R.; resources, A.Z., S.K. and N.R.; data curation, A.Z., S.K. and N.R.; writing—original draft preparation, A.Z. and S.K.; writing—review and editing, A.Z. and S.K.; visualization, A.Z. and S.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with local legislation and institutional requirements. At the time of this research, there were no such practices as IRB in the respective countries.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data are unavailable due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

Acknowledgments: We thank the (guest) editors for their valuable feedback and the anonymous peer reviewers for their insightful suggestions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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