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# 'We are always planning trips to Poland': the influence of transnational family life on the family language policy of Polish-speaking families in Ireland

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## ABSTRACT

In the context of heightened global transnational movements and the proximate geographical positioning of Poland and Ireland, this study investigates the impact of the transnational nature of Polish families' migration experiences in The Republic of Ireland on their family language policy. This research endeavours to address a gap in the literature surrounding the influence of transnationalism on family language policy within Polish-speaking migrant families in Ireland. Grounded in Curdt-Christiansen's [Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. 2018. "Family Language Policy." In *Oxford Handbook of Language Policy and Planning*, edited by J. W. Tollefson and M. Pérez-Milans. New York: Oxford University Press.] interdisciplinary model of family language policy, this investigation draws on an ethnographic inquiry into three Polish-speaking families in Ireland. The study focuses on families with first- and second-generation migrant children. Data were gathered through a combination of semi-structured interviews and children's reflective language diaries. The results depict the transnational nature of family life, with recurrent travel between Ireland and Poland evident across all three families. To sustain connections with Poland, parents implemented specific language management strategies. The study underscored the participants' recognition of the interdependence between the use of the Polish language and the continuation of connections with Poland, as well as the capacity to uphold family life across Ireland and Poland.

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Transnationalism; family language policy; home language maintenance; childhood bilingualism; minority language learning

## Introduction

Due to the ongoing process of globalisation, transnationalism, and increased mobility, Ireland is a nation that exemplifies a rich diversity in both culture and language. The influx of Polish migrants to Ireland became noticeable after Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, coinciding with a rapid expansion of the Irish economy and the availability of lucrative employment opportunities (Kropiwiec and King-O Riain 2006). Despite Ireland's descent into a severe economic downturn in 2008, leading to a surge in emigration, the migration of Polish nationals to Ireland persisted, characterised by substantial levels of chain migration and family reunification (Diskin 2013). The 2011 census revealed that a significant majority of school-aged children in families where Polish was the primary language were born in Poland, while a considerable proportion of preschool-aged

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children were born in Ireland (CSO 2012). The 2016 census indicated a rise in the number of children from Polish families born in Ireland, signifying the emergence of a second generation of Polish children and young people in Ireland (CSO 2017). According to the most recent census data from 2022, non-Irish citizens account for 12% of the population, with Poles constituting the largest migrant group in Ireland at present (CSO 2023). Presently, Polish is the most widely spoken language in Ireland, after English and Irish, with approximately 123,968 individuals speaking Polish at home in Irish households (CSO 2023). Research on the linguistic experiences of the Polish community in Ireland continues to expand, encompassing areas such as Polish complementary schooling (Pedrak 2019), second-language socialisation among Polish adolescents (Machowska-Kosciak 2020), and identity formation among young Poles in Ireland (Machowska-Kosciak 2019; Nestor and Regan 2011). Previous research in Ireland on family language policy (FLP) has primarily focused on how speakers of Irish, a native minority language, manage language use within the family home (Óhifearnáin 2007, 2013; Smith-Christmas 2020). However, there is a scarcity of research examining the impact of transnationalism on the FLP of Polish-speaking families in Ireland, apart from that of Smith-Christmas (2021) who observed the Irish language to act as a 'neutral third space' for a Polish transnational family in Ireland (716). Her study found that this particular family practised 'a strongly pro-Polish FLP', with parents acting as 'authorities in Polish' and their children as 'authorities in English' (Smith-Christmas 2021, 716).

The current study aims to investigate FLP within the home domain of Polish transnational families in Ireland, thus contributing to the limited existing body of FLP research among Polish families in Ireland. This research is significant as it provides new insights into the language management strategies employed by family members to promote and sustain the Polish language. Furthermore, it explores the intergenerational aspect of FLP within Polish families by including first-generation migrant parents and first and second-generation migrant children in the research. Finally, the inclusion of families with children between the ages of five and 17 provided insight into how children's ages and varying life experiences from early childhood to early adulthood can influence and alter FLP (He 2016, 668) in a transnational context.

### ***Significance of transnationalism for family language policy research***

The term 'transnational' is employed in this study to emphasise 'the interconnectedness across and beyond national boundaries' in the experiences of the participating families (Obojska 2018, 249). This label reflects the reality that families may reside in one country while maintaining connections with relatives and friends in other countries (Hua and Wei 2016). Transnationalism, as described by Share, Williams, and Kerrins (2017), involves the maintenance of ties 'across borders through visits, remittances, communication, and the transnational consumption of goods and services' (3012). King (2002) highlighted the diversity of migration and movement beyond the conventional 'polar types' (94). Duff (2015) emphasised the need to consider the complex nature of migrants' transnational experiences, including multiple dwellings, subsequent mobility, the mobility of children, and the role of virtual connectedness in modern society. The increased scale of worldwide migration and mobility, along with advancements in travel, has led to a rise in transnational families and parents raising bilingual and multilingual children (Baldassar et al. 2017). The sustained connections between host and home countries raise important questions about how families raise bi/multilingual children. The distinction between transnational and immigrant families is made by Hirsch and Lee (2018) who describe the experiences of transnational families as 'rooted in more frequent or intended translocation' and 'different than those of the immigrant populations' (882). This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of Polish families in Ireland, who can easily travel between Poland and Ireland due to the free movement of EU members and the proximity of the two countries.

In Ireland, which is officially bilingual, with English and Irish being mandatory curriculum subjects throughout all children's primary and post-primary education, Polish families face the

challenge of developing English and Irish for employment or access to the education system in Ireland, while also enabling their children to continue developing and maintaining Polish, the home language. Sustained connections with Poland are significant for children's Polish language learning and maintenance. This study offers original insights into the family language policy (FLP) of Polish transnational families in Ireland and their lived experiences, particularly their frequent movements between Poland and Ireland, which we argue shapes FLP and positively impacts children's Polish language maintenance.

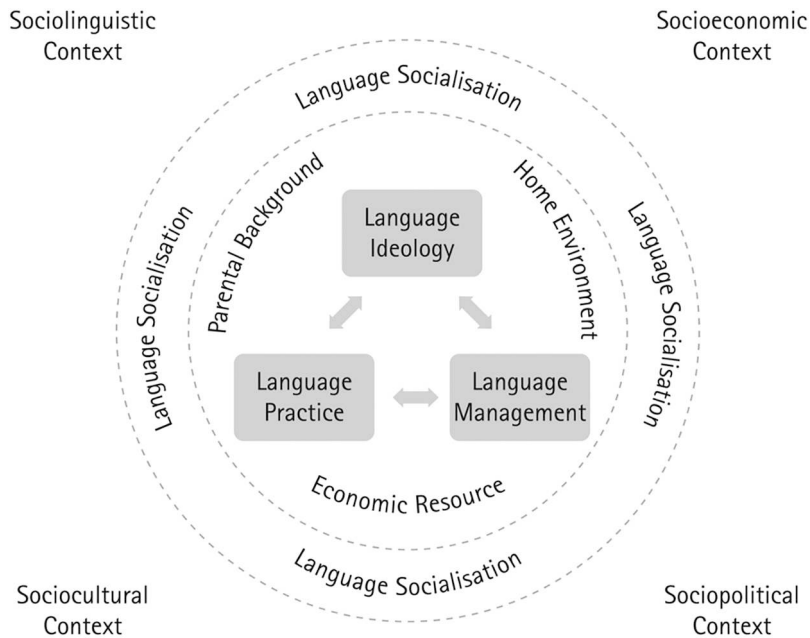
### ***Evolution of family language policy research***

FLP research has continued to evolve since initial studies, as far back as one century ago, focused on child bilingualism and early childhood language learning (King 2016). More recent research encompasses what families do with language in day-to-day interactions, their beliefs and ideologies about language and language use, and their goals and efforts to shape language use and learning outcomes (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry 2008). Studies have focused on children's language learning and use as functions of parental ideologies, decision making, and strategies concerning languages (King and Fogle 2013). While FLP involves deliberate planning with regard to language use within the home (Curdt-Christiansen 2018; Schiffman 2009; Shohamy 2006), studies have also highlighted the more implicit and covert nature of language planning in the home (Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Fogle 2012), as well as 'the default language practices in a family as a consequence of ideological beliefs' (Curdt-Christiansen 2018, 420). FLP is shaped by what the family believes will strengthen the family's social standing and best serve and support the family members' goals in life (Curdt-Christiansen 2009, 326). The intensification of transnational population flows globally over the past two decades has led to social, cultural, linguistic, and demographic changes worldwide (Martin-Jones and Martin 2016), with more recent studies of FLP referring to 'transnational' families rather than 'migrant' families due to the connectivity that families maintain with relatives and friends while living in other countries (King and Lanza 2017; Zhu Hua and Wei 2016).

This research drew on Curdt-Christiansen's (2018) interdisciplinary framework of FLP, which places Spolsky's (2004) three interrelated language components of language ideology, language practice, and language management at its centre. Language practices refer to what people do with language, while language ideology pertains to what people think should be done in relation to language use and practice. Language management involves the direct efforts made by individuals to manipulate the language situation. FLP decisions are influenced by parents' educational background, their language-learning experiences, their migration experience, and the economic resources available to families, which impact their ability to provide linguistic resources for their children. The framework also considers the impact of wider sociolinguistic, sociocultural, socio-economic, and sociopolitical contexts on FLP. Language socialisation processes at micro and macro levels are central to the framework, playing a crucial role in the ongoing connections with Poland and dual membership within the Irish and Polish communities. The application of Curdt-Christiansen's (2018) framework in the context of the current study highlighted the complexity of the FLP paradigm and helped examine the various factors affecting Polish transnational families' FLP and attitudes towards home language maintenance (HLM) (Figure 1).

### ***Home language maintenance in transnational contexts***

Song (2019) emphasises the significance of the families' future migratory plans for language ideology formation and draws a clear distinction between immigrant families, who are likely to remain in the host society, and transnational families planning a return to their country of origin. Bezioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur (2017), in their examination of second-generation Turkish families in the Netherlands, underscore the importance of the Turkish language for these families in the context of potential return migration to Turkey. Language maintenance, as defined by Mesthrie (1999,



**Figure 1.** Curdt-Christiansen (2018) interdisciplinary framework of FLP.

42), refers to ‘the continuing use of a language in the face of competition from a regionally and socially powerful or numerically stronger language’. King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry (2008) stress the importance of investigating FLP in the context of maintaining home languages. An exploration of home language maintenance (HLM) necessitates consideration and discussion of language shift, which represents the opposite of language maintenance and is often referred to as language loss. The family has been identified as a private domain and a highly influential setting for language use and maintenance (Fishman 1970). HLM is a crucial aspect of the present study of FLP, with language ideologies, beliefs, and practices directly influencing the extent to which the home language is maintained, developed, and transmitted. Supportive interactions in the home language between parents and children, as well as close and cohesive family relations, are considered to have a positive influence on maintaining the home language across generations (King and Fogle 2006; Park and Sarkar 2007). While many studies on HLM have primarily focused on the role of parents in home language acquisition, maintenance, and loss, there has been less research on the influence of extended family members and grandparents on HLM (Kibler, Palacios, and Simpson Baird 2014; Melo-Pfeifer 2015). Although parents are indeed crucial in maintaining the home language, it is important to consider the role and influence of grandparents and extended family members on language development and HLM. Braun (2012) argued that ‘the affective factors of grandparents on language maintenance’ or the role of extended family members in Home Language (HL) use have received little attention (423). The presence of grandparents in the household has been associated with slowing down the rate of language shift to English (Kondo–Brown 2005; Verdon, McLeod, and Winsler 2014). Children are more likely to maintain and use the home language when they are in contact with extended family members (Ruby 2017; Smith-Christmas 2018).

Previous studies have highlighted integrative motivations for HLM, such as maintaining connections with grandparents and family members for family unity and communication (Fillmore 2000; Gardener and Lambert 1972; Ro and Cheatham 2009; Zhang 2004). In her study of Russian speakers in Cyprus, Karpava (2020) found that almost all female adult participants tried to teach their children Russian at home and send them to Russian lessons to learn to read, write and communicate in Russian. Similarly, in a study of Marathi and Japanese parents in Australia, Atre (2023) drew links

between integrative motivations and parents' efforts to access heritage language schools for their children. Other studies among migrant families have emphasised instrumental motivations for HLM, such as the international use of the language or its potential for future employment opportunities (King and Fogle 2006; Urzúa and Gómez 2008). The current study explores families' integrative and instrumental motivations for Polish language maintenance, learning, and use.

## Methodology

This paper draws on findings from the second phase of a larger two-phased ethnographic study of FLP formation within Polish transnational families in Ireland which investigated the following research question: *How does transnational connectivity with Poland influence Polish migrant families' FLP and attitudes to HLM?* During the first phase of the study, a qualitative focus group interview was undertaken with six Polish migrant parents and individual interviews were carried out with a further six parents. The purpose of the initial phase of the study was to gain initial insight into the language experiences of Polish migrant families in Ireland before undertaking longer term case studies with five families during the second phase of the research study. The findings presented in this paper are concerned with the second phase of the study.

### Participant recruitment and profiles

The principal investigator was already familiar with many members of the Polish community residing in her local town, as she had previously served as an educator in a local primary school and had conducted prior research involving Polish children. Initially, she approached several individuals from the local Polish community and offered an invitation for their participation in the research study. Additionally, she reached out to childcare facilities, preschool providers, primary schools, and post-primary schools in various regions of Ireland, disseminating a recruitment flyer to parents, providing information about the research, and inviting them to take part.

While the research involved the participation of five Polish transnational families residing in Ireland, each with diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, this paper specifically focuses on three of these families, all of whom were classified as transnational families due to their sustained connections with Poland. All parents were first-generation migrants, and the children, aged 5–17 years, represented both first- and second-generation migrants. This study specifically focuses on bilingual children who speak Polish as a heritage language and English as the dominant societal language in Ireland. All the families have consistently spoken Polish to their children from birth, irrespective of whether the children were born in Poland or Ireland. The children have primarily been exposed to English upon their enrolment in early childhood settings or primary school, thus being described as sequential Polish-English bilingual speakers (Baker 2011). At the time of the study, the children were attending either primary or post-primary school. The families resided in urban or rural settings across different regions in Ireland. One of the families, the Kropkowska family, had a grandmother living in the family home. Informed consent for adults and informed assent for children was sought, confidentiality for all participants within the limitations of the law was assured and the right to withdraw from the study at any time was provided to all participants. Ethical approval was gained from the Research Ethics Committee at Dublin City University in advance of the fieldwork. For a detailed description of the participating families, please refer to Table 1. To maintain confidentiality, names and surnames have been replaced with Polish pseudonyms, and each participant has been assigned a code for reference in the findings.

### Data collection and analysis

The study comprised in-depth examinations of three Polish transnational families residing in Ireland. Data collection occurred over a span of fourteen months, during which the researcher made

**Table 1.** Participating family profiles.

Families Name and code in brackets	Parents				Children		Languages spoken in the home
	Name	Education/ Qualifications	Current occupation	Years in Ireland	Name, age and code in brackets	Current education	
Kowalski (F1)	Matyas (Father, F1)	Qualified carpenter	Builder and carpenter	13 years	Zofia Age 16 (Daughter 1, F1)	Transition Year (Post- primary school)	Polish English
	Sonia (Mother, F1)	Child psychologist University degree from Poland	Restaurant cook and kitchen manager	11 years	Agata Age 13 (Daughter 2, F1)	Second year (Post- primary school)	
Kropkowska (F2)	Oskar (Father, F2)	Qualified plumber	Hotel porter	13 years	Henryk Age 17 (Son, F2)	Fifth year (Post- primary school)	Polish English
	Malgorzata (Mother, F2)	Master's degree in Education and a qualified teacher	Polish teacher in a Polish weekend school	12 years			
Mazur (F3)	Jakub (Father, F3)	Qualified electrician	Employed as an electrician	10 years	Zuzanna  Age 7 (Daughter 1, F3)	First class (Primary school)	Polish English
	Aneta (Mother, F3)	Qualified social worker	Childcare worker and room manager in an early childhood setting	10 years	Maja Age 5 (Daughter 2, F3)	Junior infants (Primary school)	

six scheduled visits to each family's residence, with each visit lasting approximately three hours in duration. The participating families had been living in Ireland for at least a decade, and all family members were willing to be interviewed in English. Notably, the children expressed a greater level of comfort in expressing themselves in English in the reflective language diaries. This paper draws upon three distinct sets of data, namely: (a) interviews with parents (PI  $n = 6$ ); (b) interviews with each child aged seven years and above (CI  $n = 4$ ); and (3) reflective language diaries written by children aged 12 years and above (LD  $n = 3$ ), documenting their thoughts, emotions, and beliefs regarding language usage.

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was deemed the most suitable approach for presenting a comprehensive and detailed report of the findings, given its applicability in working with diverse and varied types of data. The process of data analysis was iterative and involved multiple rounds of reviewing the data sets to ensure that the coding process accurately reflected the researchers' evolving and deepening comprehension of the data. The data were subjected to inductive coding, employing a combination of semantic codes representing explicit or surface-level meanings, and latent codes capturing implicit or underlying meanings. This approach resulted in a blend of descriptive codes and interpretative codes developed by the researchers. Additionally, the coding process was guided by the theoretical framework, with a focus on identifying codes related to language socialisation processes and the three components of language policy: ideology, practice, and management.



## Findings

The findings revealed ongoing travel back and forth between Poland and Ireland among all three families. Varying types of movement were evident, including regular visits to Poland during school vacations, time spent in Poland for employment, attendance at university in Poland and travel to Poland in order to access medical services and purchase goods. It was clear that this consistent connectivity with Poland had implications for FLP, family cohesion and children's Polish language learning and maintenance. The findings will now be presented and discussed according to the following three themes generated during data analysis:

1. A transnational way of family life
2. Transnationalism, family cohesion and FLP.
3. Children's Polish language learning as significant for future transnational possibilities.

### *A transnational way of family life*

The findings from the current study reveal that a number of individual family members divided their time living between Poland and Ireland, spending extended periods of time during the year living in Poland in order to access employment and education in Poland. The Mazur family (F3) displayed strong links with Poland. Jakub travelled regularly between the two countries and spent up to eight months of the year working in Poland. He expressed the view that he wanted to continue running his business in Poland so that he could maintain connections with Poland in preparation for a possible permanent return there in the future. This dual living arrangement stemmed from the economic recession that began in Ireland from 2008: 'I had my business in Poland and when there was small work in Ireland during recession, I went back to Poland lots to work and build our house in Poland for future' (Father, F3, PI). Aneta described how 'Jakub has lots of contact in Poland because he had his own business in Poland before we moved to Ireland. He has many work contracts in Poland and goes to Poland a lot now for work' (Mother, F3, PI). Other recent studies of FLP also focus on transnational families that 'travel back and forth between country of residence and home country' (Curdt-Christiansen 2018, 426). Aneta described regular family trips to Poland to attend medical appointments and to purchase goods such as school and household supplies. Such experiences of transnationalism concur with Share, Williams, and Kerrins (2017) who described families' ability to maintain links across borders through visits, communication and access to goods and services.

The data also revealed how extended family members frequently travelled from Poland to Ireland. The experiences of the Kowalski family demonstrated the ongoing opportunities to move back and forth between Poland and Ireland. Agata described that 'before we went to Poland, our cousins came here' (Daughter 2, F1, CI). Zofia explained that 'our grandad was over here for six months helping Daddy get ready to move into our new house' (Daughter 1, F1, CI). This ongoing movement between the two countries demonstrates the possibility for families to divide their time between Poland and Ireland.

The transnational nature of the Kropkowska family's (F2) experience was also clearly evident from the data. Malgorzata's mother lived with the family in Ireland for nine months of the year and spent the summer months in Poland. Henryk described how he travelled to Poland each summer with his grandmother and spent the summer months there also:

She will come back to Ireland because she doesn't want to be lonely. Then she'll stay with us for the rest of the year and then we do the same thing each summer. It's kind of like a cycle because she needs to go to the doctor in Poland every summer. So, we go back to Poland for the summer and get her medical check-ups done and it's what we will do every year. (Son, F2, CI)

Henryk's sister Gertruda was attending university in Poland at the time the research took place. She lived in Poland from September until June and 'she's hoping to come to Ireland next month and



make some money during the summer as it's easier to get a job here' (Son, F2, CI). These dual living arrangements further highlight the ease of movement between Ireland and Poland for the participants who lived between Poland and Ireland. Henryk, 'didn't meet her while in Poland because she came to Ireland when I went to Poland but I did see her when I came back to Ireland because she had another week left in Ireland' (Son, F2, CI). Henryk's father Oskar also described the family's ongoing movement between Ireland and Poland: 'My kids still go back and forth every summer. My daughter is studying in Poland in Wroclaw right now ... My youngest travels with his granny to and from Poland' (Father, F2, PI). The experiences of the families show how the make-up and living arrangements of transnational families can be complex (Curdt-Christiansen 2014).

### ***Transnationalism, family cohesion and FLP***

Due to the ease of travel between Ireland and Poland, all five children travelled to Poland during school vacations to spend extended periods of time with grandparents or other extended family members. Zuzanna and Maja Mazur travelled to Poland for two months each summer with their father. Aneta 'did not see them for three weeks because I had to stay home and work, but I followed them over when I got my work holiday' (Mother, F3, PI). Similarly, Sonia also described strong connections with family in Poland due to the fact that her children 'always travel every summer to Poland to spend time with cousins and grandparents and to speak Polish with the family' (Mother, F1, PI). From the perspectives of parents and children, the data revealed that families' regular visits to Poland significantly influenced (a) language management and children's Polish language learning and (b) family cohesion and maintained connectivity with Polish family members.

### ***Language management and children's Polish language learning***

The associated benefits of spending extended periods in Poland for children's opportunities to develop their Polish language skills in a natural language learning environment were recognised by parents and children. Parents' consistent planning for children's visits to Poland can be interpreted as language management, with children getting opportunities to use and develop Polish. Aneta discussed the opportunities that spending time in Poland afforded to her children as 'they will just talk Polish all the time ... there will be no problems ... there was only Polish being spoken there, no English' (Mother, F3, PI). Her daughter Zuzanna was engaging in online Polish language learning in Ireland, funded by the Polish government at the time of the study, and she travelled to Poland every summer to sit examinations based on the learning that took place during the academic year. Similarly, Sonia discussed the benefits of her children travelling to Poland for their Polish language development and practice: 'It's so great that they get to speak Polish naturally there and hear it' (Mother, F1, PI). While Sonia's daughters Zofia and Agata spent the summer in Poland each year, their parents remained in Ireland working. Zofia explained that 'We spent about five weeks there. We stayed with my grandparents and sometimes we were at both our aunties' houses, so it depended on what our plans were and what we were doing' (Daughter 1, F1, CI).

Opportunities to use, learn and develop the Polish language were recognised and discussed by teenage child participants. They also demonstrated a clear understanding and cognisance of the cultural and linguistic benefits associated with these extended visits to Poland. According to Agata:

When we are in Poland every summer from a young age, we would watch Polish TV shows. We hang out with our cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents and that's what we do when we go to Poland. We go to the library and get Polish books so that when we're over there we can remind ourselves about Polish reading and different words and stuff. I think it has helped me become fluent in Polish. (Daughter 2, F1, CI)

Henryk was similarly cognisant of the positive impact of spending time in Poland on his Polish language learning, stating that 'I can form sentences a bit quicker now after spending the summer in Poland' and 'it definitely helped to be immersed in Polish all summer' (Son, F2, LD)

Zofia described the opportunities that she and her sister had to read in Polish while they were in Poland and discussed her access to Polish reading materials and the positive impact of her cousins and grandparents in this regard:

Every summer we read so so many Polish books when we stay over there with my grandmother and we come out of the library with a pile of Polish books. My cousins are always like ‘read this, read this’ when we go to Poland. (Daughter, F1, CI)

Despite the positive attitudes held by parents and children towards Polish language use and maintenance, there were also associated challenges. Discussing online Polish language classes, Zuzanna expressed the sentiment that ‘I don’t really like it anymore. There is all this work to do, and my mommy makes me do all the homework in Polish and then I have my other homework to do too’ (Daughter 1, F3, CI). These challenges centred around a lack of free time for other interests and hobbies due to attendance at weekend school, additional workload and technical difficulties with learning the language. Henryk described the initial challenges he faced with learning Polish: It was hard for me because I had never gone to school in Poland. It was a totally new thing for me. I wasn’t that good at reading. For the first three years in Polish school, I didn’t feel confident. (Son, F2, CI)

The challenges associated with using and speaking formal Polish when visiting Poland were recognised by the three teenage children, and spending time in Poland helped them with this aspect of the Polish language. According to Henryk,

There is of course a formal way of greeting people in Poland and thanking and talking to people, even if you don’t know them. Saying ‘you’ to people is very rude, especially to people you don’t know ... I am careful to do this properly when I am in Poland. I know this doesn’t really exist in English. (Son, F2, CI)

Spending time in Poland gave children the opportunity to develop their use and development of formal Polish and its correct use in a specific sociocultural context.

### **Family cohesion**

The data revealed the inextricable links between time spent in Poland, children’s Polish language competence, and strong family cohesion. Integrative motivations (Atre 2023; Gardener and Lambert 1972; Karpava 2020) for Polish language maintenance were discussed by parents and children in the context of their continued links with Poland. A belief that children needed Polish language competence in order to spend time in Poland and communicate with extended family members, and grandparents in particular, was expressed by parents. Sonia referred to the fact that her children ‘always travel every summer to Poland to spend time with cousins and grandparents and to speak Polish with the family ... So they communicate very very good in Polish’ (Mother, F1, PI). In the case of the Kropkowska family, Malgorzata explained that her mother travelled to Ireland from Poland and lived in the family home for nine months of the year (Mother, F2, PI). She expressed the belief that her children needed to be able to speak Polish to their grandmother who didn’t speak English. This concurs with previous research highlighting the concerns of parents for their children to maintain the home language for family unity, values and knowledge and communication where grandparents and other non-English speaking family members exist (Fillmore 2000; Ro and Cheatham 2009).

Children displayed awareness that communication with family members in Poland would not be possible without a knowledge of the Polish language, and so they felt it was important for them to have Polish. According to Henryk, ‘it is important to speak Polish when it comes to communicating with your grandparents’ (Son, F1, LD). He discussed the need to use Polish at all times when communicating with his grandmother as she ‘can’t understand a word of English really’ (Son, F2, CI). Agata discussed her contentment at being able to converse and communicate with their grandparents in Polish. According to Agata, ‘I’m so happy that I can send a letter to my grandparents in Poland and imagine if I didn’t go to Polish school, I couldn’t do this. I am happy I can write to

them' (Daughter 2, F1, LD). According to Zofia, 'we are careful to only speak Polish when Grandad is staying here' (Daughter 1, F1, CI). She placed importance on the Polish language for family cohesion and connectivity with extended family members and also aspired towards maintenance of the Polish language in future generations of the family:

I'll try to use Polish as an adult and if I ever have children, I want them to speak Polish to speak to my family and I'd try to get them to use Polish so that they could communicate with the rest of the family ... That's important to me so we can all talk together in Polish. I would say that my first language is Polish because I spoke Polish until I was 5 and then I only started learning English. (Daughter 1, F1, CI)

Agata expressed the opinion that 'I am very happy that I know how to speak Polish because I have a better connection with my family' (Daughter 2, F1, LD). Previous research has also indicated that cohesive family relations, like those described by the children in this study, are positively influential in maintaining the home language over generations (King and Fogle 2006; Park and Sarkar 2007). The findings from the current study reveal the positive impact of children's Polish language use on family cohesion and in this regard, it can be asserted that family cohesion has mutual benefits for intergenerational HLM as children describe positive attitudes to Polish language use.

Parents' and children's understanding of the potential negative consequences of Polish language loss for family cohesion and connectedness led to their increased efforts to promote the Polish language. While Polish language loss was not an issue for any of the three families, parents reflected on occurrences of language loss within other Polish-speaking families and their consequences. Oskar questioned 'Imagine not being able to communicate with your own son?' (Father, F2, PI). According to Aneta 'It's so important for family that the children speak Polish' (Mother, F3, PI). Drawing on observations she had made, she described her feelings around the negative impact of Polish language loss on familial relationships:

I heard few times in airport and saw Polish families where the child was only speaking in English and there was mummy and granny, and the child could not speak with their granny. It's stupid what parents are doing ... the Polish parent should speak Polish to the children. (Mother, F3, PI)

In order to avoid the negative impact of Polish language loss, parents were willing to work through the challenges associated with investing time and effort in their children's Polish language learning and maintenance. Aneta explained how 'it's so busy ... I teach Polish to the children, and we start Polish lessons in the home most evenings about 7pm' (Mother, F3, PI). Matyas expressed the feeling that while Polish weekend school 'was good for them ... it was a lot of time and work for me each weekend ... but you know it was worth it now because they picked up the Polish language there' (Father, F1, PI).

### ***Children's Polish language learning as significant for future transnational possibilities***

An openness to future travel and international migration was evident within all three families. Sonia described how the experience of living in Ireland had strengthened the family and made them open to future migration as 'We are now not afraid for anything or to move to any country after this' (Mother, F1). The high level of interest expressed by families in their children attending university in Poland in the future reinforced possible future transnational links with Poland. Reasons for attending university in Poland were generally economic related. Henryk's sister Gertruda moved back to Poland at the age of 18 after completing one year in university in Ireland. Henryk explained the reasons for this:

So in Poland, there are lots of university courses that are free there. When my sister did her Leaving Certificate, she went to Trinity College for a year. She had to pay €10,000, like €4,000 for fees and medical analysis and another €6,000 for accommodation in Dublin ... So then she went to Poland and her study is free there. My mam knew a friend who has an apartment for students and she made a deal with her for the equivalent of one hundred euro per month. So the price is so good there compared to Dublin. (Son, F2, CI)

Henryk explained that he wants to study medicine in the future but ‘I don’t think that will happen in Ireland. It’s too expensive here ... I do think I will need to go back to Poland to go to university’ (Son, F2, CI). According to Henryk, ‘If I ever went back to study in Poland I would prefer an English course. I wouldn’t be able to do any course in university in the Polish language. It would have to be in English, yeah’ (Son, F2, PI). Similarly, Sonia discussed the possibility of her children attending university in Poland for economic reasons and because ‘they have the choice to study through English or Polish’ (Mother, F1, PI). Aneta envisaged her children going to university in Poland in the future as the family had discussed the possibility of eventually moving back to Poland when the children finish their secondary school education in Ireland: ‘You know we might go back to Poland, but for their lives and education now, it’s easier here’ (Mother, F3, PI). Aneta was also aware that some Irish-born children were attending university in Poland:

University in Poland, I think yes because I know lots of Irish people are even going to university in Poland and doing their study through English because it’s cheaper and I know the educational level in Poland is higher. (Mother, F3, PI)

Participants’ attraction towards the possibility of studying through English may be demonstrative of a proficiency gap in children’s Polish academic language and a greater confidence in their English language proficiency.

Plans to move back to Poland had evolved and changed over time based on the needs of individual families. The Kowalski family had initially planned on staying in Ireland for a number of years and returning to Poland, but felt it was easier to remain in Ireland for the foreseeable future due to their children’s educational needs and to avoid a change in the language of instruction at school. According to Sonia:

It’s strange because in the beginning here, we thought we will go back to Poland after five years. Then the girls were in primary school and then they start secondary school and we decide we can’t change everything during the secondary school, and the change in language in school would not be good right now when they are studying for exams ... So, I don’t know when there will be good time to move home to Poland because in September Agata will start secondary school. (Mother, F1, PI)

The above excerpt is demonstrative of how children’s language learning and development impacts on decisions made by families around future migration plans and we would argue that these plans are in flux due to changing and evolving family needs. Previous research among the Turkish community in the Netherlands has also highlighted similar views around the importance of Turkish language maintenance in the context of potential return migration to Turkey (Bezioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur 2017).

## Discussion

The study makes a significant contribution to the field of FLP by specifically investigating the influence of Polish migrant families’ transnational connections with Poland on FLP and attitudes towards maintenance of the Polish language. Utilising Curdt-Christiansen’s (2018) interdisciplinary framework of FLP, the findings highlight the pivotal role of language socialisation processes in shaping FLP within the context of family members’ ongoing transnational ties with Poland. The families’ regular movement between Poland and Ireland has implications for children’s language socialisation, as frequent visits to Poland offer opportunities for children to be immersed in Polish with extended family members. These connections with Poland provide families with a purpose and motivation to support their children’s ongoing maintenance and development of the Polish language, leading to the construction, adaptation, and enactment of FLP to align with their transnational circumstances. Regular travel to Poland facilitates the continued use and development of the Polish language among family members, demonstrating the inseparable links between Polish language maintenance and frequent visits to Poland. All three families expressed a desire to maintain contact with extended family members in Poland, leading to a universal belief

among parents that their children's Polish language learning and maintenance is a crucial aspect of their FLP.

Parents implemented specific language management strategies to promote their children's Polish language learning and development, including prioritising Polish as the language spoken in the family home, facilitating opportunities for children to attend Polish weekend schools, and planning for extended stays in Poland with grandparents. Spending time in Poland with grandparents and extended family members during school holidays increased children's exposure to and use of the Polish language, positively influencing their Polish language use through the process of language socialisation (Curdtt-Christiansen 2018). Children also demonstrated an understanding of the necessity to learn and maintain Polish in order to communicate with Polish family members, particularly grandparents, aligning with previous research emphasising the importance of HLM for family cohesion among transnational families (Fillmore 2000; Ro and Cheatham 2009; Zhang 2004). Evidence of teenage children travelling to Poland alone during school holidays, and their future plans to attend university in Poland helps us to see how the families can connect with both their host and home societies. One teenage participant's expression 'I feel I live in both Poland and in Ireland' clearly depicts transnational family life.

The study also revealed a strong awareness among parents and children of the potential negative impact of Polish language loss for family cohesion and maintaining connections with extended family members in Poland. Parents emphasised the detrimental effects of Polish language loss on family life and stressed the importance of implementing language management strategies to prevent such loss, demonstrating their commitment to their children's Polish language learning and development. Additionally, the families exhibited a commitment to the Polish language for instrumental reasons, including access to employment, education, and medical care in Poland. Parents and children highlighted the importance of maintaining the Polish language in preparation for a potential permanent return to Poland, recognising the Polish language as linguistic and cultural capital for their children's future. Notwithstanding this deep desire to maintain the Polish language, parents and children alike described the challenges such an endeavour poses, including sourcing and attending complementary schools and investing time and effort in addition to their mainstream education.

Despite these rich data findings, the researchers acknowledge specific limitations regarding the study. It should be emphasised that the parents involved in the current study were particularly invested in their children's Polish language learning and development. It is not intended to make generalisations and it is not suggested that participants in this study are representative of all Polish migrant parents in Ireland. We are aware that families are on lifelong FLP enactment trajectories and data collection over a longer period of time than 14 months would provide greater insights into more longitudinal findings. We self-identified as 'outsiders' among members of the Polish community and non-speakers of the Polish language. This however became a positive aspect of the research process as some family members described cultural nuances and aspects of the Polish language that they assumed we were unfamiliar with.

## Conclusion

This study shed light on the families' hybrid habitation, as they divide their time between Poland and Ireland, leading to implications for FLP as parents enact language management strategies to promote their children's Polish language learning and maintenance, facilitated by regular trips to Poland and contact with extended family members. It is important to note that the three families studied are purposefully representative of transnational living, and the study refrains from making generalisations about the FLP of Polish migrant and transnational families in Ireland based solely on these findings. Among parents and older children, there was an awareness of the negative effects of children's Polish language loss on the children's connectedness with Polish family members in Poland. While this was not an issue for the families involved in the study, participants provided

many examples of the consequences of Polish language loss evident among other transnational families they had observed or knew. Parents and older children questioned families that had lost the Polish language. Future research with Polish migrant families who do not exhibit the same level of investment in Polish language maintenance and culture, or who simply choose not to focus on the Polish language in the home would yield important data around the reasons why some Polish migrant families choose not to maintain the home language or indeed struggle to do so.

The paper contributes to discussions on the significance of transnationalism for FLP and highlights the ability of Polish migrant families to navigate between two spaces: Poland and Ireland. The study also raises important questions about the positive impact of transnational family life on HLM, ultimately suggesting that sustained transnational living results in family members having a functional use for the Polish language beyond the family home, with implications for continued Polish language maintenance in future generations. It will be important to continue to explore the impact of the transnational aspect of family members' migration experience on FLP construction and enactment, as previous research alerts us to the fact that the family's migration experience impacts FLP (Curdt-Christiansen 2018). The current study has highlighted the fact that maintained and planned transnational links and movement between Poland and Ireland provide families with a reason to promote their children's ongoing maintenance and development of the Polish language. Most important, this study shows how families adapt and enact FLP in a way that reflects their transnational circumstances and family cohesion needs.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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