Multilingualism Doctoral School
Faculty of Humanities
University of Pannonia
Dissertation evaluation for the final defense

Family Language Policy and Heritage Language Maintenance among Hungarian Families in the United Kingdom

Zsófia Fülöp

The topic of the dissertation is interesting and relevant both from a sociolinguistic and an intercultural point of view, as it investigates family language policy and heritage language maintenance in Hungarian families in the United Kingdom. To be more precise, as the candidate postulates in her research questions, the paper explores the patterns of language practices, ideologies, and management strategies of Hungarian families in the UK, as well as the internal and external factors associated with variation in family language practices and management. The investigation is based on in-depth engagement with the relevant literature and adopts a methodologically sound mixed-methods research design, in which the quantitative and the qualitative components complement each other in a meaningful way, adding up to a coherent research project with convincing results. The theoretical background, as well as the methodological framework, and the findings of the study are presented in a largely appropriate manner, although at times considerable additions would be necessary, especially in the case of the Literature Review, as I will highlight in detail in later sections of this evaluation.

The paper is made up of six chapters, and it measures 132 pages excluding the bibliography and the appendices. I am delighted to see that the candidate has expanded her work considerably, even though at 32 pages the Literature Review is still somewhat underdeveloped considering the scope of the dissertation. The dissertation contains 22 tables and 19 figures, 7 appendices, and a reference list of almost 9 pages. The appendices provide important additions to the body of the dissertation, with the first one depicting the top 10 postcode areas reported by the respondents, while the second one contains all 236 questionnaire items used as part of the study. Appendices 3 and 4, then, sum up the language proficiency levels of the parents and their children, respectively, as reported by the participants, in the form of numerical charts as well as

some commentary in flowing text. Similarly, appendices 5 and 6 also contain numerical charts, focusing on the questionnaire items about the language practices of the participants (Appendix 5), as well as their (language) ideologies (Appendix 6). Finally, Appendix 7 is a new addition, containing an interview guide with the original Hungarian interview questions alongside their English translations. Even though a number of changes have been made to the appendices since the in-house defense, some of the charts are still relatively short and could easily be incorporated in the body of the paper. At the same time, I am glad to observe that a list of appendices has been included at the beginning of the paper, which facilitates orientation considerably.

As far as language and formatting are concerned, the paper is expertly written in appropriate academic English and with straightforward formatting. The introduction successfully situates the dissertation within the relevant academic literature, clearly defining key concepts and outlining the conceptual relationships that provide the foundation for the study. Furthermore, it also spells out the research questions that constitute the point of departure for the study as well as the research methodology with which the author seeks to answer them. Finally, the introduction also outlines the structure of the rest of the paper in a logical and concise fashion. Above all, the introduction (as well as the entirety of the dissertation) is centred on the concepts of Family Language Policy (FLP), heritage language maintenance, especially with regard to Hungarian families living in the United Kingdom. This focus on FLP in Hungarian families living in the UK makes the paper especially unique, since, as suggested by the author herself, this context has rarely been studied before, which gives the dissertation considerable relevance in this field of scholarship.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review of the dissertation, broken down into the following six sections. Section 2.1 deals with statistical data and research findings on Hungarians in the UK, while Sections 2.2 through 2.5 explore the concept of Family Language Policy, heritage language maintenance, and Spolsky's Tripartite Model from a theoretical angle, also shining some critical light on the model's shortcomings and possible extensions. Finally, Section 2.6 attempts to arrive at an integrated model of FLP, which the author creates by systematically synthesizing the research she has critically reviewed thus far, and adapting it to some degree to her own research context. This original and critical engagement with the theoretical background and the emergence of an integrated FLP model is certainly a strength of the dissertation,

especially given the fact that this synthetic theoretical innovation is subsequently empirically refined by the candidate's own findings.

The literature review establishes a forward-pointing and inclusive perspective on Family Language Policy in general, and also on Hungarian families living in the United Kingdom in particular. Even though it still only covers 32 pages, I am delighted to see that several sources has been added to it since the in-house defense. Among others, Pauwels' (2016) essential volume on language maintenance and shift provides a solid theoretical background to the general concepts and directions of research in the field, while Little (2018) and Polinsky (2018) narrow the general perspective of language maintenance down onto heritage languages in particular. Furthermore, I believe the study of language ideologies also constitutes a valuable addition to the theoretical background of the paper, especially as far as their role in FLP is concerned (see Subsection 2.2.2).

After revisiting the research questions in greater depth and adding to them two well-grounded and convincingly formulated hypotheses in Section 3.1, the candidate goes on to present the methodology of her complex research project in Sections 3.2 through 3.5. As far as the methodology is concerned, the participants as well as the research instruments and procedures are introduced in sufficient detail in Sections 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5, respectively.

The Results and Discussion chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) demonstrate a satisfactorily rigorous academic approach, with an appropriate level of detail. The structure of these chapters is highly logical as well, allowing for the qualitative and the quantitative segments of the paper to meaningfully interact with and genuinely complement each other. When it comes to the presentation of the questionnaire findings, I am delighted to see that indications have been added as to which questionnaire item yielded which result. This adds quite a lot to the clarity with which the findings are presented.

Furthermore, it is also my pleasure to observe that the interpretative depth of the Results and Discussion chapters has increased considerably, in line with my suggestions at the in-house defense. The inclusion of complex interpretative passages in relation to the research questions and the theoretical background adds to the coherence of the whole dissertation.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides a comprehensive summary of the most pivotal elements of the theoretical background and the empirical findings, and derives appropriate conclusions concerning future research directions, while remaining attentive to the limitations of the study.

Furthermore, the conclusion manages to systematically readdress the research questions and hypotheses, which is also an essential improvement as compared to the previous version of the dissertation from the perspective of coherence and unity.

In light of the above, I conclude that this dissertation represents a solid body of scholarship. Given that the candidate has incorporated most of the suggestions that were formulated as part of the pre-defense procedure, I wholeheartedly recommend acceptance of the dissertation for final defense and that the candidate be awarded the PhD degree.

References:

Little, S. 2018. Whose heritage? What inheritance? Conceptualising family language identities. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism,* 23 (2): 198-212.

Pauwels A. 2016. *Language maintenance and shift.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Polinsky, M. 2018. *Heritage languages and their speakers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dr. Máté Huber s.k.
senior assistant professor
Institute of English and American Studies
University of Szeged

November 03, 2026