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Critical Perspectives on Language and Kinship in Multilingual Families. Lyn Wright, London: Bloomsbury, 2020. 191 pp.. Hb (9781138563308) \$160, Pb (0781138563315) \$46.95, Ebk (9780429260230) \$42.26

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Over the last decade, the field known as ‘Family Language Policy’ (FLP) has burgeoned within the sociolinguistic research landscape: as Lanza and Gomes Lomeu (2020, p. 159) note in their recent overview, since the establishment of FLP as a field in its own right in 2008, there have been 163 publications with ‘Family Language Policy’ either in their abstract or title. Lyn Wright, author of *Critical Perspectives on Language and Kinship in Multilingual Families* (Bloomsbury, 2020), is one of the forerunners of this field, not only in her role as the second author of the seminal article which put FLP on the map (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry, 2008), but also through her monograph on the agency of Russian adoptee children in the US (Fogle, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. It is little surprise then that the author’s new monograph appears destined to become yet another landmark in the field which Wright helped establish. *Critical Perspectives on Language and Kinship in Multilingual Families* addresses several key growing concerns within the field: first, the need to diversify ‘who’ is studied, as FLP in many ways has been confined to a focus on families who fit the profile of the Western, nuclear ideal of ‘family’ (i.e. two cisgender, heterosexual living parents with their biological children); secondly, the need for constructivist approaches in understanding the role of language in how ‘family’ is achieved, rather than designated *a priori* (cf. King and Lanza, 2017, p. 719: “how families are constructed through multilingual language practices, and how language functions as a resource for this process of family-making and meaning-making”). Thirdly, it also addresses the need to move beyond the

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<sup>1</sup> The author published under the surname ‘Fogle.’

linguistic outcome-based approach which has dominated the field thus far, thus highlighting the imperative to centre more explicitly on the emotional aspects of language use in the family (see also Hollebeke, Struys, and Agirdag, 2020; Wilson, 2020). Finally, the book's nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon, 2004) arch—that is, triangulating individual interactions and experiences within speakers' other life experiences as well as discourses at the local/national/global level—underscores the need for more multimodal ways and diverse methodologies in looking at the complexity of language in family life. The timing of the book is apt, coming out shortly after the field's first decade, and is also timely in light of a recent paper in which the authors Akiko Hiratsuka and Alastair Pennycook (whom, it should be noted, are relative outsiders to FLP) advocate jettisoning the term 'FLP' altogether in part for what they view as a lack of clarity on what is meant by 'family,' among other critiques (Hiratsuka and Pennycook, 2019). As the title of Wright's monograph suggests, this book provides a critical exploration of what it means to 'be' a family and in doing so, elucidates the various ways in social actors navigate this phenomenon through language use in various forms.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the book's main theoretical underpinnings and highlights how single-parent families, adoptive and LGBTQ+-identified families have been sidelined in FLP research. Chapter 2 centres on Wright's observation that single parents appear to be more successful in raising children who speak a minority language (which in this case refers the lesser-used language in the child's immediate sociocultural environment) than parents in two-parent households, an observation which is quantitatively corroborated by De Houwer's (2007) comprehensive survey of bilingual parents (n=1, 899; 121 single-parent families) in the Netherlands. Wright's analysis shows how in single-parent families, the child is more likely to be involved in decision-making processes, and single parents are more likely to use 'we' to refer to

the parent and the child(ren), whereas parents in two-parent households tend to use 'we' in referring to themselves and their partner. Wright argues that this minimising of the caregiver-child power imbalance in single-parent families may be one contributing factor to single parents' success at raising multilingual children, as it leads to the child's agentive use of the minority language. Chapter 3 takes an interactional approach to examining this premise in more depth and focuses on a single mother born and raised in Russia but who now who lives with her ten year-old daughter in the US. Wright analyses recordings of the mother and daughter's daily walk to school, and demonstrates how Russian language use is a key component of how this walk becomes a site of "doing rapport building and identity work" (p.63). What is striking is how the mother's 'move-on strategy' (Lanza, 1997) when conversing with her daughter (i.e. not explicitly or implicitly correcting the daughter's replies in English to the mother's use of Russian) actually appears to promote language maintenance, rather than, as is typically observed, contributing to language shift (Gafaranga, 2010). Framing this observation within the previous discussion of how single parents are more likely to see their children as equal partners in family dynamics illustrates the importance of looking at diverse family types, and it underscores how what might be a reality for one family may play out very differently in another family.

Chapter 4 then turns to looking at US families with children adopted from Russia, and centres on one family in which the single parent father has learned some Russian prior to the adoption and another family in which neither of the two parents speak any Russian . The chapter employs a narrative analysis framework in exploring how parents construct kinship roles and their children's sense of belonging over time and space, in spite of linguistic barriers and gaps in knowledge about their children's past. For example, analysis of the family in which the father speaks some Russian (pp. 96-8) demonstrates how the father uses his linguistic knowledge to

research his two sons' biological father and how collectively, he and his sons construct the distinction between the sons' biological father ('your dad') and the adopted father (addressed in the interaction as 'Daddy'). In the other family, the mother discusses the ways in which her children display their various competencies in spite of the linguistic barrier between parents and children, who at this stage have not acquired much English.

Chapter 5 turns to focusing on multilingualism in LGBTQ+-identified families. This chapter marks a clear shift in methodological and analytical vantage point, as the previous chapters were centred on data analysed and collected using standard social science methodologies (i.e. interview and interactional data recorded by the families/by the author and analysed by using interactional/narrative analysis). Here, the chapter analyses documentaries and memoirs by LGBTQ+ family members who have public personae—in this case, comedian Wanda Sykes; photographer and gender activist Del LaGrace Volcano; and writers Minal Hajratwala and Daisy Hernández. Presumably, this discussion of multilingual LGBTQ+ families also intended to include analysis of quantitative data, as the chapter begins by discussing how there was a low response rate to the surveys (n=5) that the author sent out. Wright hypothesises how this low response rate may relate to issues of gatekeeping and how “a level of trust and perhaps personal interaction are needed to conduct this kind of research.” (p. 104) After discussing the few responses the author did receive from the survey, Wright turns to analysing the publicly-available data. One of the many strengths in this book is that this analysis does not appear to as 'Plan B' but rather, convincingly reveals how “linguistic identities intersect with sexualities and genders to construct inclusion, exclusion, and power relations in the family” (p. 117). I feel that as a social science field, FLP researchers often shy away from more diverse

ways of examining questions—such as analysis of literary texts, for instance—and Wright’s inclusion of this as a methodology provides a refreshing way for the field to move forward.

Wright complements this diverse methodology in Chapter 6 by taking a discourse analytic approach to looking at how news media reifies the nuclear, monolingual ideal of family through its coverage of Melania Trump. It focuses first on how the kinship terms employed in a corpus of newspaper articles about the former first lady’s parents’ US citizenship ceremony obscures the fact the former first family is indeed an immigrant family; the chapter then turns to examining how news media minimises discussion of the former first lady and her son Barron’s multilingual competencies. Again, this chapter contrasts with the earlier chapters in the volume in its perspective, but this shift in focus rounds out the analysis nicely in that it helps crystallise an understanding of how particular assumptions (e.g. the nuclear family as ‘normal’) pervade popular discourse, and the potential for this to influence our perspectives as researchers. Chapter 7 then summarises the main points in the book and reiterates the call for more diverse approaches to FLP, both in terms of diversity of family experience, as well as methodological and theoretical approaches.

One question that the book does not pose however—and one I think would be very beneficial for FLP researchers reflect upon—is *why* there is such a dearth of research on single-parent families. The author poses several interrelated hypotheses for why such research has not been conducted with LGBTQ+-identified families, and I think that some of these explanations may also apply to single families. For instance, one issue mentioned in the chapter on LGBTQ+-identified families is gatekeeping: are gatekeepers perhaps steering some researchers away from single parents because the gatekeepers are afraid that researchers will bring up sensitive material related to the potentially traumatic nature of single parenthood (e.g. divorce, separation,

widowhood)? Or is it because gatekeepers may be applying their own Western, nuclear norms when being asked about multilingual ‘families’? I also think that the OPOL (one-parent one-language) focus in FLP research and the transformation of this term from Grammont’s (1902) original ‘*une personne une langue*’ (one-person one language) to OPOL (one-parent one-language) has been particularly formative in reifying a nuclear focus in FLP. Further, it is important to acknowledge how working in a social science paradigm—and the attendant family-type-as-variable, thus meaning families with two parents would often not be deemed comparable to families with one parent, for instance—also potentially contributes to a sidelining of single-parent families. Wright does touch on this in the conclusion (p. 148) in discussing study design and the suggestion to “conduct complementary research (i.e., if one study includes only dual parent families another is focused on single parent families)”. While I do not disagree with her suggestion, what this book has illuminated to me is the pressing need for the field to move beyond the underlying variable-outcome approach, by which I mean ‘*If family X (where X can refer to family configuration, context for multilingualism, etc.) does Y (e.g. their language ideologies and practices) then what is the outcome (Z) (e.g. the child’s linguistic output)?*’ We should openly acknowledge that all families are different in different ways and that although useful, the cause-effect paradigm underlying social science research has its limitations. Understanding the complex and multi-layered social and emotional aspects of family life and the role of language in how this life unfolds necessitates diverse foci, methodologies, and analytical frameworks. Wright’s monograph is a valuable step in this direction.

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