

The Language Ideologies and the Macro-context in the Family Language Policy (FLP) of a Sinhala / English Bilingual Family

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The Family Language Policy (FLP) is an extension of Bernard Spolsky's conceptualisation of language policy which consists of three components: language practices, language ideology and language management. This policy is principally concerned with the decisions taken by parents with regard to their children's language use. These decisions are determined by internal factors within the family or the micro-context, as well as the external factors that stem from the macro-context. This research has studied an urban English/Sinhala bilingual family to explore the factors emerging from the macro-context, and to identify how such factors mould the language ideologies held by the parents with regard to the children's language use. By adopting a case-study approach, this research utilised the methods of participatory observation and semi-structured interviews for its data collection, which was analysed using the qualitative content analysis method. The study has identified the admission to popular public schools in Colombo, competition posed by international schools to public schools and the crucial role of English in determining the success in the job market as the factors that stem from the socio-political and socio-economic contexts in the macro-context. Several factors stemming from the sociocultural and sociolinguistic contexts that represent the macro-context also contribute to shape the language ideologies. These factors include the transmission of Sinhala cultural values through English, the lack of English leading to social marginalisation, English as a class marker and the assumed importance of foreign languages. Therefore, the family forms a language policy in response to the language policy implemented at the institutional level. In that venture the FLP adheres to the formal language policy emerging from the macro-context while emphasising the language in which the parents expect their children to gain proficiency.

Keywords: Family Language Policy (FLP), Language Ideologies, Sociolinguistic context, Socio-cultural context, Socio-political and economic context