

Heritage Language Valorisation and Family Language Policy in Indonesian Inter-Ethnic Families in Australia

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the maintenance of Indonesian as a heritage language among mixed-ethnic Indonesian couples residing in Melbourne, Australia. In this study, all couples consist of Indonesians from different regional ethnic backgrounds. It investigates household language policies, parental attitudes, and the strategies employed to sustain the use of Indonesian within family contexts. The study is theoretically grounded by the framework of Family Language Policy (FLP) and the concept of language valorisation. Utilising a qualitative approach, the study involved four Indonesian inter-ethnic families represented by four Indonesian women married to spouses of different regional backgrounds. Data were primarily gathered through in-depth interviews, supplemented by questionnaire responses. The findings reveal that although none of the families had explicit language policies, all respondents regarded Indonesian as the family's heritage language and used it regularly in daily interactions. Parents demonstrated a strong commitment to preserving Indonesian as a means of fostering cultural continuity and identity within a minority setting. Common strategies included regular use of Indonesian at home, access to Indonesian media (e.g., animated videos and books), storytelling grounded in folklore, and engagement in community-based cultural events and playgroups. Despite these positive efforts, the study highlights the need for further research on the long-term effectiveness of such strategies, particularly in addressing potential language shift and attrition among second-generation speakers growing up in multilingual, multicultural contexts.

Keywords: inter-ethnic marriage; language valorization; heritage language; language policies

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Inter-ethnic marriages are a common feature of multicultural communities (Qurratua'yun, 2018) and involve complex negotiation of identity and language (Sirait et al., 2020). In inter-ethnic marriage, language choice influences the preservation of heritage languages and shapes identity construction within multilingual families (Pebriyati, 2014). Prior studies have demonstrated that language maintenance in inter-ethnic families is shaped by partners' linguistic repertoires, proficiency levels, and the surrounding sociolinguistic environment (Kadir, 2021).

Indonesia is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with hundreds of regional languages coexisting alongside Bahasa Indonesia as the national and official language. In inter-ethnic Indonesian marriages, Indonesian commonly functions as the default language due to mutual intelligibility and its institutional status. However, when such families migrate to English-dominant societies like Australia, the linguistic landscape becomes more complex.

As of June 2019, the Australian Bureau of Statistics recorded 88,740 Indonesian-born residents in Australia, representing a 29.4% (6,750) increase since 2009 (Banirestu, 2022). This population accounts for 1.2% of the migrant community and 0.3% of Australia's total population, with approximately 15,761 Indonesians residing in Melbourne (KPU, 2023). Given their diverse ethnic backgrounds, Indonesian inter-ethnic couples often speak different regional languages. As a result, Indonesian is commonly adopted as the primary means of communication within the household, reflecting both practical and mutual intelligibility and the institutional status. However, upon settling abroad, English becomes dominant in daily communication, and children raised in such contexts tend to be more proficient in English. Many parents express concern about maintaining Indonesian within the family and fluency in English (Muslim & Brown, 2016).

Since Indonesia is close to Australia, Indonesian has been recognised by several institutions in Australia and is being taught in some schools and universities. However, English remains the most common language in society, creating an unequal hierarchy that affects processes of language valorisation and marginalisation.

This context raises a key question in inter-ethnic marriage studies: what constitutes a “heritage language”? Is it Indonesian, one of the regional languages, or both? In such households, the issue is not merely maintaining Indonesian in relation to English but also negotiating the relative position of regional languages alongside Indonesian within the family's internal linguistic hierarchy. If heritage language is defined as a language commonly used at home and transmitted across generations (Hidayati & Prasatyo, 2023), then Indonesian may be the primary candidate. Nevertheless, parents' regional languages also embody cultural heritage and identity, yet without conscious transmission, these languages risk disappearing by the second or third generation.

Balancing heritage culture with adaptation to the host society has been shown to support positive identity formation and sociocultural integration among minority youth (Muslim & Brown, 2016). Furthermore, heritage language preservation not only reinforces minority identity but also contributes to the broader cultural diversity of the host society (Hidayati & Prasatyo, 2023; Muslim & Brown, 2016). Although research on heritage language maintenance is expanding, limited research has examined how Indonesian inter-ethnic couples living overseas deal with the simultaneous hierarchical positioning of English, Indonesian, and regional languages. Building upon these concerns, this study investigates FLP and strategies employed by Indonesian inter-ethnic couples in Melbourne, as they navigate the challenges to maintain their linguistic heritage.

GAPS

Numerous studies have explored the role and preservation of heritage languages, particularly among Indonesian couples living abroad. These studies often focus on how heritage languages are conceptualised, sustained, or modified within intercultural and multilingual family contexts. For instance, Muslim and Brown (2016) examined the use of Indonesian as a heritage language among Indonesian families in Australia, raising children born in the host country. Similarly, Sirait et al. (2020) investigated linguistic practices in intercultural marriages between Indonesians and Australians, highlighting communication challenges, especially in determining which language or culture becomes dominant or whether a hybrid identity emerges.

Language use in mixed marriages has also been studied in other international contexts. Pebriyati (2014), who examined language preferences in British-Indonesian couples, addressed the preservation of Indonesian as the heritage language. Within the Indonesian context, Qurratua'yun (2018) examined choices and influencing sociocultural factors among Sasaknese–Bimanese families in West Lombok, while Sari (2020) focused on analysing patterns of language

use within Dayak–Madurese interethnic households.

While these studies provide valuable insights, there remains a gap in research focusing specifically on Indonesian inter-ethnic couples living abroad. Unlike intercultural marriages involving Indonesian and non-Indonesian, this study focuses on couples in which both spouses are Indonesian from different ethnic groups (e.g., Javanese, Sundanese, and Madurese), raising distinct questions regarding the maintenance of multiple heritage languages within a shared national identity. Existing literature has yet to fully address whether and how such couples maintain and transmit both Indonesian and their respective ethnic languages to their children in the context of dominant English-speaking societies. In such cases, the problem is not only Indonesian and English, but it also involves negotiating regional languages alongside Indonesian within the family's internal linguistic hierarchy.

Building on these gaps, this study investigates heritage language practices among Indonesian inter-ethnic couples residing in Melbourne, Australia. Specifically, the study examines how Indonesian and regional languages are valorised, prioritised, or potentially marginalised within an English-dominant context through FLP. Given their diverse cultural and linguistic profiles, this research seeks to (1) examine the language policies adopted within their households and (2) explore their attitudes and strategies for valorising and sustaining heritage language use within their families.

LITERATURE REVIEW

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN INTERETHNIC FAMILY CONTEXT

Language is a fundamental medium through which individuals construct and express their social identities. It functions not only for communication but also as an index of personal characteristics such as age, gender, and geographic origin. Social identity is closely intertwined with language use. Thus, language both reflects and shapes an individual's self-perception.

An individual's language practices are influenced by a range of social agents, including family, peer groups, and the surrounding environment. In early childhood, language acquisition is largely shaped by parental input, while peer interaction increasingly influences linguistic behaviour over time. These processes are embedded in broader ideological and power structures that shape which languages are valued and which are marginalised (Norton, 2013).

Contemporary perspectives on language and identity emphasise the dynamic and socially constructed nature of identity rather than it being static or biologically determined. As Zenker (2018) explains, social categories such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, and ability are not rigid but rather open to interpretation and transformation. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that identity emerges through various communicative acts, including labelling, implicating, stance-taking, stylistic choices, and grammatical constructions. From this sociocultural linguistic perspective, identity is interactionally achieved rather than pre-existing, and speakers actively negotiate belonging and distinction through everyday discourse.

Within inter-ethnic families, language choice becomes a symbolic act that indexes national identity (e.g., Indonesian) or regional ethnic identity (e.g., Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese). In this framework, language holds a unique position due to its reciprocal relationship with identity and its influence on broader social dynamics (Kumar & Prakash, 2019). In diaspora contexts, these negotiations are further complicated by the dominance of English, making language practices central to layered identity construction across national, ethnic, and global dimensions. Thus,

language in inter-ethnic migrant families functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a site where identity hierarchies are reproduced, challenged, and strategically reconfigured.

MAINTAINING HERITAGE LANGUAGES IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Heritage languages refer to minority languages learned in bilingual or multilingual settings (Montrul & Polinsky, 2021). Polinsky (2018) defines a heritage language as a language spoken in the home that is not societally dominant but is accessible to children through natural exposure. Individuals are considered heritage speakers when they acquire such languages naturally during childhood, although their proficiency often differs from that of monolingual native speakers of similar age (Montrul, 2015). Such asymmetrical proficiency reflects broader sociolinguistic hierarchies in which dominant languages receive greater institutional and economic support.

Several studies highlight the importance of maintaining heritage languages among younger generations. Romanowski (2021), for example, analysed how Polish families in Melbourne strive to preserve their native language and found that family language policies, particularly among older and more educated parents, strongly influence language transmission. Another study by Arnaus Gil and Jiménez-Gaspar (2022) examined heritage language use among Catalan-speaking children in Germany and found that balanced bilingualism was common and linked to contextual variables such as socioeconomic status, language input, and translation practices. These findings suggest that heritage language maintenance requires sustained input and deliberate reinforcement within family and community domains.

In the Indonesian context, Muliawati and Yusnida (2022) investigated urban Acehnese parents' attitudes toward their heritage language and their efforts to pass it on to their children. Brown (2009) examined Korean-American college students and found that being fluent in a heritage language does not necessarily equate to a strong ethnic identity. These studies underscore the multifaceted nature of heritage language maintenance, which involves not only linguistic competence but also emotional connection, identity negotiation, and community engagement factors.

However, existing research has predominantly examined cases where a single heritage language is negotiated against a dominant societal language. Less attention has been given to inter-ethnic Indonesian families in diaspora contexts, where regional ethnic languages and Indonesian coexist alongside English within the same household. In such a context, heritage language maintenance involves not only intergenerational transmission but also internal prioritisation among multiple heritage candidates.

FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICIES

In multilingual settings, individuals often choose to speak in a language that is mutually understood, which facilitates communication and fosters a sense of social belonging. Within the familial context, language policy becomes especially critical when parents consciously promote bilingualism for themselves and their children. In such a context, language choice is not merely practical but also ideological, reflecting beliefs about identity, mobility, and belonging.

According to Nupus (2021), the fundamental aim of FLP is to optimise language use within the home, with particular attention to regional or heritage languages. Families serve as the primary agents of intergenerational language transmission (Et-Bozkurt & Yağmur, 2022), bearing responsibility for the preservation of ancestral languages. FLP is commonly understood to encompass three interrelated dimensions: (1) language ideologies; (2) language practices; and (3)

language management (Othman, 2022). These frameworks allow researchers to examine not only what families do, but also why they do it and how such practices are sustained or reshaped over time.

Numerous studies have examined how parents implement FLP to support heritage language retention. Et-Bozkurt and Yağmur (2022) found that Turkish families in Melbourne actively involved heritage speakers to sustain language use, though English dominance remained influential. Similarly, Nupus (2021) showed that parental attitudes strongly shape language behaviour and that English prestige may contribute to gradual heritage language neglect. These findings suggest that FLP operates within broader sociopolitical hierarchies rather than only within private household domains. Similarly, Lubis et al. (2025) investigated 10 multilingual and multicultural families from different parts of Indonesia who migrated to Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, bringing their heritage language and culture across provincial borders. They found that a flexible family language policy supports balanced multilingual development. It is reported that these 10 migrant families adjusted their linguistic input based on situational demands (such as communicating with extended family) and children's responses (switching language based on their children's limited comprehension of their heritage ethnic language).

In another study, Torsh and Lising (2022) underscore the sociopolitical dimensions of FLP, arguing that dominant language ideologies and institutional structures shape family-level practices. They observe that dominant language ideologies, social isolation, gendered expectations, and lack of access to heritage language hinder language maintenance. Recent studies have also begun to recognise that children are not passive recipients of parental policies but active participants who may negotiate, resist, or reshape language practices within the family (Smith-Christmas, 2020).

For Indonesian inter-ethnic families living in Australia, deliberate and context-sensitive FLP may serve as a key mechanism to sustain both Indonesian and regional languages amidst the dominance of English. In such households, parents must navigate not only English dominance but also internal hierarchies between Indonesian as a national lingua franca and regional ethnic languages that index specific cultural affiliations. Examining FLP in this context, therefore, requires attention to how multiple heritage language candidates are prioritised, negotiated, or marginalised within everyday family interaction.

LANGUAGE VALORIZATION

Language valorisation refers to the extent to which a language is socially regarded as valuable, functional, and legitimate within and across linguistic communities. Hamers and Blanc (2000) define valorisation as the process through which positive value is attributed to a language for achieving personal, cognitive, and social objectives at both individual and collective levels. Language valorisation is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but is embedded in broader social dynamics that influence bilingual proficiency and language behaviour.

Language valorisation is a mechanism through which linguistic hierarchies and socioeconomic orders are reproduced. One of its central expressions is language prestige, which denotes the societal value attributed to a particular language and its relative position within the sociolinguistic hierarchy (Brandi, 2018). Thus, valorisation involves both symbolic recognition and practical utility within specific domains of use. Communities that place a high value on a particular language often cultivate stronger motivation and more positive attitudes among speakers and learners (Bergbauer et al., 2010).

The perceived value of a language significantly affects language development and maintenance. In many multilingual settings, dominant languages enjoy institutional support and wider communicative utility, while minority languages may be devalued unless actively reinforced by community or familial efforts. Without such reinforcement, speakers often shift to the dominant language. Conversely, when a minority language is regarded as meaningful within social and familial domains, it is more likely to be preserved and passed on intergenerationally (Bergbauer et al., 2010).

A strong correlation exists between language valorisation and additive bilingualism. Emotional and cognitive processes, such as motivation, cultural identity, and language confidence, play a pivotal role in heritage language maintenance (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). However, affective attachment alone does not guarantee maintenance. Language value must be reinforced through consistent use in meaningful domains of interaction (Bergbauer et al., 2010). Language legitimacy is therefore constructed through everyday exposure, parental attitudes, schooling practices, and broader societal discourses.

Recent research in the Indonesian context further illustrated how valorisation operates within multilingual hierarchies. Nurlia et al. (2025) demonstrate that English is frequently associated with global mobility and academic advancement, Indonesian with national identity and social cohesion, and regional or heritage languages with cultural belonging. These languages are not equally positioned; rather, they are hierarchically differentiated according to domain and perceived future utility. Similarly, Efendi (2020) finds that although Indonesian parents express emotional commitment to heritage languages, everyday practices often prioritise Indonesian due to its broader institutional and communicative functions. This divergence between affective support and functional prioritisation reveals how valorisation operates unevenly across domains.

These studies reveal that language valorisation is a multidimensional process involving psychological, social, and institutional factors. For heritage language maintenance, especially in immigrant contexts, valorisation determines whether a language will thrive or fade. In Indonesian inter-ethnic families living abroad, these hierarchies become more layered: English often carries high instrumental value, Indonesian functions as both a national identity marker and a practical lingua franca between spouses of different ethnic backgrounds, while regional languages may carry strong symbolic value but limited institutional support. The relative valorisation of these languages within the family directly shapes patterns of intergenerational transmission, negotiation, and potential marginalisation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives: FLP and language valorisation. FLP provides a micro-level framework for examining how families regulate and negotiate language use within the household (King & Fogle, 2006; Spolsky, 2005), while language valorisation offers a macro-level lens for understanding how broader sociolinguistic hierarchies shape perceptions of linguistic value (Brandi, 2018; Hamers & Blanc, 2000).

Within this study, FLP is operationalised through three interrelated dimensions originally proposed by Spolsky (2005): language ideologies, language practices, and language management. Language ideologies refer to parents' expressed beliefs about the value, appropriateness, and future utility of Indonesian, regional ethnic languages, and English. Language practices refer to reported patterns of language use across domains. Language management refers to deliberate strategies implemented within the household, such as rule-setting, correction, or domain allocation (Othman,

2022). Through these dimensions, FLP conceptualises "policy" as patterned family practice rather than normal documentation.

Language valorisation is operationalised by examining how participants assign symbolic, emotional, and instrumental value to different languages (Brandi, 2018; Hamers & Blanc, 2000). This includes explicit statements regarding prestige, perceived educational advantage, emotional attachment, and national belonging. These evaluative patterns reveal how English, Indonesian, and regional languages are hierarchically positioned within family discourse.

Integrating these frameworks enables the study to examine how micro-level family decisions are embedded within macro-level ideological structures (Norton, 2013; Nurlia et al., 2025). Together, these perspectives provide a coherent analytical foundation for addressing the research questions concerning language policy, attitudes, and strategies for heritage language maintenance.

METHODOLOGY

In order to attain the objectives of this study, a qualitative research design was employed. Qualitative research aims to explore and interpret social phenomena from the perspectives of participants through in-depth engagement (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach was deemed appropriate for investigating language policies and heritage language practices in family contexts.

Participants were selected using purposive snowball sampling, a strategy well-suited for qualitative inquiry (Noy, 2008; Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling enables the researcher to identify participants who meet specific criteria, while snowball sampling facilitates access through participant networks. The inclusion criteria were (1) both spouses were Indonesian and from different regional ethnic backgrounds, (2) the couple resided in Melbourne, Australia, and (3) they were raising at least one child in Australia. These criteria ensured that participants were navigating inter-ethnic language dynamics within an English-dominant environment.

Melbourne was selected because of its significant Indonesian diaspora population and its multicultural sociolinguistic environment, where English functions as the dominant societal language. The context provided an appropriate site for examining how Indonesian and regional ethnic languages are negotiated alongside English in migrant family settings.

The first participant was identified through the researcher's extended social network, as she met all the inclusion criteria and was known to be raising children in a multilingual family. Preliminary informal communication confirmed that the family predominantly used Indonesian at home despite coming from different regional ethnic backgrounds. After obtaining consent, this participant was interviewed and subsequently assisted in referring other eligible families within her community network. This recruitment process aligns with established snowball sampling procedures commonly used in research involving migrant or close-knit communities (Noy, 2008).

Four Indonesian women participated, each married to a spouse from a different regional background. The participants were (1) Eka (pseudonym), 36, a housewife who has lived in Melbourne for 22 years; (2) Dwi (pseudonym), 30, a teacher's assistant who has resided in Melbourne for 7 years; (3) Tri (pseudonym), 29, a housewife who has lived in Melbourne for 2 years and 9 months; and (4) Catur (pseudonym), 26, a housewife who has resided in the city for 7 years.

Although both spouses were initially approached, only the wives were available to be interviewed. This was because of work schedules and time differences between Indonesia and Australia, as interviews were conducted during the time when the husbands were working. Furthermore, previous research has shown that mothers often play a central role in language socialisation and everyday language management within the family (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; King & Fogle, 2006). However, the absence of the husbands' perspective is acknowledged as a limitation and may have implications for understanding potential gendered dimensions in language policy.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data were collected through semi-structured, video-recorded interviews. Interviews are widely used in qualitative research to elicit rich and contextualised accounts of participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews explored participants' language choices, the factors influencing those choices, their attitudes toward heritage language preservation, and the strategies they employed for maintenance.

In addition to interviews, a short background questionnaire was administered to collect demographic information (age, length of residence, number of children, and ethnic background) and general language use patterns at home. The questionnaire functioned as a profiling tool to contextualise participants' narratives rather than as a primary source of analytical data.

To ensure clarity, depth of response, and participant comfort, all interviews were conducted in Indonesian. The use of the participants' shared national language minimised linguistic barriers and allowed nuanced discussion of the ideological and emotional dimensions of language use.

The collected data were analysed in three stages: identifying language policies in the home, assessing parental attitudes toward heritage language use, and exploring strategies implemented to maintain and valorise the Indonesian language within the family. These stages correspond to the analytical dimensions of FLP (language ideologies, language practices, and language management) and language valorisation, combining deductive coding based on theoretical categories with inductive identification of emerging themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE RESPONDENTS

The demographic profiles of the participants are summarised in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. Demographic Data of Respondents

Background Information	Respondents			
	Eka	Dwi	Tri	Catur
Age	36	30	29	26
Ethnicity	Sundanese-Bataknese	Palembangnese	Javanese Arab descent	Sundanese
Occupation	Housewife	Teacher's Aide	Housewife	Housewife
Education	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Has not graduated yet from Bachelor's Degree
Duration of stay in Melbourne	22 years	7 years	2 years 9 months	7 years
Husband's age	37	30	38	29

Husband's ethnicity	Javanese Arab- Javanese Chinese	Javanese	Indonesian- Australian, Ireland descent	Javanese
Husband's Education	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree
Husband's duration of stay in Melbourne	24 years	13 years	38 years	25 years
Child(ren)'s age	Alya - 13 yo Billa - 10 yo Cahyo - 7 yo Dilla - 4 yo Emir - 1 yo	Farhan - 4 yo	Gio - 11 months	Helga - 5 yo Ivan - 1.5 yo

The four participants ranged in age from 26 to 36 years and represented diverse regional ethnic backgrounds, including Sundanese, Batakese, Palembangnese, Javanese, and Arab descent. All were married to Indonesian spouses from different ethnic backgrounds, confirming the inter-ethnic nature of the households. The couples had lived in Melbourne between 2 years and 22 years, with husbands' length of residence ranging from 13 to 38 years, indicating varying degrees of exposure to the Australian sociolinguistic environment. Educational backgrounds ranged from undergraduate to postgraduate levels, and all families were raising young children aged between 11 months and 13 years. This demographic variation provides insight into how inter-ethnic Indonesian families at different stages of migration and child-rearing negotiate heritage language transmission within an English-dominant context.

HERITAGE LANGUAGE OF THE FAMILY

All participants and their spouses come from Indonesia but represent different regional ethnic backgrounds. Indonesia is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with hundreds of ethnic groups, each typically associated with its own regional language. Indonesian serves as the national and official language and functions as a lingua franca across ethnic boundaries. In inter-ethnic marriages within Indonesia, couples commonly rely on Indonesian for daily communication while maintaining ties to their respective ethnic languages. Beyond its practical function, Indonesian also carries emotional and social significance, indexing shared national identity and collective belonging.

The linguistic situation becomes more complex in a diaspora context. When inter-ethnic Indonesian families migrate to English-dominant environments such as Australia, they must navigate not only internal ethnic linguistic differences but also the dominance of a new societal language. In such a context, language choice involves negotiation across three layers: regional ethnic languages, the national language (Indonesian), and English as the dominant societal language.

Given Indonesia's linguistic diversity, it might be expected that participants would identify their regional ethnic language as their heritage language. However, this was not the case. According to Montrul and Polinsky (2021), heritage languages encompass minority, diasporic, indigenous, or historically marginalised languages acquired in multilingual contexts. Instead, all respondents identified Indonesian as the primary heritage language of the household, as illustrated in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 1

Eka: We still use Indonesian, I guess, because my husband and I basically grew up here. So yes, it's Indonesian.

Excerpt 2

Dwi: The language we speak at home here is mostly Indonesian. So, it is Indonesian.

Excerpt 3

Tri: We use Indonesian to talk to baby Gio. My husband and I also speak Indonesian all the time at home. I really want Baby Gio to be able to speak Indonesian.

Excerpt 4

Catur: I think it is Indonesian because I don't feel confident using Sundanese. I'm afraid I might teach it incorrectly.

Based on the interview responses, Indonesian emerges as the family's heritage language. This choice is both practical and symbolic. Since spouses come from different ethnic backgrounds, their regional languages are not mutually intelligible. Indonesian functions as a shared medium that ensures mutual understanding within the household. At the same time, it operates as a supra-ethnic marker of national identity in interaction with other Indonesians in Melbourne and as a transnational bridge in communication with extended family in Indonesia.

While English dominates public life in Melbourne, Indonesian is deliberately maintained within family and community networks and transmitted to children. Regional ethnic languages retain symbolic value, but Indonesian occupies the most inclusive and functionally sustainable position within the family's internal linguistic hierarchy.

FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICIES

This section highlights how FLP reflects the ways in which language use is regulated, acquired, and negotiated within the household. In this study, language practices are shaped by parental decisions and contextual factors such as schooling and social interaction. The findings show that FLP in these families is flexible and evolves over time, particularly when children enter school.

For instance, Eka and her husband initially used Indonesian when communicating with their first child, Alya. However, as Alya began attending school and was increasingly exposed to English, she gradually shifted to using English at home, particularly when interacting with younger siblings.

Excerpt 5

Eka: Actually, to our first child, Alya, we initially spoke Indonesian. But when Alya started talking to the younger sibling, she used English. So now, our family mostly speaks English.

Although Eka and her husband intended to maintain Indonesian, Alya's schooling reshaped the family's everyday language practices, illustrating how children can influence FLP implementation. Because both sets of grandparents live in Melbourne and predominantly use Indonesian, her children are required to speak Indonesian when interacting with them. It can be seen in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 6

Eka: "When they visit their grandparents, they have to speak Indonesian—it's a must. My in-laws barely speak English, so the kids are required to use Indonesian. With my mother, even though she understands English, we still communicate in Indonesian. So they naturally have to learn the language.

This indicates that Indonesian remains anchored in intergenerational communication even as English becomes dominant among siblings. From an FLP perspective, this pattern reflects language management (Spolsky, 2005), where parents regulate language use in specific relational domains. By requiring Indonesian in grandparent-grandchild interactions, Indonesian is positioned

as the legitimate code of kinship communication. The modal expression “*it’s a must*” signals normative regulation, framing Indonesian as an obligation linked to intergenerational continuity rather than merely a communicative option.

Dwi reported that her child, Farhan, primarily spoke Indonesian before entering school. However, once Farhan encountered difficulties communicating with teachers and peers, Dwi began incorporating English into their daily conversations to support Farhan's adaptation at school.

Excerpt 7

Dwi: Before Farhan started school, we always used Indonesian. But then, we saw that he had difficulties communicating. So now, when I talk to Farhan, it’s about 40% English and 60% Indonesian. His father, though, still speaks Indonesian about 99% of the time.

Here, the adjustment was deliberate: English was expanded to support Farhan’s social confidence and academic participation, while Indonesian was retained as the home language.

Tri and her husband use Indonesian with their infant, but plan a bilingual approach once the child turns one. This planned shift is motivated by their anticipation of English-medium schooling and the perceived need to ensure early familiarity with the societal language before formal education begins.

Excerpt 8

Tri: I speak Indonesian with baby Gio. But starting from age one, we plan for Gio to begin learning English and Indonesian with me and English with his dad. For now, our daily conversations are entirely in Indonesian.

The decision to introduce English at age one reflects a preventive strategy: rather than waiting for school exposure to trigger a shift, the parents seek to prepare their child linguistically in advance to avoid potential communicative difficulties. This anticipatory strategy reflects parents’ awareness that English will be necessary for schooling, even if Indonesian remains central in early childhood.

A different case is found in Catur’s family: while Catur has lived in Melbourne for the past seven years, her husband has resided there for over 25 years. It might be assumed that Catur would prioritise teaching Indonesian to her children. However, the reality differs, as she explained in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 9

Catur: Right now, it's about 60% English. Interestingly, my husband uses Indonesian more often, while I tend to speak more English.

This example highlights how FLP is also negotiated between spouses, shaped by different migration trajectories and linguistic comfort levels.

Overall, discrepancies in language use between spouses typically arise after children begin school, largely due to the dominance of English. Across all families, parents express a desire for their children to speak Indonesian well, yet they also prioritise social integration and academic success in Australia. FLP, therefore, becomes a site of compromise: Indonesian is maintained as a heritage and identity resource, while English is strategically expanded to secure educational and social mobility. Indonesian remains the primary language for intra-family communication and interaction within Indonesian community gatherings.

ATTITUDE AND STRATEGIES FOR HERITAGE LANGUAGE

The interview findings indicate that all respondents identified Indonesian as their heritage language, although not all spouses considered it their first language. Two husbands (Tri's husband and Catur's husband) were socialised in Australia from early childhood, making English their dominant language and shaping their primary language identification. In contrast, the remaining participants regard Indonesian as their first language. For their Australian-born children, Indonesian typically functions as a second language.

This generational shift highlights the dynamic positioning of heritage language: while Indonesian is a first language for parents, it is already being negotiated as an additional language for their children.

Despite its limited use in daily contexts, all respondents expressed a strong commitment to preserving Indonesian. This reflects a positive attitude toward their heritage language and cultural identity. The table below summarises their attitudes:

TABLE 2. Attitudes toward the Indonesian

Attitude	Respondents			
	Eka	Dwi	Tri	Catur
1. The Indonesian language is very important.	Important	Important	Important	Important
2. The Indonesian language is used at home.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. The Indonesian language is used outside the home.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

All of the respondents stated that the Indonesian language holds significant importance for them since it is a vital aspect of cultural heritage and affirms their identity as Indonesians. Their responses indicate a clearly positive attitude toward the Indonesian language; they also expressed personal reasons for valuing the language and underscored its relevance in their lives.

Excerpt 10

Dwi: We try our best to ensure that Farhan maintains his Indonesian identity since his exposure is quite limited here. So, language plays a key role here. It's really important so that he can feel, "Yes, I am Indonesian. I have an Indonesian heritage."

Excerpt 11

Catur: Yes, Indonesian is important since I want our child to feel comfortable in the environment where we, as parents, feel at ease. I personally feel a stronger sense of belonging within the Indonesian community.

These statements show that Indonesian is not maintained solely for communication but is valorised as an identity resource through which children are positioned as Indonesian within an English-dominant society. Consistent use in intergenerational and community domains constructs Indonesian as a legitimate code of belonging. Following Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identity is interactionally achieved; when children speak Indonesian with grandparents or in community spaces, they are discursively recognised as members of the Indonesian diaspora.

The use of Indonesian at home further reflects their positive attitudes toward maintaining their heritage language. This language practice aligns with their implicit family language policies. Moreover, the use of Indonesian often extends beyond the home environment, indicating a consistent and deliberate effort to preserve the language, as illustrated below:

Excerpt 12

Eka: Besides at home, we also use Indonesian when visiting our grandparents. And when my kids gather with other Indonesian children, especially if the parents speak Indonesian, we hope our kids will speak Indonesian too.

Excerpt 13

Catur: As much as possible, I consistently speak Indonesian with my children. I also take them to Indonesian community gatherings, hoping they will speak more Indonesian when they're around other Indonesian kids.

These practices illustrate strategic language management. Parents establish domains where Indonesian is expected, such as grandparent interaction and community gatherings, thereby institutionalising it within specific relational spaces despite English dominance in schooling. This domain allocation reflects Spolsky's (2005) concept of language management within FLP and aligns with Curdt-Christiansen's (2018) view that routinised practices naturalise language choice and link it to identity and obligation.

At the same time, parents expand their use to support academic success and social integration. Heritage language maintenance, therefore, emerges not as resistance to English but as a negotiated bilingual strategy balancing identity and mobility.

Beyond attitudinal declarations, participants' language also reveals subtle regulatory and evaluative stances toward Indonesian use. For instance, Eka's statement that speaking Indonesian to grandparents is "*a must*" reflects a modal construction that indexes obligation rather than preference, positioning Indonesian as a normatively required code in intergenerational interaction. Similarly, Dwi's quantification of language use, "*40% English and 60% Indonesian,*" demonstrates conscious monitoring of linguistic balance within the household, indicating metalinguistic awareness and strategic distribution of languages across domains. In addition, expressions such as "*we hope our kids will speak Indonesian too*" employ the collective pronoun "*we,*" which indexes shared parental authority and ideological alignment in maintaining Indonesian. These linguistic choices illustrate that FLP is not merely ideological but enacted interactionally through modality, pronoun positioning, quantification, and domain allocation.

These findings underscore the significance of parental attitudes in heritage language maintenance. Attitudes toward Indonesian are not merely declarative but are operationalised through domain allocation, intergenerational language requirements, and community engagement. Language choice is both deliberate and identity-driven, shaped by familial values, education, and the broader sociolinguistic environment in Australia.

STRATEGIES FOR HERITAGE LANGUAGE VALORIZATION

Despite having resided in Melbourne for several years, the respondents remain strongly connected to their Indonesian cultural roots. Although they come from different ethnic backgrounds, they share a common heritage language, Bahasa Indonesia, which they regard as a key element of their cultural identity, and they are committed to ensuring that their children can communicate in it. While English is identified as the first language of their children, respondents expressed the need for deliberate strategies to transmit Indonesian.

The interview findings revealed consistent strategies among respondents to maintain the heritage language; at first, they use Indonesian as the main language of communication within the household, supported by informal family rules. In addition, extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, play a significant role in encouraging the use of

Indonesian by reinforcing its presence across generational interactions within and beyond the home environment, as stated in the excerpt:

Excerpt 14

Catur: The most important thing is speaking in Indonesian. I try to engage Catur more in conversations, like asking questions in Indonesia. Basically, it's just our daily conversations.

The second strategy focuses on multimedia and literacy engagement. Parents expose their children to animated videos in Indonesian, read books (either originally in Indonesian or translated from English), and incorporate Indonesian songs to support language learning in a fun, relatable manner.

Excerpt 15

Dwi: I usually read books aloud to Farhan; so far, I've been doing many sessions with him. We only have a few Indonesian books, as they are quite limited here. I'm planning to bring more when we return to Indonesia. We also watch videos – what was that, *Bi?* Ah! *Nusa and Rara*.

In addition, Indonesian cultural festivals offer effective avenues for reinforcing heritage language use while simultaneously introducing other cultural elements such as traditional dance, cuisine, and customs.

Excerpt 16

Eka: We often attend Indonesian festivals and actively participate, especially since we also sell food there. These festivals serve as a platform to introduce Indonesian culture, such as traditional dances and cuisine. And of course, many people at the events speak in Indonesian, which supports language exposure.

Since all of the respondents belong to the same Indonesian community in Melbourne, they identified that one of the biggest efforts in maintaining the heritage language is by establishing a community-based playgroup. This playgroup serves as a place where families regularly gather to engage in shared activities using Indonesian as the primary language of communication. Furthermore, they also created a small library that provides Indonesian books, supporting parents in conducting read-aloud activities with their children. This initiative was founded by Indonesian women who are deeply concerned with maintaining the Indonesian language among the younger generation.

Excerpt 17

Dwi: Right now, we, Indonesian mothers, are trying to form a group. It's similar to a playgroup but combined with a small library. There will also be competitions, and all of the activities will be conducted in Indonesian. So currently, we have a group of moms who are actively working to maintain their children's heritage language here. The playgroup includes storytelling sessions using Indonesian folklore, and those activities are already underway.

These collective efforts illustrate how community-based and family-initiated strategies play a vital role in valorising heritage language and fostering linguistic continuity across generations.

However, these strategies also reveal an internal hierarchy within the families' linguistic repertoires. While Indonesian is actively institutionalised through rules, literacy practices, and community programs, regional ethnic languages receive significantly less structured support. In most cases, parents express limited confidence in transmitting their ethnic languages, citing a lack of proficiency, a lack of resources, or limited functional necessity within the diaspora context.

This hierarchical distribution aligns with Spolsky's (2005) observation that language management often reflects broader sociopolitical values, where certain languages are granted higher legitimacy and practical utility within specific domains. This suggests that Indonesian is being valorised not only in relation to English but also in relation to minority regional languages within Indonesia itself. In prioritising Indonesian as the shared and practical heritage language, families may unintentionally marginalise ethnic languages that are associated with narrower domains of use and limited inter-ethnic intelligibility.

While previous heritage language studies often examine tension between a minority home language and a dominant societal language (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018), the present findings reveal an additional layer of hierarchy occurring within the heritage repertoire itself. Unlike contexts where a single ethnic language is maintained against a dominant national language, Indonesian inter-ethnic families in diaspora must navigate multiple potential heritage candidates. The need for mutual intelligibility between spouses from different ethnic backgrounds, combined with the functional dominance of English schooling, appears to encourage consolidation around Indonesian as a supra-ethnic resource.

The implication is not necessarily active suppression but strategic simplification. In an English-dominant environment, families appear to consolidate their linguistic resources by strengthening Indonesian as a supra-ethnic identity marker while allowing regional languages to recede into symbolic rather than functional roles. This pattern partially differs from studies in more ethnolinguistically homogeneous migrant communities, where a single ethnic language may be more strongly maintained due to clearer intergenerational continuity and community reinforcement. This layered valorisation reflects pragmatic decision-making shaped by mobility, inter-ethnic marriage, and the need for linguistic efficiency in diaspora life.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that all respondents perceive Indonesian as their heritage language. This perception is largely influenced by their prolonged residence in Melbourne and their limited connection to their ethnic languages. Regardless of how long they have lived abroad, the respondents consistently express a strong desire to transmit the Indonesian language to their children, reflecting a positive attitude grounded in national identity and cultural continuity.

From the FLP perspective, in line with Spolsky's (2005) tripartite model of ideology, practice, and management, language maintenance in these families is not rigid but adaptive. Parents adjust their practices in response to schooling, peer interaction, and children's developmental stages, negotiating between Indonesian maintenance and English expansion. This flexibility also resonates with Curdt-Christiansen's (2018) view on FLP as dynamic and context-sensitive rather than fixed household rules.

To preserve Indonesian, the participants consistently use it as the primary language at home, provide media and literacy exposure, and actively engage in Indonesian community events. These efforts demonstrate that heritage language transmission is deliberate and strategically managed rather than incidental. Such patterned domain allocation reflects language management processes through which families regulate linguistic behaviour across relational spaces.

From a language valorisation perspective, Indonesian occupies a privileged position within the families' internal linguistic hierarchy. It is strengthened not only in relation to English but also in relation to regional ethnic languages, which receive comparatively limited functional support.

This hierarchical positioning aligns with Norton's (2013) argument that language value is embedded within broader ideological structures that determine which linguistic resources are socially legitimised and symbolically powerful. In this context, Indonesian functions as a supra-ethnic identity marker and a socially inclusive resource within diaspora life.

Despite the small sample size, this study contributes to heritage language research by showing that, in inter-ethnic Indonesian diaspora families, heritage language selection is shaped by intelligibility, national identity consolidation, and mobility considerations. Extending Polinsky's (2018) conceptualisation of heritage language as a non-dominant home language, this study demonstrates that in multilingual inter-ethnic households, heritage selection may also involve internal prioritisation among multiple potential heritage candidates.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that heritage language maintenance is neither purely resistance to dominant language pressure nor simple cultural preservation; rather, it is a negotiated, future-oriented strategy that balances identity, belonging, and social mobility within a multilingual diaspora context.

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