

A CASE STUDY OF SALAR FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY

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КЕЙС-ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ К НАЦИОНАЛЬНОМУ ЯЗЫКУ В САЛАРСКИХ СЕМЬЯХ

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Abstract. This thesis uses Spolsky's family language policy theory as a conceptual basis, and analyzes parents' views and practices of Salar and Chinese in the case family from three aspects: language ideology, language practice, and language management, exploring the language policies through observations and interviews. The results show that critical language ideology is the starting point for recreating the native language of the family, together with appropriate family language management policies, children who are proficient in both Salar and Chinese can be cultivated, thereby establishing the generational inheritance of ethnic language within the family. Research shows that the bottom-up family language policy plays an important role in slowing down the loss of native languages and strengthening its inheritance and protection.

Аннотация. Теоретической основой исследования явилась модель Спольского, содержащая стратегию сохранения национального языка. Использован метод анализа отношения к использованию родного и китайского языков в саларских семьях по трем показателям, – идеи сохранения языка, практики его использования и стратегии семейного руководства обучения детей обоим языкам в одинаковой степени. Таким образом, в семьях обеспечивается наследование родного языка. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о том, что вертикаль «снизу вверх» в языковой политике играет важную роль в замедлении тенденции исчезновения национальных языков и обеспечивает их развитие и защиту.

Key words: family language policy; Salar language; language inheritance from generation to generation.

Ключевые слова: семейная языковая стратегия, саларский язык, наследование языка из поколения в поколение.

Family is a place where children naturally learn their mother tongue. Children cannot speak their mother tongue, which means that the family language is missing from generation to generation, and the family language is replaced

by the dominant language of the society. When the next generation fails to pass on the ethnic language, the ethnic language goes from the brink of danger and enters a state of dying.¹ Saving language loss has an important social function, but it is not easy to achieve. Fishman emphasizes the inheritance of the family language from generation to generation as the key to language revival, arguing that the family is the “support point” for saving language loss, but is constrained by ubiquitous “macro social forces”, the foundation of ethnic language inheritance is eroded, making it difficult to save the language loss.² Therefore, it is of great significance to strengthen the study of family language policies and to guide the inheritance and protection of minority languages.

Family language policy is a research field that has received increasing attention in recent years. The theoretical foundation of family language policy is Spolsky’s theoretical framework of language policy, which is based on the notion that family language policy, like other language policies, can be explored in terms of language practices, language ideologies, and language management. Family language policy faces many challenges and Smith Christmas’s case studies on Gaelic-speaking families shows that once the language begins to lose, it’s hard to recover.³ However, there are also successful examples of language revival, such as Hebrew, French in Quebec, and dozens of other cases.⁴ Therefore, Smith-Christmas believes that it is particularly necessary to understand the story of successful family language policies, and to explore why, or how, some families succeed in raising bilingual children who are fluent in Chinese and ethnic languages, while others do not. At present, there is a lack of micro-discussions on the inheritance and protection of native languages in ethnic minority families in China. Relevant studies mainly present the trends of ethnic minority language loss and decline in a quantitative way, intending to raise the warning signs of language loss, but ignoring the role of microscopic family language policies.

Therefore, this thesis focuses on the question: How do Salar families successfully implement and use family language policies that support the Salar language in the context of the loss of their own language and achieve the purpose of inheriting Salar language from generation to generation? Through a single case study of Salar families, it explored how urban Salar groups in the Mandarin community can use family strength to reduce language loss, establish family inheritance, and successfully cultivate bilingual children who are proficient both in

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Fund Project: National Social Science Foundation Project “Research on Minority Language Attitudes and Endangered Language Protection in Hehuang Area of Qinghai” (15BYY157)

¹Krauss. M, “The World’s Languages in Crisis”, *Language*, vol.68:No.1,1992.

²Fishman J A, *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*, Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 1991, p.18.

³Smith Christmas C. *Family Language Policy: Maintaining an Endangered Language in The Home*, United Kingdom: Springer, 2016, p.214.

⁴Leanne Hinton. *Bringing Our Languages Home: Language Revitalization for Families*, Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2013, p.149

Chinese and Salar. It is hoped that successful case studies can effectively enhance minority language awareness, language management strategies and language practices, and promote the inheritance and protection of minority languages.

1. Theoretical Concepts of Family Language Policy.

Family language policy is the research field of applying language policy theory to the family. Spolsky's language policy model is often cited as the theoretical basis of family language policy. He divides language policies into three categories: language practice, language ideology, and language management. Spolsky believes that the "agent" of language planning is not only the government, but also in other social fields. He listed four language managers, the fourth of which is family members. Language policies at the family level can also be analyzed from language ideology, language practice, and language management.⁵ In recent years, many researches on family language policies have adopted Spolsky language policy model, such as King, et al.(2008); Curdt-Christiansen(2009); Schwartz and Verschik(2013); Smith-Christmas(2016). The concept of family language policy is related to the general imbalance in the inheritance of minority languages from generation to generation. In the theory of saving language loss, the family is regarded as the core of language preservation. Spolsky called the family language policy a "key area", and emphasized the importance of family language policy for the preservation of the mother tongue. He pointed out:

Family is an important field for studying language policy. It has to decide whether to pass on the ethnic language to future generations. This decision greatly affects the family's language conversion and language preservation. In studies on reversing the effects of language conversion, people usually regard this decision as a key measure that affects the success or failure of family language policies.⁶

Family language policy focuses on the relationship between family language policy and children's bilingual development. According to Lambert, children's bilingual development in the family may be additive bilingualism or subtractive bilingualism. The former learns a second language while preserving the mother tongue; the latter sacrifices the mother tongue.⁷

2. Loss of Salar language.

The Salar ethnic group is one of the 22 less populated minority groups in China, with a population of 107,089 in 2010, accounting for about 1.9% of the total population of Qinghai Province.⁸ They mainly live in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County in the eastern part of Qinghai Province and Hualong Hui Autonomous County in the Yellow River Valley, as well as Baoan Dongxiang Salar Autonomous County in Jishi Mountain, Gansu Province. The Salar people

⁵Spolsky B, *Language Policy*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p, 27.

⁶Ibid. p, 29.

⁷Lambert, W. E, "*The Effects of Bilingualism on the Individual: Cognitive and Sociocultural Consequences*", In Hornby, P.A. (Ed.), *Bilingualism: Psychological, Social and Educational Implications*, New York: Academic Press, 1977. p.18.

⁸*The Sixth National Census of Qinghai Province Major Data Bulletin*, 2010. Among the resident population of the province, Han population is 2,983,516, accounting for 53.02%; ethnic minority population is 2,643,206, accounting for 46.98%. Among them: Salar ethnic group 107089 people, accounting for 1.90%.

have their own language, which belongs to the Western Hungarian branch of the Turkic family of the Altaic language family. They have no native characters. Historically, the Arabic alphabet-based Salar script was used, which was called “Turkiohux”⁹ and the people now use Chinese.

The Salar language is facing a serious loss and endangerment crisis due to “language without character”. According to the evaluation indicators proposed by UNESCO (Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, hereinafter referred to as UNESCO), ethnic linguists pointed out that the language loss of Salar is quite serious, and it has been classified as “Level 3”, meaning that it is truly endangered.¹⁰ According to the field survey conducted by Professor Ma Wei, Salar language does have the phenomenon of language loss and displacement of Chinese.¹¹ According to a survey conducted by Liu Hongyu and Yang Hui on Salar college students in Qinghai province, they mainly use Chinese on campus and in public places, while use Salar language at home.¹²

However, the current family ethnic language inheritance disorder has become a fatal injury to ethnic language protection. Whether the language can be preserved and passed on depends on the ability of the generation’s mother tongue. If parents do not speak their mother tongue to their children, and children lose the opportunity to acquire it, the mother tongue may become endangered. Professor Ma Wei pointed out that according to UNESCO’s evaluation standards and field surveys, Salar intergenerational language inheritance index is level 4, meaning that it is insecure. As Salar people leave their hometowns to study and work abroad, it is not easy to preserve language due to the small number of people and the inability to concentrate their residence. The spoken language inheritance of the Salar ethnic group is not optimistic. They have poor inter-generational transmission, and many parents do not pass on native language to their children.¹³ According to Zhao Lin’s field survey of Shitoupo village in Xunhua County, there is a large inter-generational difference in language use. The native language of the elderly is relatively well preserved, and the most frequent use of only Salar language is when communicating with grandparents, accounting for 95.3% of the surveyed population, followed by parents, accounting for 85.4%, with the proportion showing a tendency to decrease sequentially with age. Language use of young people and children in this village has changed greatly, with more Chinese words appearing in vocabulary, and some children living outside with their parents

⁹ “土尔克文”, a kind of phonetic script of Salar spelling based on Arabic and Persian letters. According to available materials, in the 19th century, “土尔克文” was not only used in the Salars to annotate scriptures, translate scriptures, develop scripture education, but also became a social communication, writing contracts, chronicles and biographies, mastered by some people. So far, there are still some historical, literary, religious and other documents written in this language among the Salar people.

¹⁰ 孙宏开:《中国少数民族语言活力排序研究》,《广西民族大学学报》2006年第5期,第8页。

¹¹ 马伟:《撒拉语的濒危状况与保护措施》,《中国撒拉族》2009年第1期,第13-17页。

¹² 刘洪宇, 杨晖:《青海省撒拉族大学生语言使用及语言态度分析》,《青海师范大学学报(哲学社会科学版)》,2010年第4期,第103-107页。

¹³ 马伟:《撒拉语的濒危状况及原因分析》,《青海民族研究》2009年第1期,第39-50页。

have little mastery of Salar language. From the above survey of the use and inheritance of the Salar language, it can be seen that Salar language is rapidly being lost.

3. *An Analysis of the Family Language Policy of the Case's Family.*

This thesis takes a qualitative approach to examine how Salar families successfully raise bilingual children who are fluent in Salar and Chinese through family language policies. The study adopts a single case study method to collect data with in-depth interviews and participant observation of family language policy use. Semi-structured interviews are conducted to understand the interviewed family members, the social context of the family, and family language policy.

The family under investigation in this study live in Dongguan community of Chengdong District, Xining City, which has a high concentration of Salar people, so most parents speak Salar. However, due to the imbalance in family inheritance, even for parents who can speak Salar, a certain percentage of people rarely speak it at home with their children. The interviewed family is a nuclear family. The couple are both close to 40 years old. They grew up in Sanlan Bahai Village, Jiezi Township, Xunhua County, Qinghai Province and went to school in Xining around the age of twelve, and have been living in Xining ever since. The couple use Salar as their first language and learn Chinese when they at school. The education background of this couple is a college degree and a bachelor degree respectively. The husband is a technician in a state-owned enterprise and the wife is a bank employee. They have two girls, the eldest is eleven years old, in the fifth grade of elementary school and speaks Salar and Chinese. The second is five years old, in kindergarten, speaks Salar and is trying to learn Chinese. We conducted three home interviews and observations of the family, totaling approximately 9 hours, and transcribed the interviews. Names in the article have been kept anonymous for privacy reasons. The interviewed husband's name is Hassan, his wife's name is Maryam, the eldest daughter's name is Shadiyah, and the younger daughter's name is Nadia. In the following, we refer to the family of Hassan and Maryam as the Hassan's family for ease of reference.

Spolsky's language policy includes language practice, language ideology and language management. Based on the materials obtained from interviews and observations, Hassan's family language policy is outlined and described in the above sequence.

(1) Family language practice

Spolsky defines language practice as "the sum of the choices made by each individual speaker regarding pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. This choice is sometimes conscious, sometimes subconscious. At the same time, these choices form an unmarked pattern of linguistic conventions."¹⁴ In simple terms, family practice refers to the status and degree of language used by family members. The following presents the linguistic ecology of the community in which the Hassan's family lives, followed by a description of the linguistic practices of the family

¹⁴[以]博纳德·斯波斯基著、张治国译：《语言政策—社会语言学中的重要论题》，商务印书馆2011版，第18页。

members, in order to illustrate the linguistic practices of Hassan's family, which reverses the norm of the community's use of Chinese.

Hassan lives in the core area of Dongguan Community, Chengdong District, Xining City, where the main inhabiting minorities are Hui and Salar, and Chinese is the main language of the community. Due to the popularization of Chinese, the traditional Salar language has gradually been replaced, and Chinese has become an unmarked language. Parents often use Chinese to talk to their children in order to help them with homework. Therefore, children are mainly exposed to the language environment dominated by Chinese, and Salar is more commonly used among the elders.

The Hassan and Maryam couple adopt the principle of "when you are in Rome do as the Romans do", using Salar as the only family language, making it the main language of communication among family members. They usually communicate with their children in Salar at home, and at the same time remind relatives and friends who can speak Salar to communicate from time to time, forming a small "community of Salar speakers", successfully get rid of the habit of using only Chinese in the community and establish a native-speaking family. Outside the family, the couple allows their children to choose their own language. However, because the native language is preferred, the choice of language will also extend to places outside the home. By telling relatives and friends that the children speak Salar, and at the same time asking those who can speak Salar to use it to talk to the child, the use of ethnic language is extended from the home to outside. With Chinese becoming an idiom in family and community, Hassan's family language practice mainly focuses on reversing the community habits that generally regard Chinese as the established language of the community.

Shadiyah has developed a habit of speaking Salar in the family, and has not stopped speaking it in the family because of contact with Chinese-speaking children outside. Shadiyah usually speaks Chinese deliberately at home, which is not natural. Of course, Chinese expressions are often used when involving games and homework, because many games simulate situations outside the home, such as schools, shopping malls, amusement parks, etc. These environments often use Chinese outside the home, so she and her sister often use Chinese in the process of playing games, and their parents sometimes play with them in Salar.

The Hassan's family often speaks Salar outside home. This not only increases the visibility of Salar language in the community, but also gives children the opportunity to use it outside the home. Because the local community has a large number of Salars who are engaged in catering or retail services, and all of them speak Salar. The use of Salar language in daily life is very interesting and vivid, which can greatly enhance the vitality. It also helps to create a linguistic identity by enhancing the visibility of the Salar language in daily life. With the development of new media, parents sometimes deliberately let children watch and listen, so that they can be exposed to Salar language media in their daily lives. The two daughters learned to sing "Two Tigers" in Salar through Salar language community in WeChat on their cell phones. Hassan believes that the use of these symbolic native

languages helps to cultivate a sense of identity and belonging, and allows the Salars to feel the existence of the language, to feel recognized and respected.

Such “experiential” acquisition of Salar is a language activity based on life situations and cultural contexts. Based on the unique culture of the Salars, Hassan believes that language learning is cultural learning, and advocates integrating cultural learning into the contextual language learning process. The Salar practice of the Hassan’s family is also integrated into the education of traditional culture and values. Hassan mentions that there are many educational materials in the community that teach values to children, but he hopes that there will be educational materials in the Salar language that will build the ethics of Salar life and create the values of the next generation of ethnic groups. Hassan emphasizes that Salar values are passed down through word of mouth, not books.

Hassan’s family embodies the spirit of Salar culture in the language activities. There is a lot of planning that goes into these language activities, as Hasaan says, “We try to design culturally relevant family activities in which we build the values of their own language.” Family activities are situational language learning, often with outdoor activities. For example, Hassan takes two daughters to the safari park in order to teach them to recognize various animals and remember the pronunciation of vocabularies in Salar. In the process of getting to know the animals, the ecological view of Salar is presented through different animal stories. In this way, language and situations, ethnic culture and real life are combined. Such language practice not only helps children’s ethnic language acquisition, but also experiences ethnic culture and promotes ethnic identity.

(2) Language ideology

Language ideology can also be called language attitude, which refers to the emotion and attitude towards language itself or language use. Parents’ language ideology plays a key role in the language that parents choose to communicate with their children.¹⁵ In terms of overall attitudes towards ethnic languages, Hassan’s family has a positive attitude towards their ethnic language. Both husband and wife grew up speaking their mother tongue, and started to learn Chinese and speak it when they entered school. However, there is no negative attitude towards their mother tongue. His wife Maryam works in a bank and when she meets Salar colleagues, she often communicates in Salar and finds it more cordial. She thinks it’s good that diversity coexists, saying, “If you speak one more language, then you have one more logical ability to think.” At the same time, she believes that her ethnic culture should be preserved and not let it disappear. Mother tongue interference is often used as an excuse for not teaching it. In fact, languages are not mutually exclusive. Maryam’s views on ethnic language and second language learning are in line with the views of bilingual education scholars. Cummins proposes the “linguistic interdependence hypothesis”, which states that mother

¹⁵Spolsky B, *Language Policy*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 89.

tongue is the basis for second language learning and that it is not a learning burden but a resource for any language learning.¹⁶

In terms of the relationship between ethnic language and ethnic identity, Hassan maintains a positive attitude toward ethnic language and discusses more about language attitudes and ethnic identity. His ethnic identity is manifested in the belief that ethnic language and ethnic identity are to be equated, and that being a Salar requires one to be able to speak Salar. There are various manifestations of ethnic identity. In addition to language, there are clothing, food, customs, etc., which can be used as ethnic characteristics. With the loss of language, there is often a phenomenon of separation between language and identity. For Hassan, language is the core value of culture. He believes that if culture is divided into surface and deep culture, deep culture must be transmitted through language. He said, "I used to think that it was enough to know the story of Camel Spring, tell a general idea, and then acknowledge that I am a Salar. But in fact, that's not enough, because they are all superficial, that is, the superficial cultural identity, you still have to know deep culture through language".

With a view on ethnolinguistic development, Hassan advocates the establishment and improvement of Salar language corpus plan from the standpoint of linguistic resource view, emphasizes the status planning of Salar language, establishes a bilingual system, and allows Salar language to have official documents and Salar language audio files, increasing the opportunities for Salar languages to be used in society. He pointed out: "If the official documents and writing are not bilingual, this language can only be used in daily life. For example, if the government agency does not provide talks or documents in Salar, then my chances of using it in this society will come to the scene of dysfunction."

In terms of evaluation of ethnic language, Hassan has a strong linguistic loyalty to the mother tongue. He believes that society is too negative in propaganda and keeps emphasizing that the mother tongue is not used and that the culture is dying out, which is why efforts need to be made. Instead, he advocates that the advantages of the mother tongue should be promoted in a positive perspective, for example, he emphasizes, "Because our language can bring confidence to our children, it can bring us intercultural competence, etc. We will emphasize that Salar is a beautiful language, but we will not emphasize that there are fewer and fewer people who can speak it, we can only emphasize the importance and positive effects." Hassan emphasizes to his five-year-old daughter at home, "When you play with toys, you can speak Chinese with your dolls, but when you talk to your mom, dad, and sister, you must speak Salar, otherwise you cannot be a real Salar, and you cannot be part of the family." This passage shows that parents equate ethnic linguistic identity with ethnic identity. On the one hand, it shows parents' management of children's language choices, and on the other hand, it also emphasizes the management of language ideology that "the native people speak the ethnic language".

¹⁶Cummins J, "Linguistic Interdependence and The Educational Development of Bilingual Children, " *Review of Educational Research*, vol.49: No.2, 1979.

(3) Family language management

Language management is the closest part of the language policy model to language planning. As mentioned earlier, family language management refers to the planning behaviors of family members for language use. Hassan's family first planned for children to inherit Salar, reflecting their linguistic ideology in support of the ethnic language, but also reflecting the sense of crisis caused by the loss of Salar language, and therefore consciously adopted some strategies to ensure the inheritance, learning and use of Salar language and to slow down the trend of its loss.

1. Management of language strategies

Hassan's family follows the principle of "localization", emphasizing that family is the place where the ethnic language is spoken, and that children must speak Salar at home and using Chinese when talking to non-ethnic speakers. In this way, Shadiyah and Nadia become bilinguals. The principle of speaking Salar at home, of course, is also flexible. As Shadiyah's exposure to Chinese outside the home increases, along with the influence of television and cell phones, she begins to use Chinese to play at home, and her mother, Maryam, asked her "not to speak Chinese at home, but to speak Chinese when she encountered a problem outside".

The active language management of Hassan's family also reflects the creation of the ethnic language environment outside the family. With the popularity of Chinese, even the elders who are not fluent in Chinese will talk to children in Chinese when they return to their hometown in Xunhua. In this regard, Hassan reminds the Salar-speaking elders to use their best Salar dialect to talk to the children. The elders are happy to know that the child can speak Salar, and agree with this approach. Hassan's internal and external language policy breaks the general habit of using dominant languages and establishes a language selection strategy for language preservation through direct "requests to change the medium". Hassan's family improves Shadiyah and Nadia's ability to speak Salar by going to their hometown in Xunhua once or twice a month to talk with the native speakers.

2. Language resource management

In addition to face-to-face oral communication, audiovisual and written language materials in minority languages also contribute to the creation of language environment. However, Salar language activities of Hassan's family are mainly spoken, written language and media resources are relatively lacking. The family was asked if they had any resources related to Salar language, such as pictures, picture books, cartoons, and videos. The parents responded that there were few resources in this area. Hassan family's ethnic language resources are mainly spoken, and resources in Salar language are not intentionally created. Given that young children's ethnic language acquisition is predominantly oral, the lack of resources in this area does not have much impact. Hassan's family seldom makes their own language teaching materials, but mainly adapts them. That is to say, parents will use teaching materials in other languages and translate them as Salar teaching materials. Therefore, the written language is Chinese and the spoken language is Salar. This method of solving the shortage of resources by

transforming language resources can become “translanguaging”. Shadiyah and Nadia enjoy listening to stories at bedtime, and sometimes when their parents finish the story, the two daughters will retell it and ask questions in Salar. TV shows are an important channel for Shadiyah and Nadia to learn Chinese. In addition, other children use Chinese to communicate with Shadiyah and Nadia in school and kindergarten, they have become bilingual in both Salar and Chinese.

3. Management of code-switching

Code-switching is often seen as an important way that leads to language loss. In Hassan’s family, Chinese is mixed in when they encounter unknown words in the Salar language. Parents will respond depending on the reason for the child’s code-switching. If the situation is because the child does not know how to speak the Salar language and switches to Chinese, the parent will tell her how it should be spoken. If they switch to Chinese at will, parents will remind them to speak Salar. Parents sometimes mix Chinese vocabulary for the convenience of expression, or switch to Chinese for conversation. When discussing topics beyond ordinary conversations and expressing more in-depth and abstract topics, parents will switch language codes due to the lack of corresponding ethnic vocabulary, such as “power vacuum”, “financial crisis”, etc., so it is not easy to use Salar. Expressions are usually mixed with Chinese vocabulary, but it will still be presented in the grammar of Salar.

Many parents are concerned about the negative impact of code-switching on children’s language development. In fact, code-switching is a common phenomenon among bilinguals and bilingual societies, and bilingual education scholars point out that code-switching is a natural part of children’s early language development.¹⁷ The main communication language of Hassan’s family is Salar, and conversion to Chinese is not allowed. Frequent code-switching between sentences is not conducive to the preservation of the national language, which is called “the way of speaking that causes language loss”.¹⁸

4. Conclusion.

The family is a micro society and the last bastion of language maintenance.¹⁹ Therefore, language protection and inheritance is closely related to the family’s environment and family language policy. In this thesis, a case study of a Salar family living in the city is analyzed using Spolsky’s family language policy model, and the results show that the family language policy contributes to the inheritance and protection of the ethnic language from generation to generation and saves the loss of the ethnic language. The language policy management mechanism is initiated by the positive ethnic language awareness, and through internal and external management strategies, the family ethnic language practice has been successfully established, reversing the habit of speaking dominant languages in the family, and nurturing children with bilingual ability. Under the background that the dominant language has become the main language of the family, the inheritance

¹⁷Baker C, *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, UK: Multilingual matters, 2001, p.127.

¹⁸Gafaranga J, “Medium Request: Talking Language Shift into Being,” *Language in Society*, vol.39: No.2, 2010.

¹⁹曹波, 丁石庆:《家庭网络与人口较少民族青少年母语保持——撒拉族, 达斡尔族个案考察》, 《青海民族研究》2016年第3期。

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and protection of the ethnic language must be conscious, strategic, and action-oriented. The choice of the family language is the key to the survival of the ethnic language. Therefore, parents must adopt a family language policy that focuses on their own ethnic language, bring the ethnic language home, and recreate the inheritance and protection of the family ethnic language.

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