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Conflicting Linguistic Identities: Language Choices of Parents and their Children in Rural Migrant Workers' Families

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Abstract: This study explores the interaction between rural migrant workers' (RMWs) language ideologies, linguistic identities and their family language planning activities in China. Focusing on language choices of RMW parents and their children, the study involves eight families who migrated from rural to urban areas. Data were collected through home observations, recorded family conversations and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that RMWs experience conflicting identities instantiated by their language choices and language practices. Tangled in multiple identities, such as temporary urban residents, undereducated low-paid labourers, homesick rural-urban migrants and trustworthy employees, they frequently face the predicament of having to choose between either *Putonghua* (the official language in China, also known as the *common speech*) or hometown *fangyans* (also known as regional dialects) or local *fangyans* to deal with everyday issues. The association between identities and language ideologies drive RMWs to intentionally use *Putonghua* as language management strategy at home. Consequently, the language choices of both parents and their children show a shift from *fangyan* to *Putonghua*. The

findings also suggest that parental language ideologies and planning activities in home domains are shaped by macro social systems, public discourse and language planning at a national level.

Keywords: rural migrant workers; rural migrant children; family language policy and planning; language ideologies; linguistic identities

Introduction

Massive rural-urban migration within China began in the 1980s in the wake of economic reforms. In the subsequent decades, millions of rural migrant workers (RMWs) moved from rural to urban areas, from western inland regions to southeastern coastal regions for job opportunities and better life. According to the 2018 annual survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2019), RMWs now make up more than one third of China's total urban workforce. Among them, a high proportion tends to relocate in cities as family units. In a country with 56 ethnic groups who speak nearly 2000 Chinese language varieties or *fangyans* (regional dialects) (Li, 2006; Shen & Gao, 2019), the massive population movement has resulted in a complex sociolinguistic environment and attracted much attention from researchers. While studies into migrants' language use have found that RMWs tend to shift from hometown *fangyans* to *Putonghua* (literally *common speech* which is the official language in China) and construct multiple identities through their language choices (Dong, 2009; Fu, 2015), little is known about how their language shift is connected to their family language decisions.

This study, adopting the framework of family language policy and planning (FLPP), explores language decisions and planning activities within RMWs' families, with a focus on their association with RMW parents' language ideologies and linguistic identities. To be specific, the study addresses the following questions:

- (1) What are the parents' and children's language choices in the participant families?
- (2) To what extent are their language planning activities in family domains driven by parental ideological factors in association with their perceived identities?

In seeking answers to these questions, we begin with a review of literature on language ideology and linguistic identity to understand how FLPP are shaped by these constructs. Following that, we introduce the sociocultural context in which the study is situated. We then present findings to demonstrate how participants' language ideologies and identities are related to FLPP. Finally, we conclude the article with a discussion and a call for future research in FLPP to address issues of internal migration in multilingual countries.

Language Ideology, Identity and FLPP

Ideology is broadly understood as a set of values, beliefs, assumptions and expectations in social or political domains (Freeden, 2003). Drawing on this understanding, language ideologies have been defined as beliefs and attitudes shared by individuals regarding a particular language, based on their beliefs and assumptions about the utility, power and value of the language in a given society (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994;

Blommaert, 2006; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009). *Putonghua*, for example, has been accepted as the common speech of the Chinese people across China since the 1950s, while other Chinese varieties have been given the status of *fangyans* with little socioeconomic utility (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018; Li, 2006; Li, Y., Li, D. & Gao, 2019; Zhang, 2013). In the field of FLPP, which examines the interrelationship between language ideologies, language practices and language management in home domains (Spolsky, 2004), parental ideological factors are regarded as the driving force underlying family language practices (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020). This is because parents usually decide which language should be used among family members and which language should be discontinued by not providing a natural language environment for intergenerational transmission (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018; Palviainen & Bergroth, 2018; Wang, 2017; Xia & Shen, 2019).

Identity is about how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future (Norton, 2013). Shared language beliefs and practices usually serve to ascribe an identity to an ethnic group and create the sense of belonging. An example can be found in Canada where Quebec has gained its unique position through the recognition of French as the sole official language in the province. A Quebecois identity tends to be related to and reflected by the users' language practices in French (Heller, 1994). Also in Singapore, for instance, Singaporean identity is marked by the use of 'Singlish', which is a mixture of English, Malay, Tamil and

several varieties of Chinese language, owing to the historical role of English in the region and a state ideology that supports multiple official languages (Leimgruber, 2011). These examples illustrate that the construction of social identities is closely associated with language ideologies and language practices. In other words, the interrelationship between language ideologies and identities is instantiated through language practices (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).

Although ideologies are shared by and usually identified with particular groups, not all members of a group use and value languages in the same ways (Gal, 1998). As language users reveal both their personal identities and their search for social roles through the process of language practices (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985), individual and social identities are evolving and shifting (Block, 1997; Piller, 2002).

Studies concerning identities in FLPP show that ethnic identity tends to be one of the factors in multilingual families that motivate parents to provide language resources for their children's heritage language development. Curdt-Christiansen (2009), for example, studied ten Chinese migrant families in Quebec (Canada), and found that parents considered the use of Chinese as a marker of their Chinese origin and therefore provided their children with explicit literacy-related activities for learning Chinese. A similar ideology of language as an ethnocultural identity marker has been confirmed by numbers of research on multilingual families (Li, 1994; Wang & Chong, 2011; Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; Wang, 2017).

Within the study of FLPP, the relationship between language practices, ideologies and identities is, however, by no means linear and unified. As in Li's (1994) study of

the Tyneside Chinese community in England, Chinese functioned as the marker for the origin of the grandparents' generation, while English, owing to the English-dominant sociolinguistic environment, functioned as the 'we' code for the younger generation born in England. A similar phenomenon was observed within a family on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, with Gaelic operating as the 'we' code for the older generation and English operating as the 'we' code for the younger generations (Smith-Christmas, 2019). In their study of families from Finland where Finnish and Swedish are two equal national languages, Palviainen and Bergroth (2018) found that parents identified themselves and their partners as monolingual despite the fact that they were in practice multilingual. The reason lied in the national ideology that the bilingual identity was given to those who were Finnish-Swedish bilinguals through official registration by birth. These cases reveal that the perception of identity is ideologically shaped by macro-level factors like national language planning and social systems. Importantly, the conceptualisation of an ethnic identity does not result in natural intergenerational language transmission.

Therefore, the examination of FLPP in a multilingual context is inevitably an examination of language ideologies intertwined with linguistic identities. While most FLPP research has focused on cross-border transnational migrants, less work has pointed to the complex interaction between language ideologies, language practices and identities in the context of internal migration (Dong, 2009; Guo & Gu, 2018). It is, therefore, important to place linguistic identities as the focus of analysis and to ask, on the one hand, what linguistic identities parents claim through their language choices

and, on the other hand, on what grounds parents allow or forbid their children to use a certain language within family domains.

Situating the Context of RMWs

Rural-urban migration in China is a complex population movement. It involves the *hukou* (household registration) system introduced by the government in 1958, which categorises individuals with an ‘agricultural’ or ‘urban’ identity. *Hukou* is hereditary. Children whose parents hold an agricultural *hukou* have also an agricultural *hukou* no matter where they were actually born. *Hukou* used to function as an instrument of controlling population movement, but this function has gradually been relaxed since 1980s in response to the rapid economic growth (Ma, 1999). Rural residents can now move to and work in urban areas without changing their *hukou* record.

After migrating into cities, RMWs are mainly employed by labour-intensive industry sectors like manufacturing, construction, retail services, hotel and catering services, repair and maintenance services (NBS, 2019). Though NBS’s statistical data have shown a trend that RMWs’ income is increasing, it still lags behind the income of employees with local *hukou* (Zhang, Li, Darity, & Sharpe, 2014). As summarised by Anagnost (2004), RMWs’ labour is usually devalued as it can be purchased at a lower price.

As each city issues its own *hukou*, possessing a non-local *hukou* means that RMWs are not entitled to the welfare and social benefits from the local government of host cities (Dong & Blommaert, 2009). A typical example is that about 2.25 million rural

migrant children (RMC) of primary school age are excluded from the urban public school system along with about 0.5 million RMC of middle school age (NBS,2019).

RMWs, labelled as *nongmingong* (peasant workers) in official discourse, mix features of both peasants and workers but are different from either of them. Many RMWs, though born in rural areas, have worked in cities since they completed secondary education. They have been dissociated from rural society for a long time and have little agricultural knowledge (Pun, 1999; Zhang, 2014). Nonetheless, due to their rural origin, RMWs and their children are excluded from urban society. They are frequently labelled in public discourse as the population with *di suzhi*, which means ‘low quality’ (Zhang, 2014). For instance, a newspaper clipping from *Xinwenhua Bao* (*New Culture Newspaper*), a popular urban life newspaper in Jilin province, reported:

On the 4th September, Mrs. and Mr. Zhang had dinner at a restaurant near their neighbourhood.

At about 8 o’clock, Mrs Zhang, young and pretty, went to the washing room. When she passed the dining hall, seven or eight RMW-like people whistled at her and made some obscene gestures. On seeing this, Mr. Zhang expressed his anger to them. Unexpectedly, the RMW-like people began to beat Mr. Zhang...

(*New Culture Newspaper* 10/09/2002, translated by the authors)

The seven or eight people who beat Mr. Zhang were depicted in this report as ‘RMW-like’, that is, RMWs are synonymous with obscenity and crude behaviour, even a threat to social stability. Such media discourses have influenced the general public’s attitudes towards RMWs, which today is a word that carries derogatory connotations (Yu, 2019).

Making language choices is another issue that RMWs have to deal with. In a survey of 1029 RMWs, Wu (2013) found that the majority of his participants became bilingual or multilingual in *Putonghua*, their hometown *fangyans* and the local *fangyans* of the host cities. However, while RMWs and RMC switch between different varieties of Chinese depending on the communication contexts, a great deal of research has shown their preference for *Putonghua*, not only in public but also at home (Yu, 2011; Chen, 2013; Zhang, 2016). For example, Yu's study (2011) of 327 RMC in Suzhou showed that more than 60% of the participants preferred using *Putonghua* at home and 30% used *Putonghua* and their hometown *fangyans* interchangeably with family members. Language choices in family domains, influenced by social factors, reflect RMWs' language ideologies and exhibit their multiple identities. While the above mentioned research has shed light on the language practices of RMWs and their families from a quantitative perspective, there is scarce research on how such practices are shaped in home domains. This study addresses this gap by exploring RMWs' FLPP, language ideologies and identities with a qualitative approach.

The Study

Participants

This study involves eight RMW families from four cities in Guangdong, Shanghai and Anhui. Two criteria have been employed to select the participant families: 1) at least one child under the age of 17 years, who functions as the focal RMC; 2) at least one parent is from the same *fangyan* region as the first author. This is in order to build

personal contacts and trace the variations in their language practices effectively. The families' profiles are presented in Table 1.

[Table 1 near here]

Parents from all families have worked and lived in cities for more than five years without changing their agricultural *hukou*. As shown in Table 1, 11 out of 16 parents, born in 1970s or 1980s, have completed no more than nine years of schooling. While RMW parents have been engaged in low-skilled jobs because of their educational attainment, all parents in the study are able to speak *Putonghua* fluently as a result of *Putonghua*'s medium role in instruction policy. Having grown up in their hometown, the parents are all capable of speaking the hometown *fangyans*. Having lived in the host cities for years, the parents from Family 5 and the father from Family 6 have learned to use the local *fangyans*.

The age of the focal RMC ranges from 5 to 16 years, from the level of kindergarten to high school. The three children from Families 2, 5 and 8 had been left in their hometown in the care of grandparents. They, having acquired the hometown *fangyans*, moved to cities to join their parents when they were old enough to go to kindergarten or primary school. The children, whether or not they were raised in the urban areas, have been educated in urban kindergartens or primary schools where they were exposed to *Putonghua* from a very young age.

The grandparents have been included in five families (Families 1,3, 4, 6, 7). They have lived together with the focal children and usually helped with rearing them. Five of them (from Families 1, 4, 6 7) are the first-generation RMWs. As the grandparents

were born in the 1950s or even earlier and received little or no education, they are almost all monolingual *fangyan* speakers.

Data collection

This is an ethnographic-oriented study. In addition to regular home visits, informant-recorded data were also collected in order to maintain the continuity of data collection and reduce the observational intrusion. The data were collected between July 2017 and December 2018 through the following tools.

(1) Participant observations: Home observations were arranged with the eight families once every two months, from July 2017 to August 2018, at their convenience. During home visits, 37 pages of detailed field notes were taken to understand the home language environment and the language practices between family members.

(2) Recordings of family conversations: Each family was asked to record at least one natural conversation between family members each month. In total, 147 recordings were collected, 70% of which last between 10 and 15 minutes. The recordings captured family conversations in such situations as having dinner, walking after meals, doing homework, and bedtime reading. Conversations cover a variety of topics, such as school life, friends, and food.

(3) Interviews: Four fathers and seven mothers were interviewed during the first home visit to each family to gain information on the families' background, children's language history and practices, parents' language ideologies and language management activities. The interviews, lasting from 40 to 70 minutes, were conducted in either *Putonghua* or *fangyan* as the interviewees preferred. Follow-up casual interviews with

all available family members were undertaken to further clarify the language practices observed and recorded.

Data analysis

All recordings and interviews were transcribed in Chinese first and then partially translated into English according to the research questions. After transcription, the field notes, conversation and interview transcripts were reviewed and coded. Initial coding was guided by linguistic identity and the three interrelated components of FLPP—ideologies, practices and management. Following that, transcripts and field notes were read again to generate categories under each topic. Table 2 shows the emerging categories from the interviews, recordings, and field notes. As illustrated in Table 2, the coding system was presented based on the three language varieties: *Putonghua*, hometown *fangyans*, and local *fangyans*.

[Table 2 near here]

Findings

In this section, the findings are presented to cover language practices in rural migrant families, parents' language ideologies and identities, and how these themes are related to FLPP.

Language Choices in RMW Families

Language practices are the observable behaviour with regard to what languages or language varieties the family members speak at home, and what language features they

adopt (Spolsky, 2009; Wang, 2018). Table 3 shows parents' and children's language choices in their interaction with different family members emerged from observational field notes and conversational transcripts.

[Table 3 near here]

As illustrated in Table 3, among the families in which children do not speak any *fangyan* (Families 1, 4, 6, 7), only *Putonghua* was used in parent-child interaction. Although three fathers (Families 2, 3, 8) and three mothers (Families 3, 5, 8) share a common *fangyan* with their children, only in Families 2 and 3 was the use of *fangyan* observed and recorded in parent-child interactions. Though Yue's parents from Family 5 claimed in their interviews that Yue's mother sometimes talked with Yue in Hakka (FY5), no such conversation was observed or recorded. In Families 2 and 3, parents and children often used their hometown *fangyan* and *Putonghua* interchangeably, particularly in homework sessions, as shown in Excerpt 1. (Chinese transcripts are also offered in the family conversations.)

Excerpt 1 Help me with the Chinese dictation (The underlined parts show the choice of hometown *fangyan*.)

- | | | | |
|---|---------|---------------------|---|
| 1 | Mother: | <u>今天作业做完了?</u> | <u>Have you completed your homework for</u> |
| 2 | | | <u>today?</u> |
| 3 | Yi: | <u>做完了。哦, 语文老师还</u> | <u>Yes, I have. Mum, the Chinese teacher also</u> |
| 4 | | <u>要我们听写第三单元生</u> | <u>asked us to</u> do a dictation of the new words in |
| 5 | | <u>词, 你给我报听写吧。</u> | Unit 3. <u>Help me with the dictation, please.</u> |
| 6 | Mother: | <u>把你语文书拿来。从哪</u> | <u>Give me your Chinese book. Where shall we</u> |

- 7 里开始报? start?
- 8 Yi: 从第九课开始报，只报 Start from Lesson 9, only the circled new
- 9 课文里圈的生词。 words in the texts.
- 10 Mother: 我报了，裤兜，扫帚... Let's start. *Kudou* (pocket), *saozhou*
- (broom)...

(Homework conversation in Family 3, 16/10/2017)

While helping Yi with his Chinese homework, Mother 3 initiated the conversation with a question in hometown *fangyan*, which was answered by Yi in the same language. When Yi talked about the homework assigned by his teacher, he switched to *Putonghua* to repeat what the teacher had said at school as *Putonghua* is the language of instruction in all schools across the country. Mother 3 also switched to *Putonghua* while giving dictations of the new words in the Chinese textbook.

Both *fangyan* and *Putonghua* have been observed in parent-parent interaction. In four families (Families 1, 2, 5, 6), where parents do not speak mutually intelligible *fangyans*, they used only *Putonghua* with each other, except for Family 2 in which Father 2 has persisted in using only his hometown *fangyan* at home. In the remaining families (Families 3, 4, 7, 8), in which parents have a common hometown *fangyan*, *fangyan* was used exclusively between parents, except for Family 7. The reason, as recalled by Mother 7, is that when they ‘first met each other in Shenzhen (their host city)’, they ‘talked to each other in *Putonghua*’ (Interview with Mother 7, 10/08/2017). The same situation happened in Family 5. Parents in Family 5 claimed that they learned to speak the local *fangyan*, Cantonese, but they had never communicated with each

other in Cantonese at home because they ‘had been speaking *Putonghua* to each other since they met’ (Interview with Mother 5, 19/08/2017). This situation can be explained by Spolsky’s ‘inertia condition’, that is, ‘once we start speaking to someone in a certain language, it is easier and more natural to continue using the same language, and it may be uncomfortable to switch’ (Spolsky, 2009, p. 15).

Parents’ language choices in parent-grandparent interaction are rather complicated. In addition to the exclusive use of their hometown *fangyans* in Families 3, 5, and 8, a parallel language move (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018) between *Putonghua* and *fangyan* was observed in the remaining families. One reason is that some parents, like Father 7, have shifted to *Putonghua* during his urban integration while the grandparent generation kept using their hometown *fangyans* owing to their linguistic habitus and poor *Putonghua* competence. Another reason is that family members might speak different *fangyans*, as explained in the field notes:

Excerpt 2

Grandma 6 (Mother 6’s mother) moved to Guangzhou from Sichuan province in 2002. Now she works in a Sichuan restaurant. She speaks Sichuan *fangyan*. Father 6, grew up in Anhui Province and then moved to Guangzhou, speaks a *fangyan* different from Sichuan *fangyan*. When he talks to Grandma, he uses *Putonghua* to respond to Grandma’s Sichuan *fangyan*. He has no difficulty understanding most words that Grandma says because they have lived as a family for nearly 11 years.

(Field notes in Family 6, 22/08/2017)

Such complexity has also been found in child-grandparent interactions. In the four

families (Families 2, 3, 5, 8), *fangyan* was recorded to be used in child-grandparent communication. In contrast, in the families where children do not speak any *fangyan* (Families 1, 4, 6, 7), the parallel language use pattern was found in conversation transcripts:

Excerpt 3: Something difficult to chew (The underlined parts show the choice of hometown *fangyan*.)

- | | | | |
|----|--------------|----------------------|--|
| 1 | Yu: | 奶奶，这个是什么东西啊？ | Granny, what's this? It's too hard to |
| 2 | | 咬不动。 | chew. |
| 3 | Grandmother: | 萝卜， <u>怎么会咬不动？</u> | <i>Luobo</i> (Turnip). <u>How can it be hard</u> |
| 4 | | | <u>to chew?</u> |
| 5 | Yu: | 就是咬不动，你肯定没煮烂。 | It's hard to chew. You haven't |
| 6 | | | cooked long enough. |
| 7 | Grandmother: | <u>我煮了很久啊。我尝尝，嗯，</u> | <u>I have cooked it for a long time. Let</u> |
| 8 | | <u>是有点硬。吃不动你就不吃，</u> | <u>me have a bite. Yes, it's hard. Have</u> |
| 9 | | <u>吃其他的。</u> | <u>something else since it is hard to</u> |
| 10 | | | <u>chew.</u> |

(Dinner table conversation in Family 1, 23/09/2018)

In this dinner table conversation, Yu chose *Putonghua* whereas Grandmother mainly used her native *fangyan*. The two generations used different languages without breaking down their communication. However, when it came to an object with completely different names in *Putonghua* and *fangyan*, like 'turnip' in Line 3, Grandmother tried to adjust herself to the child generation's language rather than vice

versa. This code-switch model implies the inequality of *Putonghua* and hometown *fangyan*, because in language use the inferior party usually adjusts and adapts to the rules of the superior one (Dong & Blommaert, 2009).

To sum up, though the majority of parents (10 out of 16) use different Chinese varieties (viz. *Putonghua* and hometown *fangyans*) to different family members, *Putonghua* is primarily used in parent-child communication. Their children, in turn, use dominantly *Putonghua* in their interaction with the parents. Therefore, parents' and their children's language use shows a shift from *fangyan* to *Putonghua*.

Parents' Linguistic Identities Mediated by Language Ideologies

In this subsection, RMWs' language ideologies and linguistic identities are discussed separately in terms of their choice of *Putonghua*, hometown *fangyans* and local *fangyans*.

Putonghua: rural migrants with better opportunities

RMWs' preference for *Putonghua* at home cannot be isolated from their ideologies embedded in their own experiences with *Putonghua* in public. In the cities where RMWs' hometown *fangyans* are unintelligible to urban residents, *Putonghua*, as the de facto lingua franca in China, offers a quick solution to the problem of communication, as explained by Father 1:

Excerpt 4

We sometimes move from one city to another for better opportunities. Take myself as an example, I used to *dagong* (sell labour) in Shenzhen and then moved back to Wuhu (a

prefecture-level city in China). It's not practical to learn the local *fangyan* of each city. Our generation can speak *Putonghua*, well or poorly. Anyway, we can make ourselves understood when we are in a new city... Though we don't have urban *hukou* after *dagong* for many years, it's better than farming in the hometown.

(Interview with Father 1, 26/07/2017)

'Our generation' was used by Father 1 in Excerpt 4 to categorise RMWs who were about the same age as him, in other words, the generation born in the 1980s and known as the new-generation RMWs. With the belief that they could make themselves understood through the use of *Putonghua*, Father 1 constructed a 'we' identity distinguished by its linguistic adaptability and geographical mobility, which differentiated them from peasants 'farming in the hometown'. On the other hand, this 'we' identity differentiated them from local residents and their social rights attached to urban *hukou*. 'Dagong' or selling labour in host cities connoted an exchange of labour for wages and implied the marginalisation in RMWs' employment. Despite the marginalisation, Father 1's *Putonghua* ideology was mainly framed by the possibility for a better life. In contrast to Father 1, who identified himself as an optimistic new-generation RMW possessing *Putonghua* competence and high mobility, Father 2 showed anxiety in using *Putonghua*:

Excerpt 5

Putonghua is definitely important. My *Putonghua* is poor. It seems that my tongue can't be twisted while speaking *Putonghua*. I haven't completed primary education. My primary school teachers did not speak *Putonghua* themselves... Because of my low level of education

and poor *Putonghua* competence, I can't find a high-paid job. I can only *dagong* on the construction site with the help of *laoxiang* (town fellows).

(Interview with Father 2, 09/08/ 2017)

In Excerpt 5, Father 2 echoed Father 1's language ideology that *Putonghua* was a language variety for better job opportunities. However, Father 2 identified himself as an undereducated low-paid RMW based on his 'poor' *Putonghua* competence and the limited education he had received. Owing to RMWs' marginalisation in employment and working conditions (Wong, Chang, & He, 2010), the barriers instantiated by his poor *Putonghua* competence forced him to '*dagong* on the construction site' with *laoxiang*, in-group members who shared a hometown *fangyan* with him. The restricted employability, influenced by the devaluation of RMWs' labour in public discourse, brought about his self-perceived inferior professional identity. He used his experiences to support *Putonghua*'s role in providing better opportunities in the Chinese context.

Hometown fangyans: temporary urban residents tied to rural society

As all participant parents were raised in a *fangyan* environment, their preference for speaking *fangyan* with the grandparent generation, as illustrated in Table 3, is determined by their linguistic habitus (Bourdieu, 1991) and the grandparent generation's limited *Putonghua* competence (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018). In addition, RMWs are apt to use their hometown *fangyans* with town fellows, as revealed by parents from Family 5 in a family conversation:

Excerpt 6

At the dinner table, the conversation on language choices continued. Father 5 showed his

preference for his hometown *fangyan* while talking with his town fellows. ‘It’s weird to speak *Putonghua* with *laoxiang*,’ he commented. When Mother 5 mentioned that their daughter did not understand Father 5’s hometown *fangyan*, Father 5 responded, ‘They won’t live in our hometown, so it’s unnecessary for them to learn *tuhua* (hometown *fangyan*)... When Yue paid visit to my hometown during Spring Festivals, Uncle and Aunt always spoke *Putonghua* with her. We are different. If we don’t speak *tuhua* while visiting hometown, family members and villagers will think that we’ve forgotten our origin... We’ll go back to hometown when we get old and thus we can’t forget *tuhua*. What’s the poem line? My native accent keeps unchanged when my hair turns grey. That is, it’s hard for people to forget their *tuhua*.’

(Field notes in Family 5, 21/07/2018)

Father 5, in his conversation, used *tuhua* to mean hometown *fangyan*. *Tu*, which means ‘soil’ in Chinese, is closely connected to the rural society in that soil has always been the root of the rural society (Fei, 2015). Father 5 reconciled his rural identity through the choice of ‘*tuhua*’ in his interaction with family members and town fellows. Through borrowing a line from a classical Chinese poem to display affection for his rural community, he considered the rural community as a permanent home although he had spent nearly 20 years in the host city. In this sense, Father 5 perceived his hometown *fangyan* as a language variety that maintained his rural roots and in-group intimacy. Concomitantly, Father 5 restricted the use of *tuhua* to his hometown, which denoted *fangyan*’s low mobility and limited utility outside the rural community, and even a sense of marginalisation and backwardness (Dong & Blommaert, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018). This partially accounted for Father 5’s denial of his

daughter's *tuhua* learning. His 'we' identity as first-generation RMWs was distinguished by the intimacy with their rural community and differentiated from the second-generation rural urban migrants whose rural origin was no longer marked by rural *fangyans*. However, the situation is different when using hometown *fangyans* or accent in cities, as stated by Mother 3:

Excerpt 7

I felt embarrassed when others couldn't understand me or said to me, 'you have a heavy (hometown) accent'. In my factory, the management staff always speak more standard *Putonghua*. No wonder they have decent jobs and high salary. The workers like me, low in literacy and *Putonghua* competence, have no choice but sell labour-power.

(Interview with Mother 3, 20/08/2017)

According to Mother 3, her hometown accent triggered laughter from 'others' and led to her negative emotions. Mother 3's words reflected a hometown *fangyan* ideology different from Father 5's due to the shift in context. In the urban context, her self-identification as low-literacy labourer instantiated by her heavy rural accent echoed and expanded Father 2's self-claimed inferiority. This 'we' identity differentiated RMWs from the 'they' identity connected to 'decent jobs and high salary' marked by 'more standard' *Putonghua*, a pronunciation with less or no trace of *fangyan* accent. *Fangyan*-accented *Putonghua*, therefore, was considered as non-standard and a marker of inferior aliens in cities as they were only temporary urban residents.

Local fangyans: long-stay migrants with a competitive tool in linguistic market

Some RMW participants have learnt to speak the local *fangyan* of their host city, but

complex attitudes to local *fangyans* have been identified, as explained by Father 1:

Excerpt 8

I can speak the urban *fangyan*. I learned to speak urban *fangyan* because many local residents used to look down upon migrant workers from rural areas. Everyone has self-esteem...Now I only use the local *fangyan* with those with whom I am not familiar. I've never used it at home because it sounds contrived.

(Interview with Father 1, 26/07/2017)

Though *Putonghua* solved the problem of communication, as Father 1 mentioned in Excerpt 4, it also revealed the speakers' non-local origin. A dilemma arose from urban residents' deliberate avoidance of or prejudice against RMWs. In order to resolve the dilemma, Father 1 used local *fangyan* as a key to his integration with the urban community. Father 1's accommodation to the local residents' linguistic habits implied the inequality between urban residents and RMWs. In addition, Father 1, through using urban *fangyan* with strangers, constructed an identity as an urban resident and blurred the identity as a RMW. On the other hand, Father 1 described the urban *fangyan* as 'contrived', which revealed his dislike of the urban residents as well as their *fangyan*. The reason might be that being looked down upon by the urban residents hurt RMWs' self-respect and led to their negative attitudes to urban residents, which has been formed by and in turn exacerbated the polarisation between urban residents and rural residents. This ideological position about the local *fangyan* led to his refusal of using urban *fangyan* at home.

Meanwhile, though some RMWs do not learn to speak local *fangyans*, they often

assimilate into the local society by speaking *Putonghua* with the local accent and borrowing some typical local expressions, as Mother 1 stated:

Excerpt 9

I meet customers from different areas every day. They have different accents, but most of them are local urban residents and I naturally follow their accents to get closer to them. They will think I'm trustworthy because the local accent means that I have stayed here for a long time.

(Interview with Mother 1, 26/07/ 2017)

Language varieties are not equal in a multilingual society (Dong, 2009). Urban *fangyans* are usually ranked higher than rural *fangyans* because of their socioeconomic value. As expressed by Mother 1, her customers ascribed a trustworthy long-stay status to her because she used local-*fangyan*-accented *Putonghua*. Local accent has functioned as a competitive tool in the linguistic market.

FLPP Intertwined with Parents' Conflicting Identities

Given the roles played by parents in FLPP (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Wang, 2017), family language planning activities are mainly attributed to RMWs' language ideologies intertwined with their multiple identities. Having weighed their own experiences with *Putonghua*, hometown *fangyans* and local *fangyans*, RMWs prefer to teach their children *Putonghua* rather than transmit their hometown *fangyans* to them, as expressed by Mother 8:

Excerpt 10

I hope that Mu can stay in the city as a real city dweller. At least, she won't sell labour like us

any longer. We live a hard life in Shanghai. Mu doesn't have an urban *hukou* and thus has no access to a better public primary school. She studies in her present school with a temporary status and we have to pay an extra tuition fee. Some *laoxiang's* children can't find a public school which would accept them. I hope Mu can work hard. Only knowledge can change the destiny of rural residents. Chinese is said to be more and more important in *gaokao* (the College Entrance Examination). Standard *Putonghua* must do good to her Chinese learning, so we try to create an environment for her to practice *Putonghua* at home.

(Interview with Mother 8, 25/07/2017)

Echoing Father 2's and Mother 3's perceptions, Mother 8 also defined RMWs' identity as labourers, which she did not want Mu to have. Thus, she expected that Mu would discard rural identity and achieve the conversion from someone 'selling labour' to 'a real city dweller'. As education has always been an effective way for rural-urban conversion, standard *Putonghua*, owing to its role in education, functions as educational resource and linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Mother 8 preferred to use *Putonghua* at home and considered it as a strategy to prepare Mu for a bright future. However, unlike their peers with urban *hukou*, RMC had to pay extra fee to enter public schools (Fleisher and Yang, 2003). The gap between RMC and their urban peers in education aggravated the life pressure in RMW families. Therefore, RMWs took some measures to minimize the gap, as in Family 3:

Excerpt 11 Fried tomatoes with eggs (The underlined parts show the choice of hometown *fangyan*.)

1 Grandmother: 喊你妈吃饭。

Call your mum for dinner.

- 2 Yi: 妈，吃饭了。 Mum, it's time for dinner.
- 3 Mother: 你奶奶烧什么好吃的 What delicious food did your Grandma
4 了? prepare?
- 5 Yi: 有洋柿子炒鸡蛋，我奶 Fried *yangshizi* (tomatoes in FY1) with
6 奶炒的洋柿子炒鸡蛋好 eggs. Fried *yangshizi* with eggs cooked
7 吃。 by my Grandma is delicious.
- 8 Mother: 西红柿炒鸡蛋，什么洋 Fried *xihongshi* (tomatoes in
9 柿子? 这么土的话你同 Putonghua) with eggs, not *yangshizi*.
10 学听到要笑话你! Your classmates will laugh at you for
11 such a *tu* word.
- 12 Yi: 知道，我跟同学从来不 I know. I've never said *yangshizi* to my
13 讲洋柿子。 classmates.

(Dinner table conversation in Family 3, 23/04/2018)

In the first round of the conversation in Excerpt 11, Grandmother 3, Yi and Mother 3 were comfortable with the use of their hometown *fangyan*, which indexed their origin. When Mother 3 heard Yi's use of 'such a *tu* word', however, she responded in *Putonghua* by interrupting and correcting Yi explicitly. Mother 3 tended to use a hybrid of hometown *fangyan*'s pronunciation and *Putonghua*'s vocabulary. She associated Yi's use of the *fangyan* word, *yangshizi* in Line 5 and 6, with some unfavourable rustic features of their origin. With the word *tu* in Chinese, she pointed to out-of-date or uncivilised features related to people from the countryside. From Mother 3's perspective, Yi's choice of the rustic word marked his difference from his urban peers,

which would project a stigmatised identity of country folks and trigger laughter from Yi's urban classmates. Her attitude to Yi's use of the rustic word was obviously influenced by her own experience as stated in Excerpt 7. Therefore, she corrected Yi's use of the rustic word deliberately. As a result, Yi separated his public language from his private language and chose *Putonghua* as response to his parents' *Putonghua*. Meanwhile, the language hybrid between native *fangyan* and *Putonghua* reflected RMWs' ambiguity and negotiation for urban and rural identities. As a result, they constructed a hybrid identity with the features of both urban and rural society.

As illustrated in Table 3, no children used local *fangyans* at home. This can be explained by parents' conflicting ideologies of local *fangyans*, as expressed by Father 1 in Excerpt 8. The following conversation from Family 5 further revealed parents' attitudes to *fangyans*:

Excerpt 12 Learning *fangyan*

- | | | | |
|---|---------|-------------|--|
| 1 | Yue: | 我今天跟隔壁灿灿学会 | I've learned to speak Sichuan <i>fangyan</i> |
| 2 | | 了四川话。 | from Cancan next door. |
| 3 | Father: | 你那是搞笑的，要学你就 | You are kidding me. If you want to learn |
| 4 | | 跟爸爸学广东话。 | a <i>fangyan</i> , learn Cantonese from Dad. |
| 5 | Mother: | 你那广东话没一句标准 | Your Cantonese is not standard at all. It |
| 6 | | 的，一听就不是广东人。 | tells that you are not a Cantonese. |
| 7 | Father: | 我客户能听懂我讲。 | My customers can understand me very |
| 8 | | | well. |
| 9 | Mother: | 也就跟客户套套近乎。悦 | You only use Cantonese to serve your |

10	悦会讲客家话，跟白话相	customers. Yue speaks Hakka. It has
11	近，以后她要是学也快，	much in common with Cantonese, so
12	有学白话的环境。	she'll learn Cantonese quickly in the
13		future. After all, there is an environment
14		for learning Cantonese.

(Dinner table conversation in Family 5, 11/12/2017)

It can be seen from this Excerpt that Father 5 considered local *fangyan* — Cantonese — as more useful than other *fangyans* and claimed himself as a Cantonese speaker. However, Mother 5 ascribed an identity of outsider to him because of his non-standard Cantonese. Mother 5 connected Father 5's use of urban *fangyan* to customer rapport and made it a public language beyond family domains. Due to the identity negotiation between Yue's parents with respect to the local *fangyan*, they left Yue's local *fangyan* learning to the immersion environment outside the home. Therefore, no parents tried to teach local *fangyans* to their children at home.

Data presented in the findings reveal that the shift from *fangyan* to *Putonghua* in family domains cannot be separated from RMW parents' language ideologies and linguistic identities. In addition, the ideological factors of RMWs are connected to their experiences in public. A further discussion is given to show the interaction.

Discussion

This study, against the background of Chinese internal migration, explores language ideologies, linguistic identities and FLPP of eight RMW families concerning three

language varieties in their daily life: *Putonghua*, hometown *fangyans* and local host-city *fangyans*. Taking language choices of parents and children in RMW families as the starting point, this study discusses particularly how parents' language ideologies and their linguistic identities connect to their family language planning decisions.

Consistent with the general trend of language practices among Chinese internal migrants (Dong, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018), an intergenerational shift of language use from *fangyans* to *Putonghua* has also been found in participant families. To be specific, while the parents' generation choose to speak different varieties—*Putonghua* or hometown *fangyans*—to different family members, the children's generation show a significant shift to *Putonghua* at home. The local urban *fangyans*, however, play little significant role in family domains. This language shift is caused by various factors. Their beliefs in the association between language and identity is a key factor in effect.

In the case of *Putonghua*, the influence of language ideologies on language practices and language management at home is observable. *Putonghua* has been regarded by RMWs as a symbol of new rural residents who can tackle city life. It is usually believed that China's future lies in the cities (Kim, 2010), and thus, RMW parents expect their children to become real urban residents. The emphasis on the association between *Putonghua* and new rural migrants with possibilities for the future has made the parents shift to *Putonghua* when speaking with their children at home. On the other hand, the ideological link between *Putonghua* competence and literacy leads to parents' self-identification as undereducated, low-paid labourers. This identity denotes RMWs'

sense of inferiority owing to the devaluation of RMWs' labour in public discourse (Anagnost, 2004). With the promotion of *Putonghua* in China, RMW parents perceive it as an ethnic identity marker that doesn't reveal their rural origin owing to its role as common speech. As a result, they make a purposeful choice of using *Putonghua* as the parent-to-child language.

Identity-based conflicts and negotiation in the use of hometown *fangyans* are found among the informants with the change of linguistic and social contexts. On the one hand, hometown *fangyans* or accents reveal their rural origin and restrict their social as well as geographical mobility. On the other hand, RMWs who are alienated by the urban community are seeking a sense of belonging from family members or *laoxiang* with whom they share a common rural *fangyan*. While visiting their hometown, RMWs' choice of hometown *fangyan* maintains their bond to the rural community. The comfortable rural in-group identity, however, is contradictory to their desired urban identity. Therefore, many parents deny the direct connectedness between hometown *fangyans* and RMC's identity. The parents' ideologies are thus embodied and reproduced in their family language planning, which in turn leads to the rejection of their children's learning hometown *fangyans* at home.

Conflicts are also reflected in their attitudes towards local *fangyans*. Local *fangyans* are linked to economic capital for some careers, like shop assistants and salespersons owing to its role in building rapport with the local community. While the accommodation to urban *fangyan* manifests RMWs' identity as trustworthy long-stay migrants, the polarisation between rural society and urban society leads to their

emotional rejection of urban *fangyans* at home. Furthermore, local *fangyans* have no significance in education that would help RMC become real urban residents. Therefore, local *fangyans* play an insignificant role in parents' family language decision. In response to their indifferent attitude to local *fangyans*, they believe that children's local *fangyan* learning can be left to the immersion environment outside the home.

Conclusion

The data from eight RMW families presented here point out how parents' family language decisions are reflective of their language ideologies and identities shaped by social systems, public discourse and language planning at a national level (Palviainen & Bergroth, 2018). As illustrated in this study, long-term polarisation between the rural and urban society derived from the *hukou* system has created RMWs' self-perceived inferior identities. Rustic features ascribed to RMWs by the public discourse and the misconceptions at the root of such demeaning representations (Maher & Cavalcanti, 2019) have reinforced their self-perceived inferiority. The self-perceived inferiority in turn pawns their ideology of blocking the transmission of their rural-related identities to their children through providing a *Putonghua* rather than *fangyan* environment at home. With the promotion of *Putonghua* at the national level, *Putonghua* has been widely accepted as a common speech for the future across China. RMWs' ideologies about the differentiated functions of the three language varieties reflect the language hierarchy within Chinese borders (Dong, 2009; Blommaert, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). However, the 'the more the better' language ideology, popular among Chinese

transnational families (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Wang, 2018), is not shared by RMW parents in the current study.

RMWs are a huge migrant population in multilingual China. Their urban presence gives rise to the intensive mix of people from various regions with a variety of *fangyans* and accents resulting in complex linguistic environments. RMW families are embedded in the linguistic environments functioning in a particular social context. Therefore, the context-sensitive FLPP deserves further in-depth research. The current study exemplifies how the RMWs adjust their FLPP during the process of sociolinguistic realignment in the urban community and how they negotiate language identities under external pressure. In comparison with the large population of RMWs, however, the eight families are just ‘the tip of the iceberg’. A much bigger data set is needed to reveal the patterns in RMWs’ FLPP. Further studies, therefore, should combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to address issues of internal migration in China and other multilingual countries.

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Tables

Table 1 Participating families' profiles

Family No. (Child's name)	Father			Mother			Focal Child			Grandparent(s)	
	Educ.	Employ.	Lang.	Educ.	Employ.	Lang.	Gender/ age/grade	Migrant type	Lang.	Educ.	Lang.
1 (Yu)	SS	TL	PT/FY1	HS	RS	PT/FY2	F/9/PS	B	PT	NS/PS	FY1
2 (Jie)	PS	CT	FY1	PS	MF	PT/FY3	M/16/HS	A	PT/FY1	/	/
3 (Yi)	SS	MF	PT/FY1	SS	MF	PT/FY1	M/11/PS	B	PT/FY1	PS	FY1
4 (You)	SS	CT	PT/FY1	SS	RS	PT/FY1	F/5/KD	B	PT	PS	FY1
5 (Yue)	CS	SL	PT/FY1/ FY4	HS	RS	PT/FY5/ FY4	F/11/PS	A	PT/FY5	/	/
6 (Chen)	CS	HC	PT/FY1/ FY4	HS	RS	PT/FY3	M/8/PS	B	PT	PS	FY3
7 (Han)	SS	MF	PT/FY1	SS	MF	PT/FY1	F/5/KD	B	PT	SS/PS	FY1
8 (Mu)	SS	SL	PT/FY1	SS	RS	PT/FY1	F/13/SS	A	PT/FY1	/	/

Legend:

Educ. (Education): KD-kindergarten; PS-primary school; SS-secondary school; HS-high school; CS-college; NS-no schooling or illiterate.

Employ. (Employment): MF-manufacturing; CT-construction; RS-retail services; HC-hotel and catering services; TL-transport and logistics.

Lang. (Language): PT-*Putonghua*; FY1-Jianghuai official *fangyan*; FY2-Jilu official *fangyan*; FY3-Xi'nan official *fangyan*; FY4-Yue *fangyan*/Cantonese; FY5-Hakka.

Migrant type: A-raised in rural areas and migrating to cities later; B-born and raised in the host cities.

Table 2 Coding themes

Language variety	Linguistic identity (interview transcripts, conversational transcripts, field notes)	FLPP		
		Language Ideology (interview transcripts, conversational transcripts, field notes)	Language management (interview transcripts, field notes, conversational transcripts)	Language practice (conversational transcripts, field notes)
<i>Putonghua</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ new rural residents ▪ temporary urban residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ linguistic adaptability ▪ high mobility ▪ possibilities for future ▪ employability ▪ language of school instruction ▪ educational resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ intentional use at home ▪ correction of non-<i>Putonghua</i> expressions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ preference in parent-child interaction ▪ preference in homework sessions ▪ parallel move in grandparent-child interaction
Hometown <i>fangyans</i> (or accent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ workers of rural origin ▪ undereducated labourers ▪ aliens in urban residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ low mobility ▪ limited utility ▪ no longer a marker of RMC's rural origin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ deliberately preventing child from using hometown <i>fangyans</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ in parent-grandparent interaction ▪ occasionally in parent-child or grandparent-child interaction
Local <i>fangyans</i> (or accent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ long-stay migrants ▪ trustworthy employees ▪ outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ linguistic capital ▪ competitive tool ▪ local integration ▪ rapport with natives ▪ immersion environment outside home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ neither encouraging nor discouraging child to learn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ no intentional choice at home ▪ only being used outside home

Table 3 Language choices in family domains

Family No. (Child's name)	Father			Mother			Child		
	To child	To spouse	To grand-parent(s)	To child	To spouse	To grand-parent(s)	To father	To mother	To grand-parent(s)
1 (Yu)	PT	PT	FY1	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
2 (Jie)	FY1	FY1	/	PT	PT	/	FY1/PT	FY1/PT	/
3 (Yi)	FY1/PT	FY1	FY1	FY1/PT	FY1	FY1	FY1/PT	FY1/PT	FY1
4 (You)	PT	FY1	FY1	PT	FY1	FY1	PT	PT	PT
5 (Yue)	PT	PT	/	PT	PT	/	PT	PT	/
6 (Cheng)	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	FY3	PT	PT	PT
7 (Han)	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	FY1	PT	PT	PT
8 (Mu)	PT	FY1	/	PT	FY1	/	PT	PT	/

Grandparents in this table are those who lived together with the focal child in the host cities.