



# Family Language Policies of Vietnamese–Australian Families

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## Abstract

This study aimed to investigate reported family language policies (quy tắc sử dụng ngôn ngữ cho gia đình) and language maintenance practices among Vietnamese–Australian parents. This mixed-methods study collected 151 Vietnamese–Australian parents' responses to close- and open-ended questions within an online questionnaire that was available both in English and Vietnamese. Bivariate analyses and logistic regression were conducted to explore associations between family language policies and factors related to demographics and Spolsky's language policy theory. Content analysis was undertaken in NVivo to investigate family language policies. One-third of the participants (35.6%) reported to have a family language policy and 72.5% of those with a policy indicated that they consistently implemented their policy. Significant factors associated with having a family language policy were parents' higher Vietnamese proficiency, more Vietnamese language use with their children, and intention of future residence in Vietnam. The four identified language policies were as follows: (1) using Vietnamese with the nuclear family (FLP1), (2) Vietnamese outside the nuclear family (FLP2), (3) English at home (FLP3), and (4) English outside the home (FLP4). Some families used more than one of these concurrently. This is one of the first large-scale mixed-method studies to explore family language policies, and the first to explore this issue with Vietnamese-speaking families in Australia. Many Vietnamese–Australian families do not explicitly have a family language policy aimed at maintaining Vietnamese at home; therefore, the Vietnamese–Australian community is at risk of a shift toward English language dominance and home language loss. As a result, the benefits of multilingualism within the Vietnamese–Australian community may be lost without support from the government and community to maintain their home language.

## Keywords

- ▶ language policy
- ▶ Spolsky's language
- ▶ demographics
- ▶ Vietnamese–Australian parents

## Introduction

More than 7,000 languages are spoken around the world and more than half of the world's population is multilingual.<sup>1,2</sup> In countries where English is a dominant language like the

United States or Australia, one in five people speaks a home language other than English.<sup>3,4</sup> Multilingualism is associated with a vast range of benefits and has not been found to negatively impact children's academic or socioemotional

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outcomes at school.<sup>5</sup> The widely known advantages of multilingualism include greater career opportunities, better familial cohesion, increased understanding and acceptance of different cultures, sense of identity, connection to culture, and enhanced executive brain function.<sup>6–8</sup> Multilingualism can be achieved through learning a second (or subsequent) language or by maintaining home language(s) in addition to the dominant societal language. While in many places, multilingualism is supported by both governments and society (e.g., Switzerland),<sup>9</sup> home language maintenance frequently remains the responsibility of parents.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is essential that parents be supported with strategies to maintain home languages if these benefits are to be realized. Previously, researchers have suggested that children's home language maintenance, apart from being linked with child and community factors,<sup>11</sup> is strongly associated with parents' home language use, attitudes toward the home language, and the presence of a family language policy.<sup>12–14</sup> This paper specifically investigates the presence and types of family language policies among the Vietnamese–Australian community.

### Family Language Policy

Family language policy refers to both explicit and overt planning (e.g., stated rules and strategies)<sup>15</sup> and the implicit and covert process (e.g., parents talking and reading books to children or watching TV programs in the home language),<sup>16</sup> regarding language use within the home domain by family members. For most multilingual families, the decision of which language to be used in different communicative situations is not always an easy process.<sup>17</sup> A common practice is that families choose to prioritize the dominant language over the home language. Home language should be used among family members or the speakers of that language to be maintained. Families who have been successful in maintaining home language are often those who have deliberate plans to teach their children the home language and explicit rules related to the use of languages by family members.<sup>15,20</sup> These families also have implicit management strategies directing their children to activities that promote the acquisition of and positive attitudes toward home language and culture.<sup>20,21</sup> While limited research has been undertaken to explore factors associated with these families having a language policy, research about home language maintenance has examined factors related to demographics and language policy including language practices, ideologies, and management.<sup>14,22</sup> These factors will be investigated in relation with the presence of family language policy in this study. In contrast to explicit and implicit management are “laissez-faire policies,”<sup>23</sup> which refer to the attitudes of the families of not interfering with the children's language choice. Laissez-faire policies can ultimately result in children shifting to the majority language in contexts where the home language is not the dominant language used in society.

Vietnamese–Australian parents are among the 300,000 Vietnamese speakers in Australia, accounting for 1.2% of the country's population.<sup>3</sup> The first wave of Vietnamese immi-

gration to Australia occurred in the 1970s to 1980s with most people being refugees. The second wave saw more economic immigrants coming to Australia for education and/or employment as part of the Australian Government's skilled migrant program.<sup>24</sup> The Vietnamese diaspora is presently experiencing a shift to the second and third generations, where, like in many other migrant communities who have been in a country for two to three generations, home language is at risk of being lost.<sup>10</sup>

### Spolsky's Language Policy Theory

Studies of family language policy are often informed by Spolsky's language policy theory<sup>22</sup> which outlines the following three multidirectional aspects: (1) language practices, (2) language ideologies, and (3) language management. Language practices refer to the proficiency and use of a language by family members. Language practices are under the influence of language ideologies, the beliefs and attitudes of the family toward the use of that language. Language management includes the efforts and the policies at work related to the practice of the language which are affected by language ideologies and impact language practices. Previous studies with immigrant families, including Vietnamese–Australian families, demonstrated the association between parents' attitudes toward home language maintenance, as well as between their language policies and the families' successful maintenance of their home language (s).<sup>12,25</sup> Therefore, if families are to be successful in maintaining home languages in English dominant societies, the following two things are needed: (1) a positive attitude toward language maintenance, and (2) a family language policy to guide the maintenance of home language within the family.

Studies in family language policy under the light of Spolsky's theoretical model have recently explored the language practices, ideologies, and management in families from different immigrant communities including Mexican, Iranian, Korean, and Chinese families in the United States,<sup>26–29</sup> Iranian, Ethiopian, and Colombian families in New Zealand,<sup>30,31</sup> Russian families in Israel,<sup>21</sup> and Japanese families in Australia.<sup>32</sup> Most studies supported Spolsky's theory in illustrating the multidirectional links among the three aspects of family language policy. Findings from previous studies also indicated that parents wish to pass on the home language to their children (language ideology).<sup>26–29</sup> The link between the presence of family language policies and home language maintenance points to the need for supporting families in their language management including an explicit family language policy.

Only a few studies have investigated world-wide immigrants' family language policies on a large scale and the factors that are linked to them.<sup>29</sup> The current study explored the language policies of Vietnamese–Australian families and factors associated with the presence of these policies. Understanding factors in relation to the families' having a family language policy, as well as the specific policies used by Vietnamese–Australian families will assist parents, educators, speech-language pathologists, and pediatricians to support children's language development in their home

language (e.g., Vietnamese) and the dominant language (e.g., English).

## Research Questions

The aim of this paper is to investigate reported family language policies among Vietnamese–Australian families, in particular, factors that are associated with the presence of family language policies, specifically the two questions listed below:

1. How do factors related to demographics, language practices, language ideologies, and language management affect Vietnamese–Australian parents' language policies?
2. What are Vietnamese–Australian families' language policies in relation to home language maintenance?

## Method

This study reports on quantitative and qualitative data collected via a questionnaire. Data regarding children's language proficiency, use and family language policy were obtained via parent report. Previous research has identified the reliability of parents as accurate reporters of their children's language proficiency across multiple languages and their communicative competence when compared with children's results on a multilingual standardized norm-referenced assessment.<sup>33</sup>

## Participants

A total of 151 parents with Vietnamese heritage who were living in Australia completed a questionnaire in English or Vietnamese. The English questionnaire was completed by 108 parents (online = 108; paper = 0) and the Vietnamese questionnaire by 43 parents (online = 27; paper = 16). These parents had children aged from 1 to 18 years (mean = 10.28 years, standard deviation [SD] = 4.58). The majority of the participants ( $n = 114$ , 76.0%) were females and 36 (24.0%) were males. The average age of the parents was 40.96 years ( $SD = 6.49$ , range = 25–69 years). Participants lived in all six states in Australia (i.e., New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania) and one of the two territories (i.e., Australian Capital Territory). Most parents were born in Vietnam (94.7%), were first generation immigrants (86.7%), had been living in Australia for an average period of 14.83 years ( $SD = 9.68$ , range = 2–34 years), and spoke Vietnamese as their first language (97.3%). The questionnaire was designed and circulated in a random sampling manner to ensure the involvement of Vietnamese–Australian families of different cultural and dialect backgrounds. The majority (92.6%) had a higher education qualification (i.e., bachelor's degree or above) and 72.5% worked as professionals or managers. The high ratio of participants who were professional and who had a higher education qualification could be due to the nature of convenience data collection method which recruited participants using social media and snowballing from the research team's networks using the online survey, increasing accessibility among people with computer and internet access. Therefore, the participants in this study are more representative of the second-

wave Vietnamese migrants to Australia (economic migrants) than the first wave of migrants from the South of Vietnam who came to Australia in the postwar era.

## Measures

### Questionnaire

The study used the second part of the VietSpeech questionnaire created by considering a literature review of factors affecting home language maintenance<sup>34</sup> and established surveys.<sup>35–38</sup> The development of the whole questionnaire, and the results of the first part of the questionnaire is detailed in.<sup>34</sup> The second part of the questionnaire was designed to ask parents of children under the age of 18 years questions related to family demographics, family language use and preference, family language policies and rules, and attitudes toward home language maintenance.<sup>14,30</sup> The question group on family language policies and rules included a question of whether or not the parents maintained a set of rules around which language to be used in different contexts or situations by family members and an open-ended question asking them to describe their family language policies and rules. The English questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese by the first author who is a translator accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).

### Factors Affecting Parents Having Family Language Policies

The factors that were considered relating to Vietnamese–Australian families' having language policies included demographic factors and language policy factors as outlined by Spolsky's language policy theory,<sup>22</sup> namely, language practices, language ideologies, and language management.

*Demographic factors:* demographic factors were made up of children's age and parent-related factors including age, gender, education, income, migration status, parent–child cohesion, family composition, and the availability of community meeting places. For analysis education was recoded from the original eight-category parameter into three categories: lower education (an advanced diploma, certificate, year 12, year 10, or below), bachelor's degree, and postgraduate education (graduate diploma/certificate or postgraduate degree). Income referred to the total income participants received per week (from 1 = nil income, 2 = \$1–399 per week, to 7 = \$3,000 or more per week). Migration status was an ordinal variable referring to parents' length of time living in English-speaking countries. Parent–child cohesion was explored through a group of questions adapted from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES) IV Balanced Cohesion subscale. These questions asked parents to what extent they agreed or disagreed about the connectedness and support between family members (e.g., family members support to each other in difficult times), on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree; 7 items;  $\alpha = 0.93$ ). The availability of meeting places was explored through a question asking parents whether there was a community meeting place.

**Language practice factors:** language practice factors refer to parents' language proficiency and language use. Parents' language proficiency in English and Vietnamese was measured in four skills as follows: (1) speaking, (2) understanding, (3) reading, and (4) writing and on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all, 2 = not well, 3 = average, 4 = well, and 5 = very well; 4 items;  $\alpha = 0.95$ ). Higher Vietnamese and English language proficiency is represented by a higher score and lower proficiency by a lower score. Parents' language use was comprised of parents' language use with their child and parents' language use in social situations including with different people (including with family members), in different social situations, and with different communicative media. Parents' language use with their child was examined using items adapted from Tannenbaum<sup>38</sup> including nine different situations (e.g., "You go to the museum with your child and talk with him/her about the exhibits"). The variable was measured using a 5-point scale (1 = English always, 2 = English and Vietnamese equally, 3 = Vietnamese always, 4 = other language, and 5 = not applicable). A mean score was reached by averaging options 1 to 3 for each question (and excluding options 4 and 5). Parents' language use in social situations included parents' language use with different people which was measured through 13 questions adapted from Park<sup>37</sup> (e.g., what language/s do you use with Vietnamese friends?), in different social situations through 8 questions (e.g., What language/s do you use in Vietnamese restaurants?), and with different communicative media through 8 questions (e.g., What language/s do you use when watching TV?). The parents reported their language use using a 7-point scale (1 = English always, 2 = mostly English, sometimes Vietnamese, 3 = English and Vietnamese equally, 4 = mostly Vietnamese, sometimes English, 5 = Vietnamese always, 6 = other language, and 7 = not applicable). A mean score was calculated by averaging options 1 to 5 for each question (and excluding options 6 and 7). In both measurements, more use of Vietnamese is represented by a higher score and more use of English by a lower one.

**Language ideology factors:** language ideology factors were comprised of parents' attitudes toward language maintenance; perceptions of cultural identity; belief in the importance of maintaining Vietnamese culture, value, and language; belief that home language enhances relative bonds; belief that home language increases career options; belief in the importance of children's English language maintenance; and belief in the role of first language in second language learning. Parents' attitudes and beliefs toward Vietnamese language maintenance were examined through questions adapted from Becker.<sup>39</sup> These questions asked parents how important it was for their child to maintain the ability to speak, understand, read, and write Vietnamese (4 items;  $\alpha = 0.94$ ) on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all important*, 2 = *somewhat important*, 3 = *important*, 4 = *very important*, 5 = *extremely important*). Parents' perceptions of cultural identity were measured by responses to a question asking whether the participants considered themselves more Vietnamese (1) or Australian (5) on a 5-point scale.

**Language management factors:** factors related to language management included children's attendance of Vietnamese language school, frequency of parents' visits to Vietnam, parents' intention of future residence in Vietnam, the presence of family language policies and rules, vicinity to the Vietnamese community, and attendance of community events. Children's attendance of Vietnamese language in school is examined via a question asking parents how often their child goes to Vietnamese language school. The questions related to parents' connections with Vietnam asked if they had an intention of living in Vietnam in the future and whether or not they frequently visited Vietnam. The questions of frequency of community event attendance and vicinity to a Vietnamese community asked parents how often they attended community events (0 = never, 1 = yearly, 2 = monthly, 3 = fortnightly, and 4 = weekly) and whether or not they lived close to a Vietnamese community, respectively.

### Procedure

The online and paper questionnaire, available in both English and Vietnamese, was circulated via personal and professional contacts and social media using convenience and snowball sampling. The data retrieved from paper questionnaires were entered into the online format. Vietnamese answers were translated into English by two English–Vietnamese bilingual research assistants and the translations were checked by the first author who held NAATI accreditation.

### Data Analysis

#### Quantitative Analysis

Missing data across all variables were from 0.7 to 11.9%. Specifically, data were missing for the following variables: presence of a family language policy (total  $n = 146$ ), parent education level ( $n = 130$ ), living with grandparents ( $n = 140$ ), what language/s do your children speak? ( $n = 139$ ), what language/s do you encourage your child/children to speak at home? ( $n = 143$ ), what language/s does your partner encourage your child/children to speak at home? ( $n = 138$ ), number of children living at home ( $n = 142$ ), how much have you and your partner discussed which languages to speak to your child/children? ( $n = 145$ ), do you and your partner have differences of opinion about which language/s to use with your child/children? ( $n = 143$ ), do you encourage your child/children to speak Vietnamese at home? ( $n = 144$ ), do you read Vietnamese books with your child/children? ( $n = 144$ ), do you teach your child/children to read Vietnamese? ( $n = 143$ ), do you teach your child/children to write Vietnamese? ( $n = 140$ ), play Vietnamese songs at home? ( $n = 144$ ), watch Vietnamese TV programs/movies/videos together with your family? ( $n = 143$ ), attend Vietnamese cultural events together with your family? ( $n = 144$ ), visit Vietnam together with your family? ( $n = 143$ ), how often do/does your child/children attend Vietnamese language school? ( $n = 149$ ), how important do you think it is for your child/children to speak with courtesy (e.g., using honorifics such as *đạ, vâng, ạ, thưa, xin, ...*)? ( $n = 143$ ), how often do you talk to your child/children about Vietnamese courtesy rules?

( $n = 144$ ), and how important do you think attending Vietnamese cultural events would be for your family to maintain Vietnamese language? ( $n = 144$ ). Except for categorical variables, such as education and gender, missing data were imputed using the complete dataset ( $n = 151$ ), with the maximum likelihood Expectation–Maximization (EM) method in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program Version 25.<sup>40</sup>

Chi-square analysis (used when both variables are categorical) and analysis of variance (ANOVA; used when one variable is categorical and the other is continuous) were conducted in SPSS<sup>40</sup> to whether there were significant differences between groups in relation to having a family language policy on a range of demographic and language policy factors. Welch value was tested in cases where the homogeneity of variance was violated. Significant factors from the bivariate analyses were included simultaneously in a binary logistic regression model to examine the relative association of the significant factors with the likelihood that parents would report that they had a family language policy. Odds ratios were determined for each of the factors where an odds ratio greater than 1 indicated a higher chance of having a family policy and an odds ratio less than 1 was an indicator of a lower chance of having a family language policy.

### Extended Response Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was conducted in NVivo<sup>41</sup> to identify the main themes in family language policies and classify the policies into different categories. Each main theme was comprised of several subthemes. The total number of references was summed up and percentage of references of each policy per the total number, as well as per families, was also calculated to examine the popularity of each policy.

## Results

One-third of the participants (35.6%) reported that they had a language policy or set of rules about which languages are used by their family in different places and situations. Of these, 72.5% ( $n = 37$ ) indicated that they consistently enforced their family language policy or rules and 27.5% ( $n = 14$ ) indicated that they sometimes reinforced their family's rules. The participants rated their belief in the importance of maintaining Vietnamese culture, values, and language as an average of 4.27 ( $SD = 1.14$ ; range = 1–5) on a 1 to 5 scale (1 = not at all important and 5 = extremely important).

### Factors Affecting Vietnamese–Australian Families' Language Policies

The presence of a family language policy was associated with a range of factors related to parents' demographics and language policy.

#### Bivariate Analysis

The bivariate relationships between parents' having family language policy and a range of demographic and language policy factors are shown in ►Table 1.

#### Demographic Factors

Parents who had lived in English-speaking countries longer were more likely to report having a family language policy, ( $F [1,144] = 6.62$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ; ►Table 1).

#### Language Practice Factors

Parents who had higher Vietnamese proficiency ( $F [1,144] = 5.68$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ), higher use of Vietnamese with their children ( $F [1,144] = 13.63$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.09$ ), higher use of Vietnamese in social situations ( $F [1,144] = 13.00$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.08$ ), a partner whose first language was Vietnamese ( $\chi^2 = 3.95$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and a partner with high levels of proficiency in Vietnamese ( $F [1,144] = 6.00$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ) were all more likely to report having a family language policy (►Table 1).

#### Language Ideology Factors

Parents who held the belief that home language enhanced bonds with relatives (Welch's  $F [1,144] = 9.92$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.06$ ), home language helped career opportunities ( $F [1,144] = 6.92$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ ), and home language supported second-language learning ( $F [1,144] = 16.69$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.10$ ) were more likely to report having a family language policy (►Table 1).

#### Language Management Factors

Parents who reported an intention of going back to Vietnam in the future for residence ( $\chi^2 = 12.03$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ) and who discussed Vietnamese courtesy rules within the family (Welch's  $\chi^2 = 11.32$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ) were more likely to report having a family language policy (►Table 1).

### Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

Factors identified as significantly associated with parents' having a family language policy from the bivariate analyses were simultaneously included in a binary logistic regression model to identify their relative importance in predicting parents' having family language policy (►Table 2). Binary logistic regression results showed that the overall model with all the significant factors from bivariate analyses was significant in differentiating parents who reported and did not report having a language policy ( $\chi^2 [12] = 46.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The Goodness of Fit Test by Hosmer and Lemeshow also indicated that the overall model was a good fit of the data ( $\chi^2 [8] = 8.59$ ,  $p = 0.38$ ). There were three factors significantly associated with the presence of a family language policy. Specifically, parents who had higher Vietnamese proficiency were more likely to report having a family language policy (odds ratio [OR] = 6.38;  $p = 0.04$ ). Parents who used more Vietnamese language with their children were also more likely to report having a family language policy (OR = 3.69;  $p = 0.03$ ). Parents who reported having no intention of future residence in Vietnam (OR = 0.23,  $p = 0.04$ ) or who reported feeling unsure about their intention of future residence in Vietnam (OR = 0.17,  $p = 0.01$ ) were less likely to have a family language policy. The model as a whole explained 31.7% (Cox and Snell  $R^2$ ) to 43.1% (Nagelkerke's  $R^2$ ) of the variance in the family language policy status.

**Table 1** Bivariate associations between presence of family language policy and related factors ( $n = 151$ )

Factors			Presence of family language policy	<i>n</i>
Demographic/ personal	Child	Age	Welch's $F(1, 138.66) = 0.29$	146
		Attending Vietnamese language school	$F(1, 144) = 0.56$	146
	Parent	Age	Welch's $F(1, 134.56) = 0.56$	146
		Gender	$\chi^2(1, n = 146) = 1.00$	146
		Education	$\chi^2(2, n = 146) = 3.44$	146
		Income	$F(1, 144) = 1.60$	146
		Partner's age	$F(1, 144) = 8.63$	146
		Length of stay in English-speaking country	Welch $F(1, 123.46) = 7.41^b$	146
		Parent-child cohesion	$F(1, 144) = 3.16$	146
		Family	Living with relatives	$\chi^2(1, n = 140) = 0.28$
	Presence of siblings	$F(1, 144) = 0.72$	146	
	Community	Availability of community meeting places	$\chi^2(2, n = 145) = 3.13$	145
Language practices	Parent	Vietnamese proficiency	<b>Welch <math>F(1, 141.55) = 8.22^b</math></b>	146
		English proficiency	$F(1, 144) = 0.56$	146
		Partner's first language	$\chi^2(1, n = 122) = 3.95^a$	122
		Partner's Vietnamese proficiency	<b>Welch <math>F(1, 133.85) = 7.20^b</math></b>	146
		Partner's English proficiency	$F(1, 144) = 0.14$	146
		Vietnamese language use with children	<b><math>F(1, 144) = 13.63^c</math></b>	146
		Vietnamese language use in social situations	<b><math>F(1, 144) = 13.00^c</math></b>	146
Language ideologies	Parent	Perceptions of cultural identity	$F(1, 144) = 1.32$	146
		Belief in the importance of maintaining Australian culture, value, language	$F(1, 144) = 0.35$	146
		Belief in the importance of maintaining Vietnamese culture, value, language	$F(1, 144) = 2.18$	146
		Belief that home language helps relative bonds	<b>Welch <math>F(1, 125.43) = 9.92^b</math></b>	146
		Belief that home language boosts career options	<b><math>F(1, 144) = 6.92^b</math></b>	146
		Belief in role of 1st on 2nd language learning	<b><math>F(1, 144) = 16.69^c</math></b>	146
Language management	Parent	Regular visit to Vietnam	$\chi^2(1, N = 146) = 0.50$	146
		Intention of future residence in Vietnam	<b><math>\chi^2(2, n = 146) = 12.03^b</math></b>	146
		Discussion of Vietnamese courtesy rules	<b>Welch <math>F(1, 121.89) = 12.78^b</math></b>	144
		Vicinity to Vietnamese community	Fisher's exact test = 1.21	146
		Frequency of community event attendance	$F(1, 144) = 0.11$	146

Note: Bold values are statistically significant factors.

<sup>a</sup> $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>b</sup> $p < 0.01$ .

<sup>c</sup> $p < 0.001$ .

### Vietnamese–Australian Families' Language Policies

In total, 52 families reported having a family language policy and 92 policies were described in the open-ended questions, meaning that most families reported using more than one policy concurrently. Among the language policies described by the families who had a family language policy, four common themes were identified from the content analysis.

These included using Vietnamese with nuclear family (FLP1), Vietnamese outside nuclear family (FLP2), English at home (FLP3), and English outside the home (FLP4; ▶Table 3). Policies were most frequently in relation to the use of Vietnamese, with English receiving less-specific attention in the specification of language rules within the families. Of the 92 policies described, FLP1 was mentioned most often by

**Table 2** Binary logistic regression model of the significant bivariate factors for parents' having family language policy ( $n = 122$ )

			Presence of family language policy: no (0: reference category) vs. yes (1)
Factors			Odds ratio [95% CI]
Demographic/ personal	Parent	Length of stay in English speaking countries	1.04 [.97–1.11]
Language practices	Parent	Vietnamese proficiency	<b>6.38<sup>a</sup> [1.06–38.34]</b>
		Partner's first language	1.30 [0.03–66.47]
		Partner's Vietnamese proficiency	0.71 [0.24–2.11]
		Vietnamese language use with child	<b>3.69<sup>a</sup> [1.12–12.11]</b>
Language ideologies	Parent	Vietnamese language use in social situations	1.97 [0.59–6.60]
		Belief that home language helps maintaining bonds with relatives	1.53 [0.91–2.57]
		Belief that home language helps career options	1.18 [0.81–1.70]
Language management	Parent	Belief in role of first on second language learning	1.18 [0.79–1.75]
		Discussion of Vietnamese courtesy rules	1.54 [0.90–2.64]
		Intention of future residence in Vietnam (no vs. yes)	<b>0.23<sup>a</sup> [.05-.94]</b>
		Intention of future residence in Vietnam (not sure vs. yes)	<b>0.17<sup>a</sup> [0.04–0.66]</b>

Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval.

Note: Bold values are statistically significant factors.

<sup>a</sup> $p < 0.05$ .

families ( $n = 47$ , 51.09%) and was also mentioned by the majority of families having a language policy ( $n = 42$ ; 85.71%). FLP2 was mentioned 24 times and was the policy of 22 families, accounting for 48.98% of the families. FLP3 and FLP 4 had similar numbers of 10 and 11 mentions and were the policies of 20.41 and 22.45% of the families, respectively (see **Table 3** for specific examples of each type of family language policy).

## Discussion

This study investigated the presence and type of family language policies within Vietnamese–Australian families and factors associated with the having a family language policy. While the families had a strong belief in the importance of maintaining Vietnamese culture, values, and language, just one-third of the families reported having a family language policy. This is in keeping with other studies which have found that parents wish to maintain home language for their children (language ideology) but this is not always reflected in their language use (language practices) or the presence of consistently enforced family language policies (language management).<sup>30</sup> The positive association between having a family language policy, Vietnamese proficiency and use, and intention of living in Vietnam in the future demonstrated that circular migration<sup>42</sup> is a large driving force behind home language maintenance among the Vietnamese community in Australia. Thus, these findings highlight the need for health professionals to support home language maintenance among

families who have permanently migrated to Australia, as these families are most at risk of home language loss.

The findings of the current study align with Spolsky's language policy theory,<sup>22</sup> in which language practices and language management are interrelated. The presence of a language policy is associated with the family's language use and proficiency.<sup>14</sup> The study echoed previous studies in that parents' explicit language management including having policies related to language use is linked to parents' more frequent use of the home language with their children.<sup>14,15,20</sup> Previous research in home language maintenance among the first wave of migrants within the Australian–Vietnamese community found that Vietnamese was mostly used at home with parents, rather than in public domains, and English competence was gained at the expense of Vietnamese proficiency.<sup>43</sup> The current study provided further insights by pointing to the relationship between parents' proficiency and use of Vietnamese at home and the family language policies of the second wave of migrants within the Australian–Vietnamese community.

Having a family language policy was also significantly related to Vietnamese–Australian parents' intention of future residence in Vietnam. Parents who planned to go back to Vietnam in the future were more likely to have a set of rules of what language to be used in different situations. This supported findings from previous studies among different immigrant communities including Farsi speakers in the United Kingdom,<sup>44</sup> and Spanish and Korean speakers in the United States.<sup>26,45</sup> The concern arising from this finding is if

**Table 3** Vietnamese-Australian Families' Language Policies

Theme	Subtheme	Examples	Number of mentions	Percentage of total policies mentioned (n = 92)	Number of families	Percentage of total families (n = 49)
FLP1: Vietnamese with nuclear family			47	51.09	42	85.71
	1. Vietnamese at home	"Speaking Vietnamese at home"	14	15.22	14	28.57
	2. Vietnamese always or required to use Vietnamese	"Always speaking Vietnamese at home"	14	15.22	14	28.57
	3. Encouraging children to speak Vietnamese	"Encouraging them to speak Vietnamese at home"	6	6.52	6	12.24
	4. Learning or reading Vietnamese with parent	"Reading books in Vietnamese"	6	6.52	6	12.24
	5. Vietnamese with parents	"Speaking Vietnamese with parents"	3	3.26	3	6.12
	6. Vietnamese at meal times	"Speaking to parents in Vietnamese and Vietnamese only at dinner table"	2	2.17	2	4.08
	7. Vietnamese between siblings	"No English communication between two twin sons"	1	1.09	1	2.04
	8. Speaking Vietnamese when parents speak Vietnamese to them	"When we talk to our children in Vietnamese, they will need to try to talk to us in Vietnamese"	1	1.09	1	2.04
FLP2: Vietnamese outside nuclear family			24	26.09	22	48.98
	1. Vietnamese with family friends and Vietnamese-speaking people	"When gathering with other Vietnamese speakers, speaking Vietnamese as much as possible"	11	11.96	10	20.41
	2. Vietnamese with relatives	"Speaking Vietnamese with grandpa"	9	9.78	8	16.33
	3. Attending cultural events	"Participating in cultural events"	1	1.09	1	2.04
	4. Taking children to Vietnam as much as possible	"We take the kids back to Vietnam as much as we can"	1	1.09	1	2.04
	5. Trying to speak Vietnamese at Vietnamese language school	"Trying to speak Vietnamese all the time at Vietnamese language school"	1	1.09	1	2.04
	6. Using Vietnamese titles to refer to Vietnamese relatives	"Referring to Vietnamese relatives by Vietnamese titles"	1	1.09	1	2.04
FLP3: English at home			10	10.87	10	20.41
	1. Vietnamese with mother, speaking English with father	"She always speaks Vietnamese to mum and English to dad"	2	2.17	2	4.08
	2. English or Vietnamese between siblings	"They choose to speak either Vietnamese or English to one another"	2	2.17	2	4.08
	3. English only at home when father is at home	"When my husband is at home, we speak English only so he can understand"	1	1.09	1	2.04
	4. Habit of speaking English	"We have the habit of speaking English most of the time"	1	1.09	1	2.04
	5. Mixing English and Vietnamese acceptable due to weak Vietnamese	"Mixed Vietnamese and English is acceptable due to lack of Vietnamese vocabularies"	1	1.09	1	2.04
	6. Father speaking English and Vietnamese	"Mum speaks Vietnamese all the time. Dad speaks English and Vietnamese"	1	1.09	1	2.04
	7. Only Vietnamese or English, not mixed language	"We have to speak the whole idea in one language, either Vietnamese or English"	1	1.09	1	2.04



**Table 3** (Continued)

Theme	Subtheme	Examples	Number of mentions	Percentage of total policies mentioned (n = 92)	Number of families	Percentage of total families (n = 49)
	8. English when visitor is at home	"Speaking English if there's a visitor at home"	1	1.09	1	2.04
FLP4: English outside the home			11	11.96	11	22.45
	1. English with friends at school, outside and with English-speaking people	"Kids speak English to their friends outside home or at school, etc..."	7	7.61	7	14.29
	2. Can speak English with parents when outside	"Outside: depending on the situation, kids can speak English to parents"	2	2.17	2	4.08
	3. English at mixed gatherings	"When with combination of Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese speakers, speaking English"	1	1.09	1	2.04
	4. English with other children when in Vietnam	"If we are in Vietnam, we try to speak with our children as much as we can"	1	1.09	1	2.04

Note: Participants were able to provide more than one response, while some participants did not provide an answer. Percentages are expressed as the percentage of total responses received.

circular migration<sup>43</sup> is linked to the presence of a language policy, in circumstances where families are permanent migrants and do not plan to return to Vietnam (e.g., due to reasons including political considerations), there is a risk of adverse effects on home language maintenance.

In terms of the presence of family language policy, it is notable that only one-third of the families (35.6%) had a set of rules related to which language to be used in different situations and two-thirds of those families (72.5%) are consistently enforced the rules. Previous studies including that of Japanese–Australian families in Australia have found that home language maintenance is significantly associated with the presence and consistent reinforcement of a family language policy,<sup>32</sup> the low number of families having a language policy suggests the need to raise the awareness of its importance for home language maintenance and to equip families with the skills to develop a sustainable home language policy that meets to needs and desires of their family.

The majority of families who had a language policy reported that their policies were related to the use of Vietnamese with parents and siblings and nearly half of the families had policies related to the use of Vietnamese outside the family with Vietnamese-speaking family friends or people. These findings are in keeping with previous studies in other home language groups that the use of home language is primarily at home but is also expanded to home language communities.<sup>19,46</sup>

Among those who reported to have a policy about the use of English at home, only a small number used the one-parent-one-language (OPOL) policy<sup>32,47</sup> which sets up for English to be used with one parent and Vietnamese with the other. The rest of the families used English at home for reasons including using "English as a habit," the "father speaking/being able to speak English," "siblings speaking English," and "lack of Vietnamese vocabulary." These prac-

tices are not uncommon and have been reported by previous studies in home language maintenance.<sup>19,48</sup> Despite its common use in families where parents come from different language backgrounds, the OPOL policy has been met with criticism in language maintenance research as it compartmentalizes languages, viewing bilingualism as double monolingualism rather than supporting the interlanguage that occurs in bilingual development, it does not allow for children to hear adult conversation model of the home language and has not been found to be sufficient in achieving bilingual development among children.<sup>49</sup> Researchers suggest that if OPOL is to be successful, the majority-language speaking parent must also show support for the minority language and commitment to raising their child bilingually.<sup>47</sup> Despite the limitations, OPOL remains one option for families with parents speaking different home languages.

In terms of the use of Vietnamese and English outside the family, it is notable that the families had clear policies related to the use of Vietnamese in situations when only Vietnamese speakers were present and the use of English when an English speaker was present. This suggests respect to others in English-speaking environments, but also indicates the prioritization of English as the dominant language in social contexts which is common in societies where home languages are the minority languages.<sup>50</sup> The use of English with children in Vietnam mentioned in one family's policy (e.g., "can speak English with children in Vietnam") may suggest the emphasis on the learning and use of English as a foreign language among school children in Vietnam.<sup>51</sup>

## Implications

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses of this study suggest several implications for parents, language educators, speech-language pathologists, physicians, and

other health professionals. Many parents from multilingual backgrounds are unsure about the best ways to approach language development in their children. Some are concerned that raising children bilingual may disadvantage or confuse their children. Families seek advice from health professionals about how best to support their children's multilingual development. Frequently, families are wrongly advised that they should cease speaking their home language, particularly if children have communication difficulties or conditions such as autism spectrum disorder.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, it is essential that health professionals are equipped with the latest evidence to provide appropriate advice to families, as well as to advocate for the presence of family language policy, especially among families with limited home language proficiency via educational resources and consultancy. First, it is important to inform families of the many cognitive, social, emotional, and economic benefits of maintaining home languages<sup>5-7,53-55</sup> and that it does not negatively impact children's academic or socioemotional outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Second, to maintain home language, it is important for families to have a family language policy or a set of rules of which language to be used in different situations, especially for those whose parents' Vietnamese proficiency and use are limited. Third, in order for children to receive strong language models, best practice is for parents to speak to the children in their strongest language. If this is the home language rather than English then parents should not try to speak to their children in English, but rather focus on providing children with a strong language foundation in the home language through their daily language input including educational activities and parent-child interactions. For families with one parent speaking English, prioritization of English use at home for that parent is not recommended given the large amount of input that children receive in English outside of the home. Last, if having a language policy or the will to maintain home language is limited to serve circular migration, home language will be lost among immigrant communities in a matter of time. Home language maintenance, apart from helping cultural and language transmission, could enrich the family linguistic repertoire, acting as a facilitator for family cohesion, as well as promoting the use of different languages for different social functions.<sup>56</sup>

### Limitations of the Study and Future Research

Despite the wide exploration of a range of factors affecting Vietnamese-Australian parents' having a family language policy and the examination of policies in details, this study is limited in several aspects. First, the participants of the study were not representative of all people with Vietnamese heritage living in Australia. They predominantly represented the second wave of Vietnamese migrants to Australia and there were more female and first-generation immigrants with higher education. Though the questionnaires were circulated in both paper and online format and in both English and Vietnamese language to involve parents who had restricted access to internet and low English proficiency, the high number of online and English completed questionnaires suggests the limited participation of low socioeconomic parents. Future research could use stratified method for a more representative sample to specifically investigate the perspectives of first wave migrants, as well as those of low socioeconomic status and compare differences in terms of home language maintenance and family language policies between first and second waves, as well as between middle and low socioeconomic Vietnamese-migrant populations. In this study, though the family language policies were explored qualitatively, the questionnaire format did not allow for an extensive answer and a chance for the researchers to investigate further into the reasons underlying the policies. It is recommended future research uses interview or focus group methods to obtain an in-depth understanding of the policies including their impacts and the related practices. Despite the limitations, this study has provided a picture of the language policies of Vietnamese-Australian families in terms of associated factors and the rules of which language to be used in different situations.

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### Conclusion

The findings of the current study suggest that family language policy is an important element in home language maintenance. The presence of a family language policy, which is part of a family's language management, is interrelated with the family's language practices. Multilingual families who desire to transmit the home language to their children are encouraged to have rules regarding which language can be used in different situations to ensure the use of the home language is maximized at home and among speakers of the home language. For families with one parent speaking English, the home language-speaking parent's consistency in the use of the home language is important in helping the children access both language speaking environments. For families with both parents speaking the home language, having a constantly enforced family language policy together with practices that support the children's acquisition of the home language is essential in facilitating the process of home language maintenance.

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### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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