



# Parental Language Ideologies in English and Affecting Familial Factors in Chongzuo City of Guangxi Border Areas

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## Abstract

Language ideologies play a pivotal role in shaping language use and language learning, particularly in multilingual and multicultural regions such as Chongzuo City. This paper explores the parental language ideologies in English and the intricate relationship between parental language ideologies in English and their impact on familial factors within the context of Chongzuo City in the Guangxi border areas. Through a comprehensive analysis of quantitative data obtained from questionnaires, this study delves into the various language ideologies held by parents residing in this region, focusing specifically on the English language. The findings reveal that parents have a somewhat negative perception of English as a potentially disruptive language. However, they also acknowledge its importance for future opportunities and recognize the need to understand its cultural context. Conversely, parents hold a positive view of English as a language that embraces diversity. They believe that English has evolved through interactions with various languages and cultures. Parents perceive English as relevant but not highly practical in their daily lives within the local context. They feel that their children's bilingual or multilingual skills are not effectively developed through English language learning. Additionally, the study shows that parental education and interactions with schools play a significant role in shaping perceptions of how family language ideology affects the learning of English. Other family-related factors do not appear to have a significant impact. Based on the findings, schools, community organizations, and educators may implement recommendations for career counseling, cultural context education, promotion of linguistic diversity and cultural integration, contextualization of English learning, integration of English and local language learning, and family-school collaboration to enhance language ideology.

## Keywords

Parental Language Ideologies, English, Familial Factors

## 1. Introduction

In the family, how parents or other caregivers perceive the value, rights, status, and usefulness of different languages can explicitly or implicitly influence children's language choices or language learning. This belief about language itself and language use is language ideology (Spolsky, 2018). As a predominant foreign language studied by students in elementary and secondary schools in China, English has always been a controversial topic. The main reason is that students have invested a lot of money and time in learning English, but they are still unable to understand the language

thoroughly and their English proficiency has not improved significantly, and most of them have very few opportunities to use English in their future careers. The family unit, serving as the bedrock for human language learning, stands as the environment in which individuals engage with language over extended periods, thus becoming a critical support system for language preservation and development (Zhang & Shao, 2018). Within this familial framework, parental attitudes and beliefs wield substantial influence over their children's language learning journeys.

The examination of factors that shape family language ideology has been significantly informed by the Dynamic Model of Family Language Policy, a framework developed by Curdt-Christiansen and Huang in 2020, which has garnered widespread recognition and adoption in the field. According to this model, the complex interplay of external factors (Political, Socio-cultural, Economic, and Socio-linguistic) and internal factors (Emotion, Identity, Family culture and tradition, Parental impact belief, and Child agency) play a pivotal role in shaping a family's language ideology. However, in the context of this study, Coleman's family capital theory, proposed in 1988, serves as a valuable lens through which to interpret family background and its relevance to the issue at hand. By adopting Coleman's theory, we can more effectively develop and direct our exploration of familial factors that influence language ideology.

This paper delves into understanding the parental language ideologies towards English and micro-level factors within the family context that impact parental language ideologies. In doing so, a deeper understanding of the intricate web of factors that shape and reshape family bonds in a linguistically diverse world was contributed.

## **2. Related Theories**

### **2.1 Family Capital**

Family capital can be broken down into physical (financial), human, and social capital; it is not a single idea. The family's wealth and income are referred to as the family's physical capital, often referred to as economic capital, especially within the framework of English as a foreign language (EFL). Physical capital can create a high-quality external environment for English learning and is particularly important for studying the relationship between English learning and socio-economic factors. Human capital is an intangible form of capital that is embodied in an individual's knowledge and skills; therefore, human capital in this study is defined as parents' educational background, proficiency in English, and occupation. Parents with different educational backgrounds, proficiency in English, and different occupations may convey different beliefs in the process of their children's language learning. Social capital is mainly reflected in family structure, parent-child interaction, family-community interaction (FCA), and home-school interaction. Parent-child interaction in the family is the key to the transformation of parental human capital within the family; parent-community or school interaction is an important social network for parents to understand schooling and help their children learn; Close ties to the parents of their kids' peers were used to gauge FCA. Parents' efforts to help their kids build their social capital can aid in their academic success. According to this theory, families possess different forms of capital that can impact a child's educational achievements and opportunities.

### **2.2 Three Views on the Role of English in the World**

According to Jeffrey Gil (2016), English can be summarized as English as a destructive language; English as a pluralistic language; and English as an irrelevant language. The three views are the contemporary theory on the attitudes of English as a global language. In defining English as a destructive language, we examine its role in undermining linguistic diversity and cultural heritage through its global dominance, which often leads to the marginalization and extinction of lesser-known languages (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013 ); English can be viewed as a pluralistic language that embraces diverse linguistic influences and cultural elements, evolving through interactions with other languages and cultures over time (Canagarajah, 2005a; Canagarajah, 2005b); English is considered irrelevant in certain contexts due to its limited practicality or cultural disconnection, challenging its significance in specific regions or fields (Fishman, 2000).

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Questions**

This study was undertaken with the primary objective of gaining insight into parental language beliefs regarding the English language and examining how various family-related factors impact these beliefs. Specifically, the study

sought to address the following research inquiries:

- What is the language ideology towards English as perceived by parents?
- What are the familial factors that impact parental language ideologies towards English?
- Based on the findings, what recommendations on parental language ideologies in English and affecting familial factors may be proposed?

### 3.2 Research Approach and Instrument

The research predominantly employed a quantitative research methodology. A questionnaire was utilized to furnish responses to the research questions. There are two sections to the questionnaire. The first section is parents' background, which is also considered a familial factor in the study. Based on the family capital theory, familial factors refer to income, occupation, educational background, the number of kids in the family, the frequency of interaction between parent and children, the frequency of interaction between parent and community, and the frequency of interaction between parent and school. The second section is about parental language ideology towards English.

### 3.3 Research Participant

The research participants were the parents who were drawn from three schools, namely Longzhou Ethnic Middle School, Pingxiang Ethnic Hope Experimental School, and Jiangzhou District No. 2 Middle School. In total, 633 questionnaires were received.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Language Ideology in English as Perceived by Parents in Terms of English as a Destructive Language

Table 1. The Perception of English as a Destructive Language

| Indicators   | Parents        |                     |
|--|----------------|---------------------|
|  | Weighted Mean* | Verbal Description* |
| 1. English, as a globally prevalent language that many people learn, may diminish the significance of other languages.                                 | 2.27           | Disagree            |
| 2. People who do not know English may face unfair treatment or exclusion in education or society.  | 2.16           | Disagree            |
| 3. Promoting the learning of English may pose a threat to local culture and language.  | 1.99           | Disagree            |
| 4. When learning English, feeling inferior may occur if one does not speak it as fluently as their native language, such as Mandarin.                  | 2.13           | Disagree            |
| 5. If English pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary isn't as proficient as speaking Mandarin, it may lead to ridicule from others.                     | 2.04           | Disagree            |
| 6. Having a lower proficiency in English might result in fewer opportunities in future studies or employment compared to others.                       | 2.68           | Agree               |
| 7. Foreigners who speak English are often perceived as having a sense of superiority or privilege.   | 1.95           | Disagree            |
| 8. Emphasizing English as a global language can lead to the gradual disappearance of other languages.  | 1.89           | Disagree            |
| 9. Learning materials, media, and resources related to English predominantly represent the culture and language groups of English-speaking countries.  | 2.35           | Disagree            |
| 10. Learning English to some extent also involves acquiring knowledge about the history, politics, and colonial culture of English-speaking countries. | 2.60           | Agree               |
| Over-all Weighted Mean   | 2.21           | Disagree            |

Notes. \* Legend: 3.26-4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51-3.25 Agree, 1.76-2.50 Disagree, 1.00-1.75 Strongly Disagree

Table 1 illustrates parental language beliefs in English in Chongzuo City. This analysis specifically focuses on the

negative impact of English. Each measure is assessed using a weighted average and associated descriptive wording, aiding in the interpretation of the degree of concurrence or disparity among the respondents.

From the numerical data, it's clear that parents generally have a negative view of English as a language that can harm them. The majority of the indicators have a weighted average that falls into the "disagree" category, suggesting that respondents don't see English as detrimental to language and cultural diversity.

Nonetheless, parents were in consensus about the idea that having a lower proficiency in English might result in fewer opportunities in future studies or employment compared to others (Indicator 6), with an average score of 2.68. Similarly, parents shared the view that learning English to some extent also involves acquiring knowledge about the history, politics, and colonial culture of English-speaking countries (Indicator 10), as indicated by an average score of 2.60.

The results show that parents view English with a mostly neutral to slightly negative effect, rejecting the notion that English is a harmful language leading to the erosion of linguistic diversity and cultural heritage. This implies that the individuals involved in this research acknowledge the significance of upholding their native languages and cultural heritage while acquiring English skills.

## 4.2 Language Ideology in English as Perceived by Parents in Terms of English as a Pluralistic Language

**Table 2. The Perception of English as a Pluralistic Language**

| Indicators  | Parents        |                     |
|---|----------------|---------------------|
|   | Weighted Mean* | Verbal Description* |
| 1. Learning English is an expression of multilingual proficiency, as it involves acquiring an additional language.  | 3.15           | Agree               |
| 2. Even if spoken with an accent, English is generally accepted by others.  | 2.87           | Agree               |
| 3. Learning English can serve as a tool for promoting traditional Chinese culture to the world.   | 2.83           | Agree               |
| 4. Languages are interconnected, so learning English can enhance one's proficiency in Mandarin Chinese.   | 2.88           | Agree               |
| 5. English, like endangered languages or minority languages, should also be encouraged for use.   | 2.77           | Agree               |
| 6. Learning English enables children to develop cross-cultural communication skills, facilitating effective interactions across different cultures and languages. | 3.09           | Agree               |
| 7. Learning English allows children to gain a deeper understanding of language diversity and inclusivity.   | 3.07           | Agree               |
| 8. By learning English, children can communicate with foreigners who speak different languages when the opportunity arises.                                       | 3.02           | Agree               |
| 9. Learning English alongside one's native language, such as Mandarin Chinese, fosters bilingual or multilingual abilities.                                       | 3.10           | Agree               |
| 10. Learning English is equally important as learning other languages and reflects children's linguistic diversity.   | 3.09           | Agree               |
| Over-all Weighted Mean  | 2.99           | Agree               |

Notes. \* Legend: 3.26-4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51-3.25 Agree, 1.76-2.50 Disagree, 1.00-1.75 Strongly Disagree

According to the numerical data provided in Table 2, parents generally hold a favorable view of English as a diverse language. The weighted averages for all the indicators indicate that respondents, on the whole, expressed agreement regarding the significance of fostering linguistic and cultural diversity in the process of learning the English language.

The findings indicate that parents view English as a language that embraces diversity, highlighting the significance of welcoming linguistic and cultural variations within the context of language learning. This positive perception indicates that the participants in this study recognize the value of promoting multilingualism, intercultural communication, and language empowerment in English education.

### 4.3 Language Ideology in English as Perceived by Parents in Terms of English as an Irrelevant Language

**Table 3. The Perception of English as an Irrelevant Language**

| Indicators  | Parents        |                     |
|---|----------------|---------------------|
|   | Weighted Mean* | Verbal Description* |
| 1. English is not highly practical in local daily life.   | 2.63           | Agree               |
| 2. English should not be listed as one of the compulsory examination subjects for Chinese students.   | 2.36           | Disagree            |
| 3. Local job opportunities and career development are not dependent on English proficiency.   | 2.32           | Disagree            |
| 4. Current English learning materials and courses do not align with children's learning goals or needs.   | 2.25           | Disagree            |
| 5. Children's English learning is not integrated with local language learning, and their bilingual or multilingual abilities are not developed. | 2.51           | Agree               |
| 6. Children have limited opportunities to practice English in or outside the classroom, and they rarely use English in their daily lives.       | 2.36           | Disagree            |
| 7. Children are often resistant to learning English and prefer to learn the local language.   | 2.40           | Disagree            |
| 8. Even with English learning, there are still communication barriers in practical use.   | 2.63           | Agree               |
| 9. Supporting the promotion of the local language without the need for extensive English learning.  | 2.13           | Disagree            |
| 10. Schools can offer languages other than English, such as Vietnamese, as an alternative.  | 2.26           | Disagree            |
| Over-all Weighted Mean  | 2.38           | Disagree            |

Note. \* Legend: 3.26-4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51-3.25 Agree, 1.76-2.50 Disagree, 1.00-1.75 Strongly Disagree

Table 3 illustrates how language beliefs regarding English are perceived by parents from selected schools in Chongzuo City, with a particular emphasis on the view that English is not significant. The overall weighted average score of 2.38 suggests that parents generally disagreed with the notion that English is irrelevant.

Based on the numerical data, Indicator 1 indicates that parents are in agreement that English doesn't have significant practical utility in their local daily life, as reflected in the weighted mean score of 2.63. This perception could stem from their limited exposure to English in their immediate surroundings, leading them to perceive a disconnect between the language and its practical application in their daily routines (Phan & Suryani, 2020). Similarly, respondents also concurred that learners face communication obstacles when using English to interact effectively with others, citing linguistic differences or its limited practicality, as indicated by a weighted mean score of 2.63 (Indicator 8). Furthermore, Indicator 5 reveals that parents are in accord with the idea that English learning materials do not effectively incorporate local languages, with a weighted mean of 2.51. This outcome may be attributed to parents perceiving a lack of bilingual or multilingual integration in their children's language learning experiences (Nguyen, 2018).

It is crucial to consider these findings in designing language education policies and curricula. Recognizing the local setting and valuing the preservation of cultural identities and ancestral languages can contribute to establishing a language learning environment that is more encompassing and attuned to the cultural needs of students in Chongzuo City (Wang et al., 2019).

### 4.4 Assessment of Parents on Language Ideology in English and Family Factors

Table 4 displays the evaluation provided by parents regarding the influence of family language ideology on English, considering their family background details in Chongzuo City.

The findings from the chi-square analysis on the assessment of parents-respondents regarding the impact of family language ideology in English and their demographic profile reveal interesting insights. Parents' educational background and parent-school interaction significantly influence their perceptions of the impact of family language ideology in English, whereas other demographic factors, such as income, occupation, English proficiency, the number of children, parent-child interaction, and parent-community interaction, do not show a significant influence.

**Table 4. Factors Influencing Parental Language Ideology towards English**

| Profile                      | Computed $\chi^2$ value | Critical $\chi^2$ value | $\alpha$ | Df  | p-value | Decision                      | Interpretation  |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------|-----|---------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Income                       | 0.96                    | 2.39                    | 0.05     | 632 | 0.43    | Fail to Reject H <sub>0</sub> | Not Significant |
| Occupation                   | 1.21                    | 2.23                    | 0.05     | 632 | 0.31    | Fail to Reject H <sub>0</sub> | Not Significant |
| Educational background       | 3.50                    | 2.39                    | 0.05     | 632 | 0.01    | Reject H <sub>0</sub>         | Significant     |
| Proficiency of English       | 1.68                    | 3.01                    | 0.05     | 632 | 0.19    | Fail to Reject H <sub>0</sub> | Not Significant |
| The number of children       | 0.29                    | 2.62                    | 0.05     | 632 | 0.83    | Fail to Reject H <sub>0</sub> | Not Significant |
| Parent-child interaction     | 2.78                    | 3.01                    | 0.05     | 632 | 0.06    | Fail to Reject H <sub>0</sub> | Not Significant |
| Parent-community interaction | 2.81                    | 3.01                    | 0.05     | 632 | 0.06    | Fail to Reject H <sub>0</sub> | Not Significant |
| Parent-school interaction    | 7.95                    | 3.01                    | 0.05     | 632 | 0.0004  | Reject H <sub>0</sub>         | Significant     |

These findings underscore the importance of considering parents' educational background and involvement with the school when designing language education programs for junior high school students. Engaging parents in language-related activities and providing them with resources to support their children's English language learning can enhance language development and academic performance (Harvard Family Research Project, 2019).

## 5. Conclusion

The study highlights parents' negative perception of English as a destructive language overall but their recognition of its importance for future opportunities and the need to understand its cultural context. On the other hand, parents held a favorable view of English as a pluralistic language. The parents have concurred that English has embraced a wide range of linguistic influences and cultural elements, evolving as a result of interactions with other languages and cultures throughout its history. Interestingly, parents considered English as a relevant language but not highly practical in local daily life, and that children's bilingual or multilingual abilities are not being developed effectively when learning English. Furthermore, parental education and interactions with school shape perceptions regarding the influence of family language ideology on English. Other family factors don't show a significant influence.

Considering the findings, the following recommendations on family language ideology may be proposed.

### 5.1 Career Counseling

Since parents perceive having a lower proficiency in English might result in fewer opportunities in future studies or employment compared to others, schools, and community organizations can offer career counseling services that emphasize the importance of English proficiency in future studies and employment to students. Highlight how English language skills can open doors to a wider range of opportunities. This includes introducing career counseling at an early age, starting from middle school or even earlier. Begin by discussing broad career possibilities and gradually focus on how language skills, including English proficiency, can impact career choices. Schools and community organization also can help students identify career paths that align with their skills and passions, and highlight how English proficiency can enhance their opportunities within those fields.

### 5.2 Cultural Context Education

The perception of learning English to some extent also involves acquiring knowledge about the history, politics, and colonial culture of English-speaking countries indicates incorporating cultural education into English language programs. This can help students, and by extension, their parents, better understand the history, politics, and cultural nuances of English-speaking countries. It can make learning English more meaningful and holistic.

### 5.3 Linguistic Diversity Promotion and Cultural Integration

Given that parents hold a favorable view of English as a pluralistic language and acknowledge its diverse linguistic influences and cultural elements, schools and educators can celebrate linguistic diversity within the context of English learning. Emphasizing that English itself is a product of language evolution and has absorbed elements from various

cultures and languages. Schools and educators can incorporate multicultural and cross-cultural education into English language learning. Highlighting how learning English can be a bridge to understanding and appreciating different cultures and perspectives.

#### 5.4 English Learning Contextualization

Based on the updated information parents see English as relevant but not highly practical in local daily life. Teachers can design English language programs that emphasize practical, real-life applications of English in the local context. Incorporating local scenarios, culture, and community-specific vocabulary into English lessons to make it more relevant to daily life.

#### 5.5 English and Local Language Learning Integration

Building upon the updated information indicating that parents believe children's bilingual or multilingual skills are not effectively developing during English language learning, schools can enhance language acquisition by intertwining English language education with the local language curriculum. This approach can foster the early development of bilingual or multilingual capabilities, rendering language skills more immediately practical and relevant to children's daily experiences.

#### 5.6 Family-School Collaboration for Language Ideology Enhancement

Given that parental education and interactions with the school significantly influence perceptions related to parental language ideology in English, fostering close collaboration between families and schools is essential. To address this, schools can take proactive measures to provide additional support for non-native English-speaking parents, particularly those without a strong educational background, who may face language-related challenges. This support can be designed to boost parents' confidence in guiding their children's language development. Moreover, establishing a regular and open channel of communication between schools and parents. This can include parent-teacher conferences, newsletters, and online platforms where parents can ask questions and share their concerns related to language ideology.

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