



Project Report

Family Language Policy under Unequal Access: Deaf-Hearing Families, Educational Policy, and Communicative Trust in Babahoyo, Ecuador

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Abstract

Family language policy is made not only inside households but also through families' encounters with unequal language regimes. This study examines language policy in ten families in Babahoyo, Ecuador; eight Deaf parents with hearing children and two hearing parents with deaf children. Deaf participants grew up in hearing families and encountered Ecuadorian Sign Language (LSEC) after a period of locally negotiated communication. Twenty-question interviews were conducted by a Deaf interviewer. Thematic analysis shows that parent-child configurations share a formal language mismatch but not equivalent conditions of access: Spanish is institutionally abundant but may remain perceptually inaccessible. LSEC is visually accessible, but its availability depends on particular people and networks. Within Deaf-parent families, children's trajectories diverge: some participate in sustained signed interaction and Deaf networks while others prefer Spanish or resist LSEC. Children also become interpreters and access brokers. Participants nevertheless act as language-policy makers by teaching signs, arranging Deaf social contact, using writing and gesture, setting boundaries with relatives, and imagining bilingual or sign-centered futures. We argue that intergenerational transmission depends partly on a capacity to transmit that was itself unevenly provided or withheld in the previous generation, distinguishes language presence from perceptual access, competent interlocutors, sustained interaction, and communicative trust.

Academic Editor: Firstname
LastnameReceived: date
Revised: date
Accepted: date
Published: date**Citation:** To be added by editorial
staff during production.**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors.
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(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).**Keywords:** Deaf; disability; sign language; family language policy;
home-school relations; communicative trust; inequality; Ecuador

1. Introduction

The Family language policy (FLP) examines how families organize language practices, form beliefs about the value and appropriateness of particular languages, and intervene—explicitly or implicitly—in their use and development. Spolsky's (2012)

distinction among language practices, language ideologies, and language management remains foundational, but subsequent work has shown that these dimensions do not align automatically. Families may value a language that they use only intermittently, pursue strategies that children resist or reinterpret, or alter their practices in response to changes in schooling, mobility, work, and family composition (King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009, 2018; Fogle & King, 2013).

The field has accordingly moved beyond inventories of parental choice. Ecological and critical approaches situate household practices within educational systems, labor markets, migration histories, class relations, racialization, and national language regimes (Curd-Christiansen, 2018; Mirvahedi, 2021). Schools and public institutions shape FLP even when they do not issue directives about language use at home: they distribute literacy, legitimate particular varieties, reward some forms of linguistic competence, and assign communicative labor unevenly across family members (Curd-Christiansen, 2009; Bezcioglu-Göktolga, 2022). A family's apparent language preference may therefore reflect both an ideological position and an adaptation to the resources that its environment makes available. See also Lanza and Lomeu Gomes (2020) for a synthesis of the theoretical and critical approaches to FLP. A systematic review of 411 FLP publications documents the field's expanding thematic and methodological scope while revealing uneven geographical coverage (Gu et al., 2025). The present study contributes evidence from a Deaf-hearing family context in coastal Ecuador; the review itself does not establish the absence of earlier work on signing families.

A relational approach also places child agency, emotion, and trust inside language policy. Children may accept, resist, redirect, or selectively deploy the practices proposed by adults. Parents, in turn, modify their expectations in response to children's preferences, school experiences, and changing social networks. Pride, shame, frustration, obligation, intimacy, and anticipated judgment are not secondary reactions to an otherwise technical process of transmission. They help determine whether interaction is initiated, sustained, repaired, or avoided (Wang, 2023).

These questions are particularly consequential in Latin America, where family repertoires are shaped by long histories of colonial language hierarchy, unequal educational provision, rural-urban mobility, and uneven access to public institutions. For Deaf women, these inequalities may also be gendered: while gender-based violence and economic dependency may further restrict the social networks and institutional resources through which linguistic practices are sustained, access to the public sphere as well as decision-making can be constrained by the intersection of gender and disability. Research on Indigenous and minoritized languages has demonstrated that family decisions cannot be separated from the political and material conditions under which languages become learnable, usable, and valuable. Yet Latin American FLP remains underrepresented in a literature still organized largely around migration to the Global North and around families whose members already possess substantial competence in the languages they are expected to transmit.

The resulting analytical problem concerns capacity as well as preference. Parents can transmit only resources to which they themselves have gained meaningful access, and that access is historically organized. For parents with disabilities, having access to their children and being acknowledged by their families, communities and public institutions as responsible caretakers capable of transmitting valuable knowledge is not a given. In Deaf-hearing families, this makes the relationship between parental capacity and institutional access especially consequential. Intergenerational transmission must therefore be defined as something other than "movement of language from one generation to the next". The capacity to transmit—knowledge, confidence, interlocutors, institutional support, and opportunities for sustained interaction—is itself transmitted, accumulated, interrupted, or withheld across generations. An adequate FLP account must consequently distinguish a language's nominal presence in the environment from

access to that language and from the social conditions that permit it to become a durable family practice.

2. Family Language Policy in Signing Communities

FLP in signing communities makes the distinction between language presence and language access especially visible. Deaf and hearing family members may inhabit the same household while differing in perceptual access to the language most widely used around them (Lillo-Martin & Henner, 2021; Lillo-Martin, Gale, & Chen Pichler, 2023). At the same time, a visually accessible signed language may be absent or thinly represented because relatives have not learned it, competent signers are geographically dispersed, or educational institutions privilege speech and written language (Chen Pichler, 2021; Lieberman, Mitchiner, & Pontecorvo, 2024; Ritmeester et al., 2026). The relevant ecology is therefore not adequately described by counting languages or estimating time in their presence.

Deaf-hearing families also involve more than one intergenerational configuration. First, Deaf children are frequently born into hearing families whose members do not sign (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004; Mitchiner & Batamula, 2021; WFD, 2024). Second, in many communities, deafness, like other disabilities, is considered to interfere with knowledge transmission, which means that hearing family members (e.g. grandparents) or wider systems take over the rearing of hearing children (Powell & Duffy, 2026). Similarly, hearing children of Deaf adults may encounter a signed language early at home while receiving the surrounding spoken language from relatives, schools, peers, and media (Chen Pichler, Lillo-Martin, & Palmer, 2018; Pizer, 2013). Both configurations involve linguistic difference between parent and child, but they are not mirror images: a hearing child may have perceptual access to both the parent's signing and the wider spoken-language environment; a Deaf child may be continuously surrounded by speech without equivalent access while the potentially accessible signed language remains unavailable because the hearing adults are themselves novice learners (Lillo-Martin, Gale, & Chen Pichler, 2023; Lieberman, Mitchiner, & Pontecorvo, 2024).

Scholarship on hearing heritage signers provides one point of connection. Hearing children of Deaf adults can acquire a minoritized signed language in the family while developing the socially dominant spoken language through the wider environment (Chen Pichler, Lillo-Martin, & Palmer, 2018; Isakson, 2018; Papin, 2020). Their trajectories share central concerns with heritage-language research (Montrul, 2016; Pizer, 2013, 2021): unequal input, changing patterns of use, child agency, attrition or maintenance, and the distribution of language across home and public domains. Yet the input provider's history requires additional attention: a Deaf parent's signed input may itself be the outcome of delayed access, interrupted schooling, later contact with Deaf peers, or uneven opportunities to participate in a signing community (Lillo-Martin & Henner, 2021; Chen Pichler, 2021). Work on bimodal bilingual development further demonstrates that signed-spoken bilingualism can inform generative accounts of linguistic representation (Lillo-Martin, de Quadros, & Chen Pichler, 2016), while the broader heritage-language literature identifies variation in input and use as relevant to developmental outcomes (Montrul, 2023; Montrul & Polinsky, 2021). These are connections to the acquisition literature, not grammatical outcomes assessed in the present interviews.

This observation changes the usual temporal architecture of FLP. The relevant history, instead of beginning when an adult becomes a parent, starts with the conditions under which that adult acquired—or was denied—the linguistic resources later available for transmission and the responsibility to care for their own children. The linguistic

input available to heritage sign-language learners is itself an outcome of an intergenerational history of access. Family language policy is therefore intergenerational not only because languages are transmitted to children, but because the capacity to transmit them is itself transmitted or withheld across generations.

A second consequence concerns the communicative labor – what Henner, in various works, has labeled *linguistic carework* (Henner & Robinson 2022, et seq). In settings where schools, health services, workplaces, banks, and government offices do not provide accessible communication, family members develop workarounds. They may use writing, gesture, lipreading, speech, video communication, or informal interpretation. But in this configuration, children may become interpreters or brokers for their parents, sometimes as part of ordinary family reciprocity and sometimes because institutions, or their own families, have transferred responsibility for access to the household (Napier, 2021; Gee et al., 2022). These practices belong within FLP because they affect why families value particular languages, who is expected to learn them, and which communicative futures parents imagine for their children.

A third consequence concerns affect and trust. Repeated misunderstanding, ridicule, or exclusion can make some interlocutors and settings feel unsafe even when communication is technically possible. Conversely, Deaf friendships, community organizations, and relationships with trusted signers can provide interaction in which communication is expected to succeed. Such networks supply more than additional linguistic tokens: they sustain participation, identity, and willingness to remain in interaction. FLP in signing communities must therefore examine the social organization of trust alongside language ideology, practice, and management.

The framework adopted here combines these insights. It distinguishes five analytically related conditions: the presence of a language in a setting; perceptual access to it; the availability of competent interlocutors; opportunities for sustained interaction; and communicative trust. It also treats parents and children as agents whose choices are real but made within unequal histories of linguistic and institutional access.

3. Setting: Ecuador, Babahoyo, and LSEC

Ecuador is home to approximately 17 million people: 16,938,986 residents during the 2022 census (INEC, 2023). The 2025 report by the National Council for Equality of Disabilities (CONADIS) lists 489,829 registered people with disabilities (3% of population), including 62,961 classified as having an auditory disability (though see Izquierdo-Condoy et al 2024 for numbers suggesting triple that). The study was conducted in Babahoyo, the capital of Los Ríos Province in coastal Ecuador, which, in the 2022 census, counted 178,509 residents. A recent territorial profile reports 5,731 registered residents with disabilities, including 494 classified as having an auditory disability (Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado Municipal del Cantón Babahoyo, 2024). The latter constitute 8.62% of the canton's registered disabled population and approximately 0.28% of its total population.

Spanish predominates in schools, public services, workplaces, media, and hearing households. Ecuadorian Sign Language (Lengua de Señas Ecuatoriana, LSEC) is the principal national sign language used by Ecuador's Deaf community, but access to LSEC, its users, and the institutions that support it remains unevenly distributed. The Federación Nacional de Personas Sordas del Ecuador (FENASEC) frames Ecuador's Deaf community not solely as a population defined by auditory disability but as a cultural and linguistic community whose members use LSEC (FENASEC, n.d.). This position places language, identity, association, and collective self-representation alongside disability rights and accommodations. FENASEC traces organized Deaf life in Ecuador to a Deaf sports club founded in Quito in 1958 (FENASEC, n.d.). The organization that

developed from it became the Fray Luis Ponce de León Society of Deaf Adults and is now the Asociación de Personas Sordas de Pichincha. Associations were subsequently established in Guayas in 1982 and Tungurahua in 1984. FENASEC was founded in Quito on 26 April 1986, received legal recognition in 1992, and became affiliated with the World Federation of the Deaf in 1995 (for an extensive discussion and ethnographic investigation, see Author YYY 2021).

The World Federation of the Deaf situates such claims within a dual rights framework: Deaf people are disability-rights holders and members of linguistic and cultural minorities (WFD, 2019) – auditory technologies, rehabilitation, speech services, and generalized disability accommodations therefore cannot substitute for access to a national sign language (WFD, 2024; Lillo-Martin, Gale, & Chen Pichler, 2023). In fact, in alignment with WFD, Ecuador's legal framework formally recognizes access to alternative forms of communication, including sign language: Article 47(11) of the 2008 Constitution recognizes access to alternative forms of communication, explicitly including sign language for Deaf people. More recently, the *Ley Orgánica de las Personas con Discapacidad* (2025) establishes (1).

- (1) *Se reconoce la lengua de señas ecuatoriana como lengua propia y medio de comunicación de las personas sordas o personas con discapacidad auditiva.*

"Ecuadorian Sign Language is recognized as a native language and a means of communication for deaf people or people with hearing disabilities."

Ley Orgánica de las Personas con Discapacidad (2025), Art. 80

The same legislation addresses accessibility to communication (Art. 72), provides for LSEC interpretation in public institutions, and promotes training in LSEC among public-facing personnel (Art. 80). In other words, access to signed communication is recognized as an institutional responsibility rather than exclusively an individual or familial accommodation.

The distinction between linguistic recognition and institutional accessibility becomes particularly consequential when the Deaf person becomes a parent of a hearing child. For instance, although Ecuadorian legislation recognizes LSEC and establishes institutional obligations concerning communication, these provisions do not automatically resolve the circumstances under which Deaf parents participate in Spanish-mediated schooling, communicate with teachers, or obtain information about their children's education. Indeed, Article 35's provisions concerning family participation specifically address educational processes involving persons with disabilities, rather than explicitly addressing Deaf parents of hearing children. In addition, formal recognition does not ensure routine access within families, schools, workplaces, or public services. Recent research documents the distance between formal recognition and lived access. For instance, Noschese et al. (2026), drawing on interviews with Deaf Ecuadorians and hearing relatives, parents, and educators across urban and rural locations, identify educational exclusion, economic and transportation constraints, institutional mistrust, exclusion from accessible information, and inadequate family support as mutually reinforcing barriers. Their findings indicate that communication access structures participation across domains rather than constituting an isolated service need.

Further, the administrative figures do not reliably identify LSEC users, members of the Deaf community, people who identify culturally as Deaf, or participants in Deaf social networks; for instance, one can be self-identify as culturally and biologically Deaf but community-labeled as "hard of hearing/with hearing loss (hipoacustico/a)", thus revealing complications related to language attitudes and ideologies (Author YYY). The

administrative figures may also omit people who have not received disability certification or entered the registry. The figure of 494 is thus not a census of Babahoyo's LSEC-using population. Nevertheless, it provides a scale for the local context: a numerically identifiable population can remain geographically and socially dispersed, with Deaf residents living primarily in hearing households and encountering relatively few regular signers. Spanish and LSEC are consequently distributed differently across local environments, but Spanish is supported through schooling, hearing relatives, employment, public services, media, and neighborhood life. LSEC access, in contrast, depends more heavily on contact with particular Deaf adults, signing relatives, community organizations, and opportunities for face-to-face or video-mediated interaction. In other words, families do not formulate policy between languages that are equally available or institutionally supported. Overall, the communicative conditions reported in Babahoyo form part of a broader Ecuadorian pattern of uneven access to education, information, institutional services, and family support (Noschese et al., 2026).

This project was developed in collaboration with the Fundación Casa Flotante Diversa, a community organization working with Deaf people and their families in Babahoyo (<https://www.vistazo.com/videos/casa-flotante-diversa-refugio-de-inclusion-y-cultura-en-babahoyo>). Casa Flotante is part of the language-policy ecology. In a setting where Deaf residents may be dispersed across hearing households, this organization creates opportunities for Deaf adults, hearing relatives, and children to encounter LSEC users beyond their immediate families. It can expand access to signing relationships and forms of social participation not consistently available through schools or public institutions. As the community-based organization, Casa Flotante contributed to project design, participant recruitment, interviewing, and interpretation of the local context. Its two co-founders are co-authors of the study, and one co-founder—a Deaf LSEC signer and member of the local community—conducted the interviews.

4. Methods and Materials

The study addresses three questions (2):

- (2) a. RQ1. How do parents' own language-learning histories shape their current family language practices, ideologies, and capacity to transmit LSEC or support Spanish?
- b. RQ2. How do schools, extended families, community networks, and public institutions distribute accessible language and communicative labor across Deaf-hearing families?
- c. RQ3. What similarities and asymmetries emerge when Deaf-parent/hearing-child families are compared with hearing-parent/Deaf-child families?

4.1 Participants

The study included ten parents, all residents of Babahoyo: eight Deaf or hard-of-hearing parents of hearing children (80% F, 20% M) and two hearing mothers of Deaf or hard-of-hearing children. Participants ranged in age from 31 to 57 years ($M = 40.9$). The eight Deaf participants ranged from 31 to 47 years ($M = 39.1$), while the two hearing participants were 39 and 57 years old ($M = 48.0$). The Deaf-parent group comprises six women and two men; the fathers were retained as full participants rather than supplementary cases. Participants varied in age, employment, religion, family composition, number and ages of children, schooling, contact with Deaf people, and current use of LSEC. The sample is not random; all of the participants were recruited through Fundación Casa Flotante Diversa. The eight Deaf participants had longstanding differences in access to auditory stimuli, dating from birth or early childhood and grew

up primarily in hearing families. One reported having a Deaf sibling; the remaining participants grew up without another Deaf person in the immediate household. None acquired LSEC as an established family language from birth. Before formal exposure to LSEC, they used home signs and other locally negotiated visual or multimodal resources, including family gestures, pointing, facial and bodily expression, lipreading, writing, and speech where available. All encountered LSEC later through schools, Deaf peers, religious contacts, community organizations, or other Deaf adults.

The two participant configurations were selected for analytical comparison rather than statistical balance: both involve a difference between parent and child hearing or linguistic profiles, but the accessibility of Spanish and LSEC differs across them. The comparison cases therefore help separate the quantity of language in an environment from the child's or parent's access to it.

4.2 Semi-structured interview and recording

Participants were recruited through Fundación Casa Flotante Diversa and its local networks. Data collection took place in September and October 2026. Participants received information about the project and provided consent before each interview. The study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of [anon for review] University.

The instrument was a 20-question semi-structured interview adapted from the Home Language Environment and Practices questionnaire (HLEP, Li et al., 2022; see Supplementary Materials). It addressed childhood communication and language-learning histories; current communication with individual children and family members; responsibility for teaching LSEC, Spanish, literacy, and other communicative resources; schooling and media; contact with Deaf and hearing people; discrimination and communicative exclusion; and imagined linguistic and social futures. The shared protocol permitted comparison across family configurations while allowing clarification and follow-up.

Interviews were conducted in the interviewer home and lasted approximately 20–50 minutes. They were recorded with an iPhone 13 positioned so that the camera faced the participant and captured the signing space, facial expression, and relevant bodily movement. The same Deaf co-founder of Casa Flotante conducted all interviews. Questions were presented in the local variety of LSEC, gesture, and Spanish (where appropriate), utilizing examples, repetition, or reformulation when participants' differing language histories required adaptation. These adjustments are analyzed as part of the interaction rather than treated as departures from an assumed uniform LSEC variety.

4.3 Transcription, translation, and coding

Responses were initially entered into Google Sheets by the interviewer in order to construct participant profiles, align answers with the interview questions, and identify recurring topics. The resulting spreadsheet contains structured responses as well as open-ended Spanish renderings, coded by the Interviewer. The video recordings were subsequently imported into ELAN 7.0 for time-aligned transcription, translation, and annotation (Figure 1).

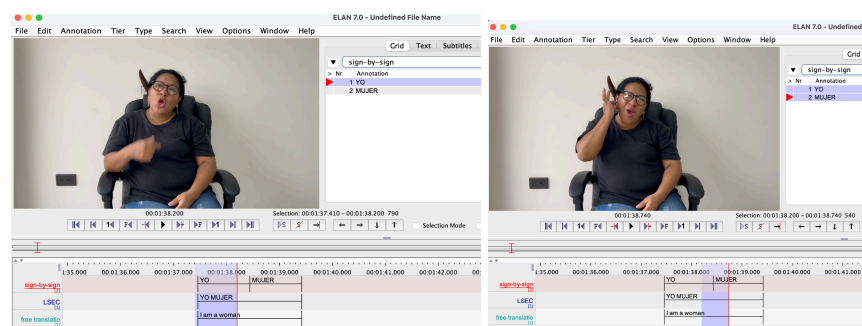


Figure 1. Screenshot of B001-D interview; ELAN 7.0

The initial Spanish rendering was completed by the interviewer because they had direct knowledge of the interaction, the local signs used, and the clarifications introduced during the interview. A second signer (a certified LSEC interpreter) reviewed the initial transcription and translation. Uncertain or contested passages were marked for discussion rather than silently normalized.

Coding proceeded iteratively at the thematic levels. Each interview was first examined as an individual linguistic and family history. Cases were then compared using provisional codes for childhood access, home sign, LSEC acquisition, language presence, perceptual accessibility, interlocutor availability, sustained interaction, explicit teaching, schooling, media, child agency, language brokering, discrimination, trust, community networks, and imagined futures – as aligned to the 20-question protocol. The two hearing-parent cases provisionally function as comparison cases rather than a control group. Because the sample is small and intentionally unbalanced across family configurations, the counts are descriptive rather than inferential, though exploratory cross-case analyses were conducted.

The Results section uses time-coded voiced interpretations, automatic captions, and interviewer translations as an interim analytic layer. The analysis is organized around the central categories of family language policy – practice, ideology, and management. The interpretation was reviewed by the Casa Flotante co-authors.

5. Results

The interviews show that the categories under analysis become explanatory only when they are related to access. Across the ten cases, the question reaches beyond which language a family values or reports using, revealing instead issues related to who can perceive that language, who can supply it, whether interaction can be sustained, and whether the relationship is sufficiently trusted for communication to be attempted. The comparison between the eight Deaf-parent/hearing-child families and the two hearing-parent/Deaf-child families is therefore used analytically rather than numerically. It identifies a reversal in the direction of language access without treating two unequal configurations as equivalent.

5.1 Descriptive results

The descriptive distribution reveals a striking asymmetry between parental management and reported child outcomes (Table 1).

Table 1. Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview results across Deaf (D) and Hearing (H). The descriptive results are reported conservatively in. NR = no response. Coding reported as binary.

Domain	Descriptive result	Deaf, N (ratio)	Hearing, N (ratio)
Childhood LSEC access	Acquired LSEC later in life	8 (1.00)	0
	Established LSEC at home from birth	0	0

Pre-LSEC childhood communication	Relied on home signs and negotiated multimodal resources	8 (1.00)	2 (1.00)
Explicit LSEC teaching/provision	Direct/explicit teaching	6 (.75)	0
	Attempted/constrained	2 (.25)	0
	Externally supplied (e.g. religious org.)	0	2 (1.00)
Difficulty in parent–child communication	Reports difficulty in mutual understanding or sustained communication	6 (.75)*	1 (.50)†
	No reported difficulty	2 (.25)*	1 (.50)†
Spanish through school	Spanish explicitly reported as a language of schooling	7 (.88)	2 (1.00)
	NR	1 (.13)	0
Contact with other Deaf parents of hearing children	Explicitly reported	7(.88)	1 (.50)+0
	Ambiguous / insufficient information	1 (.13)	1 (.50)†
Sibling divergence	Different LSEC/communication trajectories reported across siblings	3/5 (.60)‡	1 (.50)†
Child access brokering	Actual	1 (.13)	-
	Anticipated	2 (.25)	-
Imagined linguistic future	Bilingual/bimodal	4/7 (.57)§	1 (.50)†
	LSEC-centered	2/7 (.29)§	0
	Spanish-centered	1/7 (.14)§	1 (.50)†

*The 6/8 communication-difficulty coding comes from the broader interview analysis used in the manuscript, not any one question because some participants answer indirectly.

† The hearing cases are developmentally very different; this 1/2 versus 1/2 distribution should not be interpreted as a group comparison.

‡ Denominator is the five Deaf-parent cases with more than one currently represented child; B003-D, B006-D, and B008-D show explicit sibling divergence.

§ Denominator is the seven Deaf-parent cases for which the imagined-future response was sufficiently codable.

All eight Deaf parents described deliberate efforts to teach, provide, or maintain LSEC with their hearing children. This consistency in management did not yield a uniform transmission trajectory: six of the eight Deaf parents described some difficulty in mutual understanding or sustained parent–child communication (6/8), while the form and degree of difficulty varied substantially across cases. We thus observe a contrast between relatively consistent efforts to provide LSEC and heterogeneous conditions under which those efforts become sustained interaction.

This heterogeneity is especially visible *within* families (as reported by the participants). Five Deaf-parent cases included more than one current child represented in the interview material; three of those five (B003-D, B006-D, and B008-D) described clearly different LSEC or communication trajectories across siblings. B003-D reports stronger LSEC maintenance with the older child than with the younger child, who shows less interest and forgets signs; B006-D contrasts an older child with whom she reports little or no conversation with a younger child who is interested in LSEC; and B008-D describes substantially greater difficulty teaching the older child than the younger child, who knows some LSEC. Thus, in 3/5 multi-child Deaf-parent cases, a single household and parental language orientation coexists with divergent child trajectories.

The interviews also show that these families are not uniformly disconnected from Deaf social networks. Six of the eight Deaf parents explicitly reported contact with other Deaf parents of hearing children (B002-D, B003-D, B006-D, B008-D, B009-D, and B010-D). Network presence, however, does not map directly onto child outcomes. Taken together, the descriptive pattern motivates the distinction developed below among parental language management, the capacity and opportunities to provide accessible input,

sustained interaction, and the child's own trajectory. In spoken-language heritage contexts, such gaps between parental commitment and child use have also been documented (Ringblom, 2017).

An exploratory cross-case analysis suggests that the intensity of Deaf-network involvement may be related to children's reported LSEC trajectories. Among the seven Deaf-parent cases for which both dimensions could be coded, clear LSEC uptake was reported in three of the four cases characterized by sustained Deaf-network involvement, but in none of the three cases with more limited or occasional involvement. The corresponding ordinal association was substantial (Spearman's $\rho = .78$), although, given the very small sample, it did not reach conventional significance in an exact permutation test (two-sided $p = .114$). This pattern is treated as hypothesis-generating rather than inferential.

5.2 Linguistic biographies and the inherited capacity to transmit

FLP is necessarily intergenerational because a language may pass (or not) from parent to child. However, the parent's capacity to provide that language—knowledge of LSEC, confidence in using it, access to other signers, and experience of sustained interaction—is itself produced or restricted by the preceding generation and its institutions. What appears synchronically as parental language management is therefore partly the outcome of an earlier family language policy (King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008; Fogle & King, 2013). The Deaf parents' present policies begin with their own histories as language learners. None acquired LSEC as an established family language from birth. Before encountering LSEC through school, Deaf peers, religious contacts, or community organizations, participants relied on home signs, gesture, mime, lipreading, writing, speech where available, and the interpretive labor of particular relatives. Their adult repertoires consequently differ in breadth and confidence. Some now use LSEC across the home, work, and Deaf social networks; others describe a smaller LSEC repertoire and continued dependence on locally negotiated forms. B008-D explicitly connects limited teaching capacity to recent acquisition (3):

- (3) "I do not have enough LSEC to teach it; I acquired it only recently."
(B008-D, 00:03:05-00:03:18; provisional translation)

B010-D describes the preceding generation more starkly: his parents and siblings did not teach him, and he did not have sustained access through schooling. B009-D presents a contrasting adult trajectory. She reports beginning to sign with her child at approximately five months and continuing deliberately over time. The contrast is not adequately described as a difference in parental commitment. It reflects different amounts of linguistic capital accumulated after input deprivation in childhood.

The hearing-parent cases begin at another point in this history: Spanish is already established in the family repertoire, while LSEC enters later and through different routes. In B004-H, the parent must assemble visual and signed resources that are not already secure in her own repertoire. In B005-H, by contrast, Spanish was available from infancy and LSEC became relevant much later, following the daughter's hearing loss. The configurations are therefore linked by unequal access to signed-language resources, but neither the timing nor the developmental pathway is identical across the two comparison cases. The two hearing-parent cases are themselves developmentally heterogeneous. B004-H describes a Deaf/hard-of-hearing child for whom visual communication and LSEC must be assembled through family, school, religious, and online resources. B005-H, by contrast, reports that her daughter had Spanish from infancy and encountered LSEC only around ages 18–19, after experiencing hearing loss. The comparison therefore cannot be reduced to a single hearing-parent/Deaf-child

pathway: hearing status identifies the configuration at interview but not the timing or history through which signed-language access became relevant.

5.3 Family language practices as multimodal access

Reported family practice is not exhausted by the opposition between LSEC and Spanish. In fact, treating only LSEC and Spanish as relevant would conceal the practices through which interaction is actually repaired. Instead, participants describe LSEC, local signs, family home signs, mime, pointing, facial and bodily expression, writing, lipreading, speech, fingerspelling, video calls, and child-mediated interpretation as *family communication strategies*. These resources are not interchangeable but make different kinds of interaction possible and place different demands on family members. Treating them all as undifferentiated “communication” would conceal the distribution of linguistic labor. Research on multilingual home practices likewise demonstrates that family policy is enacted through variable combinations of language use and literacy activities (Karpava, Ringblom, & Zabrodska, 2019); this comparison does not, however, collapse the distinctions among established signed languages, home signs, gesture, and writing.

For the Deaf parents in the sample, Spanish is institutionally abundant but variably accessible. B003 describes using writing in public because potential interlocutors do not sign (4):

- (4) “In stores I write notes. I do not sign because hearing people do not know LSEC.”
(B003-D, 00:18:48-00:19:06)

B006 similarly describes difficulty at the bank and difficulty understanding hearing interlocutors. Spanish is therefore present in the setting without necessarily constituting accessible input or reciprocal interaction – through writing, gesture, lipreading, and family mediation, which all function as repair when direct access is not institutionally available.

LSEC (as a communicative option) presents the inverse distributional problem. It is perceptually accessible to Deaf interlocutors but less broadly available. Its presence in the family depends on particular people: a Deaf spouse, a signing child, Deaf friends, religious contacts, or a community organization. B003-D reports maintaining relationships with Deaf friends through signed video calls. B007-D, by contrast, describes living and eating with hearing relatives without meaningful conversation the majority of their life. Physical co-presence therefore cannot be equated with linguistic access and, thus, trickles down to the choices articulated in the family language policies.

The hearing-parent cases make this distinction especially visible. B004-H characterizes communication with her Deaf daughter as multimodal but not necessarily *bimodal bilingual*, differentiating signing from gesture/mime (5):

- (5) Interviewer: “How do you communicate with your child?”
B004-H: “Spanish with mime.”

The same interview points to religious visitors and online videos as sources of signs. Spoken Spanish is plentiful, but the child-accessible signed resources are intermittent and supplied through particular encounters. In the Deaf-parent cases, hearing children can perceive the parent’s LSEC while also receiving Spanish from a much larger ecology. In the hearing-parent cases, the Deaf child may be surrounded by Spanish without equivalent perceptual access while LSEC remains scarce because the parent is also a novice learner. Amount of language in the environment and accessible

input must therefore be coded separately, once again suggesting that like other areas of linguistics, FLP must be *crippled* in its framing (Henner & Robinson 2022).

5.4 Language management and distributed input provision

Language management includes explicit decisions and deliberate interventions: teaching signs, correcting or repeating a form, selecting videos, telling stories, arranging contact with other signers, encouraging Spanish literacy, or choosing a school. The interviews also show that management and input provision need not be performed by the same person: a parent may value a language and coordinate opportunities to encounter it without being able to provide fluent input directly. Lanza (1997) offers an interactional precedent for examining how parental responses to children's language choices negotiate language expectations in conversation.

In the Deaf-parent families, provision tends to be distributed by language. The Deaf parent is commonly the principal source of LSEC, while Spanish is supplied by hearing relatives, schools, peers, workplaces, and media. B003-D reports that her children watched their parents sign and learned both LSEC and Spanish early:

- (6) "The children saw their parents signing and learned. By about three, they knew both; they were bilingual." (B003-D, 00:03:09-00:03:34)

B009-D describes signing with her children throughout the day and deliberately teaching both signs and Deaf identity. B006-D reports a more bounded management routine, telling stories approximately three times a week for about an hour so that the younger child can practice. These cases differ in intensity, but the parent remains a direct LSEC provider.

The hearing-parent cases tentatively show a different distribution, although for different developmental reasons. Spanish is well established in both family histories, whereas LSEC is introduced later and relies substantially on resources outside the parent's prior repertoire. B004-H points to religious visitors and online materials as sources of signs; B005-H reports that her daughter encountered LSEC only later, after hearing loss. This pattern can be described cautiously as delegated language management: the parent recognizes or accommodates the need for LSEC, while relevant linguistic input is supplied partly through people, media, Deaf contacts, or community organizations beyond the parent's existing repertoire (Mitchiner & Batamula, 2021; Chen Pichler, 2021; Lieberman, Mitchiner, & Pontecorvo, 2024).

This distinction also clarifies the role of Casa Flotante. A community organization is not simply an external influence on an already constituted household policy. It may alter who is available to serve as an input provider, provide models of adult Deaf interaction, and allow hearing relatives to become learners. Community infrastructure can therefore change the range of family policies that are practically possible.

5.5 Child agency and divergent trajectories

Other findings demonstrate that parental ideology and management do not determine a uniform family outcome. Children accept, resist, reinterpret, or redirect the language practices proposed by adults, and siblings exposed to the same parent may develop different repertoires. B006-D contrasts an older child with whom she reports almost no communication and a younger child with whom she communicates well. The younger child reportedly prefers LSEC; the older child does not. This divergence persists despite the parent's explicit teaching practices.

B006-D is not an isolated instance. For instance, B003-D reports stronger LSEC maintenance with the older child than with the younger child, who shows less interest and forgets signs; B008-D reports that teaching the older child has been considerably

more difficult than teaching the younger child, who knows some LSEC. Across the five Deaf-parent cases with more than one current child represented, three therefore show explicit sibling divergence (3/5). This within-family variation is particularly informative because parental hearing status, much of the household ecology, and the stated orientation toward LSEC are held relatively constant while child trajectories differ. B007 likewise reports that she attempted to teach her daughter LSEC but that the daughter was not interested. Her imagined future centers not on an abstract measure of bilingual attainment but on the possibility of conversation:

- (7) “I wish my daughter and I could converse; now there is no communication.”
(B007-D, 00:08:15-00:08:31)

Other cases show more sustained participation, although not necessarily uniformly across siblings. B003 reports all-day communication and continuing video contact while also distinguishing the older child’s stronger LSEC maintenance from the younger child’s lower interest and greater attrition. B009’s children move between languages according to interlocutor:

- (8) “With hearing people they speak; with Deaf people they sign.”
(B009-D, 00:20:17-00:20:34)

B001 also reports that their children are ashamed of signing with her mother in public.

These patterns are often treated as evidence of child agency, but agency here is not independent choice exercised among equally supported alternatives. Spanish is reinforced by school, peers, media, and public life; LSEC may be associated principally with one parent and a small number of Deaf contacts. A child’s preference is consequential, but the conditions under which one option becomes easier, more prestigious, or more socially expansive remain part of the explanation. We thus conclude that the appropriate unit of analysis is not the household/family. In fact, FLP can vary by parent-child dyad and even by activity within a dyad where a family may articulate one particular ideology while sustaining several different interactional arrangements.

5.6 Schools, language brokering, and anticipated reciprocity

As is well known (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Bezcioglu-Göktolga, 2022), schools intensify the asymmetry between the dominant and minority languages (Spanish and LSEC here) even when educators do not explicitly prescribe home language use. B009-D characterizes her children’s school as:

- (9) “School is entirely in Spanish; there are no signs.” (B009-D, 00:05:45-00:06:00)

B001-D describes communication changing after her hearing children entered school and spent more time with hearing classmates (as is typical).¹ She assigns teaching roles by domain: the mother teaches signs, while school teaches Spanish. Because Spanish is also supplied by peers, relatives, and public spaces, the division of input between Spanish and LSEC is not equal: schooling increases the child’s Spanish resources while drastically reducing the relative interactional space occupied by LSEC.

But just as typically, for several Deaf parents, children’s LSEC learning is connected to anticipated institutional access. B010-D explains why he teaches his child (10); B006-D states the same orientation more generally (11):

¹ The beginning of formal schooling often reorganizes children’s bilingual environments, increasing amount of the socially dominant language, both in terms of exposure and weight, and, thus, initiating/ accelerating a shift away from the home language; this pattern has been documented for both spoken-language bilinguals and bimodal bilingual children from signing families (Wong Fillmore, 1991; Chen Pichler, Lillo-Martin, & Palmer, 2018)

(10) “I taught my child so that later the child could accompany me to social security or the doctor.” (B010-D, 00:10:27-00:10:47)

(11) “I teach my children LSEC so that they can help me in the future.” (B006-D, 00:08:21-00:08:30)

B009-D reports that her teen-aged children already interpret and that she teaches them to help other Deaf people. These accounts combine affection, reciprocity, practical foresight, and structural necessity -- the child’s bimodal repertoire can enlarge family access, but it can also move responsibility for communication with banks, clinics, schools, and government agencies onto the child. In this way, the relevant FLP category is broader than *child language brokering* (Napier, 2021), often understood as translation between languages. The children are being prepared as *access brokers*: people whose knowledge of Spanish, LSEC, hearing interactional norms, and institutional procedures may enable a Deaf parent to participate. This role, previously described in the literature (Napier, 2021; Gee et al., 2022), should not by itself be characterized automatically as either harmful or empowering -- its significance lies in the institutional conditions that make family mediation (by children) necessary and in the unequal responsibilities it may create (Napier, 2021; Gee et al., 2022).

5.7 Discrimination, communicative trust, and withdrawal

Language policy is also shaped by judgments about who is safe enough to communicate with. B002-D reports that relatives mocked her child for having a Deaf mother. She later describes responding through separation rather than continued accommodation:

(12) “I empowered myself. I was discriminated against, took my child, and we kept going.” (B002-D, 00:18:48-00:19:07)

B002-D’s imagined perfect world centers on happiness with her daughter and trusted friends rather than continued proximity to discriminatory relatives. B001-D similarly suggests that when people do not understand, being alone can feel preferable. B006-D reports little communication with neighbors, while B007-D describes a workplace in which she cleans without communicating with anyone. In other words, withdrawal should not be treated simply as an individual preference for isolation; instead, repeatedly unsuccessful or humiliating interaction simply changes the expected value of initiating communication. In this way, a physically present hearing person, even a family member, does not become a meaningful interlocutor merely by being available. A significant part of input ecology (and, thus, family language policy) is trust: it affects whether interaction begins, whether repair is attempted, and whether relationships are sustained long enough to support language development.

This point also complicates the notion of family network. Biological relatives may supply the dominant language (Spanish) but little accessible interaction, while Deaf friends or community members may provide both the accessible, albeit minoritized language (LSEC) and communicative reciprocity. Thus, parents’ decisions about whom to bring into a child’s social world, which kin relations to maintain, and when to distance the family from discriminatory people are all forms of language management because they reorganize the relationships through which language becomes available.

5.8 Deaf networks, language ideology, and imagined futures

Much research on the reduced access to linguistic input among the Deaf and hard of hearing focuses on input deprivation (Lillo-Martin & Henner, 2021; Lillo-Martin, Gale, & Chen Pichler, 2023). However, the data reported here document more than deprivation. Parents teach signs, repeat explanations, maintain signed video contact, tell stories,

introduce children to Deaf adults and children, and construct social relationships in which LSEC use is expected rather than exceptional. B003-D connects these relationships to collective political possibility:

- (13) “We can motivate and support one another and gain rights for sign language little by little.” (B003-D, 00:19:23-00:19:47)

B009-D describes a small Deaf-women friendship group and deliberately brings her children into that network. These practices enlarge the child’s pool of LSEC interlocutors while presenting Deaf adulthood as social, collective, and agentive. Resilience in these accounts is therefore relational rather than an individual capacity to endure inaccessible institutions: it resides in practices through which interlocutors mobilize, share, and enlarge the semiotic resources available for communication and thereby produce access collectively (Kusters et al., 2017; Henner & Robinson, 2023)

This networked orientation is not limited to those two cases. Six of the eight Deaf parents explicitly report contact with other Deaf parents of hearing children. The distribution cautions against equating Deaf-parent families in Babahoyo with social isolation from Deaf adults as such. What varies more consequentially is whether children participate in those relationships, how frequently interaction occurs, and whether those relationships provide sustained and trusted contexts for LSEC use.

Participants nevertheless do not share a single language ideology. B009-D imagines children who sign at home and use Spanish with hearing relatives, allowing them to communicate across both environments. B010-D imagines a sign-centered world while also hoping that his child will graduate and succeed educationally. B002-D foregrounds safety, friendship, and happiness rather than a particular division between named languages. B006-D values LSEC but ultimately privileges Spanish in the ideal-world prompt, and B005-H ranks Spanish first and LSEC second. These views prevent bilingualism from becoming an analyst-imposed measure of success (Mitchiner & Batamula, 2021; WFD, 2024).

The most visible difference between the two parent groups lies beyond a categorical opposition between pro-LSEC Deaf parents and pro-Spanish hearing parents. First, ideological heterogeneity exists within the Deaf-parent group; second, the hearing comparison is too small for such a generalization. The clearer difference concerns the relationship between ideology and provision: Deaf parents generally discuss extending an accessible but socially restricted language to children who have abundant Spanish elsewhere. Hearing parents discuss adding a visually accessible language that is not already secure in the parental repertoire. In the first configuration, management is directed toward maintenance and interactional continuity; in the second, it is directed toward introduction and often depends on delegated provision.

6. Discussion

The current findings support an account of FLP as language governance under unequal access. Families organize language practices, articulate language ideologies, and intervene through language management, but these processes unfold within an ecology that supplies Spanish and LSEC differently. Spanish has institutional reach (through schools, relatives, workplaces, media, and public services). LSEC is more dependent on particular relationships and community networks. But neither distribution alone establishes access: Spanish can be omnipresent yet inaccessible to a Deaf family member while LSEC can be perceptually accessible but unavailable because competent interlocutors are absent. A recent scoping review of 40 studies proposes the Home Translanguaging Learning Environment as a framework for examining flexible multilingual practices, parental beliefs, and home–school relations (Law et al., 2026). The data from Babahoyo extends this discussion by asking which household resources are

perceptually accessible to each family member, rather than assuming that resources present in the home are equally available to all.

The descriptive distribution makes the distinction empirically visible. Deliberate LSEC provision was reported by all eight Deaf parents, yet six of eight also described some difficulty in mutual understanding or sustained communication with their children, and three of the five multi-child Deaf-parent families reported divergent trajectories across siblings. Parental management is therefore substantially more uniform than reported transmission outcomes. The difference between the two cannot be explained simply as a difference in whether parents value or attempt to transmit LSEC, extending the familiar practice-ideology-management model (Spolsky, 2012; King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008). A family's practices cannot be interpreted without asking which resources are perceptually accessible. Its ideology cannot be interpreted without asking whether the valued language is available through competent interlocutors. Its management cannot be interpreted without asking who performs the labor of teaching, arranging contact, repairing interaction, or interpreting. Access, distributed input provision, interactional continuity, and communicative trust are therefore not contextual additions to FLP. They mediate the relationship among its established components.

The exploratory association between Deaf-network involvement and child LSEC trajectory further suggests that the relevant ecological variable(s) may not be the mere presence of Deaf people in a family's social network. Most Deaf parents for whom network information was available reported some contact with other Deaf people, yet stronger child uptake clustered in cases characterized by more sustained involvement. Although the present sample is far too small to establish an independent network effect, the distribution is consistent with the distinction proposed here between language presence, interlocutor availability, and sustained interaction: a Deaf network may expand the number of potential LSEC interlocutors without necessarily becoming part of the child's recurrent interactional ecology. What may matter for transmission, therefore, is not simply whether a network exists, but whether children participate in it sufficiently and repeatedly for LSEC to function as a language of relationships extending beyond the parent-child dyad. This constitutes a testable hypothesis for a larger comparative sample.

An instructive contrast emerges from spoken-language heritage transmission. Ringblom (2017) describes Russian-speaking parents in Sweden whose children increasingly respond in Swedish despite parental efforts to maintain Russian; where parents can themselves use Swedish, accommodation remains communicatively possible even as Russian transmission weakens. The Babahoyo cases expose a different consequence of the same apparent mismatch between parental intention and child practice: when a Deaf parent cannot readily access spoken Spanish, a hearing child's movement away from LSEC may narrow the resources for sustained parent-child communication, not merely redistribute use between two mutually accessible languages. This comparison concerns differential accessibility, not an assumption that all spoken-language bilingual parents can accommodate equally.

The first theoretical implication concerns intergenerationality. FLP is usually described as intergenerational because families transmit—or fail to transmit—a language to children. The Babahoyo data add to that description: the Deaf parents' capacity to provide LSEC reflects what they themselves received through hearing families, schools, Deaf peers, religious contacts, and community organizations. Parents who encountered LSEC late are not merely choosing how much of an already secure language to use but constructing family input from resources the earlier environments distributed unevenly; the capacity to transmit is, therefore, itself an outcome of family, educational, and governmental language policy. Research on signed-language acquisition makes the availability and timing of accessible input consequential for development (Lillo-Martin

& Henner, 2021); our interviews instead locate the question one generation earlier, in the histories of the adults expected to provide that input.

The second implication concerns directionality. Deaf-parent/hearing-child and hearing-parent/Deaf-or-hard-of-hearing-child families both involve a parent-child difference, but they are not symmetrical. In the Deaf-parent families, an accessible minoritized language is available principally through the parent and Deaf networks while the hearing child accesses the dominant language across many other domains. In the two hearing-parent cases, Spanish is already established in the family history, but LSEC enters later and through different routes: as a resource that must be assembled for a Deaf/hard-of-hearing child early (B004-H) or later in life (B005-H). This approach echoes similar contrasts related to bimodal bilingual profiles reported elsewhere (Lillo-Martin, Chen Pichler, & Gale, 2025; Chen Pichler, Lillo-Martin, & Palmer, 2018). This contrast mirrors different distributions, timings, and histories of accessibility and input provision but also further suggests a distinction between direct and delegated language management. Deaf parents commonly provide LSEC directly while relying on schools and hearing networks to provide Spanish. In the hearing-parent cases, LSEC access depends more heavily on resources outside the parent's prior repertoire, including religious visitors, media, Deaf adults, or community organizations, although the developmental reason for that dependence differs across B004-H and B005-H. Rather than locating a deficiency in hearing parents, the distinction identifies the consequences of a social structure in which families may have little preparation or infrastructure for signed-language access when it becomes relevant. With only two hearing-parent cases, the pattern is analytic rather than prevalence-estimating and should be tested in a larger comparison sample.

The third implication concerns the unit of analysis. Families cannot be assigned a single transmission outcome from parental ideology alone. B006-D's different relationships with an older and younger child, B007-D's unsuccessful attempts to engage her daughter, and B003-D's and B009-D's more sustained signing routines show that sibling position, age, interest, social networks, and interactional history can produce different trajectories within one household (Fogle & King, 2013; Pizer, 2013). In other words, child agency is consequential but ecologically situated: preferences develop within unequal distributions of prestige, schooling, peer interaction, and communicative ease. In terms of FLP then, the relevant unit may therefore be the parent-child dyad, or even a recurring activity within that dyad, rather than the household treated as a homogeneous whole (Fogle & King, 2013; Pizer, 2021). The sibling comparisons sharpen this point. Divergence is explicit not only in B006-D but also in B003-D and B008-D: three of the five Deaf-parent cases with multiple current children represented in the corpus. The household is consequently too coarse a unit for assigning a single transmission outcome – a family may sustain a relatively stable language ideology and management strategy while different parent-child dyads develop different interactional histories and repertoires.

The fourth implication concerns communicative labor. Inaccessible schools, clinics, banks, social-security offices, and workplaces turn family repertoires into access infrastructure where children become not only language brokers but access brokers, mediating institutions, explaining procedures, and making participation possible (Napier, 2021; Gee et al., 2022). Their role can express intimacy and reciprocity while also revealing the transfer of public responsibility to the family. FLP research therefore should look beyond which language children learn but what forms of institutional labor their repertoire is expected to perform. To the same analysis also belong *affect* and *trust*. Across the accounts, participants describe affective consequences including *vergüenza*, *frustration*, *loneliness*, *fear*, and *communicative withdrawal*, alongside *teaching*, *protection*, *pride*, *friendship*, and *collective support*; these affective themes are not distributed identically across all ten cases. On the one hand, architecture of input is changed by

discrimination, which influences which relatives remain close, whether interaction with neighbors is attempted, which institutions are approached, and whether a child encounters Deaf adults in relationships defined by reciprocity rather than repair. On the other hand, communicative trust helps determine whether nominally available interlocutors become actual participants in family language development.

Finally, the participants' agency is visible in the communicative environments they construct. As they teach, repeat, write, gesture, maintain video contact, bring children into Deaf networks, reorganize kin relations, they also imagine futures that differ in their preferred relationship between LSEC and Spanish. In this way, Casa Flotante and other Deaf-led networks can expand the set of competent and trusted interlocutors available to families. They also alter the policies families can enact rather than merely assisting with policies independently chosen inside the home. Comparative work on translanguaging as a family strategy (Karpava, Ringblom, & Zabrodska, 2025) is relevant here, but flexible practice alone cannot guarantee perceptually accessible interaction.

The connection to the Heritage language acquisition (e.g. Montrul, 2023) is consequential but delimited. Research on heritage signers and bimodal bilingualism investigates children's linguistic experience and developing grammars (Chen Pichler, Lillo-Martin, & Palmer, 2018; Lillo-Martin, de Quadros, & Chen Pichler, 2016, ___Author XXX___). The present study, however, does not assess children's LSEC grammars or proficiency. Its empirical focus is instead on parents as input providers: how their own histories of access to LSEC, together with family and institutional arrangements, condition the resources they can make available to the next generation. Direct study of children's linguistic trajectories is therefore a separate research question, not a conclusion licensed by the present interviews.

The study remains exploratory. The sample is small, community-recruited, and unevenly distributed between the two configurations. The evidence consists primarily of parental accounts rather than systematic recordings of everyday family interaction or direct assessments of children's language knowledge. Several quoted passages currently derive from voiced interpretations rather than careful analysis of the sample in LSEC. Therefore, emerging comparison should be treated as a set of grounded analytic propositions rather than as a population-level contrast between Deaf and hearing parents. Yet, taken together, the findings show that family language policy cannot be reduced to parental preference or to the amount of language nominally present around a child. It is shaped by what previous generations and institutions allowed parents to learn, by who is available to provide accessible input, by how children participate in or redirect interaction, and by whether relationships sustain communicative trust. In Babahoyo, families do not merely transmit LSEC and Spanish. They construct—and sometimes must reconstruct—the conditions under which either language can become accessible, relationally meaningful, and usable across generations.

7. Conclusions

Taken together, the findings provide three answers to the questions with which we began (2). First, parents' present family language policies are inseparable from their own histories of language access. For the Deaf parents in this study, LSEC is not simply a language they possess and subsequently choose whether to transmit: all acquired it after a period in which communication depended on home signs and other locally negotiated resources. Their current capacity to provide LSEC—its breadth, their confidence in using and teaching it, and the networks of signers available to sustain it—is therefore partly an outcome of what their own families, schools, and communities previously made accessible or withheld. This echoes the idea that FLP is intergenerational in this stronger sense: what is transmitted across generations is not only language, but the capacity to transmit it. The hearing-parent cases expose the same principle from the other direction: Spanish is already available within the parental repertoire, whereas LSEC must be

sought, learned, and in some cases supplied through other people and institutions. Thus, parental ideology matters, but what parents can enact depends on the linguistic resources their own histories have made available to them.

Second, those resources are distributed well beyond the household. Schools, extended families, Deaf networks, religious contacts, media, community organizations, and public institutions do not merely constitute the background against which FLP occurs; they participate in producing the communicative ecology from which families construct policy. In Babahoyo, Spanish has broad institutional distribution through schooling, hearing relatives, public services, peers, and media, but its abundance does not guarantee perceptual access for Deaf parents or Deaf children. LSEC presents an almost inverse configuration: it is visually accessible, but access to sustained LSEC interaction depends disproportionately on particular people and relationships. Deaf networks and organizations such as Casa Flotante can consequently enlarge the pool of competent and trusted interlocutors, whereas inaccessible schools, clinics, banks, and government services can shift communicative labor back onto families. In some Deaf-parent families, hearing children are consequently positioned not only as language brokers but as actual or anticipated access brokers, whose repertoires are expected to mediate between their parents and Spanish-dominant institutions. The distribution of linguistic resources is therefore simultaneously a distribution of communicative labor.

Third, Deaf-parent/hearing-child and hearing-parent/Deaf-child families are comparable, but they are not symmetrical. Both configurations involve a mismatch between the linguistic resources readily available to the parent and those available or accessible to the child, and in both, parents actively assemble communicative possibilities from unevenly distributed resources. The direction of that inequality, however, differs. Hearing children of Deaf parents can generally access Spanish through a large social and institutional ecology while encountering LSEC principally through the Deaf parent and Deaf networks. A Deaf child of a hearing parent may instead be surrounded by abundant Spanish without equivalent perceptual access to it, while the visually accessible language must be introduced through a parent who may herself be a novice signer and may depend on others for LSEC input. The two configurations therefore cannot be treated as mirror-image bilingual families. What they share is not an equivalent language mismatch but a common problem of unequal access to the resources required to construct a workable family language policy.

This comparison also clarifies why the household alone is too coarse a unit of analysis. Even where parents report similar commitments to LSEC, children within the same family can follow different trajectories, and the availability of a language does not ensure sustained interaction in it. The evidence therefore supports a sequence of distinctions that should remain analytically separate: *language presence*, *perceptual access*, *availability of competent interlocutors*, *sustained interaction*, and *communicative trust*. A language can be present without being perceptually accessible; accessible without sufficiently proficient interlocutors; supplied by interlocutors without becoming part of recurrent interaction; and interaction can remain possible without becoming sufficiently trusted to be sustained. What families actually transmit emerges from the relations among these conditions rather than from parental preference alone.

The present study stops deliberately at the parental side of that process. The interviews tell us about parents as input providers—about the linguistic resources they inherited or later acquired, the environments they construct, and the constraints under which they attempt to make LSEC or Spanish available to their children. They do not establish the resulting grammatical systems or proficiency of the children themselves. That next step belongs to a study of heritage signers and bimodal bilingual development. What the Babahoyo data establish here is the prior condition that such a study would need to explain: the input available to the next generation already has a history. Before a child can maintain, shift away from, resist, or develop a heritage

language, someone must be in a position to provide it. In these families, that capacity was itself produced through—or constrained by—the language policies of an earlier generation and by the institutions surrounding both generations. Family language policy, then, is not simply the study of what families choose to transmit. It is also the study of who has been given the linguistic and social means to transmit, who supplies what families themselves cannot supply, and who ultimately bears the labor when accessible communication is not institutionally provided.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/doi/s1>, Figure S1: title; Table S1: title; Video S1: title. [to be added after review]

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, X.X. and Y.Y.; methodology, X.X.; validation, Y.Y. and Z.Z.; formal analysis, X.X.; investigation, X.X., Y.Y., and Z.Z.; resources, X.X.; data curation, Y.Y. and Z.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, X.X.; writing—review and editing, X.X. and Y.Y.; visualization, X.X.; supervision, X.X.; project administration, X.X.; funding acquisition, X.X. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.” [to be deanonymized after review].

Funding: This research was funded by CSU AAUP, grant number ARKOUV.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of NAME OF INSTITUTE XXX[to be added after review] (protocol code 10967, May 21, 2025).”

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Signed informed consent has been obtained from the patient(s) to publish this paper

Data Availability Statement: To protect the privacy of the participants, only a part of the data are publicly available.

Acknowledgments: We thank the Deaf community of Babahoyo and the Deaf and hearing participants of the study. Special thanks go to the Research Assistants and members of the Casa Flotante Diversa. During the preparation of this manuscript/study, the author(s) used OpenAI 5.6 for the purposes of data consolidation and manuscript editing for readability purposes. The authors have reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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