

Heritage Language Loss in Multilingual Migrant Families: A Qualitative Study of Kerala Christian Diaspora Households

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research is an attempt to explore heritage language loss in Kerala Christian migrant families in Western and Middle Eastern areas. Although researchers have previously recorded intergenerational language shift among immigrant populations, little has been recorded on faith-based South Indian diasporic families and the interaction of family language policy, type of migration, and institutionalized religious behavior. To fill this gap, the paper relies on semi-structured interviews with twenty-four families and uses thematic analysis to understand the language preferences of parents, the practices of church language, generational communication, and identity change. Results indicate that English is an aspirational linguistic capital, which hastens intergenerational change, especially in long-term permanent Western migration situations. Nonetheless, organized home-based policies, religious reinforcement, and the involvement of grandparents have led to moderate erosion. The research adds to the body of scholarship in family language policy in establishing the ways in which religious institutions may act as preservation agents and as causes of heritage language loss. The results complement existing studies on the topic of diaspora multilingualism by anticipating the sociocultural dynamics of Kerala Christian migrant families and identifying future directions in the maintenance of bilingual sustainability.

KEYWORDS

Acculturation; bilingual identity; diaspora multilingualism; family language policy; heritage language loss; linguistic capital

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1. Introduction

Language is not only a communicative medium, but it also serves as a memory bank, a source of self, and continuity across generations. In the context of migration, though, it has been observed that

heritage languages are often faced with quicker erosion as families balance the forces and demands of education, as well as the forces of socioeconomic mobility. Several studies on the global migration patterns demonstrate that the linguistic shift can take place within several generations (one or two), especially when the language of the host society is of high symbolic and economic importance (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024). Heritage language decline is not sudden in many instances, but is mediated through the practices of the family, the influence of institutions, and the aspirations of parents.

Kerala Christian migrant families are one of the most interesting cases to investigate such dynamics. This community forms both temporary and permanent migration patterns due to the long-standing migration patterns to the Gulf, Europe, North America, and Australia. The heritage language Malayalam coexists with English, which has a historic position of strong educational and institutional presence among communities professing Christianity in Kerala. Migration, therefore, aggravates a preexisting bilingual ecology, and in many cases, changes the priorities in the household in relation to language.

The studies that have been conducted on heritage language maintenance have mostly been on East Asian, Hispanic, and European diasporas (Guardado, 2002; Park and Sarkar, 2007; Tannenbaum and Howie, 2002). These researchers highlight parental consistency, inter-generational communication, and schooling as major predictors of retention. Language practices are further conceptualized through family language policy (Spolsky, 2004) that views the ideology, management, and habitual use as the factors influencing language practices. Nevertheless, scholarly interests in South Indian Christian diasporic families have been limited, especially in relation to faith-based institutions and interaction between migration typologies and language retention.

In addition, the latest empirical studies also show that the symbolic power of English as aspirational capital is increasing in contemporary postcolonial and migrant communities. Sharma (2024) confirms that knowledge of English is often understood as a prerequisite to socioeconomic progress and becoming more global. These views frequently redefine the language choices of parents, favoring English over heritage languages in the home environments. On the same note, Devi (2024) notes that home-based language environments play a significant role in communicative competence, which implies that planned reinforcement plays a pivotal role in bilingual maintenance. Abbas and Iftikhar (2025) also opine that those psychosocial settings, comprising school and community factors, are at the center of determining language attitudes and practices.

Despite these contributions, there are two major gaps. To begin with, there is insubstantial research on how religious institutions, especially churches, play the role of mediators of heritage language preservation among Christian diasporic families. Second, there are very few studies that compare temporary Gulf migration and permanent Western migration in the same ethnolinguistic community. There is a lack of theory in the interaction between migration temporality, institutional

language use, and family policy.

The research paper fills these gaps by exploring the topic of heritage language loss among the Kerala Christian migrant families in varied migratory destinations. In particular, it discusses the impact of parental ambitions, church activities, the pattern of intergenerational communication, and the type of migration on Malayalam retention or erosion. The research provides a multidimensional approach to language shift in the context of a faith-based diasporic family by incorporating the family language policy theory (Spolsky, 2004), linguistic capital concept (Bourdieu, 1991), and acculturation models (Berry, 2005).

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1 What is the extent of loss of heritage languages in Kerala Christian migrant families in various migration settings?
- 2 How does language change between generations rely on the language choices of parents and the language policies practiced in the family situation?
- 3 What effects do the practices of language in church and institutional strengthening have on the retention or deterioration of heritage language?
- 4 What is the controlling effect of the nature of migration on language preservation and identity formation- temporary or permanent?

By foreshadowing sociocultural interactions of Kerala Christian migrant families, this work contributes to the study of heritage language in three significant aspects. To begin with, it improves the geography and religion of the diaspora language studies. Secondly, it illustrates the role of the institutions of faith as a preserver or catalyst of language change. Third, it provides a comparative perspective of migration temporality and its linguistic connotation. In so doing, the study situates erosion of heritage language within the context of it not being an inevitable result of migration, but a result of social mediation as dictated by ideology, aspiration, and institutional ecology.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Heritage Language Loss and Family Language Policy

The issue of heritage language erosion has also been widely analyzed in the literature on the sociolinguistics of immigrant enclaves, where the intergenerational language transmission process is often undermined by socio-political and educational pressures. Empirical research has shown that in one or two generations, linguistic attrition can be experienced, especially when the lingua franca of the dominant group holds a large symbolic or economic capital (IOM, 2024). Guido (2002) and Park and Sarkar (2007) indicate that exemplary parental consistency and deliberate language custodianship are the ultimate determinants that can determine retention results.

The conceptualization of Family Language Policy (FLP) as a systematic approach to

questioning these processes was formulated by Spolsky (2004). FLP is a trio of interrelated dimensions, namely, linguistic ideology (the beliefs about the linguistic value), language management (purposeful regulatory action), and language practice (actual communicative behaviour). De Zés Houwer (2007) also demonstrates that the minority language exposure at a young age is a strong indicator of bilingualism acquisition.

Recent scholarship develops this model in more detail when explaining environmental and psychosocial determinants. Devi (2024) suggests that communicative competence may be developed in the framework of an organized home setting, particularly when the reinforcement goes beyond the incidental exposure. As Abbas and Iftikhar (2025) reveal, schooling and peer influence, as part of psychosocial climates, determine the linguistic attitudes and alignment of identity in the learners. The results of this study support the opinion that retention of language is not an automatic process but rather socially constructed through explicit reinforcement.

However, the current scholarship of Family Language Policy is highly focused on East Asian, Hispanic, and European markets. A conspicuous lack of inquiry exists about South Indian Christian migrant families in terms of the relations that occur between faith institutions and the ideology of domestic language. This gap is rather significant, as religious organizations are often auxiliary linguistic spaces that may either support or replace language practices of heritage.

2.2 Linguistic Capital and English Dominance

It is impossible to comprehend language shift outside its context of a symbolic power structure. Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital reveals the means through which certain languages become credible and powerful in terms of socioeconomic features. In postcolonial and globalized settings, English serves as the capital of linguistic hegemony and determines the aspirations of parents and decision-making in education.

Phillipson (1992) formalizes this phenomenon as linguistic imperialism, where the structural inequalities promote voluntary loss of minority languages. The modern migration studies confirm that English tends to become the language of the home in the diasporic family where integration is required (IOM, 2024). Sharma (2024) provides empirical evidence to support their assertion by proving that upward mobility and aspirational identity can be quite frequently associated with English proficiency in South Asia. On the same note, Sharma (2023) states that language practices moderate the sustenance of identity in contemporary diasporic space, especially in the presence of cultural memory in opposition to modernization forces. These results indicate that the loss of language might not have been a result of the denial of heritage identity but a calculated choice that could be followed by the perceived economic prospects. This is particularly applicable to Kerala Christian migrants who traditionally appreciate English because of missionary schooling. Migration can thus intensify already existing linguistic hierarchies and not necessarily establish completely new hierarchies.

2.3 Acculturation and Intergenerational Identity

Berry's (2005) acculturation model identifies four major strategies or approaches to adaptation, including assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Retention of heritage languages is usually strongest in the integration paradigm, where the migrants retain their cultural identities and, at the same time, interact with the host society. On the other hand, assimilation is often accompanied by a noticeable disappearance of linguistic identity.

The results of the empirical studies of diaspora multilingualism indicate that in many cases, children begin to redefine their identity in the direction of control by the host language, especially when peer networks and educational institutions run in the majority language only (Pauwels, 2016). Viljoen and Zolkos (2021) postulate the idea that the cultural memory decreases along with the linguistic continuity, which implies the importance of language as the carrier of the intergenerational flow. Sharma (2025) provides the so-called liminal landscapes, which have been defined as migratory environments, where identity negotiation is realised in a dynamic way. In this type of liminality, the language choice gains symbolic meaning as a sign of belonging. To Kerala Christian families that have had to juggle and balance between two or more cultural identities, such as Indian, Christian, and Western, language selection can mean being strategic and not simply attrition.

Despite these theoretical developments, the literature of comparative empirical research on temporary migration (when moving to the Gulf nations) versus permanent residence in Western settings is thin in a single ethnolinguistic group. It is through such a comparative prism that it is important to explain how temporality acts upon language ideology and how language transmission occurs.

2.4 Faith Institutions and Linguistic Ecology

The ecological model by Hornberger (2002) places language in the contexts of layered environments: home, school, church, media, and community. Religious organizations, especially in-migrant households, tend to act as custodians of cultural heritage. However, they can also conform to dominant language demands so that they can still be relevant to younger generations. Among other examples, Holbah, Sharma, and Hamadi (2025) prove that literary and cultural reinforcement strengthens the involvement of languages, which means that well-organized educational interventions in the sphere of communities can maintain the minority languages. Likewise, the newer diaspora studies show that the language changes in the institution, such as the introduction of English-only services in churches, can unintentionally accelerate the depreciation of cultural history (IOM, 2024).

The choice of language in churches in Christian migrant situations has symbolic power. In cases where services are switched to English (or modernized), the intergenerational transmission might be undermined. On the contrary, the Malayalam liturgical presence can strengthen the linguistic

affiliation. Nevertheless, there is limited empirical research inquiry with respect to this dynamic among Kerala Christian diasporas.

2.5 Retention versus Erosion: Toward Analytical Balance

A significant amount of literature highlights the process of linguistic attrition, but pays relatively little attention to the definition of effective maintenance practices. According to De Houwer (2007), long-term parental management is one of the factors that are always critical. The modern qualitative studies also suggest that digital media integration, facilitation of systematic family regulations, and the role of grandparents can strengthen language preservation (Devi, 2024). However, there is still a lack of comparative studies examining high- and low-retention families in a homogeneous migrant group. Determining the discrete variables that distinguish these cohorts can give practical results that are used in setting up bilingual policies that are sustainable. The lack of such comparative depth in scholarship, however, is quite striking in the existing scholarship on South Indian Christian diasporas.

2.6 Research Gap and Theoretical Positioning

Despite the extensive literature on heritage language shift, three gaps are still present: first, a lack of empirical literature about Kerala Christian migrant families in the context of diaspora linguistics; second, an insufficiency of theoretical approaches to religious institutions as both source of preservation and disappearance; and third, a gap in comparative treatment of temporary and permanent migration settings within a single ethnolinguistic community. This paper places heritage language loss within the framework of socially mediated process based on the theory of Family Language Policy (Spolsky, 2004), linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), acculturation models (Berry, 2005), and recent empirical studies of the diaspora (Sharma, 2024; Holbah, Sharma, and Hamdi, 2025; IOM, 2024).

To explore these dynamics in a systematic manner, the next section outlines the qualitative research design, selection of the participants, data collection procedures, and analysis framework used in this investigation.

3. Methodology

The sample consisted of 24 Kerala Christian migrant families who were residing in the Western permanent migration situations ($n = 16$) and the Gulf temporary migration situations ($n = 8$). The respondents were chosen using purposive sampling to represent first-generation migrant parents who had at least one second-generation child. The semi-structured interviews took place in January and April 2025, and they lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. The interviews were conducted using either Zoom or WhatsApp (depending on the availability of the participants) and in English or Malayalam. The interview questionnaire contained questions regarding practices of home language, parental

motivation, language use in church, schooling practices, and intergenerational communication patterns.

All the interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed manually within a period of 48 hours. The semantic meaning of Malayalam texts was maintained by a careful translation. Transcripts were checked against recordings to increase credibility, and summaries were presented to the chosen participants to validate them. The thematic analysis was used to analyze data according to the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). The preliminary codes were created inductively and then arranged into larger themes in accordance with Family Language Policy (Spolsky, 2004), linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), and acculturation theory (Berry, 2005). The peer reviewer agreed to code 20 per cent of the transcripts independently to ensure reliability and disagreements were resolved through discussions.

The researcher has a cultural familiarity with the Kerala Christian community, and this helped her to attain a familiarity with the context; reflexive awareness has been applied in order to reduce interpretative bias. Limitations of the study include the purposive sample size, self-reported proficiency, and being limited to one religious community, which limits generalization. However, the design is very informative on the analysis of heritage language dynamics in this particular diasporic setting.

4. Results

The results show some interesting trends in the preservation and loss of heritage language in the twenty-four Kerala Christian migrant families. Based on self-reported language use, intergenerational patterns of communication, and how frequently Malayalam is used in household and ecclesiastical areas, families were identified into three different categories, i.e., high retention (37.5%), partial retention (16.7%), and low retention (45.8%).

A general trend was observed in all migration situations; there were much higher erosion rates of heritage languages in the case of Western permanent migrant families as opposed to their counterparts in the Gulf (temporary migrant families).

4.1 Retention Patterns Across Migration Contexts

Among Western permanent migrants, the Malayalam language was frequently confined to parental use in the house, and the children mostly responded in English. Many parents have admitted that there has been a gradual change to English as the main home language, especially after children started school education. One of the parents of the United Kingdom said, we learned Malayalam at home, but once school started, everyone found English easier. Conversely, Gulf-based families had higher continuity of Malayalam; they explained that their retention was due to future reconnection to Kerala and continued exposure to co-ethnic groups. Migration became a factor of temporality. Permanent

settlement promoted assimilation into the English-dominant setting, and temporary migration promoted maintenance-oriented language ideologies.

4.2 Parental Language Ideology and Aspirational Motivations

The aspirations of parents played a significant role in language practices. Most of the Western migrant parents framed a strong command of the English language as a way of achieving success in their academic lives and socioeconomic mobility. According to one of the participants in Canada, we do not want them to go through a hard time just like we have. English is their future.” These kinds of stories are indicative of the status of English as linguistic capital, where educational benefit is more frequently valued than the preservation of heritage. Families that were classified as high retention, however, had conscious management plans. These were Malayalam-only regulations at home, language days, prayer in Malayalam, and frequent communication with grandparents in Kerala. An Australian participant said, we insist on Malayalam at dinner time. In case they replied in English, then we re-asked them in Malayalam. These systematic interventions were used to differentiate high-retention families and those that were undergoing a rapid shift.

4.3 Church Practices and Institutional Reinforcement

The practices of church language became a major mediating factor. There was higher intergenerational retention in families who attended services in the Malayalam language. More reinforcement was given through Sunday school programs that were done in Malayalam. One of the UAE parents commented that the Church preserves the language. They read the bible in Malayalam. On the contrary, those churches that changed to English as a means of making it inclusive compromised heritage strengthening. In the United States, one of the parents noted that, after church became English-only, the children would no longer hear Malayalam outside the house. Therefore, language shift was being preserved and accelerated through religious institutions, depending on the linguistic orientation of the latter.

4.4 Intergenerational Communication and Emotional Distance

The implications of language erosion were visible as far as intergenerational relationships were concerned. In Kerala, some of the parents complained of a lack of communication between children and grandparents. A respondent informed that his daughter knows Malayalam but cannot speak fluent Malayalam. When she speaks to the grandmother, she changes to English. These trends indicate some partial retention, with the receptive competence being higher than the productive ability. Emotional distancing was more vivid in low-retention families. There were reports of some adolescents choosing to use English even when using it in culturally serious situations like prayer and family meetings. This change not only testifies to language change, but also to the changing alignment of identity to host-

society norms.

4.5 High-Retention versus Low-Retention Families

An analytical comparison of high and low retention families portrays evident structural variation in heritage language achievements. Intentional language management, a regular pattern of playing in church, ongoing communication with the extended family, and positive parental attitudes towards bilingual identity were found in high-retention households in Kerala. Conversely, families with low retention were typified with English-dominant educational settings, assimilation-based parental ideologies, low use of Malayalam in religious settings, and low levels of home-based structured reinforcement. However, to their surprise, language shift was not much referred to as intentional abandonment; it developed over time as a practical reaction to scholarly demands, assimilation, and the symbolic value of English that was perceived.

The results of the above indicate that language erosion amongst the Kerala Christian migrant families is a socially mediated phenomenon rather than a uniform phenomenon. Institutional reinforcement, parental aspiration, and migration temporality are the factors that interact to bring up intergenerational transmission. The following section explains these results with references to the theoretical frameworks of the family language policy, linguistic capital, and acculturation.

5. Discussion

The results of this paper demonstrate that heritage language loss in a group of Kerala Christian migrant families is not accidental or inevitable but mediated socially by the interplay of pressures of aspiration and institutional ecology, and migration temporality. The analysis of the results in the framework of the family language policy, linguistic capital, and acculturation makes it possible to understand that the negotiation between cultural continuity and socioeconomic mobility is a complex process.

5.1 English as Linguistic Capital and Aspirational Mobility

The value given to the English language in Western migrant households is quite similar to the conceptualization of linguistic capital developed by Bourdieu (1991), in which language possession is seen in terms of symbolic and material authority within the institutional realms. In the current study, parents were categorically placing English as a requirement to academic achievement and social acceptance, which is in line with Phillipson's (1992) description of a structural linguistic hierarchy as opposed to just preference. Therefore, the English hegemony turns out not to be the renunciation of Malayalam but the strategic choice in response to the perceived opportunity structures.

This trend confirms the argument of Sharma (2024) that English is aspirational capital in South Asian settings, which influences the decision-making process of parents even before migration. Likewise, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2024), intergenerational

shift tends to increase faster when organizations of schooling in the country of immigration and peer connections only use the majority language. Under this meaning, heritage language erosion can be perceived as an intelligent reaction to global language economies as opposed to cultural abandonment.

The findings, however, also make deterministic accounts of language shift more complicated. Although the dominance of English was eminent, it did not always lead to its complete loss. It was found that aspirational mobility and bilingual retention can coexist in those families that have an explicit management strategy. Such subtlety is congruent with the argument of De Houwer (2007), who states that the stable input, along with the systematic management, has a strong moderating effect on the shift trajectories.

5.2 Family Language Policy and Deliberate Management

The distinction between high-retention and low-retention families is a strong indication of the tripartite model of ideology, management, and practice posed by Spolsky (2004). The majority of households with high retention showed clear language-management practices, including Malayalam-only spaces, regimented prayer schedules, and deliberate reinforcement, which characterize conscious opposition to assimilation in the dominant language as Guardado (2002) defines it.

Recent studies also make the significance of structured environments more apparent; Devi (2024) claims that communicative competence is formed in the course of active enhancement and not passive exposure, whereas Abbas and Iftikhar (2025) note that the psychosocial environments play an essential role in forming attitudes towards language. In the current paper, the families who did not have explicit management plans underwent a faster transition, despite the positive ideological attachment by the parents towards Malayalam, which indicates that ideology is not enough without specific management. Notably, language shift is not negatively perceived by all scholars.

The studies argue that bilingual adaptation is a sign of negotiation of identity, flexibility, as opposed to erosion (Pauwels, 2016). However, the emotional alienation found in this research, especially between grandparents and grandchildren, suggests that being functionally bilingual does not necessarily maintain intergenerational closeness. As a result, the findings contribute to and expand the family language-policy literature by showing that management strategies play a pivotal role in faith-based diasporic settings.

5.3 Migration Temporality and Acculturation Dynamics

The main contribution of this research is that it compares the temporary migration into the Gulf and the permanent settlement of the West. Families with a Gulf background showed greater preservation of the heritage, which can be explained by the desire to come back to the homeland and the population concentration of co-ethnic groups. This noted trend is parallel to the model of integration presented by Berry (2005), in which cultural maintenance is present together with involvement in the general

society. The statistics indicate that temporary migration helps to integrate but not assimilate.

In comparison, permanent settlement in the Western context is more often linked with assimilation-oriented practices, which fit the assimilation dimension by Berry (2005). The International Organization of Migration (IOM) (2024) also notes that permanence is a factor that hastens the dominance of the majority language. These results further advance the research on diaspora multilingualism by showing how the temporality of migration has a direct effect on the family language ideologies. This dynamic can also be explained by the notion of liminal landscapes presented by Sharma (2025). The Gulf migrants, however, are psychologically attached to Kerala by the temporal dimension. On the other hand, permanent migration shifts Western migrants towards host cultures. As a result, language shift is not only a manifestation of institutional forces but also of temporal fantasy.

5.4 Faith Institutions as Dual Agents

The ecclesiastical language practices explain a dimension that is very salient in a larger context, which is linguistic ecology. The ecological framework put forward by Hornberger (2002) argues that the reinforced language in various sociocultural contexts is what determines whether a language is going to survive. Congregations, which conducted service in Malayalam, in the current research had better language retention, and mainly English-speaking congregations unwillingly facilitated linguistic erosion. Holbah et al. (2025) also conclude that there is cultural and literary reinforcement in the institutional context that increases linguistic participation. The results discussed herein further this point of view in the sphere of faith, demonstrating that the language of liturgy is a symbolic self-identification with the heritage. In situations where institutional reinforcement is weaker, home-based management will not be effective enough to promote linguistic vitality.

Such a double role makes it difficult to write reductive histories of the maintenance of diaspora. Religious institutions do not exist inherently in protective cover; in fact, they are adapted to the demographic reality and generational tastes. As a result, the maintenance of language among religious groups will require a planned policy of conformity as opposed to passive continuity.

5.5 Emotional Consequences and Identity Reconfiguration

The process of language attrition, which is evident in the present research, is not simply a functional loss but a relational phenomenon. The qualitative data that show the lack of intergenerational communication between grandchildren and grandparent generations support the description of a poor cultural memory transfer formulated by Viljoen and Zolkos (2021). As productive competence declines, symbolic continuity inevitably disintegrates. Sharma (2023) argues that memory and identity are founded on the linguistic mediators between generations, with the current results leading to the conclusion that the partial retention of the form of comprehension without production allows

maintaining a non-expressive kind of connectivity and also losing the expressive one. Therefore, the disappearance of a native language has effective consequences that go beyond educational expediency.

At the same time, the information can be viewed as a warning about the naivety of the romanticization of full language preservation. Adolescents could easily find their way around between hybrid identities with ease, and this indicated adaptive bilingualism and not an identity crisis. This empirical fact contradicts all the alarmist messages about cultural erosion and coincides with the model of integration, discussed by Berry (2005), which depends on the experience of permanent reinforcement.

5.6 Theoretical and Empirical Contribution

To the existing literature, the findings are substantively extended in three aspects. To start with, they give empirical evidence of the interplay between English as aspirational capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Sharma, 2024) and the family language policy, which explains how the interaction between these two phenomena influences the linguistic practices of a household. Second, they also establish the idea of migration temporality as an important variable in the framework of South Indian Christian diasporic communities, which brings with it a subtle temporal aspect to the migratory experience. Third, they redefine faith institutions as a changing linguistic mediator operating in the ecological context of Hornberger (2002), which can expose the mutuality of the connection between the religious environment and language preservation. The placement of Kerala Christian migrant families in more general arguments about linguistic capital, acculturation, and diaspora multilingualism means that this study will go beyond the description of the language erosion process and provide a theoretically informed statement to explain why language erosion occurs differently in different sociocultural settings.

5.7 Limitations

There are various limitations to this inquiry that should be noted. To begin with, the purposive sampling of twenty-four Christian migrant families limits the ability to generalize the results to other groups, outside of this religious and ethnolinguistic group. Second, the use of self-reported language proficiency and parental descriptions instead of measuring it with standardized measurements adds a certain element of subjectivity to the assessment. Third, a cross-sectional design only captures language practices at a single point in time and fails to capture any longitudinal change between development stages. Lastly, the very narrow scope of Christian migrant family households does not allow for comparison to other religious or regional South Indian communities. Nevertheless, the study provides insights that are analytically transferable in the relationship between migration temporality, institutional ecology, and family language policy, in spite of these limitations.

Conclusion and Future Implications

This paper explored the issue of heritage language loss among Kerala Christian migrant families based on family language policy (Spolsky, 2004), linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), and acculturation theory (Berry, 2005). The results show that the erosion of heritage languages is not a rigid result of migration; instead, it is a socially mediated event driven by the aspirational ideology, institutionalization, and the temporal nature of migratory experience. English serves as an influential symbolic capital (Sharma, 2024), thus affecting parental decision-making and speeding up the process of intergenerational transition, particularly in the cases of permanent Western settlement. A well-organized approach to home-management, church-based reinforcement, and explanatory intergenerational contact provides considerable moderation of this erosion, however. This study broadens the literature of diaspora multilingualism and predicts migration temporality as an important variable of heritage language maintenance by comparatively analyzing Gulf temporary migration and Western permanent settlement in one ethnolinguistic community. Additionally, it resocializes faith institutions as two-sided agents in the linguistic ecology conceptualized by Hornberger (2002), which, with policy orientation, preserve or hasten the process of language shift.

Longitudinal designs should be used in future studies to track the development of language trajectories at different developmental stages. The comparative research on the South Indian religious communities that are quite varied may also help to shed light on the importance of institutional ecology in language retention. Additionally, the research intervention-based studies that investigate faith-based bilingual programmes, well-organized parental seminars, and digital heritage strengthening systems might offer viable mechanisms for sustainable multilingualism. A combination of literary and cultural involvement techniques proposed by Holbah et. al. (2025) can also enhance heritage identity and educational progress.

Thus, migration should not trigger linguistic erasure. With ideological commitment that is in line with structured management and institutional reinforcement, heritage languages may coexist with global linguistic capital. To maintain this balance, it is necessary to consciously keep the balance and community cooperation, and the understanding of language as cultural memory and future resource.

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Declaration

This manuscript is original work and has not been submitted or published elsewhere in full or in part. The research, analysis, and arguments presented in this article are the author's own. AI tools, if used, were solely for language refinement, grammatical clarity, and formatting assistance. No AI tool was used for generating the core ideas, analysis, interpretations, or findings of the research.

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