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# Chapter 7

## The Socio-Material Value of Language Choices in Mozambique and Finland



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and Sonja Kosunen 

**Abstract** This chapter explores parental choice of language programs from a socio-material standpoint. It uses a DeleuzoGuattarian framework of smooth and striated spaces to understand how parents in Mozambique and Finland position themselves when making choices concerning their children's language education. We analyzed interviews from Finland and focus groups and policy documents from Mozambique to understand the materialities and social discourses that constitute parental choice. We found that in Finland, materiality as a physical space (e.g., school location) factored into caregivers' decision making when selecting schools for their children. In Mozambique, in turn, materiality as socioeconomic stability or advancement was a recurring theme. In the Mozambican context income and educational outcome (associated with Portuguese) were important factors for school/language choice, whereas in Finland social distinction was key. Based on our analysis, we draw conclusions about the nature of choice, arguing that a socio-material approach and the concept of assemblage are well-suited to understand the complexity of it.

**Keywords** Finland · Language choice · Language education · Materiality · Mozambique · Smooth and striated

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## Introduction: Examining Choice

Although longstanding research in language education and policy has drawn a more complex picture, popular discourses persist that promote the ideas that parents choose educational pathways for (or with) their children, that students choose to learn a language, or that communities choose their language practices. Our chapter complicates this notion of choice. In doing so, we draw on social constructionism and new materialism to understand how parental or familial choices about schooling shape and are shaped by social and material realities. For this purpose, we examine interview data from Finland and focus groups as well as policy documents from Mozambique, asking how parental school choice, particularly in relation to language programs, is addressed in reference to the materialities and social discourses that impact this choice.

In Mozambique, local African languages<sup>1</sup> have traditionally been given little constitutional and societal recognition in comparison to the lingua franca Portuguese. In this context, a bilingual program with 17 local languages, driven by support from communities and families, illustrated and initiated a discursive shift towards a recognition of the different values of minoritized languages (Chimbutane, 2011). In Finland, where the core curriculum (officially) keeps curricular differences between schools minimal, teachers (in general) receive the same education and training, and student achievement does not differ greatly between schools (Sulkunen et al., 2010), school selection is often assumed to be a non-issue. Yet, as research has shown (Kosunen, 2014), school choice in cities, where possible, tends to be realized along the existing divides in families' social, cultural, and economic capital. Given these multiple and interacting language ideological and educational factors, both contexts lend themselves to examining language choice in education and analyzing the larger socio-material realities that motivate it. We do this within a framework that brings together social constructionism and new materialism in that it examines material and social/cultural values of so-called “foreign<sup>2</sup>” languages and lingua francas and the smooth and striated spaces (see next section, Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) from which educational choices are made.

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<sup>1</sup>African languages spoken in Mozambique are officially referred to as “national languages”, irrespective of their geographic coverage or number of speakers.

<sup>2</sup>We use the term “foreign” with hesitation. We are aware of its negative connotations of non-belonging and otherness but use it to engage with a field where that term is still commonly used (foreign language education, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, etc.).

## Theoretical Framework: Smooth and Striated Spaces

Some strands of what has been termed “new materialism” are trying to overcome the human versus non-human binary by understanding material and non-material realities as intertwined in a process of being and becoming together (see also Muhonen & Vaarala, Chap. 4, this volume). As part of such approaches, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) make a distinction between “smooth” and “striated” spaces. In their framework, the former refers to spaces that do not restrict physical movement and allow for multidirectional growth, “imagination and creative action” (Toohey, 2018, p. 31), such as an ocean. The latter, in turn, refers to “habitual, permanent and conventional knowledge” that direct physical movement into predetermined “paths planned by and used by others” (p. 31), such as a city plan. Our chapter examines the striated and smooth spaces of parental choice.

It is important to note that Deleuze and Guattari understand smooth and striated spaces neither as separated categories, nor as value judgement. Rather, they emphasize that the smooth and the striated only exist as hybrid, or, in their words, “exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space, striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 523). In addition, they stress that smoothness does not guarantee liberation or emancipation: “Of course, smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries. Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us” (p. 500). This is echoed by Hodgson and Standish (2006), who, in their critique of the liminal and limited existence of smooth spaces in academia, remind us of Deleuze and Guattari’s warning to consider smooth spaces a silver bullet: “The suggestion is not to seek smoothness as an endgame but to allow orientation towards becoming and uncertainty and to resist the smooth becoming striated” (p. 573). Similarly, our chapter tries to make visible how striation can be resisted or smoothness of educational choice can create opportunities for increasing social equity.

Given the interconnection between striated spaces and the emerging educational inequities found in the analysis in these two contexts, the interconnection between striation and inequity calls for further examination and discussion. Our chapter identifies school choices as striated and/or smooth spaces that regulate and allow, hinder or support movement, activity, and creativity. However, we also pay attention to how such spaces exist in hybridity, what options for transformation of striated spaces there are, and how a possibility of a smooth space can be turned into a liberating reality. This is particularly relevant in postcolonial contexts such as Mozambique where the prevalence of diglossic colonial language ideologies and practices continues to constrain the development of pluralist and inclusive forms of citizenship, including in education settings. Transforming striated spaces such as these presupposes recognising and critically addressing language related social inequities, thus paving spaces for social justice. In our analysis, we use smoothness and striation as both in a literal and a metaphorical sense. In reference

to material realities, it may, for instance, describe spaces or movement; in reference to social processes it describes possibilities for thought and action. The concept of materialities helps us bring together aspects of choice that are traditionally kept separate, such as spaces, discourses, (social, financial, and other) resources, and ideologies.

In line with our theoretical framework, our methodological approach is inspired by what Lather and St. Pierre (2013) have termed “post-qualitative research” (p. 629). Our chapter is an attempt to open our work for understandings of research(er) entanglements that puts into question what we have learned about research processes (as linear), data, researcher positions, (e.g. subject vs. object), and representation, to name a few (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013). Although our data was collected very much in a “humanist qualitative research” paradigm (p. 630), which centers the human researcher subject, sees them as separate from the “research object” or “research problem”, and assumes a certain linearity of research activities (e.g., from planning to implementing to reporting), we also approach our work as a space of reflection and unlearning of what we have been taught, for instance about “choice” and “comparability” of data, and the idea of having to produce concrete “results” for implementation. We see our chapter as carrying characteristics of what Lather (2013) has described as “QUAL 2.0”, “QUAL 3.0”, and “QUAL 4.0” (p. 635) i.e. as research that is still “grounded in humanist concepts of language, reality, knowledge, power” (QUAL 2.0), etc. However, it also “begins to use postmodern theories to open up concepts associated with qualitative inquiry: validity, voice, data, empathy”, etc. (QUAL 3.0) and also aims to “imagine and accomplish an inquiry that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (QUAL 4.0) (p. 635).

## Context and Data

We operate in a context that is shaped by many interconnected global processes, including but not limited to neoliberalism, neocolonialism, mobility/migration, globalization, and need for and lack of educational equality. These larger processes permeate all layers of society and thus also shape what languages are being taught and learned at local schools. Although we bring together two ostensibly different contexts, we look at them through the same lens as we ask how parental choice regarding their children’s schooling manifests itself in terms of sociomateriality, particularly as smoothness and/or striation.

As chapter authors, we were navigating the data analysis and writing process between different national and institutional contexts and racial affiliations. As two white European women from Finland and Austria and a Black man from Mozambique, we are grappling with our positionalities in the histories and presences of epistemic colonialism, which operates, for instance, through the systematic (re)framing of data from formerly colonized countries through theoretical frameworks that were developed in the Global North. At the point of writing this piece,

we did not address our positionalities explicitly but found the sharing of work and ideas collaborative and fruitful. There is clearly more to be unpacked about how we are entangled in larger socio-political processes in such transnational collaborations.

### ***Mozambique: Language Ideology, Policy and Education in a Post-colonial Context***

Mozambique is a former Portuguese colony located in Southern Africa. The country became independent in 1975, after 10 years of armed struggle led by the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (Mozambican Liberation Front, hereafter Frelimo<sup>3</sup>). According to the latest population census, Mozambique has a population of 27.9 million inhabitants, of whom 39% are illiterate and 66.6% live in rural areas (INE, 2019). There are over 20 African languages spoken in the country, in addition to Portuguese and a few foreign languages. Results of the 2017 census show that African languages and Portuguese are spoken by about 90% and 60% of the population, respectively (INE, 2019). In the absence of African languages that assume the role of a vernacular lingua franca, Portuguese has taken the place of the *de facto* lingua franca.

Data from the four censuses conducted so far (1980–2017) indicate that while the proportion of speakers of African languages as a first language is gradually decreasing, the proportion of speakers of Portuguese as a first language is on the rise, which can be taken as a sign of language shift from African languages such as Changana, Ronga, Chope, Chuabo, and Macua to Portuguese. As is discussed and substantiated in this chapter, the diglossic language ideologies, policies and practices that have been attested in post-colonial Mozambique, including in education, have a bearing on the expansion of Portuguese and on the relative retraction of African languages.

Post-colonial language ideologies and policies as well as views commonly held in relation to Portuguese and African languages in Mozambique still reflect the colonial monolingual legacy. Indeed, after 45 years of independence, Portuguese continues to be the sole official language of the country and the *de facto* language of education and socioeconomic mobility, whereas African languages remain minoritized and relegated to informal domains.

However, there have been some transformations since 1990, when for the first time it was enshrined in the Constitution that the State promotes the development and increased used of African languages in public life, including in education (cf. RM, 1990, Article 5). After that, other legal provisions favouring multilingualism and multiculturalism have followed. Among other things, the new discourses and

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<sup>3</sup>Frelimo is the main political party in Mozambique and has been in power since independence in 1975.

legal provisions on languages in Mozambique open spaces for the promotion and development of African languages and associated cultural practices as well as for sociopolitical participation. The introduction of bilingual education in Mozambique since 2003 is one remarkable consequence of this current openness of ‘ideological and implementational spaces’ (Hornberger, 2005) in the country. The bilingual programme adopts an early-exit model in which an African language from the catchment area is used as a medium of learning and teaching in the first 3 years of schooling, a role that is then taken up by Portuguese from grade 4. After transition, the model provides for continued study of African languages up to grade 7. Among other gains, Chimbutane (2011, 2018b) shows how the introduction of African languages in education has been enabling pupils’ participation in classes and also expanding spaces for community participation and agency in education and language planning, in particular in rural areas, where Portuguese is a scarce resource.

Despite these enabling legislative and policy provisions in favor of African languages, substantial challenges remain, which jeopardize pupils’ effective learning, including limitations in human capacity and scarcity of teaching and learning resources. These factors are exacerbated by the fact that, given the colonial legacy, African languages are still not “tied to material and symbolic wealth” (Stroud, 2001, p. 351). This situation explains, at least in part, why many parents and guardians opt out of bilingual education even in cases when they value and are keen to preserve their heritage languages and associated cultures.

### *Finland: Language Choice in a Public School System*

Finland is one of the Nordic countries with a population of about 5,5 million and two constitutionally supported national languages, Finnish and Swedish, of which the latter is spoken by about 5.6%. Other minorities include the Indigenous Sami-population, Sign language users, and long-established minorities of Roma, Tatars, Jews, Karelians, and Russians. In 2018, about 7.1% of the population had a first language other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sami (Statistics Finland, 2019).

Finnish comprehensive education is known for its relatively uniform educational system and has a reputation for high-quality teaching for all (Antikainen, 2006), although critical voices exist (e.g. Kosunen & Hansen, 2018; Seppänen et al., 2019) and recent studies have pointed to different forms of educational segregation (Bernelius & Vaattovaara, 2016; Kosunen et al., 2016; Berisha & Seppänen, 2017). As the educational governance in the country is decentralised, exploring the practices city by city becomes relevant.

Previous studies (e.g. Seppänen, 2006; Kosunen et al. 2016) have shown how school choices function as a distinctive mechanism in terms of social class background in Finland. School choices were facilitated by the Basic Education Act in the end of 1990s. With less than 3% of independent schools (which are fully state-subsidized), the Finnish school landscape is usually considered to be public

(Seppänen, 2003) and the difference between public and private institutions is not typically considered a relevant point of analysis (see Seppänen & Kosunen, 2015). Nevertheless, research has shown that distinctive choices are made between public institutions, which means selection and selectivity do play a role. The central mechanisms of selection known thus far have mainly been examined in the contexts of programs with a special focus such as mathematics, music or arts. For these, schools may use aptitude tests to select and group pupils based on their scores (see e.g. Seppänen, 2006; Poikolainen & Silmäri-Salo, 2015). One strategy that has received rather little attention, even though it produces almost as much selection as other forms of focus classes (Kosunen et al., 2016), are the language choices during primary education. In our case city, Espoo, in 2009, 8.3% of pupils studied Swedish, 2.9% French, 5.2% German, and 0.2% Russian as their additional (i.e. non-compulsory) language (“A2-language”). (Education Statistics Finland, 2019).

## Methodological Approach

Data from the Mozambican context was taken from a larger research project called *Comunidade Moçambicana Bilingue* – ‘Mozambican Bilingual Community’ – 2015–2019, where 270 bilingual students from high education level responded to a questionnaire and 53 parents participated in focus group discussions (FGD). The group of students, identified as the post-independence generation, comprised participants between 18–40 years of age and the ages of parents ranged from 40 to more than 60 years. Data was gathered in three urban areas in Mozambique – Maputo, Xai-Xai and Quelimane. This chapter only considers data from focus group discussions with parents. Topics for focus group discussions included, among others (1) the value attributed to Portuguese and African languages, (2) parents’ perceptions and attitudes about their children’s competence and fluency in African languages, and (3) parents’ perceptions and attitudes towards language shift from African languages into Portuguese. The following objectives were set for FGD: (1) to characterise the attitudes and perceptions of parents in relation to Portuguese and African languages; (2) to identify the factors that could have contributed to parents’ choice of language(s) for their children’s socialisation and formal education; (3) to capture insights that could help understand and explain different sociolinguistic dimensions characterising the post-independence generation, such as language shift into Portuguese, erosion of their African home languages as well as their attitudes and perceptions about Portuguese and African languages; and (4) to collect parents’ opinions about actions and/or strategies that could be adopted in order to promote the use and maintenance of African languages and to inform the development of language policies that are inclusive of African languages in Mozambique. The rich data gathered through FGD is suitable for the present study in particular considering that it reveals how parents’ choice of their children’s language(s) of socialisation and formal education is strongly



influenced by micro-level socio-political factors, including the unequal symbolic and material value of Portuguese and African languages in societal linguistic markets. On average, FGD lasted about 1.5 hours and were conducted in Portuguese and/or in African languages, based on participants' choice. The encounters were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

The Finnish data stems from a larger research project (Parents and School Choice, Academy of Finland 2009–2013), for which 96 parents of 12–13-year-olds were interviewed. The children were about to enter lower secondary education within the comprehensive school system. The interviews lasted for about 1.5 hours each and dealt with educational choices in general, but especially the recent choice of lower secondary school and the embedded strategies. Themes such as the way to school, moving around in the urban space, friendships, school-wellbeing, willingness to apply for focus classes and language choices were discussed. Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. It is important to note that our goal here is not to juxtapose two comparable contexts, but rather to examine a phenomenon from different viewpoints. We are interested in how language operates in relation to parental choice in different educational and national contexts.

Transcriptions from both contexts were analysed thematically. The analysis was informed by the theoretical framework of smoothness and striation, which we operationalized by scanning the data for references to experienced restrictions or facilitations of material and social movement, including for instance spaces, objects, social dynamics, and financial resources. This process included a close reading of the data followed by an identification of recurring themes, such as “physical spaces”, “financial matters”, and “child wellbeing”, which we then reviewed, collapsed, and merged to best represent the data and speak to the following two research questions:

1. How does parental school/program choice interact with smooth and striated socio-material realities?
2. What role does language play in this process?

In the following, we present the findings from the two contexts and show the ways in which language operates as a matter of educational choice in socio-material realities.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Parents' perceptions of a school or the value of a language have a bearing on the choices they make for primary socialization and formal education of their children. The following section offers an analysis of the most common themes around language choice in parental discourses.

## *Materialities of Portuguese and African Languages and Parents' Educational Choices in Mozambique: Affordances, Challenges and Dilemmas*

### **Parents' Perceptions and Attitudes About the Value of Portuguese and African Languages**

Overall, for the parents who participated in focus group discussions, Portuguese is important as an instrument for access to formal education and socioeconomic mobility as well as a lingua franca and symbol of national unity. In contrast, African languages are perceived as symbols of ethnolinguistic identity, repositories of traditional values and practices, and as vehicles of intergenerational communication or intra-ethnic integration. We use a few interview excerpts to illustrate some of these perceptions and constructs.

I think that the Portuguese language is very important to our society. This is because... for example, there are many languages in our country. So, by using Portuguese we can easily understand each other. Even in this room where we are, each of us has his/her own mother tongue. In this context, the Portuguese language is what unites us, is what allows us to have a common goal. (LM, 02/10/16)

For this participant, Portuguese emerges as the unifying language of the Mozambican nation, a notion that epitomizes the colonial and post-colonial discourse on multilingualism as a problem (cf. Chimbutane, 2018a, b) and identifies the colonial language as the solution that holds together the post-colonial nation-state building project. Portuguese was also described as the language of modernity and progress, as defined in colonial and Western terms.

The Portuguese language is valuable because it opens us new horizons, provides us knowledge. (...) Acquiring knowledge in Portuguese is easier because one can learn faster. If, instead of Portuguese, you use our heritage languages, then learning becomes very difficult. The Portuguese language makes things easier both at home and at school. (FZ, 11/08/16)

For this parent, Portuguese is the language that opens up new horizons and allows fast and easy acquisition of knowledge, here problematically understood as formal, Western knowledge. In contrast, heritage African languages are assumed to be inadequate vehicles for acquisition of the sort of knowledge that the speaker regards as legitimate, allegedly because these languages make the task difficult. Again, this excerpt echoes the colonial view of African languages as inappropriate media of formal education and the construction of African knowledge as backwards, when compared to the assumed 'modern' and 'progressive' Western knowledge.

The excerpts and analysis provided so far may lead one to conclude that the parents interviewed or the Mozambican people in general neglect African languages and associated cultural capital. This would represent a striated perspective of (post) colonialism, in the sense that citizens' perceptions and attitudes are formatted in such a way that Portuguese (and not African languages) and associated cultural and symbolic capital are the legitimate conditions for citizenry and access to material rewards. We understand this alignment with (post)colonial thinking as the striated

path that has been predetermined by hegemonic forces and restricts parents' movement of thought and action as it centers around Portuguese as condition *sine qua non*. However, as will be shown below, while negative perceptions and attitudes do exist, the overwhelming majority of participants in the study support the promotion and preservation of African languages and associated cultures. Salient in the following excerpt is the essentialist view of language as a symbol of identity and its link with ones' heritage culture.

I think that our heritage languages are very important. First of all, a language is the symbol of ones' identity. So, since language is an element of identity, then it also identifies us with our culture. When we underestimate our language, we are automatically underestimating our culture. (IL, 4/10/16)

In addition to the identity symbolism, the following excerpt brings another salient role often ascribed to heritage African languages – the social integrative role.

In my view, in addition to identity, our languages also allow communication between the child and his/her parents and grandparents. This is because, sometimes our children... they like to speak Portuguese but their grandparents can only speak a dialect [heritage language]. (OU, 4/10/16)

As is often the case, since older people, in particular from rural Mozambique, do not speak Portuguese, African languages emerge as the vehicles that allow communication among family members of different generations. Therefore, in order to communicate with part of their family members and be integrated in all family networks, in addition to Portuguese some parents pass their African mother tongues to their children, even if these are not the first languages that these new generations acquire.

In all, although African languages are certainly valued, the striated perspective of (post)colonialism remains intact by juxtaposing Portuguese and African languages in these ways. Against this backdrop, parents' choice of Portuguese as the language of socialization and formal education of their children can be considered an adaptation strategy to the striation of monolingual and assimilationist language policies and practices in place since colonial rule in Mozambique. In this sense, the possession of Portuguese and associated symbolic and cultural capital is seen as a resource that allows unrestricted navigation of societal spaces, a way of smoothing striated spaces. As we will see, smoothness exists within these parental choices as well.

### **Parents' Language Education Choices and Motivations**

As parents' choice of language(s) of early socialization and formal education is influenced by the perceived sociomaterial value of Portuguese and African languages, the view of Portuguese as the language of legitimate knowledge and socio-economic mobility is the main driver of parents' overwhelming preference for Portuguese. The need to assure academic success to their children emerges as one of the reasons why parents prefer to socialize and educate their children in Portuguese:

We needed to look forward. We never know what comes next. It [the choice for Portuguese-medium education] was to try to get them run faster than we did, you know! Since the use of two languages [a mother tongue and Portuguese] made us face huge difficulties in school. We know those difficulties very well. We tried a shortcut for our children. And the shortcut resulted in this, you see! (BP, 13/05/16)

This participant is an example of the older generations of parents who started schooling without or barely speaking Portuguese and faced learning difficulties, which prevented many of them from finishing even primary education. Underlined in this account is the perception that their African first languages or their bilingualism were the seed sources of their academic failure. To avoid that their children went through the same challenges, these parents opted for socializing their children in Portuguese, hoping that this would be the way to get their children “run faster” than they did, i.e. to learn Portuguese and school content in this language as quickly and as easily as possible. However, in the last part of the excerpt, when this parent concludes that “the shortcut resulted in this, you see!”, he seems to regret the policy of exclusive use of Portuguese in the education of his children. In the focus group discussion from which this excerpt was taken, he (and other parents) expressed concern about the fact that by using Portuguese only, their children could not interact with some family members who were sole speakers of African languages and some were struggling to work in public sectors, including the health sector, in which knowledge of African languages was key for effective service delivery. These can be regarded as negative socio-material effects of the assimilationist language-in-education policy adopted in Mozambique since colonial rule.

Adding to the previous analysis, the excerpt which follows shows how parents perceive that knowledge of Portuguese, academic success and socioeconomic affordances are intrinsically linked.

Portuguese is a language that I like so much! That is why I sent my children to school for them to learn it. Today this language is even useful to my grandchildren, who were born by my children. Why I did this? I did this because our heritage language does not allow you to get a graduate or doctorate degree. That is just a language that is part of our tradition, a language that they must not forget. In contrast, with the Portuguese language they can get a job, can progress in their professional careers, can earn good salaries and can manage to take care of me, as I am aged. I did not use my money to get the shoes I am wearing now. Whose money was that? It was my grandchildren’s money. Why? Because they learnt the Portuguese language. Portuguese will help them in their future lives. Tomorrow you will get a graduate or doctorate degree and you will be somebody in life. Why? Thanks to the Portuguese language. (MM, 05/6/16)

This account substantiates the material view of Portuguese as a necessary condition for education success and socioeconomic mobility. As the participant argues, Portuguese is the passport to higher education degree success, professional advancement and well-paid jobs. He presents his grandchildren as examples of education and professional success, which allows them to take care of him. Portuguese is viewed as the language that allows navigation in the striated social and socioeconomic spaces blocked to sole speakers of minoritized African languages. The excerpt also raises crucial questions about the negotiability of social and material realities (Ennsner-Kananen & Saarinen, Chap. 1, this volume). In a sense, the family

operated and hoped to excel within the striated space of asymmetrical, (post)colonial language hierarchies. A plethora of aspects led to their choice: their own schooling experience, the available programs, their cultural values and backgrounds, the societal and communal discourses, and their socioeconomic realities, to name a few. Amidst these factors, we argue, their options for creating a smooth space, from which unconventional or creative choices can be made, were very limited. This points to the idea that smoothness is not available or negotiable for all people and communities in the same way, an important aspect to consider in questions of choice.

Despite the strong tendency to the exclusive choice of Portuguese, there are also parents who tend to opt for a bilingual or multilingual language policy – Portuguese and African language(s). This is illustrated through the following account:

Well, I especially choose the Changana language for primary socialization of my children so that they can get used to speak this language, as it is part of our tradition. I don't forbid them from learning Portuguese... that is why I send them to school so that they can learn Portuguese. No, I don't prevent them from learning this language... they can carry on! In fact I even feel happy when they can speak and have knowledge of this language. However, I wouldn't like to see them forget their language... the home language. (JM, 05/6/16)

This excerpt illustrates further the construction of African languages as symbols of ethnolinguistic identity, as part of the tradition that needs to be preserved. This is part of the chief motivations for primary socialization in these languages, hence the need to add Portuguese for instrumental reasons. That is, for some parents the policy is not to choose either Portuguese or African languages, they want their children to learn both although for different reasons – Portuguese for perceived symbolic and instrumental reasons and African languages more for symbolic reasons. This perspective substantiates the new materialism view that material and social realities are not mutually exclusive but intertwined in a process of being and becoming together. Through a lens of smoothness and striation, we have seen so far that some parents are quite intentional about making educational choices for their children that follow the striated linguistic hierarchies that colonial processes have put in place. However, these choices are neither “free” nor are they absolute. The expressed doubt and regret as well as the limitedness of available choices make it clear that in the absence of smoothness, which would be the freedom to make creative, unconventional choices, choosing striation is neither completely satisfying nor completely voluntary.

### **Challenges of Using Minoritized African Languages in Education in Post-colonial Contexts**

This perceived value of Portuguese and its associated capital makes it a much sought-after language, which is underscored by the increasing proportion of Mozambican speakers of Portuguese as a first language. As Mufwene (2004) has pointed out, language shift and language death result from individuals' and communities' adaptive responses to changing socioeconomic ecology, including the perception that the acquisition of a high status language is crucial for their survival.

Thus, parents' choice of Portuguese can be taken as an adaptive strategy to striated social, socioeconomic and political spaces that have constrained and minoritized languages and their speakers.

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that, despite the convincing educational and social advantages of bilingualism/multilingualism as presented in the literature, these still need to draw on and reflect the experience of the post-colonial contexts. Specifically, there is a need for convincing evidence showing that having an African first language or being a bilingual/multilingual does not hinder the acquisition of Portuguese and associated cultural and material capital but, on the contrary, is an enabling condition. For that to happen, bilingual schools in Mozambique need to produce convincing results showing that in post-colonial contexts students are better-off when they are educated bilingually. Such results would not only fulfil Mozambican parents' desire to see their children equipped with the sought after Portuguese language and associated cultural capital but also their desire to preserve their ethnolinguistic identity and integration. In addition, African languages and associated cultural capital would start to be perceived as valid forms of material and immaterial capital, with currency even in the job market.

Opening up constitutional and/or policy spaces for African languages is, while an important step, not enough (e.g. Bamgbose, 1999; Kamwangamalu, 2009; Bamgbose, 2011; Chimbutane, 2018a). Education programmes based on low-status languages, such as African languages in Mozambique, will only be condoned by parents if they lead to the acquisition of the resources equated with upward socioeconomic mobility or, at least, if they can lead to the reconstruction of low-status languages as valid forms of cultural capital in mainstream markets. Therefore, as argued in Chimbutane (2011, 2018a), in order to win the hearts of an increasing number of speakers of African languages, especially those of middle class parents, who tend to give greater weight to socioeconomic mobility than to language maintenance, bilingual programmes involving the use of heritage languages have to be designed and implemented in such a way that, in addition to the symbolic/heritage language, children achieve high levels of proficiency and academic attainment in the much sought-after language(s) of capital value. In other words, in order to smoothen the striation of language use and ideologies in postcolonial contexts, it is paramount to assign low-status languages an economic value and make them appealing in the market places alongside high-status languages. This, of course, has to go hand in hand with strengthening the position of the speakers of undervalued languages.

### *Language as a Distinctive Strategy of School Choice in Finland*

In the Finnish context, school choice in comprehensive education has been a widely studied phenomenon over the past decade (see e.g. Seppänen et al., 2015; Kosunen et al., 2016). Attending classes with a special focus means that the pupils take an aptitude-test and, in case they are admitted, may join a selected group of peers and

stay in this cohort in all or most subjects throughout their lower secondary schooling. The schools are allowed to test their pupils in the subject matter related to the school's focal area, such as mathematics, music or sports, and select their student population based on these tests. The choice of focus classes has been considered a way of creating social distinction within the otherwise fairly uniform comprehensive school system, as it is known that the ones that exercise their options, in Finland as well as internationally, are families from higher social classes, particularly upper middle class and upper class (see Seppänen, 2006; Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015; Seppänen et al., 2015).

Previous findings (Kosunen et al., 2016) indicate that exactly as shown a decade earlier (Seppänen, 2006), some of the schools function as magnets (pull-factor) and some as schools to be avoided (push-factor). Often the pull-factors are related to an interesting profile and a good reputation of a particular program with a special focus (see Kosunen, 2014; Kosunen et al., 2016).

If they asked me about my own children, which choice would I make... Let's put it this way: I think that in [the local school] where [child 1] is I'm really happy that he's in a hobby-based [class with a special focus], in comparison to being in just any of the classes in that school. But when I think of [child 2] in another school... I think in there it does not make a difference in which class you are. (Heikki, upper middle class)

The [classes with special focus] are slightly more selective, in all ways. What can you do ((laughs)), that in a way, to put it bluntly, but it is what it is, the leftovers are left in the regular class and there you have all sorts of people. (Laura, lower middle class)

Parallel to the Mozambican case, we understand striation in the Finnish context as parental choice of regular schools and programs without any focus classes or aptitude tests. As the excerpts above show, this is sometimes pejoratively associated with being part of the "leftovers" and of "all sorts of people". In turn, part of smoothness is not merely opting into focus strands, but having the option not to do so, for instance because, according to "Heikki", in some schools all strands offer high quality education, so that "it does not make a difference".

The choice of a class with a special focus means that in some cities, unlike in general, the families become responsible for covering the costs for travel to school. This may turn out to be a material obstacle to some families, especially for those with limited economic resources and many children.

First of all I believe that parents that are not that well educated or are in a weaker social position, they don't want to or support their children into anything with something special. Those kids go to the comprehensive school in the local school, end of story. They don't even think about it. Those parents don't care to find out or think about transport, how to get there and support the child, but the child just goes to school and period. So in that case yes, it is the kids of the so called better families that apply for those emphasized classes. (Hanna, middle class)

In this excerpt, Hanna sees striation as due to lack of education and lack of care. In other words, she associates what we call striated decisions with ignorance that is at least partly self-inflicted. This discourse of smoothness and striation as a choice also

includes material realities, the implication being that even transportation issues can be solved by “finding out”, “caring”, and “thinking”.

Even if this mother describes the social and cultural components related to the choice, also the economic and material resources related to this question play a role. In the Finnish context, it is common for students as young as age seven to commute to school on their own. What is noteworthy is that in the capital region, where educational governance is decentralized and all cities are responsible for schooling in their area, sometimes the way to the nearest school in the hometown is longer than to the one in the next municipality. The possibility of applying to another school than the local one made the everyday-life in some families easier due to material, traffic-related reasons.

Well, there is this physical feature that our daughter can take a bus straight from next to our house to in front of the school. That she can take a bus, and that was an important feature as well. Just as far in [the home city] there would have been a high school, but it would have been a lot more difficult to transfer there. (Paul, middle class)

In Paul’s case, material realities (transportation, proximity) heavily influenced the opting for the language-focused program. Interestingly, although material and practical realities shaped the family’s decision, their choice is not associated with lack of information/education or care because it led to the more socially valued educational choice. The middle-class family managed to utilize the system of educational choice in a way that makes the everyday-life of the thirteen-year-old teenager easier. Reasoning related to the socially distinctive power of a selective choice was absent in this discourse that was built around the theme of traffic. Just as well, in areas where the difference between schools were not perceived as big nor were there schools with a bad reputation, the practicalities and material surroundings of the schools were emphasized in the choice discourse:

We decided to move both of our kids to [the nearest, new] school, as it is 100 meters, so what sense would it make to send children somewhere there over the roads. (Mikael, upper middle class)

In some of the cases the officially nearest school based on local school allocation policies would have been for example on the other side of a motorway, even if nearby. Many parents disliked the idea of children either crossing or going under bridges of these huge motorways, especially so in the winter time, when it is dark in Finland both in the morning as well as in the afternoon. In these cases, different options of influencing the school allocation were considered. One of them was the choice of a class with a special focus.

Mikael reports on sending his children to the nearest school for reasons related to materialities (physical proximity). Similarly to Heikki’s case above, the fact that his discourse is relatively free of social consideration may be due to having only good options. This could be described as smoothness: the ability to make choices relatively free from social striations and being able to consider instead the material realities of the neighborhood.

Another point of distinction in the Finnish school choices, used also in this manner, are the language-choices the pupils and their families are conducting within



comprehensive education. Unlike in the Mozambican case, these choices do not refer to local but foreign languages.

In that [catchment area] ... there are these moments of anxiety and slightly tactics ... for example we have told our [child] who's going to high school, that he should not drop the [intense language class], as it may be, that then they will admit him to the [less favored class]. (Mari, upper middle class)

When thoroughly investigating the socio-economically distinctive power of a foreign language choice (Kosunen et al., 2016), it seemed to function as a means for social segregation as effectively as parental choices of other focus programs (art, music, etc.). However, as seen in the previous excerpt, parents' reasoning that undergirded language-based choices did not reveal as much moral conflict or concern about their *de facto* participating in dynamics of social segregation.

In some of the cases the social capital in the form of what is 'normal' among friends in certain schools, was pushing children to choose less commonly learned languages. In this analysis, it seems evident that the linkage between cultural capital (as in knowledge in foreign languages) and social capital (as in having friends studying the same languages and presumably ending up in same schools) exists, and is naturalized:

Interviewer: So has he started another foreign language in addition to English in primary school?

Anna, upper class: French at fourth grade. ...

Interviewer: How did you end up with that?

Anna: He wanted himself. I didn't do anything. I just asked, as we got the note [from school] that what do you want? All his friends are going, he said, he'll take [French].

In this context, the presentation of smoothness as the most common option ("all his friends are going"), naturalizes the choice and removes any need for explanation. In general, it should be noted that apart from the few exceptions around schools with unfavorable reputations, the choice of a language seemed like a choice of any subject in the discourse of these parents.

Interviewer: How did she end up taking French from the first grade?

Leo, upper class: If I don't remember wrong, it went so that you chose either French or German in the first grade, and she ended up taking French, unlike her brother, her older brother chose German right from the beginning.

Looking at the larger picture of this phenomenon (see Kosunen et al., 2016), the early choices of less common languages clearly functioned as socially distinctive choices within the system, which did not cause extra financial costs to families as they operated as choices of and within local schools. Thereby the strategy of choosing some other language than English to study was working as a manner of distinction either intentionally or unintentionally, but it was evident that it seemed to be almost as effective as a socio-economic divider as the choice of special focus classes. In addition, the choices of so-called "long languages" (i.e. extended language programs) are already made at the primary school stage, when the children are between 7–9 years old. Thus, the influence of the parents in the long-term educational strategies and planning and the amounts of different forms of capital

embedded in these choices, which they are able to mobilize, play an important role, as shown in the next excerpt:

We discussed this [sport emphasized class], as my daughter dances and plays [a ballgame] and does horse riding, that would it be something related to these hobbies. ... one of her friends went there and we discussed that a bit. But as there were other friends going there, and it would have been slightly difficult to reach [physically], that was also dropped out. ... we even discussed the language choices, we sat down to a table went through the choices that if you wanted to read this and that language, which are not just basic options like English or German or something else, then you would have needed to choose certain schools. But she wasn't really into that. (Sebastian, upper class)

Oscar, upper class: ...so we didn't want to give too many instructions, where to go. We went through the options. Why [school A] was out of the picture, as there is no long French.

Interviewer: That's right, so it's a language choice.

Oscar: In [school B] there is, in [school C] there is. [School A] would have been a natural choice in all other cases, but she wanted to continue in the [focus class] and she absolutely likes French. So we had only these two options. And then she managed to get through the aptitude-tests [to the class with a special focus], so she's going. And of course there was a role in the fact that can you really [physically] make it by taking one bus? And yes. That was a criteria as well, if it is feasible to get there.

Interestingly, this is the first mention of language in discourses of parental choice regarding language-focused programs. Language seems to be one of many material and social factors that shape this choice. Further, this excerpt shows how the dual strategy of choosing both, a special focus program and an less common language (see Kosunen et al., 2016), is functioning socially as the most distinctive one. Students who have chosen a long language other than English and are additionally choosing a class with a special focus show a strong tendency to come from higher SES backgrounds in the city scape.

Several things have emerged from analyzing Finnish parents' choice discourses through a lens of smoothness and striation. Striation has been associated by upper class parents with making less socially valued or legitimate choices and explained through lack of education or caring. However, smoothness leading to the same choices has not been marked.

## Conclusions

Concluding this chapter but hopefully stimulating further discussion, we offer a few key points that the analysis of parental discourses in Mozambique and Finland unearthed.

## *Materiality*

As our analysis showed, materiality played an important role in the two different contexts. On the one hand, for some of the Finnish parents, materiality as a physical space (e.g., school location, see also Laihonen & Szabó, Chap. 6, this volume) factored into their decision making when selecting a school for their children. Although there was a strong sense that parents were or should be invested in the social environment of their children, in other words in being part of a selected and selective circle of high-SES groups, in some cases physical proximity or barriers (e.g. the presence of motorways on the way to school) overruled such sociocultural factors, particularly when social factors could be ruled out. This can be also related to the relatively low risk of making a “bad” choice of a school in the comprehensive school stage, which opens possibilities for considering physical space and other material restrictions. In the Mozambican context, materiality as socioeconomic stability or advancement, sometimes mentioned as what the older generation was deprived of, showed to be a strong theme in the parents’ discourse around language choice, although this did not necessarily run counter to a deep appreciation of African languages. It differed from the Finnish context in that income and educational outcome (associated with Portuguese) were explicitly or unmistakably mentioned as important factors, whereas in Finland the socially distinctive argument was dominant (but not always explicit).

In relation to materiality, its varying degrees of negotiability are important to note. For instance, while some parents in Finland are in positions and have the means to (at least partially) change or defy the physical limitations of a cityspace (e.g. by arranging transportation), for others such moves of smoothing a striation may not be available. Non- or limited negotiability may also be connected to larger societal forces such as ideologies or discourses. For example, referring back to the Mozambican context, the negotiability of materiality as socioeconomic advancement does not usually hinge on an individual or even a community, so that even in contexts where a lot of appreciation of African languages exists, language choice driven by material desires cannot always be viewed as negotiable. Thus the contextual factors around language-policies and -practices are fuelling different parental practices in terms of materiality in these two contexts.

## *Language*

In regards to language, our analysis showed that, in the Finnish context, language programs tended to be seen as a protective measure against students ending up in the “leftover class” from the point of view of these primarily middle-class families. In other words, parents considered language/school choices as sociocultural positioning within a socioeconomic elite by choosing the only officially available option for joining a socioeconomically distinctive group of families (or avoiding undesirable

peer groups) within a comprehensive school system. While language choice was also regarded as opening or closing doors in Mozambique, this was not to access an elitist circle or affirm one's social status, but rather to gain financial stability and educational credentials for a secure future, preserve or gain linguistic and cultural identities (usually connected to African languages) or participate in an (imagined) national unity discourse (usually connected to Portuguese). In other words, although social advancement may play a role in both contexts, language choice in Mozambican data was less driven by the desire to set oneself apart, but rather to gain access to different forms of capital (e.g., knowledge, salary) and foster or an integrative sociocultural space (e.g., across generations and communities).

What is noteworthy against this backdrop is the position language assumed in relation to knowledge and learning. Whereas in Mozambique languages as key to perceived legitimate (i.e. western, formal) knowledge was an important theme, often along the problematic striation of Portuguese being the key to academic knowledge and African languages standing in the way of that, the language itself was usually not an important factor in the Finnish data. Rather than foregrounding the language itself in their schooling choice, parents presented language, if they mentioned it at all, within the frame of child preferences. This underlines the argument that language choice is often not first and foremost about language (Saarinen & Ennsner-Kananen, 2020), but, for instance, like in our case, about social status.

What has to be taken into account is the comparison between a so-called foreign language context (Finland) with a post-colonial context (Mozambique) and its linguistic diversity (many minoritized languages with Portuguese as de facto lingua franca). In Mozambique, languages are associated with culture, identity, and socio-economic mobility, the stakes of language choice are relatively high compared to Finland, where the choice of a "foreign" language seems less weighty as, for instance, intergenerational communication is not usually at stake. Whether or not the stakes of choice are (perceived as) high (and for whom and under which circumstances) affects the negotiability of a decision, or to put it differently, the ability to negotiate language choice depends on what is (perceived to be) at stake and is thus not equally distributed, neither within nor between the two contexts.

## *Choice*

Based on the previous ones, our last conclusion has to be simply that choice is complicated, and, compared to many other educational choices, language-choice especially so, given its multiple variations of function. As we have seen, it can have social distinction and upward mobility as goals or consequences, which illustrates how choices are "made", how they are perceived, and how negotiable they are, particularly when it comes to their material components. In short, all aspects of choice and choice-making are permeated by power dynamics, without necessarily following traditional hegemonies.

Choice is commonly seen as something people have and make. The underlying assumption is that humans have the ability and agency to consider several options and rationally decide for one. This decision-making agency is traditionally assigned to humans, and humans tend to be seen as lacking if their performance of this agency is (considered) lacking in some respect. In this chapter, we have allowed for more complexity in this process. Rather than starting from the idea that “humans make choices”, we conclude based on our analyses that a more appropriate framing of choice would be as an assemblage, i.e. as multiplicity of elements that can be “added, subtracted, and recombined with one another ad infinitum” (Nail, 2017, p. 23). Such a concept of choice compels us to ask not “What is ...? but rather, how? where? when? from what viewpoint?” (p. 24) and broadens the concept to include material and social factors, including for example policies, discourses, financial means, possessions, and physical spaces. All these factors shape each other and together bring about a “choice” that consists of more than a human’s decision, which reinscribes or renegotiates striation and smoothness.

Such a broadening and complicating of the concept of choice has important implications. When we consider choice as a socio-material assemblage, the (non-)negotiability of choices becomes more pronounced, so that choice cannot be viewed as innocently flexible or dynamic anymore. As we have seen, material realities and physical spaces, i.e. social and material striations are not usually easy to negotiate, at least not for everyone in every context. The framework of smoothness and striation as well as the assemblage approach to choice thus allowed us to focus on equity issues (or prevented us from losing sight of them) because they push us to ask: What aspects of school choice are negotiable to whom and which ones aren’t and to whom?

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