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Connecting chronotopes and language ideologies: Educator views on migrants' majority language use in vocational education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of language and migrant students' language use in the interplay of chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981) and language ideologies (Blommaert 1999) in vocational education and training (VET) in Finland. The study scrutinises how 16 educators imagined and situated migrant students' language use and constructed values for the majority language and migrant students' other languages. Data were gathered team-ethnographically in a VET institute. Critical sociolinguistic analysis showed that language use was spatiotemporally located in present education and present and future blue-collar worksites. In these timespaces, the majority language was valorised and viewed as a tool for graduating from VET and performing blue-collar work tasks. The findings indicate that migrant students' imagined language use rarely extends beyond their VET education or worksites, and that their diverse language resources should thus be better considered and valued in VET.

1. Introduction

Educational institutions are effective in constructing and circulating ideologies and values related to languages and their users (Silverstein, 1998, 138; Gal, 2006, 20; Rosa & Burdick, 2017, 111–113). Understood as discursively formed systemic ideas and expectations of the value and functions of language and language practices (Blommaert, 1999; Irvine, 2022, 232; 1989), language ideologies also reconfigure the hierarchy between students and their linguistic resources in the schooling system. These ideas arise in metapragmatic discourse, where the topic of language use is language itself (Silverstein, 1993).

Educators are important as they often turn into practice the ideals informing an educational system and its core curriculum. Bringing together the concepts of chronotopes – the discursively constructed entanglement of time and space (Bakhtin, 1981; Park, 2017, 24; Silverstein, 1993) – and language ideologies (Blommaert, 1999; Irvine, 2022) this study explores educators' views on migrant students' language skills in a Finnish vocational education and training (VET) institute. Specifically, I explore how the role of language in VET is constructed in the interplay of the spatiotemporal situatedness of migrant students' language use and the language-ideological values constructed primarily for the majority language, Finnish, but also for other languages. Language use and learning can be seen as always

having spatiotemporal dimensions (Dufva & Aro 2012; Oxford, 2017). Earlier research has shown that in educational institutions, the national language of the given society may be so that disregards migrant students' linguistic resources, or even views them as deficient (e.g., Cushing, 2022; Flores, 2020; García & Otheguy 2017). As an educational form, VET is an interesting ideological hotspot at the intersection both of the practices and expectations of the monolingual nation-state and multilingual students and of the ideals of the educational system and practical worklife.

Language practices in VET are often complex, and earlier research has shown that students differ in their abilities to master them (Efing, 2017; Filliettaz, Loca, & Duc, 2013; 2010; Leone-Pizzighella, 2022). In Finland, VET is the most common type of secondary education amongst migrant students and second language (L2) speakers of Finnish: in 2021, 16,2 % of all students in Finland had a first language (L1) other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sami, and 10,9 % some other citizenship than Finnish (StatFin 2023). In Finland, unlike in the other Nordic countries, many migrants are guided to VET despite their prior educational background or future educational wishes. This is due to a high need for employees in several blue-collar fields and to heavily gendered and racialized beliefs about migrants' suitability for blue-collar sector jobs. (Dunlavy, de Montgomery, Lorentzen, Malin, & Hjern, 2020; Kurki, 2018.) VET is an important steppingstone on many migrants' journey to

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worklife as in Finland, contrary to countries that rely on workplace learning, formal education-based competence is often a prerequisite for employment. The strong guidance of migrants to VET instead of other educational choices could, however, lead migrants into a linguistically narrow blue-collar ecological niche (Sunni, 2017).

Despite the strong worklife orientation, the official goals of Finnish VET state that students not only learn a vocation but also grow as “members of society” (EDUFI 2023a). For migrant students especially, this also means acquiring the necessary language skills (also Hsieh, 2021). Finland has two “national languages”: Finnish and Swedish. However, the majority language, Finnish, is heavily valorised: in the wider society, it is generally believed that one must know Finnish to get a job (see Lehtimäja, Virtanen, & Sunni, 2021). Hence, in this study, I focus on the role of Finnish, using the term “majority language” while also considering migrant students’ other language resources when applicable. Compared to educational legislation elsewhere, the Finnish law on VET (L 531/2017) is exceptionally multilingual, mentioning Finnish, Swedish, Sami, Romani, and the Finnish sign language as languages of education, as well as an unspecified “foreign language” as an alternative language of instruction. This means that multilingual practices supporting migrant students’ learning (e.g., García & Kleyn 2016) could in principle be incorporated into VET. However, research on language ideologies and practices in basic and higher education has shown that the Finnish educational system currently supports monolingual and nationalistic ideals, emphasising the role of the majority language, Finnish, and that educators differ in how they encounter multilingual learners (e.g., Mustonen, 2021; Niemelä, 2020; Repo, 2020; Suuriniemi, 2019; Alisaari, Heikkola, Commins, & Acquah, 2019; Tarnanen & Palviainen 2018).

In this study, I expand the focus of language-ideological research in educational contexts to include VET. I sought to identify the chronotopes constructed for migrant students’ language use and language ideologies and address the following research question: How is the role of the majority language constructed in the interplay of these chronotopic imaginaries and language-ideological values? I apply critical sociolinguistic analytical methods (Heller, Pietikäinen, & Pujolar, 2018) and anthropological analytical methods in sociolinguistics (Jaffe, 2014) to team-ethnographic data (Blackledge & Creese 2010) gathered with educational staff – teachers, supervisors, and guidance counsellors – in a VET institute. In the interests of clarity, I often refer to these different participants as “educators”.

The findings suggest that the role of the majority language in the VET institute is dominant and that the scope of migrant students’ imagined language use rarely extends their present or future educational context or practical worksite. First, I unite the theoretical underpinnings of the chronotopic and language-ideological research frameworks, and review some of the earlier research on language learning and use in blue-collar education. In section 3, I present the research context, data gathering, and analysis process. In section 4, I report my findings on the chronotopes and language ideologies constructed in the VET institute. I then discuss the results, limitations, and practical implications of the study.

2. Connecting chronotopes and language ideologies in blue-collar education

2.1. Connecting chronotopes and language ideologies

In this article, I apply the concepts of chronotopes and language ideologies. The concept of chronotopes, literally, *time-spaces*, derives from Bakhtin’s (1937–1938; 1981) dialogical philosophy of language. Bakhtin used the term in literary analysis to explore “the inseparability of space and time” (1981, 84), i.e., how imagined space and time are connected through discourse. According to Bakhtin, the constructed entanglement of space and time plays a part in narrative construction and character development (Bakhtin, 1981; Kroon & Swanenberg eds. 2020; Woolard, 2013). Chronotopes have subsequently been defined as

“the ratio and characteristics of the temporal and spatial categories represented in certain language practices” (Dovchin, 2020, 27). The spatiotemporal dimensions become visible in the chronotopic approach in two ways: first, the approach explores which time-places are invoked and considered in the present discourse, and second it asks which times and places become associated in the constructed chronotopic imaginaries, such as which places connect to the imagined past, present, and future (Catedral & Djuraeva, 2022).

The chronotopic approach considers the historicity of each spatio-temporal context explored, as historical conditions play a role in the ways discursive constructions are shaped and how times and places become associated in the present (see Blommaert, 2020; Kroon & Swanenberg eds. 2020). As this dialogic construction of historicity is socially and ideologically intertwined, chronotopic exploration locates the historicity of each situation in the realm of (language) ideologies and is “loaded with language-ideological affordances” (Blommaert, 2020, 20). Consequently, the concept of chronotope helps us to examine value judgements, meanings, and expectations regarding, e.g., languages, language speakers, and language practices (De Fina, 2019; Blommaert & De Fina, 2017; Karimzad & Catedral 2018; 2021; Blommaert, 2015; Woolard, 2013, 222).

Hegemonic chronotopes can have material consequences in teaching, and are thus worth exploring (Catedral & Djuraeva, 2022). Their material influence on language education has been explored previously. Different chronotopes and ideological and cultural meanings influence how individuals discursively present and position themselves as language learners and users: whether, for example, they see political meanings in their learning or if they see it more as an individual project (Park, 2017; Woolard, 2013). In an ethnographic study on a literacy class, however, chronotopes continuously socially position migrant students as migrants originating from elsewhere (Zhang & Sterponi, 2020). Flores, Lewis, and Phuong (2018) found that for teachers institutional chronotopes produced institutional subjectification: teachers’ actions towards, e.g., linguistically responsive teaching, were rooted in historical, institutional structures and little driven by their individual attitudes. Hence, for example, implementing language-aware teaching strategies in practice may take time, even if supported by the current educational guidelines and individual educators.

As Catedral and Djuraeva (2022, 422) point out, chronotopes are primary in the formation of “(language) ideologies and ideologically mediated (linguistic) practices”, because they often guide ideas about imagined behaviour and practices in different times and places. In earlier empirical research, the concepts of chronotopes and language ideologies have not been much combined as analytical tools. In this study, I use the concept of chronotope to explore the situatedness and temporality of migrant students’ language use and the concept of language ideologies to explore the constructed value of language. Together, these concepts help to cross-examine how the role of the majority language is constructed in a VET institute. In the interplay of these concepts, chronotopes offer an explanation on the language-ideological value of the majority language present in the ongoing education, whereas language ideologies may explain why some chronotopes are more present in the educational institute than others.

Language ideologies form in a sociocultural, historical horizon but are locally applied (Blommaert, 1999; Irvine, 2022, 232; 1989). The concept stems from the traditions of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (e.g., Jaffe, 2009). Jaffe (2014, 216) defines the study of language ideologies as consisting of four subareas: ideas about the nature of language; values and meanings attached to language practices; hierarchies of linguistic value; and the connections between linguistic forms and identities. Here, I focus mainly on discursively constructed meanings and hierarchies of linguistic value. By seeing language ideologies as discursively constructed, the processual and dynamic nature of the phenomenon is made visible, as along with its local impact on language practices (Mäntynen, Halonen, Pietikäinen, & Solin, 2012, 329; Jaffe, 2009; Mäntynen & Kalliokoski 2018). Linking semiotic practices

and metapragmatic commentary as constructing language ideologies and chronotopes can be seen as processes of linguistic enregisterment (see Agha, 2007). Some earlier research on the intertwining of chronotopes and identity construction have also touched on language ideologies (e.g., Karimzad and Catedral, 2018; Christiansen, 2023).

Language ideologies are powerful as they affect the societal status of languages and language speakers (Blommaert, 1999; Kroskrity, 2000). The power of different chronotopes and their ideological force vary based on the institutional forces that support them and on the authoritative speakers voicing the chronotopic imaginaries. The voices of institutional and authoritative actors get heard more easily, and hence the chronotopes constructed in their language use and practices are societally more powerful (Karimzad & Catedral 2018, 90–91; Blommaert, 2015; Bourdieu, 1991; Catedral & Djuraeva, 2022): VET as an educational institution, and the educators representing it, legitimise the chronotopes constructed locally in the institute, which makes them more powerful in the discussion of migrants' worklife language skills in the society. Issues of power and inequality can be seen in whose chronotopes become acted upon: institutional chronotopic imaginaries – such as those raised by educators in educational institutes – often have material consequences, whereas marginalised groups – such as migrant students – are often less able to “materialise their imaginaries” (Catedral & Djuraeva, 2022, 3).

2.2. Language in blue-collar education

As an educational context, VET connects the present study to the literature on educational linguistics and on language practices in multilingual work settings. The vocations studied in VET share many features with each other and with what is commonly known as “blue-collar” work: the formal education component is relatively short and attracts migrant workers, a large proportion of the education is done onsite, and the work is manual and physically demanding (see Gonçalves & Kelly-Holmes 2020). Traditionally female-dominant occupations, such as hairdressing and practical nursing, are often referred to as “pink-collar” work. However, as gender issues are beyond the scope of this article the colour of collars is not relevant. Thus, I use the terms “blue-collar work” and “blue-collar education” in discussing VET vocations and education.

VET educators' language-awareness and their focus on teaching (field-specific) language in VET vary (Mustonen & Puranen, 2021; Wildeman, Koopman, & Beijaard, 2021). In this context, language-awareness is understood as acknowledging language's substantial role in e.g., learning and identity construction (e.g. Cenoz, Gorter, & May, 2017). This lens has been largely implemented in the Finnish basic education (see EDUFI 2023b). Earlier multimodal analysis of language practices in VET has shown that language use in these educational settings is closely connected to their material and physical surroundings (Lilja & Tapaninen 2022; 2019). In Finland, while language skills are often seen as part of students' vocational competence, the requirements are often vague, and educators assume the target vocation can be learnt without language use (Härmälä, 2008). The line between everyday language skills and worklife language skills is also vague (Seilonen et al., 2016; Virtanen, 2017; Lappalainen, 2004). In earlier ethnographic exploration on language-aware pedagogical practices in VET, migrant students' language repertoire was rarely considered in their studies, and students were not encouraged to use languages other than Finnish (Mustonen & Puranen, 2021).

Earlier research on blue-collar occupations studied in VET has shown variability in the role of language skills and language ideologies. Workers in catering or resource extraction, for example, did not see their language skills as important prerequisites for their employment, but as communication practices that help to get the job done (Gonçalves 2020; McLaughlin, 2020). In Kraft's (2020) study, blue-collar workers made a distinction between language and communication: they saw *language* as their work-related medium and *communication* as a way to create

understanding between multilingual workers. In contrast, in occupations such as practical nursing and hairdressing, linguistic competence is seen as central (e.g., Mustonen & Strömmer, 2022; Duff, Wong, & Early, 2002; Lappalainen, 2004; Moanakwena, 2021; Moore, Morton, Hall, & Wallis, 2015).

The linguistic requirements for different types of language users also vary within workplaces, although not based solely on work tasks but also language users' language-ideological positioning. The language choice is often made based on what is “natural” at a worksite, a notion that is revealing about the ideologised nature of worksite language practices. Earlier research in another Nordic context, Denmark, showed that the “natural” language choice in blue-collar settings is often the majority language of the society: the language is intertwined with the geographical area. In “international” work settings, however, the naturalised language is English – although these territories also overlap. (Kirilova & Lønsmann 2020; Kraft & Lønsmann 2018; see also Blackledge, 2000; Woolard, 1998.) On the issue of language learning on the job, earlier ethnographic exploration has found that blue-collar work only offers limited possibilities to learn the majority language, especially if the work is repetitive and performed alone (Sandwall, 2013; Strömmer, 2017). Lately, a trend has emerged towards more language-aware supervision practices in workplaces aimed at supporting migrants' language learning (e.g., Lehtimaja et al., 2021).

3. Research context, data, and methods

3.1. Research context: VET in Finland

Finland has two upper secondary-level educational options: general upper secondary school and VET. The vocational upper secondary qualification, which is the degree most often pursued in Finnish VET, is usually gained after three years of full-time study, with some individual variation. The vocational qualification (180 competence points) consists of common vocational units (35 competence points), such as courses in communication and interaction competence and mathematics, and vocational qualification units (145 competence points), including field-specific courses and work placement periods (eRequirements, 2023). The work placement periods contain practical tasks completed on worksites under the guidance of work placement supervisors who are experienced professionals in their respective vocations. Each course lasts approximately six weeks.

Whereas many other countries organise VET through different sorts of apprenticeship programs (e.g., Filliettaz, 2022), Finnish VET is more school-based and the curriculum also includes literacy skills, social sciences, and mathematics. The goal of VET is to develop students' vocational skills while supporting their growth as civilised people and members of society: VET not only prepares students for worklife but also – unlike in many other countries – prepares them for possible higher education, meaning university-level education or equivalent after their studies (EDUFI 2023a). Continuing to higher education is not, however, a common practice, unless a student first completes a so-called double qualification, or other studies after VET (e.g., Haltia, Isopahkala-Bouret, & Jauhiainen, 2022; Opintopolku 2023).

As no national level language requirements for applying for VET studies exist in Finland, VET institutes can decide on their own language requirements (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019, 30). This gives VET educators and institutes more power and responsibility to guide students in their studies and to assess whose language skills are seen as adequate when applying for vocational studies. Earlier research suggests that possibilities for multilingual practices in VET education are relatively limited, although some exist, such as multilingual peer support initiated by migrant students themselves and programmes tailored for migrants studying for a qualification in L2 Finnish (e.g., Mustonen & Strömmer, 2022; Mustonen & Puranen, 2021). While the law on VET supports multilingual language policies (L 531/2017), in practice, the education is implemented largely in Finnish. Hence, the role of language

and VET educators' ideals regarding migrant students' language skills are worth exploring.

3.2. Data gathering and participants

The data¹ were gathered team-ethnographically (Blackledge & Creese 2010) during the academic years 2019–2021 in a VET institute in Finland, during which our five-member research team followed young migrants in their VET studies. I was an active member of the research team and in charge of coordinating the fieldwork jointly with the VET institute. We did team ethnography mainly in pairs and spent time gathering data at the institute, e.g., in classrooms, hallways, and the school cafeteria.

The focal institute was located outside the metropolitan area, in a city mostly inhabited by L1 Finnish-speakers. Thus, the institute operated mainly in Finnish in both official and unofficial settings. The focus institute was chosen for its wide selection of programs as well as its “typical” student demography: as is common in VET institutes in Finland, most students represented the ethnic and linguistic majority, and a few students in each study group had a migration background or L2 Finnish.

The followed migrant students arrived in Finland from outside of Europe as unaccompanied minors in 2015. During the data gathering, they were young men studying their vocational upper secondary qualifications in surface finishing, hairdressing, ICT, building maintenance technology, and construction work with mostly L1 Finnish-speaking peers. We also observed a social and health studies group in which all students were adult migrants using L2 Finnish and having different language backgrounds. In all these groups, the language of instruction was primarily Finnish. While all students followed the same basic curriculum, it was sometimes altered either by plan or extemporaneously according to the migrant students' needs.

Here, I focus on the data my co-researchers and I gathered with the teachers, guidance counsellors, and work placement supervisors of the followed migrant students. The linguistic ethnography applied in this study shares features with institutional ethnography, as I see educators as institutional actors in the educational system (Plöger & Barakos 2021; Smith, 2005). We interviewed the educators, attended lessons and work placements taught and supervised by them, made fieldnotes, took photographs, and collected the study materials used by them. Sanna Mustonen and I conducted most observations and interviews together. Thus, for many of the observed situations reported in this article, I have fieldnotes by at least two researchers. During and after the data gathering, we often discussed our observations and reflections together. I was personally present in all observations and interviews analysed in more detail in this study.

The observational data comprised 72 h of observations collected in classrooms and on worksites. In the analysis, I focused on the moments that brought out issues related to language ideology. The interview data comprised 7 h 50 mins of semi-structured and audio-recorded interviews. In the interviews, most questions were related to study content, participants' experiences teaching and guiding migrant students, and how linguistic aspects were considered in VET studies. All interviews were conducted and transcribed in Finnish, and fieldnotes were written in Finnish. Data excerpts in this article are given in Finnish (in italics) and in English translations. Particularly significant parts of the excerpts appear in bold. A research permission was given by the VET institution, and all participants gave their informed consent. Table 1 presents further details on the participating educators. Those with pseudonyms are featured in the data excerpts.

All educator participants were L1 speakers of Finnish and

¹ The study is part of the *Building Blocks: Developing Second Language Resources for Working Life* research project, funded by the Academy of Finland (2019–2023).

Table 1

Participants ($n = 16$), vocational fields, and pseudonyms.

Vocational field	Participant's role in the institute, pseudonym
Construction work and surface finishing	Guidance counsellor, <i>the Guidance Counsellor</i>
Hairdressing	Teacher, <i>the Hairdressing Teacher</i>
Surface finishing	Teacher, <i>the Painting Teacher</i>
Surface finishing	Supervisor, <i>the Painting Supervisor</i>
Construction work	Teacher, <i>the Construction Teacher</i>
Building maintenance technology	Teacher
ICT	Teacher
Social and health care	Teacher
Communication and interaction competence	Teacher, <i>the Finnish Teacher</i>
Mathematics	Teacher, <i>the Math Teacher</i>
Worklife competence	Teacher, <i>the Worklife Teacher</i>
Social studies	Teacher
Physics	Teacher
Sustainable development	Teacher
Health education	Teacher
Practical nursing	Teacher

represented the ethnic majority of Finland. They had at least two but up to 35 years of VET teaching experience. The teachers of the vocational qualification units had mostly been educated in VET institutes or universities of applied sciences, whereas the teachers of the common vocational units and the guidance counsellor mostly had a university degree. Most participants had only worked in Finland. Some reported having worked abroad, however, meaning that they had first-hand experience of being a migrant employee working in their L2.

3.3. Sociolinguistic analysis methods

I analysed the data using critical sociolinguistic methods (Heller et al., 2018) and anthropological methods used in sociolinguistics (Jaffe, 2014). I started by mapping the data, focusing on metapragmatic discourse on the Finnish language in the ethnographic interviews and fieldnotes. Later, I began paying attention to recurrent chronotopic utterances and spatiotemporal aspects constructed discursively for migrant students' use of Finnish, both when – in the past, present, or future – and where the expected language use happened (e.g., *työelämässä*, “in worklife”). I systematically explored the entangled times and spaces in the data through this chronotopic lens to gain a holistic understanding of the imagined language use of migrant students. I identified three main chronotopes based on the functions of language use in different timespaces and named them after their specific focus.

As the metapragmatic discourse on Finnish largely valorised its role, I then connected the frameworks of chronotopic and language-ideological exploration: I added the language-ideological lens to explore the value of Finnish, as well as sometimes other languages, in the data. I focused on the discursive ways the value of language was constructed: the function of the migrant students' (Finnish) language use in different settings, the assessment of their Finnish language skills, and the language policies and practices concerning Finnish discussed in interviews and in educational contexts (e.g., *arkikieli ... pitäs hallita*, “everyday language... one should know”). I brought together the concepts, analysed them together, and finally reached my conclusions. At times, cross-examining the concepts allowed me to note chronotopes or language ideologies not present in the data.

In the next section, I present my findings and provide data excerpts as examples of larger phenomena in the data. First, some terminology needs clarification. The educator participants often referred to students born outside Finland as *maahanmuuttajaopiskelijat*, “(im)migrant students” or *S2-opiskelijat*, “L2 students”. In the analysis, I use the term “migrant students” and sometimes just “students”. I acknowledge that people referred to as “migrants” are a heterogeneous group whose

linguistic skills, vocational skills, and life trajectories vary. The “migrant student” discussed in the analysis is a generalised image of a young adult born outside Finland, and who, after migrating to Finland, started VET studies using Finnish as an additional language. I use the term “language skills” to mean the emerging and diverse linguistic skills of each student in a broad and functionally orientated way, that is, to their communicative abilities in the L2.

My theoretical and methodological choices stem from the critical sociolinguistic tradition. As a researcher, I share many features with the educator participants of the study, in that I am a Finnish language educator and researcher who has lived and taught L2 Finnish in multilingual settings. Additionally, I represent the linguistic and ethnic majority in Finland. My interests lie in developing a more language-aware VET, which is why I see the importance of exploring the institutional role of the majority language in the current VET. Therefore, this study focuses on educator perspectives.

Based on my analysis, I have named the three chronotopes as educational, practical, and speculative futures. Below, I present the chronotopes in temporal order from immediate to future uses. The chronotopes are intertwined and co-exist in the VET institute.

4. Chronotopes and language ideologies in the VET institute

4.1. Educational chronotope

The predominant chronotope in the data valorises the role of Finnish as the language needed to pass VET in the current educational institute and in the present. In this chronotope, other spatial and temporal aspects are mainly ignored or set aside, although the next spatiotemporal step is often imagined as entering blue-collar worklife in Finland. Thus, I named this the educational chronotope.

When talking about the role of Finnish language skills in the current VET studies with me, most educators raise exam requirements. The educational chronotope suggests that language-testing practices² serve an institutional, diagnostic role more than a formative one (e.g., [Huhta & Ahola 2020](#)): courses, tests, and education must be passed to enter worklife. The first excerpt comes from an interview I conducted with the Guidance Counsellor in their office. Having previously followed the migrant students studying construction work and surface finishing, I wished to discuss the structure of the studies and educational pathways of these students. The counsellor remembered each of the observed migrant students and seemed to value the role of the guidance counsellor in supporting students’ learning (fieldnote February 13, 2020). In the interview, we discussed the language tests that many educators had previously mentioned in the data, which are administered by the institute and often required of applicant migrant students (see [InfoFinland 2023](#)). Below, the counsellor is describing the purpose of these tests:

1. Pauliina: *minkälaiset ne on ne kielitestit jos ei oo sitä peruskoulun päättötodistusta ni minkälaisilla tiiäksä minkälaiset ne kielitestit on mitä*

Guidance Counsellor: *kielikoe en tiiä tarkemmin sisältöä*

Pauliina: *nii just*

Counsellor: *mut siinä niinku sitä minimikielitaitotasoa pyritään testaamaan että selviäis meidän ammattiteorioista ja sitten noista yhteisistä aineista*

Pauliina: what kind of language tests are there if one doesn’t have the basic education certificate do you know what kind of language tests they are

Guidance Counsellor: language test I don’t know the content more specifically

Pauliina: okay Counsellor: but **they aim to test the minimum**

language level so that they could survive our vocational theories and then the common unit courses

In the excerpt, the words of the Guidance Counsellor discursively construct the value of language, stating that the purpose of the test is to make sure that migrant students have *minimikielitaitotasoa - - että selviäis*, “the minimum language level - - so that could survive” the theoretical VET courses. The metaphor of “survival” creates an alarming image of the present, the education as a place that migrant students currently must battle through to take the next spatiotemporal step, i.e., entering worklife. The use of the verb *selviäis*, “could survive” in its conditional form foregrounds the uncertainty of survival ([VISK-Hakulinen et al., 2004 §1592](#)), meaning that it is unsure whether migrant students will pass their current education.

The Guidance Counsellor further explains that language tests are not required if a student has graduated from Finnish basic education or general upper secondary studies before entering VET (interview February 13, 2020). This invokes the historical chronotope, where migrant students, in the imagined past, are located in another Finnish educational institution before their present one. Thus, the historical chronotope omits migrant students’ experiences before entering Finland. From a language-ideological viewpoint, the counsellor’s chronotopic statement locating the Finnish language in a hegemonic position in the present studies and testing practice constructs Finnish as the language of the VET institute: Finnish is the sole language a student is required to know to complete their studies. Simultaneously, other languages are ignored. This monolingual language ideology has been explored in earlier studies on Finnish educational institutes, and it is rooted in educational language policies supporting the societal status of the Finnish language ([Alisaari et al., 2019](#); [Mustonen, 2021](#); [Niemelä, 2020](#); [Repo, 2020](#); [Suuriniemi, 2019](#); [Tarnanen & Palviainen 2018](#); [Pietikäinen, 2012](#)).

The historicity considered in the educational timespace does not include contexts spatially outside Finland and temporally before immigration, which creates the image that these people have no history before coming to Finland, or that they have not gained relevant skills before their arrival. This may cause them to be seen as deficient in education (e.g., [Cushing, 2022](#); [Flores, 2020](#)). The observed students who had Finnish as their L2 studied Finnish on the same courses as their L1 peers, in the same classrooms at the same time, but with an L2 syllabus (fieldnote December 9, 2019). The official name of the common vocational unit where Finnish is taught is Communication and interaction competence; however, the Finnish Teacher, along with five others, called the unit *äikkä* or *äidinkieli*, “mother tongue”, and the teacher of the unit *äikänpettaja*, “a mother tongue teacher”. The use of the concept “mother tongue” constructs language as inherited and native speaker-centred. This emphasises the idea of one language closely connected to a speaker (e.g., [Palviainen & Bergroth 2018](#)). Only after my reminder did the Finnish Teacher explain that they also teach L2 Finnish on these courses, thereby showing that L1 Finnish teaching is the dominant focus in the course. The fact that most educators rely on the conventionalised way of speaking and discursively construct the unit as *äikkä* can be seen as an institutionalised way of speaking: the naturalised and monolingual idea is that the L1 of all students in the present VET institute is Finnish.

I talked about the same phenomenon with the Math Teacher after I had observed their class. The teacher recounted a situation where, after teaching a student for several years, often meeting them in class several times a week, it emerged that the student had a migration background and Finnish as an L2. In the interview, the Math Teacher related the incident as follows:

2. Math Teacher: *mulla oli nyt, yks poika, hänellä oli suhteellisen suomenkielinen nimi ja hänellä oli sanallisissa tehtävissä paljon, hän on siis kaksoistutkintolainen lukion aineissa, hänellä oli sanallisissa tehtävissä tosi paljon vaikeuksia. Ja hän on nyt abiturienti. Ja nyt, oliko ihan viime*

² Language testing requirements can be connected to large-scale chronotopes of standardness and nationalism. These have earlier been explored by, e.g., [Catedral \(2021\)](#) and [Karimzad & Catedral \(2021\)](#).

kevään lopussa vai tämän syksyn alussa selvisi, et hän oli alun perin venäjänkielinen, ja kukaan ei ollu mulle kertonu sitä. Ja mä sanoin sille, että olipa hyvä että kerroit, mä tähän asti luulin että sä oot vaan tyhmä ((nauraa))

Math Teacher: I had now, one boy, he had a relatively Finnish name and in verbal assignments he had a lot of, he is doing a double qualification with general upper secondary subjects, he had lots of problems with verbal assignments. And now he's a senior. And now, was it the end of last spring or the beginning of this fall I found out that he was initially Russian-speaking, and no one had told me about it. And I said to him that it was good that you told me, until now I had thought you were just dumb ((laughs))

The excerpt shows that Finnish language skills in present studies can be interpreted as a sign of a student's cognitive skills: the Math Teacher had interpreted the student, as *vaan tyhmä*, "just dumb" – using the emphatic exclusive focus particle *vaan* (formally *vain*) (VISK-Hakulinen et al., 2004 §844) – and not as a multilingual learner. The teacher had assumed the student's L1 to be Finnish as the institution had not given the teacher any information about the migrant student's background – the historical chronotope had not been invoked in the educational timespace. This had led to the teacher applying the expectations of an L1 speaker to this migrant student and thus, misjudging the student's cognitive capacities. The language-ideological assumption that students studying in Finnish in Finland are all L1 speakers of Finnish – and hence face the expectations usually placed on L1 speakers – has earlier been recognised in higher education settings (Ruuska, 2020, 121–126, 196–200).

The Math Teacher reported a changed understanding of the situation that after hearing about the migrant student's background: the teacher now understood the variability in the student's language skills and the student's present need for linguistic support. The student had discursively constructed their spatiotemporal history for the Math Teacher, who in recounting this story laughs at this past misinterpretation. In the lessons I attended, this teacher's teaching practices were highly language-aware, allowing migrant students to use their multilingual resources for learning, e.g., to watch online videos about the course content in other languages (fieldnote October 22, 2019; see Mustonen & Puranen, 2021). The Math Teacher had been made aware of the student's past and was able to consider the student's needs in the present educational timespace. Although the institutional language ideology was starkly monolingual, the individual migrant student and the individual educator were able to counter the hegemonic language ideology by communicating about student's past and needs in the present.

In turn, using the term *kotikieli*, "home language" for the student's L1, the Hairdressing Teacher spoke of migrant students' own languages as spatially for use at home (interview October 22, 2020). Although somewhat naturalised in everyday language use, the term is a strong chronotopic statement that locates students' use of their L1's in their homes and free time (see Hyltenstam & Milani 2012; Latomaa, 2007). Language-ideologically it constructs students' L1s – other than Finnish – as unimportant in education, and in the VET context as also irrelevant for future employment. The Construction Teacher disallowed migrant students' use of their own language in workshops and insisted on the use of Finnish in practical workspaces during their studies (March 11, 2020). No support for multilingual practices was observed in classes where most students' L1 was Finnish, although some educators, in e.g., ICT and building maintenance technology studies, "allowed" multilingual practices in class. An exception was observed in social and health studies classes, in which all the students were multilingual migrants (see Mustonen & Strömmer, 2022). There, students' various spatiotemporal trajectories and linguistic repertoires were considered, even if Finnish remained the main language of instruction.

The educational chronotope shows the VET institute as a monolingual timespace where Finnish is valorised and hegemonically used. The institutional structures working with this chronotope, along with

most educators' views and practices, ignore migrant students' diverse backgrounds. Migrant students' other linguistic repertoire is deemed for home use, outside the educational institute. While this chronotope is supported in institutional practices, individual students and educators may resist it via their own practices. The valorisation of Finnish and its monolingual use often remain unexplained, indicating that its choice is seen as natural in the educational institute: Finnish is intertwined with a geographical area and the educational system of Finland. The institutional chronotope supporting the monolingual nation-state remains powerful and is rarely questioned (see Karimzad & Catedral 2018).

4.2. Practical chronotope

The practical chronotope describes language use in courses in the present vocational qualification unit that include work-based learning and the imagined future of students in blue-collar worksites in Finland. The connecting element in the practical chronotope is that the need of language is motivated through the need for language skills embedded in field-specific blue-collar work and in education in present and future timespaces (cf. McLaughlin, 2020; Kraft, 2020). However, the value of language varies spatially from one worksite to another: language skills have lower value in many technical fields and higher value in worksites involving customer work.

The practical chronotope was particularly evident in the vocational qualification unit educators' interviews and teaching practices in, such vocational areas as surface finishing, construction work, hairdressing, and practical nursing. The priority of practical skills is often discursively highlighted by metaphors. The following excerpt comes from a work placement period of a migrant painting student: he was placed on a worksite where he painted buildings under the supervision of an experienced construction worker. When I observed the student's work placement, the Painting Supervisor constructed "work" as the object of understanding in timespaces where practical work is done, not language itself. This metaphor of understanding "work" instead of language was repeated by the Painting Teacher and the Construction Teacher in their interviews. This is exemplified in the next excerpt, where I ask the Painting Student and the Painting Supervisor about possible linguistic challenges encountered in the present, during the student's work placement period on a worksite:

3. Pauliina: *tääl on sitä ammattisanastoo on paljon onko jotain muita sellasia juttuja mitkä on tuntunu hankalilta tai jotenki (.) tai ei hankalilta helpoiltaki ((naurhaata))*

Painting Supervisor: *en mää sillei osaa sanoo ei kai siinä ((huokaisee)) nii mitä mikä [opiskelijan] mielestä onko ollu semmosta*

Painting Student: *mun mielestä kaikki on vaikeaa mulle ((nauraa))*

Pauliina: *((nauraa))*

Supervisor: *@nii@ ((nauraen)) niin no joo*

Pauliina: *@ihan kaikki@ ((nauraen))*

Student: *@joo@ ((nauraen))*

Supervisor: *se on tietysti-*

Student: *mä en tiennyt-*

Supervisor: *joo sekin voi olla sit siinä että tota (.) tuleeko aina sitte niinku tarpeeks selkeesti sanottua ite jos jotain niinku*

Student: *mm*

Supervisor: *mut eihän meillä siinä oo ongelmaa ollu ku meillä nyt on sillei ollu (.) sanotaanko yksinkertaset hommat ni ei ei oo tarvinnu hirveesti*

Student: *joo*

Supervisor: *hirveitä niinku pähkäilyjä olla (.) eikä selittää koska hän hän osaa ja ymmärtää niinku hyvin pitkälle tätä touhua että*

Pauliina: *joo niinku ymmärtää niinku osaa jo käytännössä tehdä sen*

Supervisor: *nii nimenomaan se*

Pauliina: *joo nii just*

Supervisor: *että ei niinku (.) ei hirveitä selostuksia tarvii ku*

Pauliina: *joo*

Supervisor: *et mä sanoinkin että on niinkun (.) hyvin se asenne kohdallaan ja ammattitaitoo niin eipä siinä paljon tarvii sillon jutella ((nauraa))*

Pauliina: here you have a lot of field-specific vocabulary are there some other things that you've found complicated or somehow (.) or not complicated also easy ((laughs)) Painting

Supervisor: I don't know I don't think so ((sighs)) well what does [the student] think are there some

Painting Student: **I think everything has been hard for me ((laughs))**

Pauliina: ((laughs))

Supervisor: @yeah@ ((laughs)) yeah well

Pauliina: @every single thing@ ((laughs))

Student: @yeah@ ((laughs))

Supervisor: that's of course-

Student: I didn't know-

Supervisor: **yeah it may also be that (.) do I always say things clearly enough myself if there is something like**

Student: mm

Supervisor: but we haven't had any problems when **we have had (.) let's say simple tasks so we haven't needed that much**

Student: yeah

Supervisor: **to ponder that much (.) or explain because he can do [the work] and understands very well what's going on**

Pauliina: yeah so understands like he can already do it in practice

Supervisor: yeah exactly

Pauliina: yeah right

Supervisor: **so not like (.) no need to explain an awful lot because**

Pauliina: yeah Supervisor: I said that it's like (.) if you have a good attitude and the vocational skills you don't really need to chat ((laughs))

In this excerpt, the Painting Student states that he has experienced "everything" as linguistically challenging. The student then laughs. Thus, his claim can be interpreted as self-ironic or an exaggeration – either way, it shows that he has found using Finnish challenging when doing practical work on a real worksite. The Painting Supervisor, however, interrupts the student by talking out of turn and expressing a differing view. When talking about the student's language use at work, the supervisor states that since *hän osaa ja ymmärtää niinku hyvin pitkälle tätä touhua*, "he can do [the work] and understands very well what's going on", he has no need to use or understand Finnish in the present worksite. In the supervisor's discourse, language use in the present worksite – about which the supervisor uses expressions highlighting its intercommunicational functions, such as *selittää* "to explain" and *jutella* "to chat" – is constructed as only "needed" to perform the task, to which the migrant student submissively answers *joo*, "yeah". Here language use is presented as not only the medium of work but also a way to create understanding between workers (also Kraft, 2020). However, in the present and imagined worksites constructed in the supervisor's discourse, neither of these uses of Finnish – or any other language – are needed. Providing the vocational tasks are correctly performed: language-ideologically, the present and imagined future workplaces become constructed as somewhat languageless (see Rosa, 2016; 2019).

Thus, this traditional view of construction sites as spaces where people speak little (cf. Lilja & Tapaninen 2022; 2019) is reconstructed at the VET institute in the practical chronotope. However, in the case of migrant students, it may be that the educators, using Finnish, their L1, are not as aware of the linguistic needs of blue-collar work and education, as the Painting Student's view on everything being hard for him suggests in excerpt 3. Research has shown that many blue-collar jobs are perceived as languageless despite their constant need for language use (e.g., McLaughlin, 2020). A multimodal study on learning in professional settings (Bezemer & Kress 2015) found that semiotic practices

other than language are often more effective in meaning-making. Nevertheless, to learn the vocational skills needed in these present and imagined blue-collar worksites, often needs language (see Filliettaz, 2022), a situation that may explain the Painting Student's self-reported challenges.

In some vocational fields, language skills play a bigger role in present and future worksites. In hairdressing and practical nursing studies, language itself is constructed as part of the job, and language skills are considered work skills – perhaps partly due to the spatial closeness to customers in these vocations. Earlier research on language practices in hairdressing has shown that in Finnish these are often free in form, while containing some institutional features that distinguish them from everyday conversations (Lappalainen, 2004, 151–211). In an online interview that followed a hairdressing observation period, it was also emphasised by the Hairdressing Teacher that when at a hairdressing worksite, a hairdresser needs not only to talk freely with the customer but also in a professional register with colleagues. Below, the teacher elaborates on the role of language in hairdressing studies and students' imagined future worksites:

4. Sanna: *sanoit että se kirjoittaminen esimerkiksi on sellanen että sitä ei vaadita niin miten sä ylipäätään ajattelet niinku kielen roolin sitä työelämässä et minkälaiset osa-alueet siellä painottuu*

Hairdressing Teacher: *no kyl se vuorovaikutus ja puhuminen että ensinnäkin että ymmärtää sitä asiakasta kun se on asiakaspalvelutyötä eliikkä ymmärtää sitä asiakasta mutta myöskin pystyy asiakkaan kanssa kommunikoimaan ja tietysti sitten että ymmärtää tiettyjä niinku käsitteitä jos esimerkiksi keskustele työkavereitten kanssa niin ymmärtää niinku (.) ammatillisia käsitteitä ja mun mielestä se ammatin käsitteiden ymmärtäminen ei ole mikään ehkä sillä tavalla haaste kun sehän on periaatteessa ihan uusi asia kaikille opiskelijoille ja nehän joutuu ihan opettelemaan niitä*

Sanna: *joo joo*

Teacher: *niin mutta että jos se lähtötilanne on vähän että ei osaa niinkun vaikka (.) vaikka tota niin semmosta niinkun normaalia semmosta small talk tyyppistä keskustelua asiakkaan kanssa (.) niin niin se on se tämmösen arkikielen hallinta*

Sanna: *joo*

Teacher: *sanotaanko pitäs hallita kun lähetään opiskelamaan jo ammattia*

Sanna: you said that writing for example is something that is not required so what do you think in general about **the role of language in worklife** what kind of areas are emphasised

Hairdressing Teacher: well **communication and speaking so that first of all one understands the customer since it's a customer service job** so to understand the **customer** but also to be able to communicate with the **customer** and of course then to understand specific concepts if for example one discusses with work mates so that one understands like (.) vocational concepts and I think understanding vocational concepts is not maybe in a way challenge because it's basically a whole new thing for all the students and they need to learn it

Sanna: yeah yeah

Teacher: yeah but so if the starting point is a bit like that you cannot (.) for example like have a normal **small talk type of discussion with a customer (.) it's about knowing everyday language**

Sanna: yeah

Teacher: **let's say one should know already when beginning to study a vocation**

In this excerpt, the Hairdressing Teacher categorises the present and imagined future timespaces of hairdressing as a "customer service job", in which one must be able to "communicate" and "speak". The teacher strengthens the factual importance of language skills by using the modal particle "of course" (VISK-Hakulinen et al., 2004 §1608) and the

customer-centred nature of the job by repeating the word “customer” five times during the excerpt. Strömmer (2020) found that when a blue-collar vocation – in Strömmer’s article, cleaning work – is categorised as a customer service, it has diverse and often multilingual spoken language requirements. The diverse uses of language in hairdressing were evident both in excerpt 4 and in the fieldnotes from practical classes in hairdressing, when a migrant hairdressing student discussed eating pizza and going to the gym with a customer, but also analysed the customer’s hair and asked how the customer treated it, all in Finnish (fieldnotes January 20, 2020). The pizza and gym-related conversation can be seen as the small talk mentioned by the teacher, whereas the hair-type analysis represents the professional register. Thus, the importance of these different genres constructs language use as central in the job.

Interestingly, all the diverse language practices in the hairdressing observation period were performed in Finnish. The hegemonic status of Finnish is supported by the teacher’s word choice, adding that *arkikielen hallinta - - sanotaanko pitäs hallita kun lähetään opiskelemaan jo ammatia*, “everyday language - - one should know already when beginning to study a vocation”. The teacher’s words construct Finnish as the “everyday language”, which reflects the position of Finnish as the naturalised language of the institute. The teacher also reported that communication skills were required and assessed in the hairdressing competence demonstration exclusively in Finnish. The teacher added that English was sometimes used. Even though these are not part of the official requirements, educators in position of power are able to materialise these chronotopic imaginaries through their practices (also Catedral & Djuraeva, 2022). This was echoed by the Painting Supervisor, who explicitly stated that although most of their customers are Finnish-speaking, the supervisor has had English- and French-speaking customers who have been served in English (fieldnotes September 23, 2020). The present and imagined future workplaces were constructed as Finnish-speaking, with a dash of English.

Similar customer-centred requirements for language use were observed in practical nursing studies, in a group tailored for adult migrants with L2 Finnish (see Mustonen & Strömmer, 2022). Language was constructed as essential in the timespaces of the students’ present studies and future worksites. For example, students were instructed to practice speaking Finnish in different tones of voice, such as *kauniisti ja kunnioltavasti*, “in a nice and respectful way” about sensitive topics with customers (August 17, 2020). Using appropriate language was presented as being “ethical” at work, and students were encouraged to use their whole linguistic repertoire along with Finnish, including languages such as Persian, Somali, Russian, English, and Latin (fieldnotes August 12 & 17, 2020). Discursively, this constructs the language ideology as heteroglossic: language use as a multivoiced communicative tool for performing practical tasks (e.g., Pietikäinen, 2012; Busch & Schick 2006; Dufva, 2003): while “ideal” language use was discursively constructed, migrant students’ varying performances were all accepted (cf. Bell, 2017). The present and imagined future workplaces were thus constructed as timespaces for not only practical but also language work, and the workers were not seen only as a “work force” but also “word force” (e.g., Duchêne, 2011; Heller, 2010). The practical nursing study group, perhaps due to its diverse and multilingual nature, was an exception in the promotion of multilingual practices in the VET institute.

Language-ideologically, the practical chronotope reinforces the view of language as heteroglossic in nature, i.e., of language use as a multivoiced communicative tool for performing practical tasks. Educators in technical fields generally construct practical work as physical, embodied work that can be done in present and future worksites without any language use. This is challenged in practice by individual migrant students. Educators construct vocational fields such as hairdressing and practical nursing as customer service jobs, and thus, language acquires a more essential role. From the language hierarchical viewpoint, Finnish is naturalised and valorised as the most important language of both present practical studies and imagined future worksites in Finland.

Other languages or multilingual practices are often “allowed” but not presented as particularly desired or necessary.

4.3. Speculative futures chronotope

The third chronotope, which I call “the speculative futures chronotope”, leaves room for speculation as well as migrant students’ own agency. In this chronotope, the Finnish used by migrant students is temporally located in the imagined future and spatially in higher education or in undefined contexts chosen by migrant students themselves. While less prominent in the data, this chronotope shows alternative options in the VET institution for students’ post-VET trajectories.

As explained in section 3.1, VET offers its students a possibility to access higher education, after obtaining a VET qualification (EDUFI 2023a). This, according to many of the educators, is not a common imagined future for most VET students: higher education is often described as a hypothetical goal that VET *should* have. Higher education studies as an imagined future were sometimes mentioned in our data, especially by the Guidance Counsellor, the Worklife Teacher, and the Finnish Teacher. In the interview with the Guidance Counsellor, I discussed migrant students’ possibilities to enter higher education after VET. In the following excerpt, the counsellor describes this imagined future for migrant students as *semmonen muodollinen*, “like a formality”, more than realistic future timespace:

5. Guidance Counsellor: *ja ammatillinen perustutkinto sinänsäkiihän antaa yleisen jatko-opintokelpisuuden että jos sitte lukuhaluja ja rahkeita riittää niin*

Pauliina: *niinpä*

Counsellor: *niin voi toki hakee jatsoon sitte*

Pauliina: *kyllä*

Counsellor: *vaikka ei oo niitä lukio-opintoja tehnykään*

Pauliina: *kyllä kyllä (.) näetkö että se oikeestikin antaa ne mahdollisuudet vai onks se minkälainen*

Counsellor: *no tota se mun mielestä tota (.) se on semmonen muodollinen että kyllä sit täytyy olla niitä lukuhaluja ja rahkeita aika paljon*

Pauliina: *joo*

Counsellor: *et siinä mielessä on hyvä että sitten meillä on semmosia opiskelijoita jotka esimerkiksi sitä matematiikkaa opiskelee sitte lukiota-votteisesti vaikka ei oo kahden tutkinnon opinnoissa muuten*

Pauliina: *aivan*

Counsellor: *eli hankkii niinku vahvuuksia justiainsa sinne jatko-opintoihin*

Guidance Counsellor: and the **vocational upper secondary qualification itself gives general eligibility for further studies if you have the will to study and sufficient ability** then

Pauliina: *right*

Counsellor: **so you can apply for further studies then**

Pauliina: *yes*

Counsellor: **even if you haven’t done the general upper secondary studies**

Pauliina: *yes yes (.) do you think that it really gives the possibilities or how is it*

Counsellor: **well in my opinion (.) it’s like a formality so you must have the will to study and quite a lot of ability**

Pauliina: *yeah*

Counsellor: *so in that way it’s good that we have the kind of students who for example study math by the general upper secondary school syllabus even if they’re not doing joint degree studies*

Pauliina: *right*

Counsellor: *so you gain strengths for further studies*

The counsellor’s words construct future higher education as an option for skilled individuals if they have *lukuhaluja ja rahkeita*, “the will to study and quite a lot of ability”. The counsellor uses a conditional clause

with the word “if” (VISK-Hakulinen et al., 2004 §1641), as well as the partitive forms of the nouns “the will to study” and “ability”, which imply doubts (VISK-Hakulinen et al., 2004 §1616) about students’ abilities. Based on the counsellor’s words, VET itself does not furnish all students with the required level of skills. Even though this is not explicitly materialised as a language issue, the phrases “will to study” and “ability” can be interpreted as indexing language and referring to the requirement of language and literacy skills in higher education. These have previously been reported as typical challenges for students with a VET background (e.g., Barber & Netherton 2018). Language’s absence from the discourse is a sign of the language-ideological process of erasure (Irvine & Gal 2000): thus, the future studies are discussed as a matter of motivation and talent. The imagined future of higher education is constructed as a linguistically demanding Finnish timespace: only especially talented students need apply, although none of the educators explained how the language of higher education differs from that of VET, other than in the required amount of reading (cf. Flores, 2020). Here, the imagined future timespace of higher education is constructed as a possibility, even if unlikely.

Some educators also gave space for migrant students’ own voices and imagination in the classroom. Whereas the institutional view locates students’ post-VET futures in blue-collar worksites or possibly higher education, the Worklife Teacher, as an individual, challenged these hegemonic chronotopes. In the worklife competence classes, migrant students, along with other students, were asked to reflect on their current skills, past life experiences before entering Finland, and wishes for their future trajectories. During our post-lesson interview, the teacher told that they often ask students if their chosen vocational field feels right for them, or if they now wish to do something different in the future. This means that, in practice, migrant students’ individual past and imagined future chronotopes were invoked in the present classroom. Students were able to voice and possibly materialise their chronotopic imaginaries also in educational settings (see Catedral & Djuraeva, 2022). The teacher elaborated on this later in the interview, saying that it was important to give all students the possibility to choose their own path in society. Here, too, the language-ideological process of erasure (Irvine & Gal 2000) was present: the teacher did not raise the topic of language in discussions with me or the students. In this context, however, it can be interpreted as empowering: the teacher trusted students’ language skills and their future language learning.

The speculative futures chronotope thus constructs a wider image of migrant students’ imagined future trajectories and timespaces: the migrant students have agency and can choose the futures they want to transition to after VET. While Finnish is once again constructed as the natural language of Finnish society, no status or profession is presented as linguistically impossible, if sometimes unlikely, for migrant students. The imagined future might be a Finnish blue-collar worksite, but the students can also change their paths or, e.g., exit or expand their work-related niche (see Suni, 2017).

5. Results and discussion

In this study, I applied the concepts of chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1981) and language ideologies (Blommaert, 1999; Irvine, 2022) to explore educators’ views on migrant students’ language skills in a Finnish VET institute. By applying methods of critical sociolinguistic analysis (Heller et al., 2018) and anthropological analysis in sociolinguistics (Jaffe, 2014) to ethnographic data, I identified three main chronotopes for migrant students’ situated language use: educational, practical, and speculative futures. The timespaces for language use in these chronotopes were students’ current VET studies and their current and future blue-collar worksites. These timespaces were mainly constructed as monolingual spaces functioning in the majority language, Finnish; other languages were often spatialised as being used outside the educational institute. The imagined future of migrant students was generally located in blue-collar worksites, although the possibility of future higher

education was occasionally present. However, migrant students’ spatiotemporal history before coming to Finland was rarely considered: language and vocational skills they had acquired temporally before VET or spatially outside Finland were not considered. Language-ideologically, the majority language was valorised, while these students’ other linguistic resources were disregarded. Individual educators and migrant students, however, sometimes challenged these hegemonic views.

While the majority language was valorised in each of the chronotopes no ideal of purism or ideas about the entanglement of nationality and language were present (e.g., Niemelä, 2020; Tarnanen & Palviainen 2018). The role of language was often constructed as a heteroglossic (e.g., Pietikäinen, 2012; Busch & Schick 2006; Dufva, 2003) practical tool for performing tasks in VET and in worksites, unlike the often-constructed views of blue-collar work as “languageless” (McLaughlin, 2020; Rosa, 2016; 2019) or as migrants’ key to blue-collar worklife (Kirilova & Lønsmann 2020). The majority language was, however, the only language a migrant student needed to complete VET studies and become employed. It seems that while VET in law (L 531/2017) and in principle is open to and supports multilingual practices, the institutional chronotopes and language ideologies supporting monolingualism and presenting Finnish as the natural language of Finland ended up maintaining the hegemonic status of the majority language in students’ studies (also Flores et al., 2018; Kirilova & Lønsmann 2020; Woolard, 1998).

Given that the ideologies of a monolingual nation-state, multilingual students, the educational system, and worklife intersect in VET, it is important to uncover the implicit ideals that underpin formal education. This study rendered visible some of the language-ideological meanings and values related to migrants’ language use in blue-collar education. While VET studies often focus on practical tasks, it is important to note that language nevertheless plays a role, even if unnoticed by educators with the majority language as their L1. My results indicate that migrant students are institutionally imagined monolingually using the majority language in both education and at work. Future pedagogies must better recognise that migrant students live multilingual lives, both in and outside of institutes and worksites. Students use the majority language in informal everyday settings, and learning the language for these purposes must also be supported in education. To support students’ multilingual practices and identity construction, language-awareness must be brought to the curricular level of VET, too. Additionally, the educational system must better note migrant students’ earlier education and experience. As chronotopes point at students’ “possible venues of development” (De Fina, 2019, 190), it is also important to ensure that students can have a say when planning their future life trajectories in VET (EDUFI 2023a; see Catedral & Djuraeva, 2022).

Focusing on a single VET institute allowed me to delve deeply into its chronotopes and language ideologies. Team ethnography (Blackledge & Creese 2010) enabled data and researcher triangulation, despite my being solely responsible for the data analysis. At the same time, given that the focus was on only one educational institute, the results cannot be generalised further. My role as a researcher representing the linguistic and ethnic majority in Finland can also be seen as limiting my understanding of the phenomena encountered by migrant students, as in many ways I am part of the community I critically explored in this study.

This study contributes to the ethnographic research on chronotopes and language ideologies. Combining the two concepts has helped to examine how the role of language was constructed in the interplay of the spatiotemporal situatedness of migrant students’ language use and the language-ideological values given to the majority language. The analytical combination of the two concepts proved fruitful. The concepts often reinforced each other in explaining the construction of the strong status of the majority language. They also enabled me to explore the unsaid, e.g., the language-ideological assumption that migrant students’ majority language skills are inadequate may help explain why the future chronotope of higher education was barely constructed in the data. This

would not have been possible using only one of the concepts.

This article portrays the language-ideological reality in which multilingual migrants study and which influences their everyday choices. If the institution's language ideologies exclusively valorise the majority language, this may narrow students' deployment of other language resources and skills obtained before entering Finland and cause them to perceive themselves as deficient (e.g., Cushing, 2022; Flores, 2020; García & Otheguy 2017; Suni, 2017). On the curriculum level, Finnish VET upholds the principles of being competence-based, of recognising students' varying skills, and of valuing diversity (eRe-quirements, 2023). It seems that everyday education could be further improved to realise this, as formal education appears still to most serve monolingual students using the majority L1. The heteroglossic view of language could also support the implementation of multilingual practices (e.g., Flores & Schissel 2014; García & Kleyn 2016). Further studies are needed to explore migrant students' language ideologies as well as the role of language in the VET core curriculum, to raise awareness of migrant students' diverse (language) skills and the raciolinguistic processes (Flores & Rosa 2015) that influence how these skills are institutionally viewed in VET.

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Declaration of competing interest

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