5 Family Time(s)

Migrant Temporalities in Family Language Planning in the Urban African South

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1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on the ways in which questions in the research field of Family Language Policy (FLP), as an outcome of family language planning, are contextually determined. We refer specifically to international African migration in South Africa. Working critically with a definition of “family language policy” as the explicit and overt planning of language use within the home and among family members (King and Fogle 2017), we consider the choices families¹ make regarding the language resources they have and which to prioritize in various social situations. The chapter discusses migrant-family language positions and practices against the background of an overt, *de jure* national language policy that recognizes equal rights for 11 South African family languages,² and a covert, *de facto* policy that privileges English, as in the national education policy as well as in widespread public domain practices, e.g. in employment and in courts of law. Further, we bear in mind the increased linguistic diversity in the country due to migrancy from other African countries, particularly in the past ten years. We relate to Lanza and Li Wei (2016, 653), who turn attention to studies of diverse transnational family types with multilingualism as a dominant cultural feature, and to King (2016, 731), who refers to the need for FLP research to go beyond traditional family dispensations and consider the diversity of “globally dispersed, transnational populations.” Gomes (2018) moves toward a critical approach in which research not only describes and explains FLP phenomena, but also critically responds and, on the basis of an enlarged data basis with an expanded scope “in terms of languages, countries and family configurations,” impacts on FLP literature and could shift perspectives and practices. In this chapter, we wish to continue along this critical trajectory. We do so by considering a specific dynamic in the formation and maintenance of family structures, namely *temporality*, suggesting that time is not only a variable in family planning but also a determinant of family structure and the resources – material, institutional and otherwise – that are available to families.

To understand the linguistic context into which migrant families enter on coming to South Africa in the twenty-first century, a history of human mobility of at least 400 years, European colonial and trade expansion since the mid-seventeenth century, and Apartheid rule of 40 years (which included mobility restrictions), needs to be considered. After the transition to democratic rule in 1994, an extensive language planning and policy project ended in a decision to extend the former two-languages policy that recognized only English and Afrikaans in official use. Thus, the early transition regulations already accepted the nine widely used (regional) indigenous languages additional to the two former colonial, Germanic languages. Since 1996, the official languages (listed in order of numbers of L1-speakers) are: isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, Sepedi, English, Setswana, Sesotho, Xitsonga, siSwati, Tshivenda, and isiNdebele.

In what follows, we first very briefly consider what language planning and policy might mean in a contemporary world of enormous diversity and mobility, given that the basic framework for language planning on which FLP studies rest, emerged out of a much less complex context of diversity and human movement. Second, we elaborate on one construct that rarely gets attention, yet deserves more consideration in language planning and policy studies generally, namely that of “time” and temporality (Robertson and Ho 2016). The importance of temporality – especially subjective time – for agency and choice is starkly highlighted by the types of families that we discuss here and that find themselves in often inherently chaotic, multiplex, intensely fluid, and precarious life situations. Third, we look closely at a small data-set of interviews and observations by way of analysis and illustration, in order to explore the kind of family language policies that would emerge in migrant communities where the notion of “family” requires new (ecological, including temporal) framings. Here, we also provide short biographical sketches of the families we discuss. Finally, by way of discussion, we introduce the notion of “vulnerability,”³ suggesting this has implications for planning and policy. We follow the IFRC definition of “vulnerability” as a concept opposed to “capacity,” which refers to “the diminished capacity of an individual or group to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural or man-made hazard.” We anticipate that our chapter will add to the field by considering how the concept of FLP would be enacted and which critical features are pertinent in vulnerable migrant families whose recent histories are ones of south–south migration.

2 Migrants in the African City

Any planning endeavour presupposes an understanding of time as unfolding in a linear way; it also presupposes the mobilization of relevant institutional and other resources to pursue this unfolding. Planning anticipates submitting to forms of governmentality that work on *emplacement* and stable “presents” (Robertson and Ho 2016) with conditions in which investments

(of shorter or longer duration) will reap the rewards in an anticipated (in the plan, definable) future, and in ways that are of significance and of relevance to those stakeholders who are doing the planning. It also assumes that the institutions and other structures (schools, workplaces, etc.) are accessible to stakeholders, and are understood to be in line with the aspirations and goals of the plan(ner), and/or are sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of potentially quite divergent actors. These conditions facilitate “explicit and overt” planning that will determine how language is used in the family setting.

For many African migrants in urban spaces such as Cape Town, many of these planning preconditions are far from being met – if any at all. The “families” that we discuss in this study, comprising of migrants from sub-Saharan African countries, such as Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Malawi, and Mozambique, illustrate well some of the common ways in which the situation of the migrant in African urban spaces may differ from those commonly treated in extant FLP literature. Considering the African and South African migrancy context, our approach extends King and Fogle’s (2017) definition to show that much planning and eventual fixing of an FLP is done implicitly, unreflectively, and therefore also covertly.

First, we need to recognize that crossing borders is not just a spatial journey, but, and perhaps more importantly for this study, a *temporal* journey. An important function of contemporary borders is to manage the flows and trickles of migrant labor in accordance with the movement and needs of transnational capital. One implication of this is that different migrant categories are subject to different (official) temporal regimes characteristic of (e.g.) short-term labour, exceptional skills residence permits, etc. (for more on such differentiation, see Li Wei and Kelly-Holmes 2021). We can see this as “time as governance” instantiated variously in institutions, workplaces, educational trajectories, etc., situationally referred to in this study.

The migrant experience is also oriented to time and temporality in other ways. Many migrants remain rooted in the past (the lives and families left behind), as well as being inclined toward the future. The past *as past* is thus very much part of the migrant *present*, e.g. in the form of remittances sent home, keeping in touch with children and other family members left behind, or waiting for accredited qualifications to arrive. Another axis of temporality defining migration is fundamental to the migrant experience itself, which is the idea of a “future” that is “better than the past.” The migrant is often “assumed” to have goals and agendas for the future – better education, health, a good job, secure housing. For all sorts of reasons, fulfilling the hopes and dreams of a better future may be difficult – often the migrant has no job, no link to the formal economy, no relevant permits (many employers will not employ migrants who do not have a South African ID) making concrete, tangible goals of this type hardly attainable.

If we take the temporal experiences of the migrant as our point of departure – not least because of the centrality of time in the planning

endeavour itself, we can discuss the migrant experience in terms of the salience of itineraries, provisionality, and improvised (uncertain) futures.

2.1 *Itineraries*

Many migrants live with “itineraries” (Best 2019; Simone 2019) characterized by short-term stays, short-term jobs, “a certain kind of circulation” – all “not easily governable within systems that rely upon notions of emplacement as a mode of governmentality” (Simone 2019). People occupy spaces of “provisionality” rather than permanence (Simone 2018; Best 2019). For most, the city where they first settle is not the place where they stay. For example, many coming to South Africa via Zimbabwe start in Johannesburg or Pretoria, but soon find their way to other urban and also semi-urban spaces. Especially for DRC migrants, Cape Town is such a stop en route to other places (cf. Vigouroux 2008, 2009), some with dreams of eventually finding their way to countries where their linguistic resources will have more currency, e.g. to France or Francophone Canada.

Personal histories of the migrants in our data-set all start out in areas of conflict, stress, and hardship, in conditions of civil war, political unrest, ethnic strife, poverty, or family disruption. The decision to move south is based on expectations of better life chances. All our respondents have travelling histories; none found exactly what they had imagined, yet most do not want to return. Some do not believe the situation back “home” will improve (e.g. civil unrest and social disruption in the DRC); others would like to return if political and economic conditions were to improve (e.g. to Zimbabwe, where people hope the economic devastation will be repaired).

Their trajectories from their home community to Cape Town tell stories of living in *transient* circumstances, along itinerant lines, paying intermediaries to make transport reservations, waiting for months in temporary arrangements dependant on the care or kindness of distant acquaintances or strangers, in anticipation of a bus ticket and some kind of certification for border crossings. Finally, some would mention they found their way to (e.g.) Maputo in Mozambique and then on to Durban. Seeking and not finding employment in Durban they take up contact with acquaintances, an uncle, a sister, in Cape Town and then move there. These are people for whom mobility and temporality are to a large extent a constant – they move between cities and towns, from one housing arrangement to another, between different kinds of employment – always on the move.

2.2 *Provisionality*

The itinerant nature of this type of migration leads to provisionality (Simone 2018). Always being on the move, the migrants pick up jobs where available in (e.g.) the security industry, the hospitality industry, as gardeners, housekeepers, in construction work; some try to make a living in entrepreneurial

ways, setting up roadside kiosks as street vendors, hairdressers, musicians; others source help from close friends or relatives. Most wish for and even succeed in finding fragile stability, relying on networking and communicative skills, creatively making a living in a relatively hostile ecology. It is a “lucky” few who find options in the formal economy or institutional structures of the host country. These contingencies are led and reinforced by the fact that the largest group of recently relocated migrants come as young single men, less often also as single women, who travel over land by car or bus, in some cases also more and less covertly in large goods-transport lorries. The migrants we met in interviews all mentioned having come to metropolitan areas in the north and east of the country to join a family member or friend already in the country, at least as a starting point. These migrants form communities that could resemble family relationships, small groups with shared heritage in terms of where they started life, what their needs and aspirations are, the kinds of difficulties they run into, and finally also the language(s) they share. Starting out in South Africa, most rely on provisional accommodation, provisional forms of income, provisional rights to stay and make a living. Relationships to friends, family members, and accidental acquaintances of similar origin, give more security than any formal and institutional structures – also because they minimally engage with or receive support from such formal structures. They live out their daily lives in “polycentric, horizontal social relationships” (Landau and Freemantle 2016) in which they respond to “management from below (or beside), relying less on the coercive and normative power of state institutions, churches and regulated markets than on varying vernacular discourses” (Landau and Freemantle 2016).

2.3 Improvised Futures

The provisionality and itinerant lives of migrants also impact notions of the future. Migrants generally are future-oriented; however, once they have entered the South African marketplace, the hoped-for futures may be bleak or, realistically, even unattainable. In the absence of clearly defined futures, there is a focus on the concrete here and now, where agencies are informed by “radical hope” (Kallio, Meier, and Hakli 2020), a view of the future as “an unsettled horizon” (ibid), as a potentiality rather than a set agenda. Disillusioned expectations and battles to keep day-to-day life going tend to limit future perspectives and undermine decisive agency toward possibilities. Of course, the bleak future leads to an orientation to the “now” and the extra-systemic, institutional – the provisional grouping.

2.4 Family Structure

Thinking of the migrant in terms of different temporal regimes, we can distinguish different family structures as well as (and related to) different socio-ethnic-demographic-migrant structures, each marking different aspects of identity, all with relevance to language. Forms of temporality determine the

migrant experience. Also relevant are how particular identities, ethnicities, and languages intersect with mobilities and temporalities to construct vastly differential experiences of what aspirations are possible, which material conditions will structure family life. There are of course immigrant families that fit a traditional pattern according to which a family relocates from (e.g.) Zimbabwe or Malawi on the basis of one or both parents having gained lucrative employment (e.g.) as an accountant, university lecturer, or health care professional. However, more often, the temporariness leads to disrupted and vulnerable family structures. Many leave the closest family, such as their wife and parents behind; others leave children in the care of grandparents or other close relatives, thus disrupting traditional nuclear as well as extended family structures.

The provisionality among migrants of not staying too long in any particular place also has an effect on the kind of family life migrants can imagine. Without a stable income, a fixed address – how does one start a family, how does one plan for the future of children, what kind of family intimacy is possible? Many who leave children in their country of origin intend to send for them, bring them to join the parents once established in South Africa. However, for a sizeable majority, such stability is hardly attainable. Particularly, as mentioned above, adult migrants whose English-language skills prohibit the social mobility and relational stability they came after in leaving “home,” imagine finding their feet by moving on to more stability in yet another country.

The provisional and temporary nature of this common migrant experience also finds reflection in family structure with respect to children who come with their parents or are born after their parents arrived and “settled” in South Africa. Many come to South Africa on their own, find long- or short-term partners, and have children born into precarious family circumstances. As we will see in Section 4, such temporarily defined family structures contribute powerfully to the profiles of FLP.

2.5 *Migrant Children’s Access to Education*

The itinerant, provisional, and improvised futures of migrant families also resonate in the educational and other structural child care provisions on offer and accessible to these families (on similar exclusion practices, see Li Wei and Kelly-Holmes 2021). Although there is a well-developed legal and policy framework for the protection of migrant children’s rights in South Africa, regardless of their documentation,⁴ a relatively large body of work on the rights of migrant children demonstrates the limited protection they often get globally, as well as in South Africa (see, e.g. Stephens 1995; Babha 2009; Palmary 2009; Van Baalen 2012; Washinyira 2019). Reports on the marginalization and discrimination of migrant children are not uncommon. Considering migrants of African descent in south–south migration into South Africa, Vigouroux’s (2008, 2009) interviews

with 154 migrants from Francophone African countries into Cape Town touches on family life and children's education as only one of the various kinds of settlement difficulties. Similarly, Landau and Pampalone's (2018) interviews with migrants in the Gauteng region give very little on children and provision for their education. On the one hand, Chae, Hayford, and Agadjanian's (2016) longitudinal study in rural Mozambique confirms that paternal labour migration, in which children are left in the home environment, is widespread and increasing; on the other hand, the numbers of children living precariously due to the precarity of their parents' circumstances are obscured. Rarely mentioned are the perilous circumstances of unaccompanied migrant children (see, e.g. Skelton and Ngidi 2014; Zhou 2018), often young boys, who find their way into the informal economies around major urban centres.

In spite of relatively progressive protective legislation, also in the National Education Policy Act (27/1996), admission to primary and secondary schools is often discriminatory. As recent as in March 2019, Killander (2019) gave evidence of how migrant children's access even to basic education is limited, either due to their parents or guardians not having secured their child's required identity documents, or due to their inability to pay school fees, even in no-fee designated state schools (cf. also Van Baalen 2012; Washinyira 2019).

3 Family Language Planning and Multilingualism in Migrant Families

We have noted in the preceding section a number of dimensions revolving around temporality that distinguishes migrant families in the South African context from "prototypical" families – if such exist (although we also recognize diversity in the prototype). Coetzee (2018) refers to such a-typical families in sub-economic settlements in Cape Town, showing not only the diversity of language practices in such indigenous multilingual communities but also indicating how disrupted family life is not a feature only of precariously situated migrant families. What, then, do we find with respect to the FLP of migrant families of whom we met representatives in the Cape Town metropolitan area in South Africa? We introduce a number of case studies, in which various matters relevant to their FLPs become evident. The cases selected here show (i) the effects of fluid temporality, of families constantly being on the move, of unstable housing conditions, (ii) the precarity of vulnerable migrant families vs. the security of those more socially secure, and (iii) the role schooling plays as a means of improving family life chances, highlighting again the accidental way in which FLP develops in migrant communities with exceptionally low socio-economic status due to their transience. The case studies highlight the effects these social conditions have on family structures and related FLPs, highlighting how implicitly and coincidentally FLPs are developed.

We refer to material collected in two focus group discussions and three personal interviews on various occasions between November 2015 and December 2018, in which migrant parents and caregivers from such migrant communities in and around Cape Town referred to their own language repertoires, those of their children, and thus also disclosed multilingual family language policies. The data presented here was collected by one of the authors, with assistance from four postgraduate students in the course of projects where our main interest was not in FLP, but in the value and use of the linguistic repertoires African migrants bring to the region. We used the same meta-data form for all participants, thus ensuring that similar kinds of data were elicited, even if at different times. The discourses on the trajectories that brought the participants to South Africa only partially referred to children and their part in the migrancy experience. Nevertheless, either in passing (Focus group 1, with hospitality industry workers), or in response to direct questions (Interviews 1 and 2, with participants at a training centre, selected on the basis of their contribution to a foregoing, second focus group discussion), references to children's education gave clues to the kinds of FLP that were either in place or in planning.

3.1 Case Studies

Case 1: Sewing and Hairdressing – Parents at a Community Training Centre

Jacob,⁵ a hairdresser from the DRC, has been living in Cape Town since 2003. Besides the six Congolese languages he knows (Bembe, Kikongo, Kiswahili, French, Lari, and Lingala), in migrating to South Africa he added Portuguese, English, isiXhosa, and even a few words of Afrikaans. Although he had, at the time of the interview, been in the country for 13 years, he still had refugee status with the limitations such a status holds in relation to citizenship rights. He provides for himself and his family (i.e. his wife, also from the DRC, and two young children, both born in South Africa) by facilitating skills development in hairdressing and sewing at a small training centre for “whoever comes,” i.e. foreigners as well as local unemployed trainees. Jacob introduced us⁶ to a number of other migrants (snowball sampling) of whom some work at the centre. One of these, Claudette, has two South African-born children (aged 7 and 2 years old). The older daughter (7 years old) attends a local state school where the language of learning is English. Their home language is French. Thus the *de facto* FLP maintains the mother's DRC French at home, while the children's development of the language of education becomes the schools' responsibility. Claudette has low English proficiency; in communication with us she was reticent, would give answers and comment in a few English words, and then switch to French, looking at one of the other participants to relay her contribution. Both her children spend 8–9 hours per day at school, after-school, and in daycare, as Claudette works long hours. She does not reflect on the

education of her children in terms of rights; thus, in response to our questions about enrolment or language support, she was not demanding. She is proud of the way in which her first-born has learnt English, and is probably already more proficient in this local lingua franca than she is herself:

No, she's good. She can read ... write.

Asked whether the child sometimes interprets for her, she laughed and answered:

Yes, she can. Sometimes.

A second respondent at Jacob's training centre, Myriam, gave an account of considerably more dire circumstances. She had come to South Africa from Malawi a couple of years earlier, leaving the house of a harsh uncle who had been appointed as her guardian after the death of both her parents. She has a South African-born 7-year-old son who is currently registered in an Afrikaans-medium school in a historically "coloured," lower-middle-class area. Myriam has an extremely irregular income, and moves house often as she can rarely keep up with the rent, which means she has to find new accommodation when she gets evicted. Her son is battling at school to the extent that she had been summoned to meet the principal more than once in the foregoing months, mostly to address her son's irregular attendance, which Myriam says is due to difficulties finding suitable and affordable transport. She has very little to give in terms of participating in her child's formal education (see also Matchet (2002) on problems of literacy in disadvantaged communities in South Africa). The *de facto* FLP that Myriam follows is one of using a mixture of Chichewa and English with her son at home. Although the school does have an English-medium class, the majority of the children, as well as the class teacher, are Afrikaans L1 speakers. When asked whether the boy's English is developing in line with the school's expectations, and whether he is informally building Afrikaans language skills, Myriam's answer was vague. She offered an excuse we interpreted as one explaining his poor progress – probably not only in developing Afrikaans:

He is ok. Ehh ... I can't get taxi, then he can't go to school.

A third respondent, Sophie, represents a family from Burundi, where although the majority language is Kirundi, their family language was Swahili, while the language of learning and of prestige more widely, is French. Although Sophie indicated that she came to South Africa wanting to further her tertiary studies, she also mentioned that she lives with her

brother, who runs an informal business, had invited her to South Africa to help with the care of his two small children (a boy aged one and a girl aged 5 years old), after his estranged wife had left, returning to Durban where the family had lived before moving to Cape Town. Regarding the languages used in this family, Sophie mentions that the adults speak Swahili, but that they speak English to the children following the language of the creche and the school. Therefore here, the FLP determines a heritage language between the adults, but the local *lingua franca* between adults and children. Asked whether the children had learnt English from their parents or from her, she said:

No! Not from me. Eh ... I don't know where ... from neighbours.

On the children's ability to follow the adult's Swahili, at first she said they don't understand, but later:

The little one, she's trying, but / not good ...

In an interview with Jacob and his wife, regarding the home language practices, Jacob mentioned first that his wife was not progressing well with learning English. Regarding the children's repertoires, he seemed pleased that their multilingual repertoires were developing well:

I'm teaching them with my mother tongue, Kibembe ... Swahili. // Those are the two languages I want them to speak ... If I say something in Kibembe, they hear; if I force them to talk, they can come after me. Their mother, she can speak Kibembe, but most of the time she speaks with them – Swahili. Now at school, creche ... I'm taking them to one of the Zimbabwean creches. Most of the children they come from / Zimbabwe. There, they are speaking only English. So at school – the little ones – all English.

Case 2: The Hospitality Service Industry – Parents Employed as Waiters
Goodwin was interviewed⁷ after coming from duty at his workplace, a well-established restaurant and winery. He moved to South Africa from Zimbabwe shortly after the economic meltdown of the early 2000s. Trained as an electrician, he could find work neither in his home country nor in South Africa. A family member, on the basis of him having a driver's licence, introduced him to the support staff of a big hotel, where he gained the kind of experience that assisted in getting the current appointment. After a number of years his wife and two children joined so that they now live in relative comfort.

The grandparents looked after them when they were still home. But it's better for children with their parents.

The children attend a local state school where the language of learning used to be Afrikaans only, which has recently added a number of English-medium classes for children whose parents are L1 speakers of languages other than English, but elect to have their children educated in English. Goodwin is satisfied with the opportunities his children get: there were no enrolment difficulties, and he finds the schooling and after-care good. Regarding FLP, their home language is Shona, thus not one that assists in integrating with the isiXhosa-dominant community in which they live. However, there is a supportive group of ex-Zimbabweans who alternate between Shona and English in their community interactions. Therefore, Goodwin and his family conduct family life through Shona L1, relatively good L2-English, and some receptive isiXhosa proficiency. He is entertained and impressed by the fact that his eldest has a number of Afrikaans L1 friends with whom he speaks a local variety of Afrikaans quite fluently.

He visits friends in Ida's Valley; they speak only Afrikaans. (laugh)

In Goodwin's case, the family repertoire of Shona and English has been extended through their migration experience. Specifically, the children have added conversational proficiency in Afrikaans, and receptive proficiency in isiXhosa.

Case 3: Financial management – mobile, well-qualified parents

An interview of a completely different kind took place with Gloria,⁸ a mother of three boys, originally from Zimbabwe whose trajectory with her husband, an accountant, has taken the family to various places in South Africa and on a two-year stint to Egypt and back. The family moved to South Africa when the eldest was 2 years old and at the time could speak the family's Shona L1 fluently. However, when he started attending pre-school in South Africa, he understood no English, and to assist him with fitting in the parents started to speak English at home. Now, ten years later, according to the mother, all three children can speak and understand English only, even while the parents speak Shona to each other. This family's socio-economic security translates into expressed interest in their children's education and how language can facilitate learning, social interaction, as well as attachment to a Shona heritage. Gloria believes that her teenage children's English is "way, way better than mine ... ten times better," and she is proud that her 9-year-old's teacher reported to her that his English and spelling "is of a 12-year-old." She has requested that her first-born be exempted from the compulsory Afrikaans lessons in secondary school – not because she objects to Afrikaans generally, but "because I cannot help them in any way."

3.2 *Participants' Critical Engagement: Who is Supposed to Help the Children?*

In Jacob's narrative he referred to his child who was born in the local Karl Bremer Hospital and now is 7 years old, who, on the basis of her father's status, has a birth certificate that identifies her as a refugee. Jacob took initiative in resisting our narrow research agenda, changing the topic from interesting linguistic repertoires to what he found to be the burning questions. Regarding their children's education he asked:

What about the children? Who helps them with their homework? We [*the parents*] are supposed to help them. But we are broken ... [*referring to his non-standard English*]

In fact, Jacob was quite impatient about how little our academic interest in foreigners' linguistic repertoires offered; his message, summarized, was:

You are citizens; you have a position from which to speak; you should address these people who do not listen to us, who do not want to accept us here. You can call us "foreigners" and "refugees" – but what about the children?

By the end of the first focus group discussion, Jacob changed the multilingual biography discourse into a discourse of resistance. Although he was the most fluent and animated speaker in the group, other participants joined in, quite vocally reminding the researchers and one another of their social realities, and how various discourses are connected, one embedded in the other.

The generous national language policy in South Africa that affords 11 native languages official status, provides little official support in transferring from non-indigenous home languages to the local language of education. This responsibility is implicitly transferred to parents, or unofficially, to empathetic, concerned teachers. Besides language and literacy development (Mafandala 2014), other concerns regarding integrating migrant children and their parents into an enabling schooling system, are rarely addressed. At best, families and their children are invited to join in; at worst, they are refused access on the grounds of not having documentation that justifies their use of the educational resources. These social circumstances contribute to developing FLPs that in some cases maintain and perpetuate the heritage languages (as in the cases of Jacob and Goodwin), in other cases give up the heritage language in favour of developing English (as in the case of Gloria), and in some bring extended repertoires for the children, even if not for the parents (as in the cases of Claudette and Goodwin) (see also Li Wei and Kelly-Holmes 2021). The socially more vulnerable families can hardly attend to language development, even of the parents' L1, as in the cases of Sophie and Myriam. These cases confirm that planning family language(s)

is a luxury in the migrancy condition – vulnerable respondents preferred telling their stories of hardship to merely reflecting on which languages they use when.

3.3 Summary: Different Heritage Communities, Different Experiences, Different FLP Outcomes

The following sections will illustrate the various dimensions we recognized, referring to the discursive contributions of specific migrant parents regarding their language identity, linguistic repertoire, and how these tie in to possible FLPs they would adhere to, even if rarely explicitly contemplated. We augment the excerpts above with complementary information from the focus groups. All recorded data is in English, an L2 for researchers as well as participants. However, participants' L2 skills were of varying competence levels: notably, migrants from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Nigeria, and Tanzania (former British colonies) were more able to clearly articulate their experiences than those from the DRC where French is the *lingua franca* and language in education. Nevertheless, relying on ten Thije's (2018) concept of "receptive multilingualism" in reference to such conversations in which speakers use different levels of the *lingua franca* and draw on the range of their linguistic resources, we achieved considerable communicative success (measured in terms of mutual agreement) in the given settings.

First, as we noted earlier, particular identities (ethnic, social class) and related background factors (education, languages) work in tandem with temporalities of migration. We note that where the migrants come from shapes language identities and FLPs. Migrants' national identities, their heritage communities, contribute in more and less obvious ways to their ability to establish as families in the Western Cape. This was evident in shared experiences, as well as differences between respondents from the DRC, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Mozambique.

The distinction is marked between migrants from anglophone countries where the education system cultivates English-language and literacy skills (Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania, Nigeria) on the one hand, and those from Francophone (DRC, Burundi, Rwanda) or Lusophone countries (Mozambique, Angola) on the other hand, where populations are multilingual, but with low English competence. Respondents of DRC origin, for example, experienced their rich repertoires as very limiting, many indicating that they did not anticipate the challenge of settling in an English-dominant context. At first, meeting with researchers interested in language was awkward, as participants could not envisage the relevance of language considering the other pertinent things they (i) had to manage and take care of, and (ii) would prefer to raise with South Africans perceived to be in secure and powerful social positions. Thus, at first, we found little resonance when discussion was on repertoire, language biography, or language planning.

Regarding language repertoire and language planning, most respondents were unprepared for such a question. They appeared not to think of themselves in terms of multilinguals with “linguistic capital.” Respondents from Zimbabwe (e.g.), when prompted, would acknowledge the advantage of their fluency in L2-English, although they associated their employability more with their willingness to commit to job requirements, and at times also to accept relatively low wages. In contrast, respondents from the DRC would confirm the difficulties of language and accent marking them as foreigners, and of being found unsuitable for professions that require basic or even advanced communicative skills. Some expressed aspirations to improve their English, though as adult learners who needed to find a means of income, formal language learning was never an option. In temporality terms – only a very few could afford to spend six months in courses or in libraries trying to advance their English-language skills. Ranking their difficulties, however, worries about documentation, personal safety, and opportunities for upward mobility, seemed to be of greater concern than language. All of this, of course, is the result of living in provisionality.

Interestingly, though, possessing a broad repertoire and having language skills appeared to be one factor that could literally “buy time” for some migrants in the sense of providing more opportunities. In assessing their own competence, the relative terms in which many consider English proficiency became clear. Jacob, as a French-educated DRC citizen, could speak English considerably more fluently than Claudette, a highly skilled designer and tailor in the training shop, also from the DRC. Jacob’s English gave a degree of job security and flexibility, while Claudette experienced very limited employment opportunities. Her work in the tailoring business – cutting, sewing, training – with Jacob as her supervisor, was highly valued though she would have to remain in the setting where communication through DRC French was possible. Possessing language skills is one way in which the scope of the local agency was expanded in opening up some future of “radical hope” mentioned above.

Second, regarding parents’ engagement in their children’s language learning, those with more permanent and less transient migrant conditions through, for example, income security were in a good position to reflect on FLP, to consider which languages to maintain, which ideally to develop for their children, which to select in deciding on schooling, which even to “sacrifice” in the process of preparing for suitable future employment. In contrast, the ills of itinerant and provisional lives, such as having to battle with employment uncertainty, low wages, insecure housing arrangements, official papers, and staying safe in the face of sporadic xenophobic violence, pushes language issues to the periphery – perhaps not surprisingly.

Considering FLP in migrant families, there are at least two kinds of structures, namely children left behind in the parent’s home country to be cared for by family or extended family members, and those in the care of their foreigner parents in South Africa (cf. Palmary 2009, 3). For example,

large numbers of migrants of Zimbabwean origin with matric-level education leave their families at a young age, anticipating employment with an income large enough to sustain them in South Africa while also taking care of parents and siblings, a spouse, and children left behind in their home country. In contrast, migrants of Congolese origin who were schooled in French, face considerably greater difficulties in finding employment and a sustainable income. Many underestimate the difficulty of finding lucrative employment without English fluency. Some studies report on the advantages for left-behind children if the migrating parents are able to send home remittances (cf. UNICEF paper 2009/10); in substitute care, migrant FLPs are not directly relevant, although the absence of the parent is not without effect.

Third, regarding planning family language vs. school language(s) – to take part in planning one has to be included. FLP literature in a global northern context does reflect diversity in the integrating and accommodating practices followed in different contexts; yet it generally presupposes that institutions in multilingual communities will recognize (to some extent) the family language, and in considered contexts also plan for bridging between home and school languages, as with Spanish in the USA, Welsh and English in Wales, Finnish in Sweden, etc. Claudette’s daughter’s school has neither teachers nor programmes prepared for learners with non-SA languages as L1s. The teacher appointed to support the English literacy of learners with migrant-family backgrounds (e.g. from DRC, Somalia) mentioned that parents are not confident in interacting with the school, so that although they register their children there they cannot support them at home. These parents, reportedly, very rarely attend parent–teacher meetings, possibly intimidated due to their own limited English or assuming they have no role in assuring their child’s progress.⁹ Further, some schools are reluctant to enrol students with migrancy backgrounds (as indicated above), so that once a child is enrolled, parents could be hesitant to jeopardize the child’s access by exhibiting their “foreignness.” Decisions about which family language will be introduced in such families, which kind of schooling would be ideal, and which SA languages the children would be introduced to, are often taken only by default.

4 Discussion

The unsettled families in our study (i) do not fit traditional family structures, (ii) are highly mobile with limited perspective on stability in terms of location, family income, settling children in formal education, and (iii) hardly reflect on “language matters” in a context where apparently more existential issues such as accommodation, daily livelihood, dealing with police and internal administration, or xenophobic violence, confront them. As noted, these are families that live with the affordances provided by short-term itineraries, characterized by provisionality and uncertain, non-determinable

futures. They are highly *vulnerable* families in many respects. We have wanted to suggest that bilingualism and multilingualism as enacted in such migrant communities differ largely from those in more secure contexts, where there is structural – even if often unsociable – support for migrants with traumatic backgrounds.

From the data, we can conclude that these socially vulnerable migrant families have language policy directives that are quite different to those of socially secure families who have time and material resources to invest in “family language planning.” Ideologies on official languages, on (e.g.) which languages have value in finding lucrative employment and therefore should be promoted for and in education (cf., e.g. King and Lanza 2017), often reinforce the value of resources accessible to “upwardly mobile” families. Linguistic resources of the vulnerable (even if mobile) communities (Spencer, Clegg, and Stackhouse 2012) are mentioned in national policies that promote multilingualism, but they often stop at lip-service (cf. Van Baalen 2012; Mafandala 2014). Even so, for many migrants consideration of various options seems to be irrelevant – a luxury quite removed from their everyday lives.

Existing research (cf. Spolsky 2004, Shohamy 2006) indicates how vulnerable families, which include migrant families, are rarely supported with good information on home language vs. the languages used in education, developing bilingual skills, learning the official (dominant) language, and simultaneously maintaining family languages (Nieto 1987, Fishman 1970, Genesee 2013). Narrative data in the various publications, and from semi-structured interviews (De Fina 2009) also informs what happens in planning and executing family language policies among migrants from central and southern Africa, in urban contexts in South Africa. The presupposition that vulnerable migrant respondents will view language as a resource and would see language as an explicit part of their identity if not directly questioned has to be interrogated.

Although characterizing “family” – including non-traditional families – in FLP research is not a new suggestion (see, e.g. King 2016, King and Lanza 2017, Gomes 2018), focusing on “vulnerability” does add an important dimension. We have suggested that a core feature of these migrant families that needs more consideration is how their vulnerability can be correlated with the temporal regimes under which they live and with which they struggle. Different migration profiles in terms of aspiration, orientation, and structure produce a diversity of ‘family’ profiles, more or less vulnerable. The most vulnerable migrant communities not only extend our understanding of “family,” they in fact identify family life and relationships as a site of disruption and even trauma. Imagining family and imagining personal futures are contested grounds, areas of uncertainty and insecurity. The temporal regimes determine what choices might even be relevant. At the very least, migrant families hardly have

the time or capacity to reflect on the available choices (cf. Yabiku and Agadjanian 2017).

There are also methodological implications that follow from a more explicit reflection of the temporal life conditions of migrants. For example, it would seem desirable to revisit the types of question we ask, and to question what is appropriate and productive, and what is not. How do we take structures of anticipation and mobility of the respondents into account when engaging in linguistic modes of enquiry? The vocabularizing of linguistic identity can be an alien and alienating discourse. These are just a few implications that follow from family temporalities of precarity.

5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have focused on a particular instance of FLP, that of African migrants' within Africa, and one significant dimension of FLP, namely temporality. Temporality is the subjective and lived experience in time, and the manner in which the "African migrant" orientates to time. Temporality is important for a number of reasons we have pointed to above. Two ways that stand out as particularly relevant for family language planning are first provisionality – lack of engagement with formal structures – and an uncertain future. And second, planning itself is a temporal practice – albeit one clearly tailored to the temporal regime of linear (national) time – from which many in this group are excluded.

We have illustrated the nature of the journeys of the migrants in terms of their structured identities, expectations, and possibilities, although these are diverse across individuals and groups. We have considered the profiles of highly mobile and often greatly disrupted migrants as they are given in the literature, media reports, as well as a number of personal interviews, and sought answers to how the concept of "family language" features, which choices (explicit or implicitly, conscious or unconsciously) such families make in terms of family language vs. community languages and language-in-education. We have argued that raising the theme of language, linguistic diversity, language repertoires, different competences, and finally also family language choices, preferences, and ideologies in such communities, promises a range of new perspectives. Specifically, reflecting on these migrant communities in terms of family and FLP raises questions with the potential to extend the research field of FLP, particularly at the intersection with sociolinguistics, social anthropology, and critical linguistics.

Perhaps the long and the short of it is that you cannot plan for the future unless you have one, and you cannot plan for equitable futures when you do not have the means – or access to the means (infrastructures, institutions) – to make them happen. We acknowledge that this is hardly a novel insight, but one that nevertheless seems not to resonate loudly in policy and planning documents or even in much research literature.

Notes

- 1 Regarding “family” we take this term as one that designates a diversity of social forms, of parents and children living together as a unit (Beck-Gernsheim 2002), including also groups constituted by one adult member and one or more others, where there is a generational connection, and members are related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together, working towards mutual need fulfilment, nurturance, and development (Edwards and Graham 2009, 193).
- 2 For a more elaborate description of linguistic diversity and the inclusion of all South African home languages in the official language policy, see Anthonissen (2010, 109–113).
- 3 The International federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a humanitarian network with primary aim to reduce vulnerability, also by reducing discrimination, increasing resilience and fostering a culture of peace globally. See <https://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/>
- 4 Also, South Africa has accepted a number of UN directives intended to secure the social and educational rights of refugee children (Van Baalen 2012).
- 5 All respondents’ names have been changed to protect their identity.
- 6 Special thanks to Lauren Mongie, Carla Roets, Philip Steyn who assisted with recording the focus group discussions.
- 7 Thank you to Erica George who assisted with recording the interview.
- 8 Interview jointly conducted by CA (author) and Elizabeth Lanza.
- 9 See Grolnick et al. (1997) and Flouri (2006) regarding a correlation between poor social support to parents and less personal involvement in the child’s schooling.

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