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## “Prétendre comme si on connaît pas une autre langue que le swahili”: Multilingual parents in Norway on change and continuity in their family language policies

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**Abstract:** In this article, we examine how parents explain their choices of transmitting certain languages to their children, a key element of family language policies (FLP), in light of their dynamic linguistic repertoires and biographic experiences. Contributing to the framework of FLP, we focus in particular on parents' memories, their narratives of multilingual upbringing in the past, and how these are used to construct present FLP. We analyze conversations where six multilingual parents in Norway talk about their experiences and intentions regarding FLP, and in particular, their reasons for the transmission of (some of their) languages to their children. The parents of three of the families are from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and in three others at least one of the parents migrated from Germany. We find that the parents align their decisions with both prior and new experiences. They relate to their language(s), their past and their current family life, and express the wish for continuity across the lifespan. At the same time, they demonstrate a certain flexibility and willingness to adapt to the constantly changing environments that they and their children experience and in which they navigate. Through their complex accounts, their memories and lived language experiences, we can understand parents' manifold positions as regards their children's linguistic repertoires.

**Keywords:** family language policy, biographies, intergenerational transmission, Norway

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# 1 Introduction

Parents and children negotiate family language policies while in constant contact with societal and individual expectations and evaluations. In this article, we explore *family language policy* (FLP, see Fogle and King 2017) as the practices and ideologies which are normalized within a family unit, including which languages and registers are used, when, and with whom. We are particularly interested in parents' linguistic repertoires, that is, the range of languages, registers and communicative genres which they possess (see Gumperz 1964; Busch 2012), as a factor in the development of the children's repertoire, given that parents generally want their children to speak (some of) their language(s) both for identity and communicative purposes (Purkathofer 2017).

The data we examine are conversations where the parents of six multilingual families in Norway tell about their FLP to researchers (the authors of this article). Our analysis centers on the concepts of *continuity* and *change*, that is, we focus on the extent to which the parents aim for continuity and how they adapt to change. The strong focus on the here-and-now that FLP research has taken so far, and which has led to important insights into micro practices, parental strategies and child agency, has at times left (large) parts of parents' lives aside. However, analyzing biographical constructions of parents can help us to understand how lived language experiences contribute to the formation of FLP, as well as the relationship between the dynamic linguistic repertoires of multilingual parents, and their ideas of family language policies and thus why family situations and conditions in the present might translate only partly, and not necessarily predictably, into FLP. More specifically, our research question is as follows: how do change and continuity appear in memories and biographical narratives of the parents, and what can they tell us about FLP? We adopt an understanding of speakers' positions much like Taylor (1996[1989]), who speaks about the self in society:

understanding our society requires that we take a cut through time – as one takes a cut through rock to find that some strata are older than others. Views coexist with those which have arisen later in reaction to them [...] because these rival outlooks go on influencing and shaping each other.

(Taylor 1996[1989]: 497)

For our case, this means that we focus on a biographic “cut through time” to understand how parents, from a present perspective, look back at their own experiences and ahead to (anticipated) experiences of their children.

The article is structured as follows. In Section 2, we situate the study within the theoretical frameworks of biographic research, linguistic repertoires, memory and narratives, and research on FLP. Section 3 is devoted to a description of the data and the participants' backgrounds. We then turn to the analysis in Section 4 where we present illustrative excerpts of narratives and memories to show how parents draw on continuity and change to explain their FLP. The implications of our findings are discussed in the final section.

## 2 From biographies and memories to narratives about continuity and change

Biographical research and life stories told to researchers or captured through autobiographic writing are prevalent in several research fields, among them in research on multilingualism (for an overview, see Busch 2017). For our research, we are drawing on the idea of linguistic repertoires as a component of the individual's biography and as influencing the interactional construction of the self. In this approach, lived language experiences are seen as situations of language use, with related emotions (positive, negative or ambivalent). These situations might be common and repeated in everyday life or singular and outstanding. Over time, they form a speaker's linguistic repertoire (Gumperz 1964; Busch 2012), a concept that refers to language competence, the individual's biography including the history of language learning and use, metalinguistic knowledge, speech styles, registers and the contexts of use, and the ability to understand the social meaning of those as well as aspirations, ideologies and attitudes about languages. How speakers relate to their different languages, for example affectively, is also a part of their linguistic repertoire, and this is true both for past experiences and future imaginations/aspirations (King and Fogle 2006; Purkarthofer 2017).

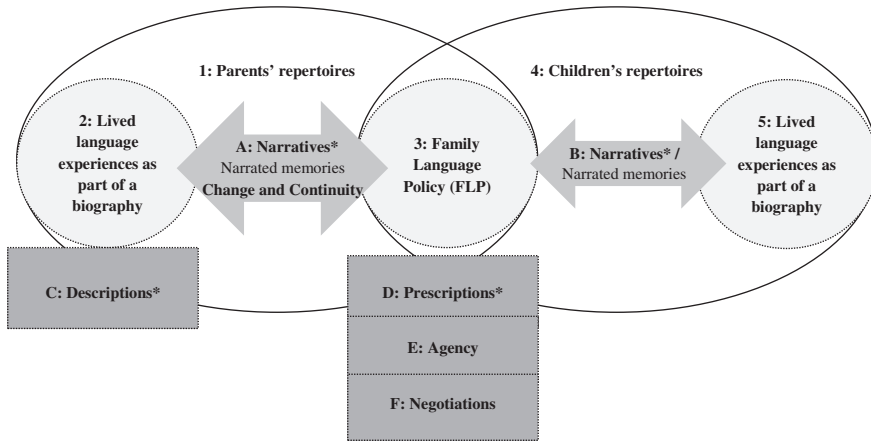
### 2.1 Change and continuity

Change is an inherent property of a linguistic repertoire as it develops across the lifespan according to individuals' needs, ideas and possibilities of participation (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Wenger 1998). From when they acquire their first language(s), speakers are constantly engaged in changing their repertoire – consciously and unconsciously – as linguistic and communicative resources are being added or gain more importance due to biographical events, while others become

weaker or even disappear as they are less used and/or are associated with negative social values. Both parents and children are active participants in different environments (Dagenais and Berron 2001; Crippen and Brew 2007; Lanza 2007), and migration (national or transnational) is one of the factors that are expected to have an influence on the construction and re-evaluation of one's own language biography. Continuity is the other inherent characteristic of linguistic repertoires as they must consist of some stable elements, continuously reproduced in order to reconstruct established practices. Within families, we can thus expect certain patterns to persist across generations, also in the case of migration.

As constant negotiation of FLP involves both change and continuity, families themselves can be seen as dynamic and ever-changing systems. When parents raise children and make decisions concerning their FLP, their perception of societal beliefs, as well as biographic experiences and language competences are taken into account (King and Fogle 2006; Van Mensel 2016). Parents with highly multilingual repertoires have to make choices about the languages they prioritize in their family – in relation to languages of the environment and to languages of a relevant past and of an anticipated future of the child(ren) (Purkarthofer 2017). At the same time, children interact with society, where they might be exposed to other languages than the home language(s). The children's experiences outside the home might therefore also influence FLP, as they confront their parents with linguistic resources that they have acquired. We consider the parents' languages as potential family languages, and are, in this study, interested in the meaning of these resources in the reported FLP. Parents, on the one hand, make efforts to naturalize language use or are, on the other hand, held responsible for what their environment deems “unnatural” or forced language education and policing (Armstrong 2014: 577). Moreover, explicit and implicit parental strategies are used to enforce and support desired language practices while children contribute to their families' FLP by going along or resisting these strategies (Gafaranga 2010; Lanza 2004). Over time, FLP decisions are reevaluated and adapted and efforts and outcomes are weighed against each other in retrospect (see e.g. Curdt-Christiansen 2013).

In other words, through their contribution to and construction of the FLP, parents are important in the formation of the linguistic repertoires of their children – who in turn take agency to respond to their parents' choices and align or resist them. This may again lead to changes in the parents' repertoires, as the children may introduce new languages in the home or change communicative practices. In this way, parents' biographies are influential, but at the same time influenced by their children as their repertoires interact (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Framework of the interaction between the linguistic repertoires of parents, children and the FLP (with Ricoeur's terms marked with \*).

## 2.2 Narratives and memory

Narrated memories provide a window into parents' prior experiences and their relation to current and future FLP. Narratives can and have been analyzed in different ways (see De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2015), but what brings them together is that they are stories told to be heard in interaction with others or with the self. For our purpose, we find the narrative analysis of Ricoeur (1992) useful as he proposes continuity (concordance) and change (discordance) as forces of biographical development. In particular, we are interested in his reasoning about how narratives can link descriptions (in our case of lived language experiences) and prescriptions (language policy). Our understanding differs from Ricoeur's understanding in that we do not see descriptions as completely neutral and prescriptions as only unidirectional, but as options on the same continuum. Moreover, we use these terms to express a certain temporal quality; descriptions are related to the past or present, whereas prescriptions include a future-directed perspective. FLP, the way we understand it, is partly prescriptive as parents propose languages to children or arrange language environments for them, and we claim that parents' narratives can be read as one way to make sense of their lived language experiences which, in turn, are more descriptive in nature.

Speakers make use of narratives to convey memories, as they transform parts of their biographies into stories to be told. Bergson even calls remembering the past the *éclaircissement de l'action* (Bergson 1975: 57); it is through prior experience we are able to understand (and explain) present decisions. In this sense, change

is one of the continuities of human life. Schütz (1981[1924–1928], 103–104) works on the formation of memories and underlines how we do not memorize the events themselves, but their meaning and on how this meaning is reevaluated when past experiences are retold. When speakers describe and narrate their experiences, they extract meaning and put it in relation to other experiences. In constructing and in talking about their FLP, parents draw on prior experiences (descriptions) to form future policies (prescriptions).

Memories and narratives are told and re-told and belong to several people: “Even at an individual level, it is through stories revolving around others and around ourselves that we articulate and shape our own temporality” (Ricoeur 1995: 6). The image of *entangled stories* can capture the telling and re-telling of memories that influence families’ FLPs; parents (and also children) draw on their lived language experiences to make themselves and their actions understood by others. Lambek (1996: 239) stresses that it is not “the most coherent narrative [that] is the most adequate. Indeed, if anything the reverse – the smoother the story, the more evident that it is the product of secondary reworking.”

To summarize, we will point to Figure 1 which gives an overview of these processes and situates them in a wider research field: the figure shows how narrated memories of parents (A) provide a connection between lived language experiences (2), as parts of a biography, and the resulting FLP (3). All these elements are related to the linguistic repertoire of the parents (1). Via the FLP and related narratives, the parents’ repertoires influence the children’s repertoires (4), as this becomes part of their own experiences and memories (5). In Ricoeur’s terms, we can use the poles of a continuum that are description (C) and prescription (D) to be associated with the description of lived experiences and the prescriptive nature of the FLP. Apart from the parts that are in focus in our analysis, speakers’ agency and ability to act (E) and ongoing negotiations of language practices in interactions (F) are also relevant for the dynamic formation of FLP (see Fogle and King 2017).

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Participants

All families who participated in this study currently live in Norway. They are six heterosexual couples, each raising or having raised children in South Eastern Norway. We bring two different national backgrounds together, the Democratic

Republic of Congo (DRC) and Germany, assuming that differences in the parents' background might be reflected in how they see their lives in Norway now and in the future, and potentially in what kind of FLP they want to adopt. When looking at research on bi- and multilingual children and families, we find that parents of African origin are underrepresented in most studies. Only recently have Somali speakers (Bigelow 2010), speakers from Rwanda (Gafaranga 2010) and West Africa (Roubeni et al. 2015) been in the center of research projects. German, on the other hand, has been part of the first studies on bilingual children (Ronjat 1913 on German and French; Leopold 1939–1949 on German and English). Since then, English has become more important but still, research on speakers of German is regularly published (among the more recent monographs Piller (2002)).<sup>1</sup> The present study thus contributes with new insights to the field of FLP, as it compares families of European and African origin living in the same country.

In the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, Norway was one of the host countries for UN refugees from the DRC who escaped the country after the fall of the Muboto regime in 1997, and approximately 1,800 persons of DRC origin lived in Norway in 2010.<sup>2</sup> The Congolese families thus came to Norway as refugees; they were forced to leave their country and their wish was not to come to Norway specifically. Unlike the Congolese, the German families came to Norway because of job offers to one parent or because job opportunities for the Norwegian partner were better in Norway. Germany occupies the 5th rank among the 15 most numerous migrant populations in Norway with a number of approximately 25,000 in 2015. All the six families had established themselves relatively successfully in Norway at the time of the conversations, and they spoke about connections to their environment, through work and school.

The three participating families (A, B and C) from the DRC are highly multilingual. The adults of these families speak several languages in addition to Norwegian and have at least three family languages they can potentially choose to transmit to the next generation. This sets them apart from the other three families (D, E and F), who have different varieties of German

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<sup>1</sup> While this difference in presence was not initially motivating our choices, we feel that it adds to the urgency of bringing together these groups of speakers and we thank our reviewers for highlighting this factor.

<sup>2</sup> Migrants from Somalia (4th) and Eritrea (10th) are the only African nations to rank among the 15 most numerous migrant populations. Statistics Norway: <http://www.ssb.no/en/innvandring-og-innvandrer/nokkeltall/immigration-and-immigrants> (2015) and [http://www.ssb.no/a/english/kortnavn/innvbef\\_en/arkiv/tab-2010-04-29-04-en.html](http://www.ssb.no/a/english/kortnavn/innvbef_en/arkiv/tab-2010-04-29-04-en.html) (2010)

and Norwegian as their family languages. In these families, at least one of the parents grew up in Germany, and came to Norway as an adult in the years 2000, 2014 and 2015. All of them learned English as their second language and have learned further languages in school or through exchanges. In the following, we will discuss how these differences and similarities are reflected in their FLP.

In this article we use conversation excerpts from three families (A, B and F) which are representative of trends among families. See Table 1.

**Table 1:** Overview of the participants. The codes represent the family (A-F), the parents' dominant language (S = Swahili, L = Lingala, G = German, N = Norwegian) and gender (M/F). Languages are given in the order of self-reported language proficiency.

Family	Parents	Languages	Children
Family A	AS_F	Swahili, French, Norwegian, Mashi	2 children
	AS_M	Swahili, French, Norwegian, Kinyindu	(4 and 7 years old)
Family B	BS_F	Swahili/French, Norwegian, Mashi	5 children
	BL_M	French, Lingala, Swahili, Norwegian, Chokwe	(age unknown)
Family C	CS_F	Swahili, Norwegian, Mashi, Bemba, French	12 children
	CS_M	Swahili, French, Norwegian, Mashi, Bemba, Lingala	(age unknown)
Family D	DN_F	Norwegian/German, English	1 child
	DG_M	German, English, Norwegian	(3 years old)
Family E	EG_F	German/Norwegian, English, Spanish, Italian	2 children
	EG_M	German/Norwegian, English, Italian	(3 and 6 years old)
Family F	FG_F	German, English, Norwegian, French, Spanish	2 children
	FG_M	German (and dialect), English / Norwegian, French	(1 and 5 years old)

### 3.2 Conversations

The data we are looking at are semi-structured conversations in the course of which the parents told their linguistic autobiographies. The topics ranged from language biographical experience, schooling and family languages to work situations in Norway, changes in one's own repertoire and finally plans and imaginations for the family in Norway. We refer to the interactions as conversational interviews as they turned out to be quite natural in the sense that one topic led to another without the researcher having to ask questions explicitly for each topic. They were all carried out in the participants' homes, and in each of them, one researcher and the two adults in the family were



present. The conversations with the German/Norwegian families were mainly in German, while all participants (including JP as the researcher) drew on other linguistic resources for certain concepts or words. The shared languages between the researcher GBS and the Congolese participants are French and Norwegian, and both languages were used in the conversations. The transcription conventions are given in the Appendix.

To understand how change and continuity are constructed, we analyzed the conversations with the parents that spoke about their own upbringing and language experiences and how they were now dealing with the multilingual FLP with their children. After a macrolevel analysis of topics, we focused on episodes that centered around family policies and practices. On the level of the episodes, we used sequential approaches to understand the construction of moments of change and continuity: this includes moments of change in the parents' language biography (e.g. no longer speaking certain languages) as well as the construction of a continuous development, that is, passing on certain languages or certain approaches to multilingual family life. The examples draw on long timeframes, starting with the parents' childhood but also include memories of relatively recent and rather short events. Both researchers worked with both data sets for the analysis.

## 4 Change and continuity in the parents' accounts

### 4.1 Family language, now and before

As a starting point, let us first look at an excerpt from Family B in which the choice of family languages is discussed. In this family, Swahili is the main family language. The parents grew up with Mashi and Chokwe as their family languages respectively, but they have rarely spoken those languages since their childhood. Swahili, Lingala and French became their dominant languages before they moved to Norway, and now Norwegian also occupies an important space in their linguistic repertoires. The excerpt of example (1A) is taken from a part of the conversation where the researcher has just asked explicitly about Chokwe and Mashi as potential family languages. Both parents respond in the subsequent turns.

(1A)

- 1 BS\_F: *mais moi, je parle le mashi avec mes parents*  
 2 [question de GBS, pourquoi ne pas transmettre les langues; quelques échanges]  
 3 BL\_M: *le chokwe d'abord, moi même je l'ai perdu parce que je n'avais pas de contact quand je*  
 4 *me suis déplacé je n'en parlais pas/ quand je me suis déplacé depuis l'âge de dix ans/ onze ans*  
 5 *j'étais à l'internat, c'était fini et à l'internat on était obligé de parler seulement le français*  
 6 GBS: *mhm*  
 7 BL\_M: *et puis c'est/ c'est comme ça, je/ je ne le parle plus*  
 8 GBS: *mhm mhm*  
 9 BL\_M: *c'est pas à moi de/ de transmettre aux enfants*  
 10 GBS: *mhm mhm et toi, c'est pareil pour toi?*  
 11 BS\_F: *moi tout simplement c'est/ je voulais qu'ils puissent apprendre, seulement le/ je ne*  
 12 *voulais pas mélanger beaucoup de choses à la fois < GBS: oui > mais je sais qu'ils ont la*  
 13 *capacité, mais moi même je ne maîtrisais pas le/ donc je maîtrise pas le mashi*

[Translation (28/29)]

- 1 BS\_F: but I, I speak Mashi with my parents  
 2 [question of GBS, why languages were not transmitted ; some utterances]  
 3 BL\_M: Chokwe first of all, I have lost it myself because I had no more contact, when I moved I  
 4 did not speak it when I moved at the age of ten/ eleven I was in a boarding school, it was over  
 5 and at the boarding school we were obliged to only speak French  
 6 GBS: mhm  
 7 BL\_M: and it is/ it is like that, I/ I do not speak it anymore  
 8 GBS: mhm mhm  
 9 BL\_M: it is not [for me / my responsibility] to transmit it to the children  
 10 GBS: mhm mhm and is it the same for you?  
 11 BS\_F: me what I wanted was just that they could learn/ only I did not want to mix many things

- 12 at the same time <GBS: yes> but I know they have the capacity, but  
myself, I was not able/ I
- 13 do not master Mashi myself

We will start our analysis by looking at lines 3 to 9, where the father (BL\_M) of the family presents a part of his linguistic biography. As a child, Chokwe was his home language, but he lost it due to lack of contact with its speakers. In fact, he moved to a boarding school at the age of 10–11 years and was subsequently forced to use only French (see line 5). The final evaluation, pointing to the continuity of non-use of Chokwe, is expressed in line 7 by the expression *c'est comme ça* 'it is like that'. Following the hearer signal from the researcher, he continues his utterance (line 9) and claims that it is not in his power or responsibility to transmit Chokwe to his children. The French expression leaves room for interpretation as the phrasing deletes all agency and can thus point to inability, but also to the lack of feeling of responsibility. We can see the alignment of his language experience with the projected language experience of his children, in that neither of them will use or learn Chokwe in the family context. The way he presents the final evaluation, he constructs a continued state of not using (or learning) Chokwe, neither for him nor for his children. This decision is presented as one that is not open for negotiation.

In the mother's (BS\_F) account, we see a relatively complex narrative that includes some implicit assumptions. Her turn starts in line 1, but it is not developed right away. The use of Mashi is reintroduced in the conversation in line 10 when the researcher asks her explicitly to elaborate on the topic. As opposed to her husband who does not express any wish to transmit Chokwe, she says that she would have liked the children to speak it. This builds a continuation from herself speaking Mashi with her parents, but is combined with the constraint that she did not want to confuse the children with too many languages at once. From this utterance, we can already understand that the children did not learn the language, even if this is not expressed explicitly. Instead, she stresses her confidence in the children's abilities of learning several languages. In the final utterance, she turns to her own abilities, and underlined by the repetition, she states her own (felt) incompetence to speak Mashi. The choice of verb *maîtriser* 'master' might indicate that she is referring to a broader competence, in the sense of knowing and owning a language, as opposed to speaking or using. In a way, her turn expresses several moments of change: the first one moves from her wish to pass on a language to the reason for not doing so earlier (which takes the form of a rationalization that might also be, in Schütz' sense, a re-telling as the children do not speak the

language). Second, she expresses the potential of her children to learn several languages, but evaluates her competence in Mashi as (unfortunately) not sufficient to pass it on to her children. Her narrative self that appears in these lines is torn between several goals and ideas how language transmission should have happened but also how circumstances and abilities influenced the outcomes. The different goals and parts of the tellings point to the fact, that this memory might not be readily available or told very often (see Lambek 1996: 246–247). We see in this example very clearly that intentions are linked to the memories that are brought up – the regret over the loss of the parental language can thus be related to the own ideas about the family language but it can also be an effect of the construction vis-à-vis a researcher who is perceived to be interested in multilingual upbringing.

Later in the conversation, the researcher goes back to the choice of Swahili as a family language (1B) and here we see the importance of continuity that appears in the mother's utterance:

(1B)

14 GBS: *oui donc tu voulais que/ tu voulais au moins qu'ils aient le Swahili*

15 BL\_M: *plus rapidement tu sais si on peut s'ils peuvent parler le Swahili c'est quand même bien*

16 BS\_F: *c'est quand même bien <BL\_M: le Lingala > qu'ils ont au moins une langue africaine*

[Translation]

14 GBS: ok, so you wanted/ you wanted that they at least have Swahili?

15 BL\_M: faster, you know, if you can, if they can speak Swahili that's at least good

16 BS\_F: it's pretty good <BL\_M: Lingala > that they have at least one African language

In this excerpt, both parents evaluate their children's competence in Swahili using the same slightly positive expression (*c'est quand même bien* 'it is pretty good'). At the same time, the expression *quand même* relativizes the situation as not ideal (which is repeated later with *au moins* 'at least' in line 16). Thinking of potentials and possibilities here, we observe the parents' awareness of the difficulties of passing on more than one language (e.g. Armstrong 2014). In the last part of this excerpt, Swahili is put (along with Mashi, Chokwe and Lingala which is mentioned later) in a special frame of African languages. Rather than thinking of all languages individually, despite

them being typologically different, they are constructed as belonging together as “African languages” and one of them, in this case Swahili, is the likely choice.

An interesting tendency in the Congolese narratives is the pro-Swahili FLP. This is understandable both from the parents’ experiences and their evaluation of Swahili being their strongest language, but it also might reflect on tendencies that place Swahili in an East-African language ecology. Swahili has gained importance as a language of schooling and regional and transnational lingua franca (Babaci-Wilhite 2015), among the languages of DRC and the neighbouring countries. The parents’ motivation is thus also voiced by stressing the use of Swahili as a language of interaction with family members and other Congolese abroad. French, which the researchers perceived as a potentially important language, as it aligns more with the Norwegian school system and is taught as a foreign language, does not hold cultural capital in the Norwegian context the eyes of the parents.

Looking at our second set of data, we find also references to the parents’ own upbringing and in example (2), the father of family F speaks about his continued relationship with the German language after moving to Norway. In contrast to the parents of family B, he does not speak about major language shifts during his childhood at first, but mentions them only briefly at the end of the excerpt.

(2)

- 1 F\_GM: *ähm. naja gut, für mich ist es im Prinzip Deutsch, naja, logischerweise die Sprache von*  
 2 *der ich ausgeh, dass ich sie weiterhin sprechen werde, in der Familie zumindest, mit der*  
 3 *Familie und Freunden und in Deutschland, und naja, ähm . (3 sec)*  
 4 *wobei ich auch sagen muss,*  
 4 *dass ich in der Kindheit und Jugend eigentlich Dialekt gesprochen hab*

[Translation]

- 1 F\_GM: hm, well, for me it is German, in principle, well, it’s logically the language I assume  
 2 that I will keep speaking it, in the family at least, with the [members of the] family and friends  
 3 and in Germany and well, hm (3 sec break) but I also have to say that during my childhood and  
 4 youth, I spoke actually dialect

The construction of German as the main language, the one to start from, is also linked to the continued use of the language: starting from the family (at least), and then extended to the relatives and friends and as being used in Germany. The first part of this utterance is centered on him as the speaker and interaction partners are only addressed in the second. He seems to draw on circles of speakers, starting out from the (immediate) family in Oslo to the extended family and friends and then going on to Germany as another place to speak. In this excerpt, like in most of the conversations in both data sets, the country of origin is brought up as a potential place for continued language use whereas other places where the same language could be used are not mentioned explicitly.

After a rather long pause his narrative goes back in time, and he admits to having spoken a different language when he was a child, a dialectal variant of German. In this way, it gets constructed as a hidden language (which is also underlined by the hesitation), and one that he is not considering transmitting to his children.

If we position these accounts and memories in relation to our model in Figure 1, we see that the parents describe their own language biography and use their linguistic repertoire to argue why they (want to) use certain languages in their own family and with their children. Several formulations point to the rather long term goals (“continue to speak”), and they do describe their FLP as relatively stable. This includes the prescriptive ideas about which languages the children should have (“at least one African language”, “German as a family language”). The children are not constructed as active participants in these parts of the narratives, but this will change, as we see in the next section.

## 4.2 Family languages coming in contact with the kindergarten

When we look at narratives that are more focused on recent memories, we see different patterns. In the following example (3), we will look at the construction of continuity in more short-term actions, making decisions within the family with pre-school aged children. This first example of a relevant moment in the family’s FLP is told by the mother of family F.

(3)

- 1 F\_GF: *wir hatten uns nämlich ähm schon überlegt/ also wir hatten uns aufgefallen, dass Tina auch*
- 2 *jetzt plötzlich im Deutschen [sehr getragen] grammatikalische Fehler macht, was sie vorher*

- 3           *nicht gemacht hat. Ne, die konnt ja eigentlich super/ die konnte  
sprechen bevor sie laufen*
- 4           *konnte. [F\_GM: mhm]*
- 5 F\_GF: *ich glaub, die so sprachlich ist sie/ ist sie/ war sie eigentlich immer  
sehr weit und dann hat*
- 6           *sie/ da war eben neulich diese Dreikantgeschichte, soll ich erzählen,  
dass sie eben das Dreikant*
- 7           *und wir so "Hä?", eben Trekant, nä, also Dreieck. und sie hat quasi  
gemischt*
- 8 F\_GM: *hat sie gemischt*
- 9 F\_GF: *oder sie sagt auch immer so, ja du musst noch meine Ma:tboks  
einpacken [F\_GM: mhm]*
- 10          *oder ich brauch jetzt ein paar "joggesko", "joggeschu", "joggesko, ich  
weiß nicht das Wort auf*
- 11          *deutsch"*

[Translation]

- 1 F\_GF: we already thought about / so we had realized that Tina [daughter]
- 2           suddenly she has in her German, she has [heavily emphasized]
- 3           grammatical errors, that she never had
- 4           before. no, she actually was very good/ she could speak before she
- 5           could
- 6           walk. <F\_GM: mhm >
- 7           I think language-wise, she was always very advanced and the
- 8           recently, there was this \*tricorn story, should I tell it, that she like
- 9           tricorn
- 10          and we like 'ha?', so *trekant*, ah, triangle. and she was actually
- 11          mixing.
- 12 F\_GM: she was mixing
- 13 F\_GF: or she says things like: yes, you have to pack my 'matboks' [lunch
- 14          box] <F\_GM: 'mhm' > 'or I
- 15          need a pair of "joggesko", "joggeschu", "joggesko [running shoes], I
- 16          don't know the word in
- 17          German"

The mother of the family speaks about changes in her daughter's language use. At first, she mentions what she perceives as errors in the use of German. Her construction highlights the sudden nature of these occurrences and the fact that

they were never produced by the daughter before. To underline their exceptional character, she speaks about the daughter's very good command of language, explaining that she was able to speak before she could walk. To demonstrate the nature of the errors, she uses the example of the naming of a triangle (*Dreieck/trekant*). The daughter constructed the assumed German form from the Norwegian form. The mother goes on to cite more examples but those are rather lexical borrowings, using the Norwegian word in an otherwise German phrase. The mother's accounts are commented by the father through affirmative signals. Both parents construct the daughter's new language behavior as a (rather unwanted) change and even refer to it as an error. Thus, they present the separation of the two languages as the intended and desired language use. From a perspective on the changing FLP of the family, we could see the child's choice of Norwegian over German words as first steps of the child to intervene with the parents' intended FLP. For the mother however, it is rather a moment where specific efforts are needed to ensure the continuation of their intentions in using (only) German as their home language.

The narrative about the daughter's former language competencies (and even the focus on her particularly good command of German) presents an even clearer frame for the disappointment of the parents with her mixing of the two languages. Interestingly enough, in the same instance, lexical borrowings are grouped with language errors. We see that emphasis is put on the changed language patterns of the child, through an explicit comparison between an earlier stage and the present in (3). Looking at the constructions of the parents, we see that while in the situation (3), less reference to explicit FLP is made whereas looking back at instances like this (2) puts the parents' actions into a more purposeful context. Going back to Schütz (1981[1924–1928]), we understand that parental actions (and children's reactions) are reconstructed in the light of current events and in the light of developments so far.

Concerning change in the family's FLP, we will now come to a final example from family A (4A), where Swahili and French were the main languages for the parents before coming to Norway. For their FLP in Norway, they decided to focus on Swahili, thus coming from a situation of multilingualism-as-norm to a more monolingually intended FLP. From line 2 on, the father explains the intended result (learning Swahili) and also the strategy they employed (pretending to only understand Swahili). He evaluates their strategy as quite successful (line 4 and 5), before he illustrates it with a very concrete example, namely how he dealt with this FLP in a monolingual Norwegian-speaking environment, the kindergarten (lines 7, 8). The researcher asks how he dealt with the necessity of communicating with the employees of the kindergarten. In response, he explains a strategy of



avoidance (not speaking in front of the child, line 10). Finally, he describes one event (line 12 to 20) that he constructs as being very influential in the future FLP.

(4A)

- 1 AS\_M: *on avait décidé à la maison qu'il est strictement interdit de parler norvégien à la maison,*  
 2 *quand on a eu les Anita <GBS: à ce point> parce qu'on voulait qu'ils apprennent le swahili*  
 3 *donc nous sommes convenus nous deux que nous allons prétendre comme si on connaît pas une*  
 4 *autre langue que le swahili et Anita je crois jusque jusqu'en deux mille douze ou deux mille*  
 5 *onze deux mille douze Anita savait que moi je parlais pas norvégien*  
 6 GBS: *elle croyait que tu ne parlais pas norvégien <AS\_M: ouai s>*  
 7 AS\_M: *parce que je l'amenais je la remettais au barnehage là je viens la récupérer à la maison on*  
 8 *parle que français non swahili*  
 9 GBS: *mais elle t'a pas vu discuter avec les employés à barnehage en norvégien*  
 10 AS\_M: *non <GBS: non> souvent on le faisait à côté*  
 11 GBS: *ah d'accord tu faisais exprès*  
 12 AS\_M: *mais maintenant un jour j'étais exposé et c'est là qu'elle m'avait attrapé donc j'avais*  
 13 *<GBS: latter> nous sommes venus/ nous sommes venus et je l'avais mise et elle est partie et*  
 14 *puis y avait une dame qui parlait un peu trop là et elle m'avait arrêté et moi j'ai chaque fois*  
 15 *qu'on m'arrêtait pour me donner des informations ou quoi je m'arrachais pour ne pas parler à*  
 16 *haute voix pour que Anita ne comprenne pas ou je ne faisais pressé pour partir et cette dame-là*  
 17 *elle disait non non non non c'est simplement important tu dois tu dois tu dois et je me suis mis à*  
 18 *l'écouter et y à des questions qu'elle avait posées et j'étais obligé d'y répondre et en répondant*  
 19 *j'ai vu Anita qui me guettait comme ça elle dit et puis elle elle elle sourit un peu et après elle dit*  
 20 *papa tu parles norvégien j'ai dit oui alors depuis ce jour là elle commence à à essayer un peu*

- 21 *de pousser mes limites et donc elle essaye de me provoquer en  
norvégien et moi je prétends je*  
22 *n'entends rien elle disait **jo pappa du forstår**, non je n'entends rien et  
puis*

[Translation]

- 1 AS\_M: we had decided that it was strictly forbidden to speak Norwegian at  
home, when we got  
2 Anita <GBS: to that extent > since we wanted them to learn Swahili  
we agreed the two of us that  
3 we would pretend as if we did not speak any other language than  
Swahili and Anita I think until  
4 2012 2011 Anita knew that I did not speak Norwegian  
5 GBS: she thought that you did not speak Norwegian <AS\_M: yeah >  
6 AS\_M: because I took her/ I left her at the kindergarten I came to pick her  
up in the house we only  
7 speak French no Swahili  
8 GBS: but she hasn't seen you talking with the employees at the  
kindergarten  
9 AS\_M: no <GBS: no > often we did it aside  
10 GBS: ah ok you did it on purpose  
11 AS\_M: but now one day I was exposed and it is at that moment she caught  
me so I had <GBS:  
12 laughter > we came/ we came and I had left her [here] and she left  
and there was a lady that  
13 talked too much and she stopped me and I each time someone  
stopped me to give me  
14 information or whatever, I hid not to speak loudly so that Anita did  
not understand or I  
15 pretended to be in a hurry but this lady she said no no no no it is  
simply important, you have to,  
16 you have to you have to and I stayed to listen to her and there were  
questions she asked and I  
17 had to answer them and when I answered I saw Anita who watched  
me like that, she says and  
18 she/ she she smiles a bit et then she says dad you speak Norwegian I  
said yes and after that day

- 19 she starts to try to push my limits so she tries to provoke me in  
Norwegian and I pretend that I  
20 do not understand anything she says *jo pappa du forstår* [yes Dad  
you understand], no I  
21 understand nothing and then

In the narrative starting in line 12, he tells how his daughter discovered that he speaks Norwegian. As usual, he takes her to the kindergarten and an employee starts to speak to him in Norwegian. Despite his efforts (as he had done earlier), she insists on speaking to him, and at some point he had to answer her (in Norwegian). As he describes in line 18, this was the first time he was “caught by his daughter” speaking Norwegian. The way he constructs this story is a very typical narrative, in that it leads to a climax where a discovery changes the course of events, in this case the FLP.

While the parents in this family try to establish a relatively monolingual identity (see Lanza 2004: 255), this not only influences their behavior but also the reactions of the child (see Lanza 2004: 269). After this event, his daughter starts pushing the boundaries of the intended FLP. Even when he continues to pretend that he does not understand Norwegian, she no longer complies fully with this policy. The daughter is quoted in Norwegian here in line 21, which marks the discovery as a highlight in the otherwise French narrative. The narrated example has a long-lasting influence on the FLP, in that the parents then established a spatial distribution of one home language (Swahili) and an exterior language (Norwegian), as can be seen in (4B).

(4B)

- 23 AS\_M: *et puis l'autre, le garçon, mon fils um il a appris le même principe il  
sait que quand on est  
24 au barnehage on parle que norvégien parce que là c'est/ c'est en  
norvégien mais quand on est à  
25 la maison on parle swahili et puis je suis allé-là le récupérer un jour et  
moi je commençais à lui  
26 parler en swahili, il dit 'papa ikke snakke swahili i barnehage'*

[Translation]

- 23 AS\_M: and then the other one, the boy, my son um he learned the same  
principle um he knows that  
24 when we are in the kindergarten we speak only Norwegian because  
there it is/ it is Norwegian

- 25 but when we are at home we speak Swahili and I went to get him one  
day and I started to speak
- 26 to him in Swahili and he says *pappa ikke snakke Swahili i barneh-*  
*age* [Dad do not speak Swahili in kindergarten]

The father here underlines the changed FLP with example (4B) of his second child who calls him out for using Swahili in the kindergarten and thus violating the FLP. Here again, the turn of the child is reproduced in the language of the event and not in the language of the story. While in the narrative about the older child, she discovers the parental language competences ('but you do understand'), the younger child is quoted with explicit policing ('don't speak Swahili'). The different construction of the narratives can thus point to different levels of explicitness in the FLP: the parents probably mentioned the spatial distribution and presented it as a rule while the "monolingualism" of the parents was an implicit strategy and only valid until the parents were discovered being multilingual.

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we have shown that the multilingual repertoires of parents are indeed a source of reasoning when current FLP are in question and revealed some strategies how the parents transform their lived language experiences into narrated memories to explain and illustrate decisions they have taken in their FLP. Ricoeur's framework provided us with a clearer distinction between descriptive and prescriptive practices to understand how experiences are translated into policy.

Regarding our research question, on change or continuity in the narratives of parents, we find that the discussed examples point to continuity from parents' side but also the adaptation of the FLP to accommodate changed circumstances (and in this case, changed levels of knowledge). The intention of the parents is continuously pursued, and the "core" of the FLP (i.e. the transmission of Swahili and German) is still unchanged. At the same time, the choice of narrative can be read as the telling of a parental success story in raising children to understand their environments and the stories are presented with parental pride as they also underline how the children were in a way cleverer than the parents. Looking back at our model (Figure 1), we see that the parents' narrated experiences serve as the basis for future decisions about the FLP. The role of the children and the parents' reaction to their discoveries strengthens the understanding of the family as a dynamic system and the FLP as negotiated among family members. For the families themselves, their reactions to change seem ambiguous: the dynamic

character of the FLP ensures to some extent the desired transmission of more than one language but it also stresses the continuous need for parental interventions, policing or negotiations.

In our examples, it is in particular the children who bring Norwegian into the family home and hence, introduce languages from the *barnehage* 'kindergarten' to the parents. We have seen two narratives that focus on this relatively fast change in language use, and both are presented by the parents as influencing the FLP. The fact that parents and children are using new linguistic resources make re-evaluations necessary. The parents describe their resistance or strategies of avoidance to the introduction of a new language (like pretending to not understand Norwegian) – while being aware and expressing the fact that this language is of great importance in their lives and in those of their children. Thus, we also see accommodation strategies, i.e. adapting a policy that fosters one language in the home and one language outside.

Thus, while we were talking to families from different cultural contexts and with different experiences of migration to Norway, we see common patterns in their construction and adaptation of the FLP. In spite of the differences in the languages of their own upbringing, we find it interesting that the position towards the languages of the children is quite similar. All parents in our sample highlight the importance to transmit (at least one) language other than the majority language and they are quite outspoken about strategies. Given our results, we underline the importance of looking at the biographical dimension when doing research in families, as the connection between former experiences, memories and reconstructions in the light of recent circumstances enlightens our understanding of families' motivations and choices. The focus on retellings of relatively recent episodes gave us insights in the parents' perception of micro practices, parental strategies and child agency, but the long-term memories and narratives gave a more nuanced insight into the aims and goals of parents regarding their FLP.

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## Appendix

The conversations are transcribed orthographically. Both authors went through the transcriptions and translations. We rely on the data in the original languages in our analysis; the English translations are given for the readers that are not familiar with the languages of the conversations.

Transcription conventions/notation:

- / Interruption, followed by reformulation
- , Brief pause
- . Falling intonation
- [...] Description, comment of the authors
- <...> Overlapping speech