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Community literacy club and family language policymaking initiatives for biliteracy development

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Background: Our article analyses two case studies that show an urban South African family and members of a community literacy club engaging in grassroots initiatives as family and community language policymakers and planners for bilingual and biliteracy development.

Objectives: The main aim is to describe and analyse the initiatives taken by both community members of the literacy club and family members in challenging separate bilingualism, monoglossic, and anglonormative ideologies.

Method: The researchers used linguistic ethnographic methods to collect data and primarily draw on image data, a written text at the literacy club, as well as transcribed data from observational data.

Results: The research findings point to the critical role that communities and families play in developing and maintaining children's home language, as well as desire and uses of more than one language to develop children's biliteracy.

Conclusion: We view children's biliteracy development in the community and the family as rooted in the sociocultural through a process of drawing from a rich linguistic knowledge and vocabulary that is learned in context.

Contribution: Our contribution to the field is in highlighting policymaking from below and how policymaking from above needs to meet language policymaking and planning from below. We also contribute to understandings of simultaneous biliteracy as opposed to separate and sequential biliteracy.

Keywords: biliteracy; pedagogic translanguaging; family language socialisation; family language policy; family multilingualism; third spaces.

Introduction

South Africa has 12 official languages and, except for Afrikaans schools, and up until 2025, the rest of the schools have always been English medium from Grade 4, even though the Language-in-Education Policy of 1997 promotes multilingual education. From the foundation phase, rural and urban working-class schools offer education in children's home languages but encourage a transition to English as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) from the intermediate phase, even in cases where the children at the school are not sufficiently proficient in English. Children attending these schools are viewed as deficient, as they are not achieving well in the standardised local Early Grade Reading Studies and in the international reading assessments (Department of Basic Education 2023). At schools serving affluent middle-class children, most white English monolingual teachers teach children from diverse communities mainly in English straight from the foundation phase. Black families whose children speak African languages and attend at these schools find themselves conflicted as to whether to communicate at home in English or in African languages, or both, with their children. While some families assimilate to or tolerate the school's English-only language policies (English immersion from Grade 1/Grade 4 transition to English), other families, such as the one in case study two of this article, resist this anglonormativity (Xeketwana, Xeketwana & Athonissen 2025). Out-of-school or after-school programmes also tend to welcome children's multilingual communication practices, and thus do not adhere to English monolingualism (Guzula 2021; Tyler 2023).

Anglonormativity describes 'the expectation that everyone will be or should become English, and if not, they are deficient or deviant' (McKinney 2017:80). These families and after-school programmes

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also resist monoglossia – the learning of one named language as a separate bounded entity in its standard form (García 2009b; Makoe & McKinney 2014). In this article, we analyse two case studies from our doctoral research, one which included child members of a community literacy club known as Stars of Today Literacy Club# (STLC#)[1] who attend school in a township setting and one focusing on an urban South African family with the child attending an ex-Model C school. Both cases engaged in grassroots initiatives as family and community language policymakers and planners to promote bilingualism and biliteracy development. In 2015–2018, we were both members and facilitators of the bilingual STLC#. This literacy club was co-founded and established with the children, their teachers, postgraduate students studying language and literacy or Early Childhood Development, and local storytellers and artists. Its aim was to legitimise simultaneous biliteracy learning and the use of children's hybrid language repertoires as resources for learning language and literacy. Later, Molate (2025) moved on to investigate family language policymaking and planning.

We demonstrate how the STLC# in case study one, and the family in case study two, engaged in the kinds of grassroots language planning and language policy initiatives that build on children's linguistic repertoires to challenge the monoglossic and anglonormative ideologies that shape the schools' authorised language policies. In addition, we show how the children themselves challenged how adults think about use of languages in both the literacy club and in the family. Our aim is to propose an expanded view of the concept of family in community and Family Language Policy (FLP) – to one that is inclusive of the African language-speaking families setup, which is typified by dual-household arrangements where both blood kinship and community membership afford collective responsibility in the language socialisation process involving children. It is also to show how language policies are contested by communities who, through their linguistic practices, construct language policies from below (grassroots) with the help of experts from the side (universities) (Benson 2021) to resist both school and state educational policies around language. We argue that the responsibility and success of language-in-education policies needs to take into consideration grassroots language planning initiatives of communities and families. We also highlight the roles of literacy advocates in the communities and those of language and literacy specialists, like Marlene in case study one (one of the facilitators at the club), as we attempt to show various ways to scaffold children's linguistic expertise as they learn languages and literacy through pedagogical translanguaging. Finally, we argue that family language planning goes beyond the confines of a nuclear family to include community members.

Working from a biliteracy perspective, and drawing on heteroglossia, we start by contextualising indigenous African multilingualism to show how we came to view bi/multilingual learners as having multilingual repertoires (Busch 2012). We also show the implications of this for these learners' identity formation and their meaning-making processes as they develop their bilingualism and biliteracy. To theorise and explore ways in which community activists, parents at home and the children work and think about language to maintain the children's home languages and to promote their bilingualism and biliteracy, we draw on language socialisation theory (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986), family language policy (Curdt-Christiansen 2018; Fogle, King & Logan-Terry 2008; Xetwana, Xeketwana & Athonissen 2025) and third space theory (Anzaldua 1987; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda 1999; Soja 1996).

Contextualising African indigenous multilingualism and language debates

South Africa is a multilingual country which has been immeasurably affected by colonial and Eurocentric one-nation-one language ideologies (Alexander 1989; Makalela 2015). An example of this is the attempt of the Apartheid government, which promoted separate development based on race to divide and rule the country's diverse population. The geopolitical creation of Bantustans (homelands), and borders within townships in urban areas, based on ethnicity and race, together with the Bantu Education curriculum for all 'African' language-speaking children, were examples of this attempt to maintain separate 'onenesses' (Makalela 2015). However, the abolition of Bantustans post 1994, together with freedom of mobility and the opening of former white English and Afrikaans schools, rehybridised South African communities. This (re)created bilingual, multilingual, multicultural, and multiracial school communities.

Despite this rehybridisation of communities, the question about which languages to use in teaching children from multilingual communities results in binary constructions of the learners as either monolingual in an African language, or as English monolinguals (Wolff 2017). Biliteracy development is also conceived of as sequential and separate biliteracy rather than as simultaneous biliteracy development (Bloch 2002; Guzula 2021). This situation either reduces children's linguistic repertoires to simplistic monolingualism or constructs their bilingualism as separate multilingualisms, as can be observed in the terms used for teaching and learning of and via languages as Home Languages (HLs) or First Additional Languages (FALs) (Guzula 2021). Additionally, Xeketwana et al (2025) argue that family multilingualism needs to be aligned with the languages used at school. While we agree to some extent with this sentiment, we also recognise how such a view perpetuates further marginalisation of non-standard languages. In this context, African language and English bi/multilingualism tends to be valued more than indigenous multilingualism (multilingualism inclusive of other African languages and dialects and varieties) (McKinney & Molate 2022). Thus, one can be regarded as bilingual only if they can speak English alongside their mother tongue (Guzula 2021).

1. Stars of Today Literacy Club# (STLC#) is the name given to the literacy club by the children. Though the hashtag usually comes before a theme or idea (e.g. it would be #STLC if written conventionally), the children wrote it at the end. The hashtag is significant in that children observe at home how people use digital technologies and social media platforms such as Twitter to make trending topics, themes or ideas easy to find and filter (Guzula 2021).

Another controversial issue is that of monoglossia: teaching of the named languages, seen as pure, and in standardised forms. Scholars arguing for recognition of linguistic repertoires and translanguaging have been criticised for drawing on concepts developed by Northern/Western scholars (Heugh & Stroud 2019), when translanguaging in African countries and schools is not a new phenomenon. Although it is important to teach standard registers of languages in schools to empower children with the language varieties valued in workplaces, and higher education, we argue for the possibility of working with both monolingual and hybrid languaging practices. Abdulatief, Guzula and McKinney (2021), building on Spivak (1988) and Fuss (1989), argue for strategic essentialism and for the naming of language resources in cases where standard African languages are marginalised in institutions. We also argue for the use of translanguaging and linguistic repertoires in cases of highly multilingual classrooms. Gutiérrez et al. (1999) argue that what is often not understood by scholars who argue for monolingual languaging practices is the educational principle of building one's teaching on familiar linguistic repertoires and using them as mediational and scaffolding tools for teaching the standardised languages. Thus, we argue that heteroglossic practices can also be used as tools for exploratory learning and production of educational material in otherwise marginalised varieties, drawing on both spontaneous translanguaging and pedagogical translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter 2017).

Creating linguistic and pedagogical third spaces for community and family language planning and policy-making initiatives at grassroots level

Soja (1996:5) defines third spaces as spaces 'in between' and beyond two binaries, conceptualisations and discourses often thought of as separate and uncombinable. An example of a third space is a bilingual learner who translanguages (García 2009a) and draws on multiple semiotic resources to communicate (Bock 2016). García (2009a:141) defines translanguaging as 'the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages'. Thus, engaging in multilingual discourse practices (García 2009a:44) creates a third space that constructs the speakers, not as either home language or second language speakers, but as bilingual and multilingual speakers who language in flexible and dynamic ways. Such a flexible and dynamic approach to languages creates linguistic or translanguaging third spaces that transform how language is used in the classroom (Flores & Garcia 2013).

It has been argued that out-of-school, or after-school learning programmes that offer informal education play a significant role in developing children's languages and literacies in various African countries (eds. Ouane & Glanz 2011). These programmes form bridges between informal out-of-school spaces and formal education spaces. Their flexibility plays a powerful role in developing creative and innovative approaches that calibrate learning to the needs of children, youth and adults (eds. Ouane & Glanz 2011:38). Busch (2012) argues that establishing linguistic third spaces is to deliberately challenge languages that are considered as legitimate language, and to disrupt interactional patterns, leaning towards the ones that legitimise use of linguistic repertoires. In fact, García and Wei (2014) make a distinction between established third spaces and adaptive third spaces, arguing that established third spaces play a more transformative role than adaptive ones that are used temporarily only when children do not understand and then reverting to English.

Language socialisation and family language policy

Language Socialisation (LS) theory and Family Language Policy (FLP) also inform this article. Family Language Policy is a mechanism in LS, defined as the explicit and observable planning a family undertakes in relation to language use among its family members within their home. It is also the management and negotiation of how languages are learnt within that family (Fogle et al. 2008:907). And, reflecting on the description Schieffelin and Ochs (1986:183) offer of LS as 'the socialisation *to use* and *through the use* of language', we note the functional and symbolic interplay that exists between language and culture. Thus, the process of this socialisation serves both a practical and ideological purpose in navigating language and culture. Curdt-Christiansen (2018) maintains that, in the FLP framework, a language interplay between the home and school domains is brought about, and that families are often conflicted between maintaining their own language and cultural desires, and succumbing to social pressures, political desires, and public educational demands. Further, in FLP, Ochs & Schieffelin (2017) identify community and context as key features of the socialisation process when defining LS. This is why in this study we see the community and the family as well as the school as mutually reinforcing.

In this article, we show how family language planning happens implicitly in the home and the spaces beyond. Further, we reflect on Grosjean's (1982:172) view of a language policy, whether family or community, as a direct way of encouraging and promoting bi/multilingualism in young children. Our concern is thus to show the implicit and explicit ways in which the processes of being and becoming multilingual in the family and community are avenues through which African languages and multilingualism are sustained. This is crucial in Africa, where both the family and the community are important in language enculturation involving a child, and where indigenous multilingualism is the norm. Our family case study is representative of a family context and dynamic not widely represented in FLP research. It draws on Epistemologies of the South (Escobar 2016), which foregrounds local/Southern concepts and terminologies for a more expansive definition of 'family' and considers the effects of coloniality on family multilingualism. Molate (2025)

identifies ikhaya,[2] an isiXhosa word for family (and home), as a concept and term that means home and family, and which encompasses the more expansive definition and kinship membership within family and the more complex household structure that is typical in Black families in South Africa.

The next section presents and analyses two case studies of linguistic ethnography which present the literacy club and the family engaging in language policy planning and making from below.

Research methods

We now turn to analysis of case studies one and two, both of which present linguistic ethnographic data from the authors' doctoral theses (Guzula 2021; Molate 2025). Merriam (1998:27) defines a case as a 'bounded system' which is humanly constructed both as an actual and conceptual selection of what is to be studied rather than something waiting to be discovered. Both the STLC# (case study one) and the family case study (case study two) were constructed and selected by means of purposeful sampling which entails the selection of participants as guided by researchers' research designs (Higginbottom 2004). Miles (2015) argues that case study generates accounts of practice in educational research, which provide knowledge of experience that has conceptual contribution to research understandings of practice. She argues further that 'in educational research, case study as both method and methodology afford a study of human, and arguably non-human affairs resulting in the generation of an account of practice' (Miles 2015:309). The constructed and bounded cases of the literacy club and the family constitute units of analyses which provide us with holistic representations of context-dependent knowledge of practice which we analyse (Flyvberg 2001). Since language policy planning and making reveal themselves in everyday practices that not only feature in official documents (McCarty 2014), the accounts of practice that this article seeks to generate and analyse are the uses of language in the STLC# and the family settings which presents members of a community literacy club and the family as grassroots policymakers.

The linguistic ethnographic data collected for case study one is from a larger doctoral study of Guzula (2021), collected over one-and-a-half years, and includes naturally occurring interactions, planning documents for club sessions, still photographs, and semi-structured interviews with the child members of STLC#. The analysis focuses on the texts produced as planning documents for the sessions of the October 2015 holiday programme, still photographs showing the process of shared writing and the draft written text produced by the children and Marlene. The data for case study two is also extracted from a larger linguistic ethnographic doctoral study of Molate (2025) and was collected over a period of 1 year by means of linguistic ethnography and remote/digital ethnography (Varis & Hou 2020). The data from the study comprises recording of participants' naturally occurring data of literacy events in the home, telephonic interview data, and participants' observations transcribed from audio-recorded conversations between family members and the researcher. The data presented and analysed for this article is from an onsite participant observation.

2.Ikhaya – home and/or family.

Case study 1: Stars of Today Literacy Club# creating a linguistic and pedagogical third space

In case study one, Guzula (2021) presents a linguistic ethnographic study of a multilingual and multimodal literacy club she co-constructed for the doctoral thesis as a third space for isiXhosa–emergent English-speaking bilinguals attending school in Khayelitsha. Khayelitsha is an underserved community where schools implement a subtractive bilingualism model: where children learn their subjects through isiXhosa in the foundation phase and suddenly switch to English LoLT from the intermediate phase onwards. In the foundation phase, English is taught as a FAL for 2–3 hours a week separately from isiXhosa, before the abrupt switch to English LoLT in the intermediate phase. The result of the reported 'crisis' in education, confirmed by international standardised assessments such as the PIRLS (Department of Basic Education 2023), is an increased focus on teaching 'basic skills'. These include the teaching of the 'Big Five' literacy skills. The focus on decoding and phonics reduces literacy to discrete, decontextualised skills and fails to conceptualise literacy as a social practice, where reading and writing are understood as daily activities in one's daily life that are contextually embedded (Street 1993). It also fails to provide children with rich literacies, such as appreciation or enjoyment of literature, multimodal and critical literacies, and production of texts (Bua-lit 2018). Concerned by the rendering down of literacy for African language-speaking learners, Xolisa decided to start an intervention, defined as an established third space. She aimed to reconceptualise and transform language and literacy pedagogy for emergent bilinguals in South African township communities, to challenge the dominant ideologies, and to create a more humanising pedagogy, for children from underserved communities. After recruiting a group of literacy club facilitators, they visited Jabulani Primary School in Khayelitsha township and invited a group of Grades 3–6 (9–12-year-olds) children to be members of a literacy club on a voluntary basis on Saturday mornings between 10:00 and 12:00. Together they established the STLC# of 30–60 child members whose parents gave consent for their children to attend, seeing this as beneficial for their literacy development (Guzula 2021).

Xolisa became a participant observer in the literacy club that she co-established with other facilitators and the children. The club was thus the research site with intervention grounded in third spaces theory, in translanguaging and multimodal pedagogies, as well as within a multiliteracies framework (situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformative practice) (García 2009a; New London Group 2000; Stein 2008). The idea of the literacy club was formed over

years of grassroots work in community reading clubs that Xolisa and some adult facilitators of the club had done with the Vulindlela Reading Clubs (Alexander et al. 2011), Nal'ibali (Here's the story) reading clubs, as well as Phemba Mfundi (Fire Learner) writing camps of the Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development (Guzula 2021). She was also the lead facilitator, co-planning activities for the literacy club with fellow facilitators, training and demonstrating to facilitators how to implement pedagogical translanguaging. Babalwayashe, who was studying for her honour's degree at the time, became a facilitator at the STLC#, together with Marlene, the facilitator whose pedagogical practice is being analysed for case study one. A facilitator co-plans with other facilitators for language and literacy activities that include reading, writing, performance (role play, storytelling, singing, games), and art, all of which were requested by the children on the first day of the meeting of the club and included in each of the meetings of the club. It also required facilitators to decide how languages were to be used during these activities. Facilitation also meant participating in whole group activities and facilitating small breakaway groups for other activities. To get the club functioning, the approach to language and literacy had to be discussed with and agreed upon by the children and the facilitators. In doing so, the club was organically co-established with children as active participants, thus building on the cultural and linguistic resources that children had as well as their ideas and interests.

Babalwayashe became interested in family multilingualism and family literacy socialisation during this time and has been following this field of work from honours to doctoral studies and the second case study draws on this work later in the article.

Stars of Today Literacy Club# as a linguistic and pedagogical third space

This case study draws specifically on the holiday programme designed for the members of the STLC#, one in which the facilitators engaged in explicit language policy planning for how languages were to be used. As students and teachers, the facilitators were aware of the official South African language policy which promotes additive bilingualism. They were also aware that schools, such as those that members of the STLC# attend, implement the de facto language policy which encourages transition into English medium in Grade 4. McCarty (2014) argues that language policies can be overt and covert, meaning officially written documents and enacted language policies. In this case study, Xolisa analyses the overt language plan that facilitators designed for the holiday programme. She also analyses how children, as active participants in the construction of their club as an established pedagogical third space, used their agency to disrupt, reject, deconstruct, and co-construct a new language policy that transcends binaries of isiXhosa and English in the facilitator's plan by constructing bilingual texts (Guzula 2021).

The language plan

At the start of the literacy club, a discussion was held with the children where they were asked to document their expectations, which the facilitators aimed to achieve through the activities they planned for the literacy club. The children, who then became members of STLC#, had expressed their desire to engage in reading, writing, storytelling, dance, drama, and drawing, as well as doing poetry. The facilitators were planning to offer literacy activities that would align with what the children desired. In addition to the Saturday literacy sessions that the club held, three holiday programmes to be held at a local library were planned for the duration of Xolisa's data collection. The literacy aspect of the programme that Xolisa's analyses was based on took place on Day 1 of 3 of the October 2015 holiday programme. The idea was to first have Xolisa tell a story in isiXhosa, of the boy and the drum, which had a monster in it. Secondly, the children had to retell the story of the boy and a drum through a shared writing activity with Marlene, who was one of the facilitators, with an English–Afrikaans bilingual repertoire. Marlene became a scribe, thus leading the children as they retold the story orally in English with her writing their ideas on flipchart paper. Xolisa combines both textual analysis of the language plan designed by the facilitators and the children's final writing activity they shared with Marlene. In the two data sets she presents, Xolisa demonstrates how the children and the facilitators challenge the dominant language ideologies embedded in language and literacy learning.

Box 1 shows the plan for Day 1 activities that were carried out over three mornings in collaboration with the Harare Library in Khayelitsha.

The facilitators' plan for Day 1 shows how language was to be used by facilitators and the children, which is consciously planned, drawing on their multilingual repertoires. The explicit planning of activities helps us to understand the distinction that Cenoz and Gorter (2017) make between translanguaging as pedagogy and translanguaging as practice. The first thing that facilitators planned was for the children to engage in performative activities such as singing songs and reciting rhymes in isiXhosa, English, and Afrikaans at the start of each of the three days. The intention was to start with oral storytelling in isiXhosa, followed by the retelling of the story by the children in English. Two additional stories which had monsters in them were planned to be read aloud over the next two days of the

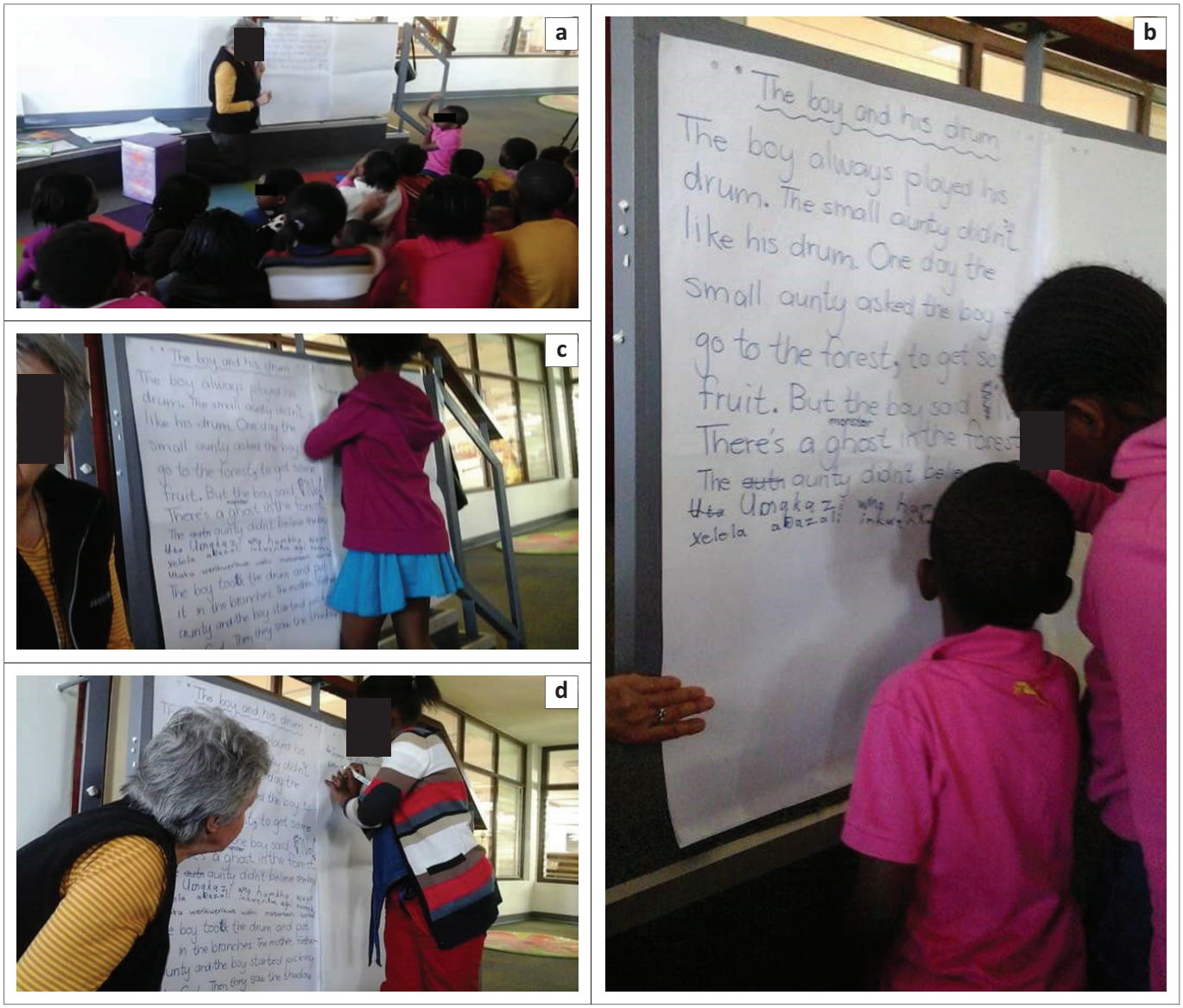
BOX 1: Stars of Today Literacy Club#'s holiday programme for Day 1 in October 2015.

Day 1
• Songs and Games (isiXhosa, English, Afrikaans). • Storytelling: story of the boy and his drum in isiXhosa (Xolisa). • Shared writing of the retelling of the story in English - on flipchart with Marlene. • Discussion of the story – what children liked or did not like about the story, which character they liked the most, ways in which the story is similar or different in our lives, and who might the monster be in real life. • Children draw own monsters and show and discuss their monsters with a friend (all facilitators supervise).

Source: Guzula, X., 2021, 'Constructing a pedagogical third space with multilingual children: A case study of the bilingual Stars of Today Literacy Club# (STLC#)', PhD dissertation, University of Cape Town, p. 204.

holiday programme. On Day 3, shared writing of a song which was to be sung in isiXhosa and Afrikaans was also planned. The children were also going to be allowed to speak in isiXhosa, English, Japanese, and Afrikaans when working on their origami activity time. Japanese and Afrikaans were the linguistic resources of two of the facilitators. Furthermore, for Day 3, the facilitators had planned for discussion of the setting, the plot and resolution in isiXhosa and English. This was to be followed by joint writing of the story of the boy and his drum from the perspective of the monster, also in English and isiXhosa (Guzula 2021). Thus, the club was not aimed at teaching one language at a time, but for activities to flow from one language to another interdependently.

However, isiXhosa and English dominated the programme, even though four named languages are mentioned in the plan. One reason is that Khayelitsha township in Cape Town is dominated by isiXhosa-speaking families, though other languages are also spoken. The second reason is that the current curriculum requires teaching of two languages, one designated as HL and another as FAL. The children thus learn English as FAL in Grades 1–12. Thirdly, the children learn through the isiXhosa LoLT in the foundation phase, and transition to English LoLT from the intermediate phase onwards. Although isiXhosa is supposed to be promoted alongside English and Afrikaans as official provincial languages in the Western Cape, Afrikaans is not taught at Jabulani because the curriculum limits schools to teaching languages as HLs and FALs. The inclusion of Afrikaans as one of the languages to be used in the holiday programme seems to present facilitators as challenging regulations from the curriculum that limit multilingualism. However, given that the STLC# is an afterschool programme, facilitators feel free to plan for language according to the linguistic resources that they – and the children – have and



Source: Guzula, X., 2021, 'Constructing a pedagogical third space with multilingual children: A case study of the bilingual Stars of Today Literacy Club# (STLC#)', PhD dissertation, University of Cape Town, pp. 210–211

FIGURE 1: (a) Joint construction of the story of the boy and his drum through retelling and shared writing; (b) The children are invited by Marlene to write their contributions in isiXhosa; (c) The children helping each other to write down their isiXhosa contributions; (d) Marlene watching with keen interest as the children write.

can offer. Marlene is an English–Afrikaans bilingual, whereas most of the facilitators have isiXhosa, English, and Afrikaans resources. Kyoko has Japanese, English, and isiXhosa resources, and wanted to teach the children some Japanese (Guzula 2021).

In Box 1 language planning by facilitators appears well organised with one-activity–one-language; for example, isiXhosa is allocated to storytelling, and English is allocated to written retelling of the story. However, we observe that language is not specified for some activities, such as with the discussion about the monster in the story of the boy his drum and role play. Despite the structured plan, the analysis demonstrates transformation of the talking and writing activities meant to be done in English, into a bilingual English and isiXhosa text.

Shared writing with Marlene and the complex uses of multilingual repertoires by the children

As soon as the isiXhosa storytelling of 'The boy, his drum and the monster' was done, the children were instructed that they were going to retell it orally in English and that Marlene was going to be their scribe. In Figure 1a, Marlene engages in a shared writing process of the retelling. Figures 1a–d show Marlene and the children engaged in a joint or collaborative construction of the story in writing (what is called shared writing). We also present the first draft of the story that was jointly constructed. The draft product in the flipchart has also been rendered as text in Box 2 for the reader to see the final product in its original draft form; it is thus not the translation of the data.

BOX 2: Transcript of the shared written retelling of the story in its draft form.

1.	The boy and his drum.
2.	The boy always played his drum.
3.	The small aunty didn't like his drum.
4.	One day the small aunty asked the boy to go to the forest, to get some fruit.
5.	But the boy said NO! There's a ghost [*monster*] in the forest.
6.	The ~~autn~~ aunty didn't believe the boy.
7.	*Umakazi wha hambha wayo xelela abazali inkwenkwe ayi tumeki uUtata wenkwenkwe wathi masambeni sonke.* [The aunt went to tell the parents that the boy refuses when she sends him to do things for her and the father said they must all go]
8.	The boy took the drum and put it in the branches.
9.	The mother, the father and the aunty and the boy started picking the fruit.
10.	Then they saw the shadow of the big monster!
11.	*Isigebenga satya uMakazi, umama no tata.* [The monster ate the aunt, mother and father]
12.	*Inkwenkwe ya betha igubu layo. Saze Isigebenga sadanisa sabane hlaba sakhupa utata, nomama kugala.* [The boy beat his drum and the monster danced and had stomach pains and then spit up the father and mother first.]
13.	*Inkwenkwe yabhetha igubu kwakona ~~wsa~~ x[h]entsa ~~isigenga~~ isigebenga ~~wsa~~ kukhupa umakaszi.* [The boy beat the drum again and the monster danced and spit out the aunt]
14.	*Bathatha iziqhamo babaleka baphindela endlini [endlwini]* [They took the fruit and ran away going back to the house]
15.	Then the small aunty started to believe the boy.
16.	She said, "you must teach me how to play the drum tomorrow."

Source: Guzula, X., 2021, 'Constructing a pedagogical third space with multilingual children: A case study of the bilingual Stars of Today Literacy Club# (STLC#)', PhD dissertation, University of Cape Town, p. 212

In Figures 1a–d, the children retold the story, and Marlene wrote on their behalf on the flipchart, thus constructing the text jointly using oral and written language. Box 2 is a presentation of a typed-up transcript of the flipchart text. Marlene writes and the children retell the story orally to her. In Figure 1a, the children start retelling the story in English, but Figures 1b–d present the transformation of the text from English to isiXhosa. Not all the children were comfortable expressing what they understood about the story in English, and when Marlene noticed that, she invited them to retell the story in isiXhosa. As the children started expressing themselves in isiXhosa as they told the story, Marlene also invited them to come up to the flipchart to write what they told her. Here we observe how Marlene shows her disposition to translanguaging by inviting the children to draw on their linguistic resources and repertoires to participate in the activity. In doing so, she does not allow her limited understanding and competence in isiXhosa to silence the children. Thus, she actively encourages the children to write their sentences in the language the response was given in. In Figure 1b, we see two children writing on the flipchart in isiXhosa, thus taking over the scribing role, and Marlene watches with interest as they write. When the first child she invited to write appeared to be struggling, Marlene invited the children to help, hence we see two children writing together. Thus, inviting children to help each other responds to one of the expectations that the children had expressed at the start of their club, demonstrating ubuntu translanguaging (Makalela 2015) where the learning of one child is dependent on Marlene's invitation for them to use familiar language resources to express themselves as well as help from a peer. Makalela (2015) argues that ubuntu translanguaging extends the African philosophical perspective of 'I am because you are and you are because I am', meaning one is incomplete without the other. This challenges both individualism and competition in learning and fosters and builds a community of learners. Secure in knowing that help is readily available, the children learn to take risks and to learn by making mistakes without fear of being reprimanded or feeling stupid. For Marlene, this becomes a scaffolding strategy as well as decentring of herself as the teacher, thus positioning learners not only as each other's teachers but also her isiXhosa teachers. By challenging individualistic pedagogies to the teaching of writing or pedagogies that are only interested in the formal product to be assessed, Marlene created what Kell (2000:211) calls a '"distributive system", where effective performance does not require equal skilling of all its parts, but the effective performance of the system as a whole'. This means that Marlene fosters a pedagogy that has an understanding that children and adults in learning spaces are differently gifted with each bringing their own skills to the task that requires each to contribute their skills to complete the task. It also demonstrates how the knowledge of isiXhosa by the children and the knowledge of English by Marlene is not a problem but that languages can be drawn on together as resources for teaching and learning (Guzula 2021).

The flipchart shows the top six sentences written in English, and the seventh sentence written in isiXhosa, showing a point at which one learner started to express their contribution in isiXhosa. Having isiXhosa written next to English in one text not only disrupts the given instruction to retell the story in writing in English, but also transforms a monolingual text, turning it into a bilingual text. As Marlene, takes over the scribing again, we see lines 8, 9, and 10 that follow written in English. These lines are then followed by four more isiXhosa contributions in lines 11, 12, 13, and 14, and they are written up by the children. Finally, we see lines 15 and 16 concluding the retelling in English. There appears to be a tussle and a productive exchange between the children and Marlene, as the holder of the pen determines the language for writing. There also seems to be some visible learning between the changing positionings for both Marlene and the children: they become both teachers and learners displaying their language and writing competences. From Marlene's demonstration, we see a stroke in line 6, as she explicitly shows the children they can strike through the mistake when they make a mistake. In line 13, we see the children doing the same showing how they have taken up Marlene's teaching. This demonstrates a practice she and the children have collectively taken up through shared writing. In this way, Marlene and the children are simultaneously positioned as teachers and learners (Guzula 2021).

As has been mentioned, the transformation of the English-only text into a bilingual English-isiXhosa text also changes the original plan by the facilitators to have the retelling activity done only in English. Unlike many teachers who fear surveillance for conformity to monolingual standardised texts, Marlene is not bothered as she continues to invite children to speak and write using their familiar linguistic resources. As is usually the case with shared writing, Marlene instructs the whole group of children to read each sentence after writing it in isiXhosa, before asking them to read from the beginning. In doing so, she combines the written text, both in English and isiXhosa into one linguistic repertoire. In their recent paper on crossing the written frontier in Grade 9 science classrooms, Abdulatief and Guzula (2024) and Tyler and McKinney (2024) argue that though teachers are known to translanguage orally in their classrooms, they are reluctant to translanguage in writing. Thus, Marlene's pedagogy also confronts fear of translanguaging in written texts, valuing both English and isiXhosa simultaneously as legitimate languages for writing when teaching bilingual children. Kiramba (2017) laments the scarcity of studies that analyse multilingual texts produced in multilingual classroom settings in Africa, attributing this to monolingual habitus (Guzula 2021).

The STLC# as an established third space provided facilitators and the children with new and innovative opportunities for reconceptualisation of literacy pedagogy for children in multilingual communities. As can be seen through the shared writing activity, the club legitimised and valued children's hybrid linguistic resources and knowledges in its curriculum. The fact that children could understand Marlene's spoken English and responded in both English and isiXhosa demonstrates that emergent bilinguals function at different levels in the bilingualism continuum (García 2009b), thus challenging expectations of balanced bilingual competences. It also demonstrates the fluidity with which bilinguals communicate, for example showing that as some children confidently produce English, others can understand it but choose to express themselves better in their familiar language resources. A repertoire consists of specific bits of language and that we never know all of the language (Blommaert 2010, cited in Bristowe, Oostendorp & Anthonissen 2014). This explains the distance between receptive and productive language which teachers and educators teaching learners and students from multilingual settings need to understand. This also explains why the children were able to understand the sentences previously produced orally and written in English on which they added isiXhosa sentences in a way that keeps the flow of the events of the story. Kell's (2000) notion of distributed skills and knowledge takes away the fear of contributing to activities by learners because they feel they are not fully proficient in English. In taking equal charge of the shared writing process as scribes, the children took the identity of being Marlene's teachers by showing to her that they can read and write in isiXhosa, while she is their English teacher, by writing in English. However, they also showed her that they can also communicate orally in English (Guzula 2021).

Case study 2: The Maqoma family

This case study draws on data from a multilingual Xhosa family in an urban township setting in Cape Town. This family comprises a mother and child as the focus participants. The mother, Nosi, is a teacher assistant at a suburban preschool and Siya, her Grade 4 child, attends a neighbouring historically white school, where English, Afrikaans, and isiXhosa are taught hierarchically as HL, FAL, and Second Additional Language (SAL) for all learners, irrespective of their home languages or language choice. The mother and child thus traverse between a multilingual home domain and the largely anglonormative school domain. Another feature of this family is their dual-household arrangement dynamic that Hall and Richter (2018) describe as typical of Black families in South Africa. The Maqoma family oscillates between their township homes in the city and their village in a rural region of the country. The family's own definitions of family include maternal grandmother, uncle, aunt, and cousin, all of whom, we will argue, in the African context, are collectively considered as part of the 'nuclear family'.

Language identity and the African family kinship system

The Maqoma family identifies isiXhosa as their home language and places value on their being a multilingual family and on their use of isiXhosa and multiple languages within and beyond the home domain. Additionally, while both mother and daughter embrace the learning and use of English and Afrikaans, they show concern for the status of isiXhosa in previously white primary schools, where

isiXhosa is only available as an additional language. The data in Box 3 reveal the family's language identity, their language ideologies, and family and community members' considerations for the promotion of isiXhosa in all domains. It was extracted from an audio-recorded conversation between the participants and the researcher (Babalwayashe) during a participant observation in one of the family's homes in the township.

In responding to Babalwayashe's question about the source of her dissatisfaction with her daughter's isiXhosa proficiency, despite Siya's oral competency, Nosi, in line 4, prioritises language identity. She identifies isiXhosa as Siya's language, 'it's Siyamthanda's language first of all, do you realise?', but also as a language of the family and home. She uses the words 'apha ekhaya apha endlini', which can be taken to mean both the home and the house, but which can essentially mean family. While 'apha ekhaya' means at home and with family members, this is reflected in the connection between the last part of line 'here at home [*in the house*] she is not going to speak English' and 'because even when we have gone home [*sigodukile*] to our family [*ekhaya*] there are no people there who know English' in line 8. Ukugoduka, from which sigodukile is derived, is an act of going home – to your primary residence or to a secondary (rural) home, as is typically the case with Black South Africans. Relatedly, ekhaya can mean a home to our family, derived from the noun ikhaya, the home or the family. Thus,

BOX 3: Participants' observation on 09 December 2020.

1.	Babalwa	*so khoke uthi- khoke ulentoze uthi gqaba-gqaba kutheni ufuna, kutheni ungonelisekanga ukuba esithetha qha?kutheni ufuna akwazi ukusi bhala no- nokusifunda*? [so can you thingy can you briefly talk about why you want, why you are not satisfied by her only speaking it?]
2.	Nosi	*So Babalwa kaloku isiXhosa apha ekhaya apha endlini* [so Babalwa the thing is isiXhosa here at home here in the house]
3.	Babalwa	hm
4.	Nosi	*lulwimi lakhe uSiyamthanda okokuqala, uyaqaphela*? [it's Siyamthanda's language first of all, do you realise]
5.	Babalwa	hm
6.	Nosi	*lulwimi lwakhe lulwimi lethu apha endlini, so uh nezizinye andizikhabi iilwimi ke ngoku andifuni ukuthi sona sibesemve whereas ilulwimi lakhe umntwana wam akhule ngalo kufuneke ethethile, apha endlini akazukuthetha sisNgesi* [it's her language it's our language here at home {in the house}, so uh even the other languages I don't reject so now I don't want that it to be behind whereas it is my child's language that she has been raised with that she has to speak, here at home {in the house} she is not going to speak English]
7.	Babalwa	Hm
8.	Nosi	*because naxa sigodukile ekhaya akho bantu bazi siNgesi* [because even when we have gone home there are no people who know English]
9.	Babalwa	m
10.	Nosi	*so akazuthi ukuba athethe athethe nam qha and ke ngoku kufuneka ekwazile ukusithetha akwazi ukusibhala akwazi ukusifunda, uyaqonda*? [So it can't be that when she wants to speak {*isiXhosa*} she only speaks to me and so now she needs to know how to write it and know how to read it, do you understand?]
11.	Babalwa	hm
12.	Nosi	*ngeli hlobo azazi ngayo ezinye iilanguages* [in the same way she knows other languages]
13.	Babalwa	hm hm
14.	Nosi	*uyaqonda*? [do you understand?]
15.	Babalwa	hm

Source: Molate, B., 2025, 'Resisting dominant language ideologies through family multilingualism and the making of ikhaya', PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, p. 201.

Nosi, in her valuing of isiXhosa, is considering the role and existence of her family residing in her rural, village home. As such, we argue that collective language identity – whether as an expansive family definition or community (township or village) – is an important consideration in a family's language management plan. Essentially, part of Nosi's language desire for her daughter is for her to be competent in isiXhosa so that she can fit in with her family in the village, who do not know English. It is interesting, though, that she claims that '[there are no people who know English]' in her village home, if one is aware that those members, especially Siya's grandmother, at one time lived in their second township home and worked in an environment requiring communicative competence in English. Perhaps Nosi is considering the elderly members in the community. In this context, both the family and community are significant role players in shaping family language policies.

In line 6 and 12 the aspect of her language ideologies that comes through is Nosi's values and attitudes towards languages beyond isiXhosa. She is clear that her desire and embracing of isiXhosa is not at the expense or rejection of other languages, 'so uh even the other languages I don't reject' and further explains that her concern is with the possibility of isiXhosa, 'my child's language'. Siya's language, lagging behind (line 6). And in line 8, she mentions her desire for language equality between isiXhosa and the other languages. By other languages, she means English and Afrikaans, which have been afforded a higher social status both currently and in the history of education in South Africa. Asserting her position regarding the need for Siya to know how to speak, read and write in isiXhosa (line 10), she maintains that her daughter must be well developed in these skills in isiXhosa, 'in the same way she knows other languages' (line 12). By explicitly bringing up the three literacy skills, which are valued in English literacy development at school, Nosi shows how she sees languages as equals and the need for her child to develop these literacies in isiXhosa alongside English. Moreover, we argue that Nosi places a high value on isiXhosa for identity reasons as well as seeing it accorded equal value and status with English and Afrikaans in the literacy development of her child. Moreover, it could be argued that, for a bi/multilingual family, biliteracy development is a desired outcome in schooling despite the family's decision to send a child to a historically white English medium school.

Resisting the marginalisation of isiXhosa and the hierarchisation of languages

Despite having made the choice to send Siya to an English dominant school, one of Nosi's concerns is for her child's limited literacy development in isiXhosa. She is looking at how Siya's writing and reading skills in isiXhosa compare with those in the two other languages offered at school – English and Afrikaans. It appears that she is singling out and valuing these skills because of the value ascribed to them in Siya's schooling. In Box 4, we present interview data that positions Nosi as a parent whose language values and

BOX 4: The observations of participants shared during the study on 09 December 2020.

1.	Nosi	*umbuzo wam wena Babalwa* why [my question Babalwa {*is*} why]
2.	Babalwa	hm//
3.	Nosi	*ilevel yabo yesiXhosa, umsebenzi wabo wesiXhosa ungafani nelevel yezinye iilangweji*? [their level of isiXhosa, their work in isiXhosa (,) is not the same as the level of other languages?]
4.	Babalwa	hm?
5.	Nosi	*like bafunda izinto ezintsha everyday kwezinye iilangweji nhe* [like they learn new things every day in other languages right]
6.	Babalwa	*eh'e* [*yes*]
7.	Nosi	*bhathi why esiXhoseni iyinto enye okoko*? [but why is it the same thing all the time in isiXhosa?]// (turns omitted)*
28.	Nosi	*bendibona ndijonge le ncwadi izolo ndizibuza lo nto* [I was seeing I was looking this book {isiXhosa workbook} asking myself that]
30.	Nosi	*ukuba mani why i- cause ndijonga i-iNglishi, i-iNglish iyaqhubeleka* [that {,} man {,} why is- {,} 'cause I look at English, English progresses]
31.	Babalwa	hm
32.	Nosi	*like ilevel igrades//* [like the level the grades]
33.	Babalwa	*uyawubona umehluko//* [you see the difference]
34.	Nosi	*eh'e uyawubona from grade R to Grade 4* [yes you can see it from grade R {*pre-Grade 1*} to Grade 4]

Source: Molate, B., 2025, 'Resisting dominant language ideologies through family multilingualism and the making of ikhaya', PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, p. 85.

attitude resist the kind of multilingualism that arranges languages in rigid hierarchical categories.

Nosi believes that languages are not valued equally in Siya's school (line 1 & 4). In an indignant tone she asks, 'my question, Babalwa is why [...] their level of isiXhosa, their work is not on the same level as other languages?', expressing her concern. Further, in line 34, she mentions unequal treatment of the languages, 'yes you see the difference from Grade R to Grade 4'. Siya had also stated the same frustration of repetitive elementary work in isiXhosa from previous grades which differs from her experience in Afrikaans and English classes. This came up during an interview in which Siya's responses to a question about her experience of isiXhosa in Grade 4 is, 'we were learning this same thing in Grade 3'.

Nosi is also concerned about the subject content of isiXhosa, and the slower progression to new content (line 7), expressing frustration with repeated covering of the same work in line 28. Essentially, she is measuring the worth accorded to isiXhosa by comparing it to the levels at which English and Afrikaans are offered, and more explicitly, refers to English, 'I look at English, English progresses' (line 30). Nosi's discontent arises from the lower positioning of isiXhosa and the slower, more laborious pace of progression of isiXhosa compared with that of the two other languages as subjects on offer and reveals her awareness of the injustices that exist in schooling regarding the marginalisation of African languages while privileging colonial languages. We argue that, despite the schooling and social pressures that place parents in conflict with wanting to value their own languages at the same level as English, Nosi is challenging the normative language hierarchy in the school: Nosi sees all the languages available to her child at school, particularly isiXhosa, as being equally valuable in Siya's literacy development. In the same way as she sees herself as bi/multilingual, so Nosi sees being biliterate as the norm.

Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that language policies are contested. We have shown how facilitators of the STLC# transgressed the mandated language policy enacted in schools, and in the curriculum. We have seen how the facilitators defied the strict separation of languages, as well as provincial language policy which promotes only three languages in the Western Cape, by including Japanese as a fourth language. We have argued that, in doing so, the facilitators of the literacy club were engaging in language policymaking and planning at the grassroots level. We have seen how they engaged in language planning drawing on what is referred to as translanguaging pedagogy (Cenoz & Gorter 2017). However, we have seen how Marlene, the facilitator, who, in her bilingual repertoire, does not share the same isiXhosa language resources with the children, transgressed the agreed-upon plan by inviting the children to draw on their isiXhosa resources to complete the activity. We have also seen how the children took up her invitation and ended up co-creating a bilingual text. Thus, they too deviated from the facilitator's plan for producing a monolingual English text. Based on the children's response, we argue that language planning and policymaking from above, must build on how people for whom it is intended spontaneously use their language resources productively for learning. In this writing activity, the children's learning of the dominant language is scaffolded by drawing on their linguistic resources. The interdependent use of two languages is a demonstration of what Makalela (2015) terms ubuntu translanguaging.

We have also argued that, in the context of the study, the inclusion of 'extended family' members in the family transcends the demarcation of a single location as a marker of home in the African context. We argue that family members beyond what is traditionally defined as the 'nuclear family' are strongly considered in the family language management plan. Furthermore, we view parents like Nosi as agentic in isiXhosa language and literacy development of children through organic teaching moments at home as well as the immersion of her child in an isiXhosa-rich environment. This takes place through the ongoing movement between the city and the rural homes. We also view the language learning happening in the home as being rooted in the sociocultural context where a child's isiXhosa is developed in a process of drawing from a rich linguistic knowledge and vocabulary that is learned in context and in relation to a broader kinship system and community membership. Furthermore, we have argued that Nosi's questioning of, and resistance to the existing language hierarchy in schooling, specifically the marginalisation of isiXhosa in historically white schools, is indicative of her strong valuing of isiXhosa. Additionally, her concern for the inadequacy of the teaching of isiXhosa as a SAL for Xhosa children is rooted in her valuing of isiXhosa for identity reasons as well as the importance of multilingualism in the South African context.

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This article also includes content that overlaps with research originally conducted as part of Babalwayashe Molate's doctoral thesis titled 'Resisting dominant language and literacy ideologies through family multilingualism and the making of ikhaya', submitted to the School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town, in 2025. The thesis is currently unpublished and not publicly available. The thesis was supervised by Carolyn McKinney. The manuscript has been revised and adapted for journal publication. The author confirms that the content has not been previously published or disseminated and complies with ethical standards for original publication.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

Both authors, X.M. and B.M., conceptualised the article and initially drafted different parts of the article, for example analysis and theory, introduction and methodology, and they then swapped the work around, adding to each other's contributions. They also contributed to the revision and editing of the article.

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