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"Mashi – this language was in my ears"

Metaphors of 'language' in language autobiographies narrated by Congolese migrants in Norway

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In order to understand the process of learning new languages as adults, we need to take into account learners' past experiences with all of their language(s). Such experiences shape attitudes and conceptualizations. In this paper, we present an analysis of metaphorical expressions in the narrated linguistic biographies of (former) refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in Norway. The participants speak a multitude of languages, e.g., different local Congolese languages, Congolese national languages (Lingala or Swahili), French (the official language of the DRC), in addition to Norwegian (the language of the host society). Attention is paid to how the participants' expressions align with conceptual metaphors emerged from work in Cognitive Linguistics, such as LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT, LANGUAGE IS A PERSON and LANGUAGE IS AN IDENTITY MARKER, as well as specifications LIKE LANGUAGE IS A TOOL and LANGUAGE IS A POSSESSION. We argue that awareness of conceptualizations of 'language' can contribute to the development of

language training pedagogies that better reflect learners' past

experiences.

Key words: Conceptualization, Conceptual metaphors, Emic

perspectives, Global South, Language biographies

1 Introduction

Past experiences with languages play an important role in the processes of developing

new linguistic resources. *Experience* might be understood as habits (being used to a

certain way of doing things) (e.g., Bourdieu, 1980), as culture (the way we do it around

here) (e.g., Van Lier, 2004) or action/reactions accumulated as historical bodies (this

happened when ...) (e.g., Scollon & Scollon, 2007). In the field of Second Language

Acquisition (SLA), the role of past experiences is often examined through the concept

of cross-linguistic influences (Golden, Jarvis & Tenfjord, 2017; Jarvis 2020; Jarvis &

Pavlenko, 2008), which highlights the fact that learners tend to draw on already known

features when expressing themselves in a newly acquired language. For instance,

prosodic features from previously acquired languages often appear in speech produced

in an additional language (e.g., Steien, 2018). Moreover, past experiences with writing

norms influence the writing style in a new language as learners tend to compose their

texts according to the norms with which they are familiar (Axelsson & Magnusson,

2012; Golden & Kulbrandstad, in press).

An aspect of past experience that has received little attention in SLA, however, is

how learners conceptualize the phenomenon 'language' (Evans & Green, 2006), e.g.,

the extent to which they perceive straight or fuzzy borders between different linguistic

resources, consider their linguistic resources as socially inequal, or experience them as belonging to different domains. When expressed in language, conceptualization has an experiential basis as it "link[s] up with the way in which human beings experience reality, both culturally and physiologically" (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2010, p. 12). Concepts are formed and developed through socialization from early on, through children's interaction with others and the world around them, combined with different sensory experiences. How people understand a phenomenon will unavoidably vary between individuals as well as between social and geographical spaces (Cortazzi & Jin, 2020). Hence, it is not a given that a learner's conceptualizations of the phenomenon 'language' (*emic perspectives*), align with the conceptualizations that underlie language training pedagogies (*etic perspectives*).

During the last two decades, a number of researchers in the field of applied linguistics have accentuated the lack of attention to realities, experiences and conceptualizations of language in the Global South (for a discussion of the concept, see Pennycook & Makoni, 2019). For instance, Canagarajah, points out that "the local knowledge of […] peripheral communities have been ignored in linguistic scholarship" (2007, p. 924), while Pennycook and Makoni state that "[in] many southern contexts, Global North concepts of language, mother tongue or multilingualism simply do not reflect the ways languages are used and understood" (2019, p. 55). In Norway, many of those who have the right and obligation to participate in the country's *Introduction programme*[1], designed to provide migrants with linguistic tools and other skills required to participate in the labor marked, did indeed grow up in the Global South, e.g., in

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[1] See https://www.imdi.no/en/the-introduction-programme/the-introduction-programme/

peripheral regions of Africa or Asia. However, their experiences and conceptualizations of language are rarely problematized in research and textbooks, which often assume that all learners are monolingual when they learn an additional language (see Steien, 2021).

Awareness of conceptualizations has been shown to be useful in teaching contexts in general (Littlemore, 2004) and language learning in particular (Cortazzi & Jin, 2020), and our aim with this article is to argue that insights into *how* people with various backgrounds understand 'language' as a phenomenon can contribute to the development of language training pedagogies that better reflect learners' past experiences. Our argument is based on a study of metaphorical expressions that emerged in the narrated language autobiographies of migrants from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in Norway. What they have is common is a store of varied linguistic repertoires reflecting childhoods in linguistically diverse ecologies in the DRC, mobility within African and as UN quota refugees to Norway. Through an analysis of conceptualizations underlying the participants' choice of metaphors in the narratives, we discuss the complex ways in which the phenomenon 'language' is experienced, understood and verbalized as well as the pedagogical implications of insights into this complexity.

2 Use of metaphors

We use *metaphor* as our analytical tool to gain insights into the participants' conceptualizations of 'language'. The use of metaphors as a channel into peoples' way of seeing the world, has received attention in research because "how we talk about things (in metaphors) not only reflect, but also influences how we think about them (in concepts and social contexts) and, often, take consequent action" (Cortazzi & Jin, 2020, p. 489).

Our understanding of metaphors aligns with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT; Gibbs, 1994; Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Johnson 1999), and with its further development and use in discourse analysis (Cameron, 2008; Deignan, 2005, 2010) and in critical metaphor analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004; Koller, 2008). Our approach is thus socio-cognitive, as this theoretical perspective allows us to view metaphor as both a cognitive and social phenomenon (Cameron, 1999). In these frameworks, metaphor is defined as a way of conceiving one thing in terms of another, i.e., it is a mapping between two domains, *the source domain* (often concrete or embodied) and *the target domain* (often abstract) and the primary functions of metaphor are understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and structuring knowledge (Gibbs, 1994). There is a distinction between *conceptual metaphors* that are part of thought and the *metaphorical expressions* we find in discourse, the latter being instantiations of the former. As metaphors are frequently used for abstract concepts, and 'language' is one of them, analysis of metaphors used when people are narrating their experience with 'language', might reveal their conceptualizations, as well as their attitudes and values (Cameron, 2008) to 'language' as well as how this concept is interpreted by the community (Deignan, 2005). Identification of conceptual metaphors allows for understanding of conceptualizations, as the source domain "has important entailments for the way in which the target domain is conceptualized" (Berthele, 2002, p. 31). Metaphors "help us to construct reality" and act as a means by which "people make sense of the world" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p.52). Metaphors and narratives are both instruments suitable for addressing meaning making and reflections of complex phenomena (Hanna & Kaal, 2019), hence, investigating metaphorical expressions in narratives when people talk about their linguistic repertoire is a promising avenue of

research. Such analysis should not be reserved only to new, creative metaphors; as Lakoff (1992) claims, it is the most conventional metaphors that reveal our conceptualizations since they are not reflected upon or planned. The presence of metaphors in speech also influences thinking – people get socialized through discourse – and hence, the choice of metaphorical expressions frequently used in a society will have an impact on concept formations. In that sense, metaphor is in part constitutive of mental processes (Frezza & Gagliasso, 2017; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Studies of metaphors used in connections with 'language' are often concerned with peoples' attitudes towards different language varieties as well as language ideologies (e.g., Berthele, 2008; Geeraerts, 2003; Polzenhagen & Dirvin, 2008; Vukotić, 2014, 2016). For instance, Polzenhagen and Dirvin (2008) identify two conceptual metaphors of language, A LANGUAGE IS A TOOL and A LANGUAGE IS AN IDENTITY MARKER, representing poles on a continuum of views expressed in language debates. By contrast, Berthele (2002) discusses the mental models frequently use to represent language in Western thinking, in particular LANGUAGE IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE (BUILDING), LANGUAGE IS RAW MATERIAL (NATURAL RESOURCES) and LANGUAGE IS A TERRITORY. Seargeant (2009), on the other hand, is concerned with metaphors of language used in the field of linguistics. Focusing on the works of the linguist Einar Haugen, he argues that the conceptual metaphor LANGUAGE IS A POSSESSION is prominent in contemporary linguistics, being instantiated by metaphorical expressions such as *second language acquisition*, *borrowing* and *loanwords*. Bas and Gezegin (2017) is one of the few studies of metaphors of 'language' with an emic and additional language perspective. In an elicitation task, they find that students of English in Turkey use metaphors belonging to seven main conceptual categories: ENGLISH IS LABOR/PRODUCT, ENGLISH IS INNOVATION,

ENGLISH IS A TOOL, ENGLISH IS DIFFICULTY, ENGLISH IS A NEED, ENGLISH IS A COMPULSION and ENGLISH IS A JOURNEY.

In studies in the field of education, metaphor analysis is used in order to gain access to students' and teachers' understandings of language teaching and/or learning (e.g. Ahlgren, 2014, 2020; Ellis, 2001; Kramsch, 2003, 2009; Oxford et al., 1998; Wan, Low & Li, 2011). An example of the latter is the conceptual metaphor INVESTMENT which captures the various sociological factors influencing how much efforts learners put into learning a new language (Darvin & Norton; 2015, Norton, 2013, Norton Pierce, 1995). In Norway, Golden and Kulbrandstad (2018) analyze metaphors used in the Norwegian version of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR authors' claim that the framework is not based upon any particular theory of additional language learning, yet Golden and Kulbrandstad find a conceptualization of language learning as a STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS.

The link between conceptualizations of language and language learning is underscored by Cortazzi and Jin (2020), as they claim that different metaphors of language might reveal different orientations to language learning. In an earlier study (Cortazzi & Jin, 2014), they found that the dominant metaphors for language were expressed by students from certain countries as "a static object, a functional *'tool'* for communication or *'a key'* to open doors to knowledge and professional employment" (Cortazzi & Jin, 2020, p. 489; italics in the original). Students from other countries had a different orientation to language learning and used metaphors of 'language' "as a '*bridge*' to international socio-cultural contact '*to join people in friendship*' and '*to connect minds and emotions*'" and again others held language to be a social and

aesthetic process. With such insights, Cortazzi and Jin (2020, p.489) argues that teachers can "invite classes to share metaphors, work out implications, and through metaphors widen their repertoire of language-user identities from themselves and those with whom they communicate". In other words, metaphor analysis has shown to be a fruitful tool to acquire insights into conceptualizations of abstract phenomena, such as 'language' and 'language learning', and may also be valuable for pedagogical purposes.

3 Data and methods

The data under analysis are seven semi-structured interviews with twelve Congolese migrants in Norway. The participants do not constitute a true community of practice, in the sense that not all of them knew each other, but they have all fled the DRC due to instabilities and were resettled in Norway by the UN. The interviews were carried out by one of the authors of this paper, Guri, with the aim of eliciting the participants' language autobiographies, i.e., "biographical accounts in which the narrator makes a language, or languages – and their acquisition and use in particular – the topic of his or her narrative […]" (Nekvapil, 2003, p. 63). Hence, the interviews were not explicitly set up to elicit metaphors and the narratives were co-constructed by the participants and Guri.

The shared languages between the participants and Guri are French and Norwegian. When language choice was negotiated, the participants were told to draw on the resources with which they felt most comfortable. In all the conversations, both French and Norwegian were used, even though there was a general preference for French. The interviews were audio-recorded (6 hours in all) and transcribed orthographically with

the software *Transcriber²* by one of the authors and checked several times by both. They were coded with respect to language names and topics for content analysis.

In this study, we focus on three interviews with four participants, Jean-Marc, Geoffroy and the married couple Augustine and Charles, the two latter interviewed together (see Table 1). At the time of the interviews, the participants had lived in Norway for a period ranging from 11 to 13 years. They had finished the obligatory Norwegian language training programs and had jobs in Norway. Their way of sharing their experiences with Guri and telling her about their learning and practicing language through life is to some extent affected by the amount of time they had been living in Norway, and also coloured by their success or lack of success in learning Norwegian. At the same time, their stories seem to be motivated by their desire to make their language trajectories comprehensible to Guri. The metaphors they use related to language practices in their narratives thus provide a glimpse into their conceptualizations of 'language', following the CMT view that metaphors are frequently used to make abstract concepts more comprehensible.

TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

In order to identify metaphors of language in the narratives, we used the Pragglegaz Group (2007) MIP procedure in the following way: First, we identified all expressions used related to language in the data. Second, both authors independently determined which expressions were metaphorical, i.e., words that have a more basic and/or concrete meaning than the way they are used in the data, and where the basic and contextual

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² http://transag.sourceforge.net

senses are related by means of comparison. These expressions were then categorized according to their basic and/or concrete meanings. Based on these categorizations, conceptual metaphors were generated.

4 Language biographies

As a context for the analysis of metaphors, we first present an overview of the participants' language autobiographies as they were narrated during the interviews. All of the participants are first-generation city dwellers, having grown up in Congolese cities, such as Bukavu, Lubumbashi or Kinshasa. Their parents spoke the languages of their home villages (Ekonda, Kishelele, Tchokwé, Mashi or Taabwa) with each other and sometimes with their children. The languages of wider communication in the cities are Lingala (Kinshasa) and Swahili (Bukavu, Lubumbashi) and these are the ones they report having used most of the time as children. Some of the participants from the Swahili-speaking cities also learned Lingala from interactions with Mobutu soldiers stationed in their neighborhood. All of them started to learn French when they entered school and it was the only medium of instruction from some point in their education. English was taught as a school subject in the DRC, but rarely used outside of the classroom. The participants describe everyday linguistic practices in the DRC as fluid (cf. Canagarajah (2013)), i.e., they did not stick to one named language in everyday interactions. The way in which the sociolinguistic situation in the country is presented, however, reveals language ideologies according to which named languages can be placed in a rather fixed hierarchy based on their official status and social prestige, which in turn reflects power relations within the society. The former colonial and only official language, French, has the highest prestige and speaking this language indexes being

educated and/or belonging to the elite, while the four national languages, Kikongo, Lingala, Swahili and Tshiluba, index urbanity and regional identity. The remaining languages, referred to by the participants as *dialects* or *ethnic/tribal languages,* have low prestige – they are often not mentioned when the participants first enumerate the languages they know and are only evoked when Guri asks explicitly about them.

Due to mobility within the Congo or to other African countries, all the participants had learned additional languages as adults before they came to Norway. For instance, some of the participants from the Lingala-speaking capital, Kinshasa, studied in Eastern Congo where they learned Swahili, while others were refugees in Uganda where they learned (some) Luganda and English. After entering Norway, they learned Norwegian through both formal education, i.e., obligatory adult language training courses for migrants, and informal interactions with people in their environment. Although Norway exhibits a large degree of linguistic diversity, both on the individual and society level, the participants all claim that knowing the Norwegian language (in its variation) is the only way to become integrated in the society. According to their experience, knowing for instance the international language French is not useful in Norway (see Steien, 2019).

To summarize, the linguistic resources mentioned in the interviews can be named and categorized as such: 1) Local languages: Mashi, Ekonda etc.; 2) National languages: Lingala and Swahili; 3) Official language: French; 4) School subject language: English; 5) Other African languages: Luganda, Bemba, etc. and 6) Host country language: Norwegian. The categorization in 2) and 3) refer to categories in the Congolese constitution.

5 Metaphors and conceptualizations

In the narratives, we identified three main conceptual metaphors, LANGUAGE IS AIR,

LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT and LANGUAGE IS A PERSON (with specifications). These are

discussed in the following sections.

5.1 LANGUAGE IS AIR

In Excerpt 1, Augustine talks about her childhood linguistic practices. Guri starts the

interview by introducing the aim of it, saying *the first thing I would like to know is the*

order of acquisition of all the languages you know. Augustine answers that her first

language was Swahili before evoking the local language Mashi. The first turn in

Excerpt 1 is an answer of Guri's question about when and how Augustine learned

Mashi.

Excerpt 1. *The language was in my ears*

Turn	French (original version)	English (translation)
1 Augustine	Mon père et ma mère […] ils parlaient le mashi entre eux.	My father and my mother […] they spoke Mashi between them.
2 Guri	Mashi oui.	Mashi yes.
3 Augustine	Les deux […] c'est-à-dire dès les bas âges, donc *cette langue-là était euh/ donc euh/ dans mes oreilles*[3], donc c'est comme ça, mais je la parlais pas.	The two […] that is from early age, well, *this language was in my ears*, well it is like that, but I did not speak it.
4 Guri	Tu ne la parlais pas tu l'entendais tu la comprenais ?	You did not speak it you heard it you understood it?
5 Augustine	Oui.	Yes.

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[3] The expressions commented on are in *italic* and the metaphorical elements are underlined.

6 Guri	Mais tu la parlais pas ?	But you did not speak it?
7 Augustine	Mais au village, quand je partais au village là j'étais obligée de/ de m'exercer donc de parler un peu tout ça.	But in the village, when I went to the village, then I had to/ to practice, well to speak a bit like that

In turn 3, Augustine uses the metaphorical expression *this language was in my ears* to describe her relationship with Mashi during her childhood. The expression *d'avoir quelque chose dans les oreilles* ('to have something in the ear') resembles the expression *d'avoir quelque chose dans la tête* ('to have something in the head') which is a conventional (metonymic) way in French of saying that you cannot stop thinking of something – 'the head' is usually linked with thinking. The ear is likewise connected to listening and what Augustine tells Guri is that she has heard the sound of Mashi all the time. Regardless if this expression (*this language was in my ears*) is a conventional way of expressing that this language is heard (from early on), the expression reveals how this language is conceptualized. The question is therefore how this sound (of Mashi) got into the ear? Experts on sound[4] would state that sound is created when something vibrates and sends waves into our ear through solids, liquids and gases. As we are most used to the sound travelling through air, in our non-expert view, the sounds are *in* the air. The metaphorical expression can therefore be understood as an instantiation of the conceptual metaphor LANGUAGE IS AIR and consequently, 'language' is understood as something intangible. Augustine's choice of metaphor might indicate that she remembers Mashi as something she was surrounded by even if she did not really possess or grasp it.

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[4] https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/2814-sound-visualising-sound-waves

5.2 LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT

The most frequent way of conceptualizing language in the narratives is through the conceptual metaphor LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT, i.e., language is presented as something that can be manipulated, categorized and quantified. As in several studies mentioned above, we see instantiations of it in Excerpt 2, where Jean-Marc describes the changes in his linguistic repertoire since he came to Norway. Turn 1 is his answer to Guri's question whether he feels that his French has become weaker after leaving the DRC.

Excerpt 2. *Swahili is stuck*

Turn	Norwegian (original version)	English (translation)
1 Jean-Marc	Jeg føler at jeg/ jeg har liksom *mista en del av franskspråket*.	I feel like I/ I have kind of *lost a part of the French language*.
2 Guri	Swahilien *har du mista noe av den* heller?	The Swahili *have you lost some of that* or?
3 Jean-Marc	Nei swahili *den er der, den sitter fast.*	No Swahili *that one is there, it is stuck.*
4 Guri	Men hvordan er det med lingala og luganda føler du at du *har mista noe av det* eller snakker..?	But how is it with Lingala and Luganda, do you feel you *have lost some of that* or do you speak..?
5 Jean-Marc	Ja lingala ja luganda *har ikke jeg mista* noe for jeg er ikke sånn vant inni selv om jeg kan snakke luganda ikke på luganda sammen jeg sier jeg kan snakke norsk men ikke på norsk sant?	Yes Lingala yes Luganda *I have not lost* anything because I am not kind of used inside even though I can speak Luganda but not in Luganda as I say I can speak Norwegian but not in Norwegian you see?
6 Guri	Ja jeg skjønner men du snakker veldig godt norsk da nei men jeg skjønner ja.	Yes I understand but you speak very well Norwegian and no well I understand yes.

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7 Jean-Marc	Så jeg *har ikke mista mye* jeg kan fortsatt snakke med noen *jeg kan en del* så jeg kan leve på å snakke luganda med uganesere eller sånn.	So I *have not lost much* I can still talk to someone *I know a part* so that I can survive talking Luganda with Ugandans or something like that.
8 Guri	Men synes du det er noe forskjell fra når du bodde i Uganda til nå hvor godt du snakker det?	But do you think there is any difference from when you lived in Uganda until now as to how well you speak it?
9 Jean-Marc	Ja det er litt/ det er litt forskjell.	Yes there is some/ there is some difference.
10 Guri	*Mista det* heller *har du..*?	*Lost it* or *have you..*?
11 Jean-Marc	Nei *ikke mista* men jeg har ikke brukt det mye og det hender at ordene *det tar litt tid for å hente de ordene*.	No *not lost* but I have not used it much and at times the words *it takes some time to fetch those words*.
12 Guri	Ja ja det tar litt lenger tid ja og fransken din føler du at du *har mista litt.*	Yes yes it takes some more time yes and your French you feel you *have lost a bit*.
13 Jean-Marc	Ja. Jeg vet ikke om jeg *har hatt det* en gang.	Yes. I do not know if I ever *had it* in fact.

The LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT metaphor is instantiated in Excerpt 2 through metaphorical expressions involving the verbs *å miste* ('to lose'), *å ha* ('to have'), and *å hente* ('to fetch') by Jean-Marc, all transitive verbs requiring an object. These are rather conventional ways of talking about languages, at least with expressions including 'to lose' and Guri uses this verb in her follow-up questions as well (turn 2 and 10). However, the object 'language' is not only expressed as a solid one in this Excerpt. Jean-Marc explains that he has lost *a part of French* and knows *a part of Luganda,* entailing that these objects can be divided. Interestingly, Swahili is different than French: as he sees it, it will not be lost as he claims that *den sitter fast* ('it is stuck')

literally: 'it <u>sits tight</u>'). Words in Luganda seem to be deep inside something, probably in the body, as he says that it sometimes takes time to *fetch* these words. In turn 13 of Excerpt 2, Jean-Marc reveals that he does not know if he ever *had French*, indexing the specification LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT THAT SOMEBODY POSSESSES. However, possessing a language is not necessarily linked to language knowledge, as Jean-Marc speaks French fluently – his choice of expression might rather be related to identity (according to the cognitive metaphor LANGUAGE IS A PERSON, see section 5.2, Excerpt 5).

Sometimes language is presented as a specific object, for instance in Excerpt 3, where Charles and Augustine talk about the outcome of the mandatory Norwegian language training program in which they participated when they arrived in Norway.

Excerpt 3. *Norwegian is a springboard*

Turn	French (original version)	English (translation)
1 Charles	Le norvégien qu'on nous apprend à l'école c'était *c'est le tremplin* qu'on nous donne.	The Norwegian they give us at school is *the springboard* that they give us.
2 Augustine	C 'est la *base.*	It is the *base.*
3 Charles	C'est la *base* mais c'est la société qui va nous aider à *approfondir*.	It is the *base*, but it is the society that will help us to *deepen*.

Charles claims that the Norwegian learned at school is *le tremplin* ('the springboard') that has been given to them – i.e., an instrument which helps you reach higher (up in the air). But this kind of Norwegian is also the 'base' according to Augustine, that is, a very important part (when objects have a base, the rest of the object depends on it, like a construction), but still a base just constitute a part of an entity. More of this entity is needed and this will come from the society that will help them *approfondir* ('deepen') their knowledge of Norwegian (seen as an object). It seems somewhat contradictory that

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language is seen as a springboard and an object that may be deepened at the same time. However, these uses indicate compatible notions of *effort* being something that is necessary for improvement or growth. A springboard has the potential to help you progress (MORE IS UP), albeit with some effort on your part. Similarly, and if you use effort to dig deeper, you will have created more space (DEEPER IS MORE) and you will make a safer place for valuable things (DEEPER IS SAFER).

Other instantiations of the conceptual metaphor LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT are uttered by the other participants as answers to Guri's questions about how many languages they speak, how these languages are learned, and when and how often they have been used. The participants frequently allude to the phenomenon of attrition (cf. Schmid, 2011) by means of metaphorical expressions such as *il arrive que je retrouve difficilement un mot* ('sometimes I have difficulties finding a word'). Moreover, the translingual nature of participants' linguistic practices in the DRC is also often described through expressions related to the LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT metaphor. For instance, Swahili is conceptualized as a hollow object, like a container, or as liquid, where other objects might be inserted, i.e. *tu peux même entrer des mots français dedans en swahili* ('you can even enter French words in the Swahili'). Here, the French words are the objects entered. Their linguistic practices are also seen as mixing the objects together *je mélange les mots français avec les mots Swahili* ('I mix French words with Swahili word') in this way indexing a translingual practice (cf. Canagarajah, 2013). The container may also be of a looser kind in which 'other things' – probably words and sounds from different languages – are mixed, e.g. *så swahilien var altså rammen og så blanda vi andre ting inni swahilien* ('so Swahili was the frame and then we mixed other things into the Swahili').

The object 'language', besides belonging to somebody, also has qualities that might be part of an evaluation. This is commented upon by several of the participants. In Excerpt 4, Jean-Marc explains to Guri how their translingual practices affects people's view of the various languages.

Excerpt 4. *Pure Swahili*

Turn	Norwegian (original version)	English (translation)
1 Jean-Marc	Også var det swahili i Uganda i Kenya og Rwanda men vi som har mange språk brukte swahili og det var mye lettere å si et fransk ord i en swahilisetning eller et etnisk ord i swahilisetning så vi var liksom *blanda swahili*.	Also there was Swahili in Uganda in Kenya and Rwanda but we who have many languages used Swahili and it was easier to say a French word in a Swahili sentence or an ethnic word in Swahili sentence so we kind of *mixed Swahili*.
2 Guri	Så swahili var på en måte rammen også *blanda* dere andre ting inn i inn i swahilien?	So Swahili was in a way the frame and you *mixed* other things into the Swahili?
3 Jean-Marc	Det vi har gjort det, ja fordi fleste når noe fra Kongo som snakker swahili de fleste klarer ikke å forstå en fra Tanzania som snakker den *ren swahili*.	We have done that, yes, since most people when someone from Congo who speaks Swahili most of them cannot understand someone from Tanzania who speaks *the pure Swahili*.

In Turn 3, Jean-Marc says that the Swahili in Tanzania is *ren* ('pure'), indicating that other versions of Swahili have other qualities. Other participants also speak of languages having qualities. For instance, they mention *le vrai français* ('real French') or *ordentlig engelsk* ('real English'). This view aligns with monolingual norm as more valuable and hence without variation (Ahlgren, 2020) as well as the traditional and

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widespread view that sees the value of a language in its purity: as Berthele (2002, p. 38) claims, "[p]urity is the initial state of language and through a negligent use of the people, it becomes more and more unpure, mixed, alienated" Berthele connects this to the metaphor LANGUAGE AS RAW MATERIAL as contaminated, mixed, unpure materials are less valuable in the manufacturing processes.

5.3 LANGUAGE IS A PERSON

Another conceptual metaphor that appears rather frequently in the data is LANGUAGE IS A PERSON, i.e., language is conceptualized as something with agency. Human beings are the most prevalent agents, also experienced at a young age, leading to the specification LANGUAGE IS (A PERSON WITH) POWER. In Excerpt 5, Geoffroy answers Guri's question of whether he speaks his parents' local language. His response of having some words indicates the conceptualization LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT (previously discussed in section 5.2), and when he claims that it is *ma langue* ('my language'), he indexes the specification LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT THAT SOMEBODY POSSESSES. But then he develops his thoughts further by relating the language to his identity in Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5. *The language participates in my identity*.

	French (original version)	English (translation)
Geoffroy	Je parle mais c'est difficile quoi *j'ai quelques mots* mais c'était difficile à un moment donné ce n'est que maintenant avec l'avènement à la compréhension du monde tel qu'il apparaît que je me dis qu'il faut que je parle *ma langue* il faut que ce soit moi	I speak it but it is difficult *I have some words* but it was difficult at a certain moment it is only now with the emerging understanding of the world as it appears that I tell myself that I need to speak *my language*, I need to be myself, to find back

que je retrouve mon identité que je me définisse par rapport à l'autre parce que *la langue me définit* aussi c'est-à-dire la langue *participe à mon identité.*

my identity, that I define myself in relation to others because *the language defines me* too that is the language *participates in my identity.*

When Geoffroy talks about his parents' local language in Excerpt 5, he actually calls it *his* language even if he thinks it is difficult to speak. He explains that he should pay more attention to this language as it has a certain power: it contributes to the construction of his identity. He uses agentive verbs, stating that *la language me définit* ('the language defines me') and that *la langue participe à mon identité* ('the language participates in my identity'). In so doing, he conceptualizes 'language' as a having power, hence the specification LANGUAGE IS (A PERSON WITH) POWER is at play.

Language manifesting agency is also present when Charles explains *il y a des mots qui m'échappent* ('there are words that escape me').[5] Furthermore, certain languages are conceptualized as something that also has the power of including and excluding people in society. According to Augustine and her husband Charles, this is the case for Norwegian in Norway and French in the DRC. Turn 1 of Excerpt 6 follows a comparison of the language situations in Norway and the DRC.

Excerpt 6. *French blocks people*

Turn	French (original version)	English (translation)
1 Augustine	Je peux terminer avec le français en ce qui concerne donc les élèves qui	I can finish with French when it comes to the students who learn at our place in

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[5] This is uttered at the end of the talk, after the discussion in Except 6.

	apprennent là chez nous au Congo. Le français c'est le cours principal même si tu connais tous les autres cours si tu ne connais pas le français…		Congo. French is the main lesson even if you know all the other lessons if you do not know French…
2 Charles	Tu ne passes pas.		You don't pass.
3 Augustine	Ne peux pas avancer donc tu sens combien/ c'est donc cette langue-là le français *bloque* les gens.		You cannot advance so you feel how much/ it is thus that this language *French blocks* people.
4 Charles	Tout le système.		The whole system.
5 Augustine	Tout le système donc les informations ça passe en français donc ma mère qui ne parlait pas français donc *elle est écartée de tout* ce qui se passe donc beaucoup de choses alors vous voyez comment ça a créé un certain donc ça *a créé une barrière* ç'a divisé *ç'a divisé la/ la/ la/ la population* en deux classes classe des *évolués* et classe des autres.		The whole system so information passes in French so my mother who did not speak French *she is discarded from everything* that happens well many things you see how this has created a certain well this *has created a fence* it has separated *it has separated the/ the/ the/ the population* in two classes the class of the *evolved* and the class of others.

Augustine presents French with the power to stop students from succeeding in their studies (*le français bloque les gens*) and to exclude people like his mother from certain levels of the society (*elle est écartée de tout)*. It has the ability to create *une barrière* ('a fence') and it has separated the population in two classes (*divisé la/la/la/la population en deux classes*). Hence, the power French has, is extended to the societal level as well as having an impact on the individuals.

In addition, there is an association between the language and the speaker (or 'not speaker') of a language, which could be formulated as THE LANGUAGE IS THE SPEAKER/THE SPEAKER IS THE LANGUAGE. This means that there exists an inherent connection between a

language and a group of people, i.e., what Irvine and Gal (2000) refers to as *iconicity.*
As some languages tend to be stigmatized, people speaking them might be downgraded, while people who speak prestigious languages might be rather well-regarded. In Excerpt 7, Augustine illustrates such language ideologies with the example of Swahili in the DRC.

Excerpt 7. *The language of politeness*

Turn	French (original version)	English (translation)
1 Augustine	Par contre les/les/les gens de/de/de l'ouest ils aiment bien parler le swahili puisqu'ils disent que c'est une langue qui est un peu comment il faut dire donc euh *langue de politesse* c'est une langue qui donc les gens qui les gens qui/qui la parlent ils sont calmes.	On the other hand the/the/the people in/in/in the West they like speaking Swahili as they say that it is a language that is a bit how to put it eh *language of politeness* it is a language that people who people who/who speak it they are calm.
2 Charles	Mais il faut aussi expliquer si/si le swahili pour le moment les choses ont changé c'est quand la rébellion qui est venu là/c'est venu de l'est.	But we also need to explain that if/if Swahili now things have changed it is when the rebellion which came there/it came from the East.
3 Augustine	Oui ça aussi mais avant cela.	Yes that too but before that.
4 Charles	C'était pas comme ça.	It was not like that.
5 Augustine	Avant cela c'était pas comme ça avant cela c'était comme une *langue euh respectueuse* - les gens polis.	Before that it was not like that before that it was like a eh *respectful language* - polite people.

In Excerpt 7 the metaphor LANGUAGE IS A PERSON is at play with two different specifications. The first, LANGUAGE IS A PERSON WITH POWER, enables the speakers to

focus on different qualities (or personalities) of 'language', in this case Swahili as a language of politeness and as a respectful language, characteristics that are common to human beings. The second, LANGUAGE HAS AGENCY, is manifested through the claim that Swahili provides people with certain qualities (or personalities), speaking Swahili indexes 'calm' and 'politeness'. Agency and power are central in this regard. Powerful people that speak a certain language (whether they are liked or disliked), have an impact on the way people see the language (Bourdieu, 1980). And as Augustine and Charles claim when they further compare the two languages, Swahili and Lingala, and the speakers of these languages, this is also related to politics and might change.

6 Discussion and conclusions

One of the aims of this study has been to draw attention to 'language' as conceptualized by people with experiences form southern contexts. In the narrated language autobiographies of Congolese migrants in Norway, we have identified three main conceptual metaphors of language, LANGUAGE IS AIR, LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT and LANGUAGE IS A PERSON with specifications. The conceptual metaphors LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT (including words as objects, sounds as objects), and further specified as LANGUAGE IS A TOOL and LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT THAT SOMEBODY POSSESSES are frequently used in this data by the participants, as well as by Guri. These are common ways of talking about language (see section 2), and several of the instantiations are examples of highly conventionalized expressions. They are nevertheless important in revealing the way in which abstract concepts are understood (Lakoff, 1992). The concept 'object' – specified as a tool, or an instrument of some kind – is frequently used as the source domain for all kinds of abstract concepts, including 'language'. In this

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way, abstract phenomena become tangible and thus easier to understand. "Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them – and, by this means, reason about them" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 25). Moreover, the attribution of language with qualities usually reserved for people, i.e., by using the metaphor LANGUAGE IS A PERSON, highlights the dimension of agency, in which power is a central ingredient (Norton, 2013). This metaphor is typically used when language ideologies are emerging in the narratives and reveals the importance given to language as a door-opener and as a gatekeeper, together with the impact it has for people's identity.

Both the participants' varied linguistic repertoires and their language ideologies from the DRC are reflected in the narratives and influence how 'language' is conceptualized, i.e., there is a tendency that different linguistic resources are conceptualized in different ways. For instance, the conceptual metaphor LANGUAGE IS AIR is only used about a local language, that is, when Augustin talks about the language of her parents in their home villages. The fact that some languages, especially local languages with low prestige, were just around, but not always spoken or learned, is underscored by several of participants and is typical in linguistically diverse contexts (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019).

Moreover, the translingual nature of linguistic practices in the DRC is expressed by metaphorical expressions indicating a conceptualization of LANGUAGE IS AN OBJECT that can be divided and mixed – it is thus not a solid one with clear boundaries. Language is an object that can be owned, but whether one owns a language or not seem to be related to identity rather than knowledge. As Jean-Marc says, he never had French, a language his speaks fluently; Geoffroy refers to Tshiluba, a language he does not know as *his*

language. Finally, the use of the LANGUAGE IS A PERSON metaphor, reflecting a view of language as agentive, gives the participants the opportunity to express experiences related to inclusion and exclusion – languages can either open or close doors to social and geographical spaces. This metaphor may also shed light on the social indexicality of certain languages – certain languages might influence how you are perceived as a person.

The participants' different metaphorical choices related to different languages shows that 'language' is not one, but many phenomena. For the Congolese participants of this study 'language' is sometimes seen as a tool, sometimes as a person, and sometimes as air. A teacher who is aware of such aspects of learners' experiences might avoid simplifying learners' experiences by asking them to draw on their 'mother tongue' as part of learning a new language. The language learner refers to as 'their' language is not always one they know best (or at all). It will therefore not necessarily give the intended effect if the learners are asked to translate new words into their mother tongue. Learners themselves might also discover their repertoires in new ways that open for the development of learning strategies better suited to their own experiences. For instance, languages that a learner had 'in her ears' as a child might contribute to enhance her phonological awareness which in turn can be a resource in the processes of learning to pronounce a new language, even though she does not actually speak the language in question.

Past experiences with languages influence the process of acquiring new linguistic resources. Increased insight into learners' metaphorical expressions and underlying conceptualizations brings "implicit assumptions into awareness, or encourage personal reflection, and as a result provide some insights into individuals' perspectives on given

topics" (Wan, 2012, p. 4). Such awareness has pedagogical implications that are relevant both for teachers and learners. Teachers might find that learners' conceptualizations of language differ from their own, and learners might become aware of how their own understanding of their linguistic repertoire influences how they perceive new linguistic resources. Implementing such insights into the adult language training classroom requires awareness and openness to the multitude of experiences of adults.

Notations

/   Interruption, followed by reformulation

,   Continuation intonation

.   Falling intonation

?   Question intonation

[...]   Deleted single word when marked in a turn or deleted utterances when marked

between   turns

Acknowledgement

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