

# Language-in-education policy and boundaries in Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia

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## Abstract

*This paper discusses how boundaries are created, perceived, and reinforced within language-in-education policies in the African context, focusing on primary education in Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia. While the linguistic and policy context is different in each country, they all adopt policies which are monoglossic, privilege English, and do not allow use of the majority of languages in the country. Within this context, tensions emerge when policies which adopt monolingual ways of doing language are imposed in spaces in which there is a lived multilingual reality. The paper discusses the findings from linguistic ethnographic work conducted in each of the three countries. The focus is on what the data highlights with regards to the different types of boundaries which are created through language ideologies and language policies. The main boundaries discussed are 1) languages as bounded, separate objects; 2) boundaries between the home/community and the educational space; 3) geographical boundaries between different areas. Across all contexts, language boundaries are imposed on classroom settings as multilingual language practices are stigmatised and learners are punished when they do not follow a monolingual way of languaging. There are also clear boundaries established between the home and the educational space. Finally, we see close connections being made between particular geographic regions and the language and cultural identity of the people within those regions.*

**Keywords:** *boundaries, language-in-education policy, multilingualism, translanguaging*

## 1 Introduction

Boundaries can exist in many forms and be created and implemented in many ways. Windle, de Jesus and Bartlett (2020, xi-xii) state '[b]oundaries can be enacted through linguistic ideologies, language policies, curriculum choices, exclusionary identity constructions and communicative practices'. This paper explores the relationship between language, language-in-education policy and boundaries. Specifically, it discusses how boundaries are created, perceived, and reinforced within language-in-education policies in the African context. Findings are presented from the British Academy-funded research project *Bringing the Outside In: Merging Local Language and Literacy Practices to Enhance Classroom Learning and Achievement*. This project investigated multilingualism and education in three African countries: Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia. While the linguistic and policy context is different in each country, they all adopt policies which are monoglossic, privilege English, and do not allow use of the majority of languages in the country (Bagwasi & Costley, 2022; Kula & Mwansa, 2022; Mapunda & Gibson, 2022). Within this context, tensions emerge when policies which adopt monolingual ways of doing language are imposed in spaces in which there is a 'lived multilingual reality' (Reilly et al., 2022).

Monoglossic views of language were a major part of colonial language ideologies in Africa; and the categorisation, description and division of distinct languages played a key role in the colonial project and in the oppression of colonised peoples (Deumert & Storch, 2020; Errington, 2008; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Samarin (1996) has suggested that in Africa, prior to colonialism, conceptualisations of languages as distinct, countable entities with clear boundaries did not exist. The codification, enumeration, and naming of languages associated with specific communities was part of a process of marginalisation (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021; Rosa & Flores, 2017) to reinforce boundaries between groups and between territories (Chapman, 2023). Pennycook, Kubota and Morgan (2021, p. xi) state that approaches towards language in education in Africa – including those which call for the use of multiple languages – 'simply do not match the ways in which languages are used or understood in many African contexts'. This is a consequence of language-in-education policies and language pedagogies that are influenced by monolingual ideologies and 'a mono-epistemic paradigm that focuses on standard countable language things' (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021, p. 11). Viewing multilingualism as the co-existence of multiple, separate named languages is an overly simplistic, 'mono-epistemic paradigm' and Heugh and Stroud (2020, p. 231) stress that it is important to 'understand multilingualism as historically, spatially and ecologically complex in Africa'. Makalela (2015) critiques the boundaries between named African languages and suggests a more fluid perspective is needed. Research has shown that for many individuals and communities across contexts in Africa, everyday life is characterised by fluid multilingual practices in which people engage in languaging which 'integrates different languages, definitions, lects and styles that are intermixed in a way that is appropriate for the respective situation' (Weidl, 2022, p. 42; see also Gramling, 2021, p. 54-56; Lüpke, 2017; Lüpke & Cisse, 2024; Makalela, 2015; Nassenstein & Hollington, 2016; Weidl et al., 2023).

Wa Thiongo (1986, p. 28 cited in Tyler, 2023, p. 3) writes:

Colonial alienation...starts with a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualisation, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community. It is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person.

It is this disassociation and separation which is the focus of this paper which proposes using boundaries as a concept to understand the multiple and interlinked ways in which separation is maintained in the design and implementation of language-in-education policies in three African countries. The core research questions guiding this paper are:

- 1) What boundaries are constructed through language-in-education policies in Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia?
- 2) How are these boundaries maintained and enforced through the implementation of language-in-education policy?

The research discussed in this paper emerges from the *Bringing the Outside In* project which was a collaboration between the Universities of Botswana, Dar es Salaam, Essex and Zambia. The project investigated language practices and language attitudes both inside and outside of educational spaces, to see to what extent language practices of students and their communities were used, and valued, by education policy and in the school environment.

In order to provide a contextual backdrop, the paper begins by briefly outlining the three research contexts. Then the paper highlights the colonial origins of the monolingual ideologies within education systems in the three countries and discusses the detrimental effects which arise when learners' linguistic repertoires are not welcomed in classrooms. The paper then introduces the concept of boundaries as an analytical tool for understanding how language policies are implemented, and viewed, in educational contexts. The linguistic ethnographic approach of the research will be discussed, followed by an analysis of the ethnographic data, before concluding remarks.

## 2 Research contexts

Despite the multilingual linguistic reality across Africa (Amfo & Anderson, 2019; Glanz, 2013), education systems in many countries continue to adopt monolingual approaches to language use in education (Chimbutane, 2018; Erling et al., 2021; Ndhlovu, 2015; Reilly et al., 2023a; Rubagumya, 2009; Set, 2023). While there is increased evidence, and support, for the use of multilingual approaches in education (see Barrett et al., 2025), education systems globally can be seen as 'strongly regulated language spaces... set apart from language use in wider society (Lüpke & Cisse, 2024, pp. 43-44).

The three countries involved in the study - Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia - provide different linguistic and language-in-education policy contexts (For further discussion of the policy situation in each context, see Bagwasi & Costley, 2022; Kula & Mwansa, 2022; Mapunda & Gibson, 2022.). In Botswana there are around 25-28 named languages, with the official language being English and the national language being Setswana<sup>1</sup>. At the time of the project (2019-2022), language-in-education policy stated that Setswana should be used as the medium of instruction (MOI) in Standard 1 (the first year of primary education), and that English should be used as the medium of instruction from Standard 2 or as soon as is practical. The Government of Botswana have recently begun implementing a new 'Botswana Languages Policy in Education' which seeks to be more inclusive, introducing additional Botswanan languages as MOI at early stages of education (Gabanamotse-Mogara et al., 2023). In Tanzania, there are around 150 named languages. The official language and national language of the country is Swahili. In education, Swahili is the MOI for primary school, while English is also an official language and is the MOI for secondary school onwards. In Zambia, there are approximately 72 named languages. English is the official language and there are 7 national languages based on regions. The language-in-education policy in Zambia states that in the first four years of primary school a 'familiar' language can be used as

1. As outlined by Batibo (2007) an official language is generally regarded as a language which functions in formal domains such as education, government, and the judiciary, while a national language functions as a symbol of national identity and unity, and may serve as a lingua franca within a country. In some cases, official and national languages may be named explicitly as such in formal language policies, or they may be *de facto*. Formal language policies may also designate language(s) as official/national for largely symbolic purposes, with no practical implications for how the language functions within a country.

MOI, which in practice has meant one of the 7 regional languages. English is taught as a subject from Grade 2 in primary school, and from Grade 5 English is the MOI.

Previous research has illustrated issues caused by the language-in-education policy approach in all of these countries. In Botswana, the inclusion of only two languages in education led to children being unable to effectively access learning, and to children not completing their education, which particularly affected children who had limited exposure to Setswana or English before beginning school (Boyer & Zsiga, 2014; Mokibelo, 2016). Bagwasi (2017, p. 212) argues that language policy in Botswana has involved the division, separation and creation of boundaries between languages, is 'out of touch with reality' and does not reflect the languaging practices of individuals and communities. The policy enforces hierarchical language ideologies in the country, in which English is viewed as most valuable, followed by Setswana, and in which other Botswanan languages are minoritised and devalued (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2000). Nyati-Ramahobo (2000) suggests that 'majority' and 'minority' groups in the country are not numerical categorisations but are instead based partly on the languages people use. As the two-language education policy does not align with the multilingual reality of the country, the education system becomes 'a source of oppression and dominance' for many (Chebanne, 2022, p. 74). Nkosana (2011) also highlights the dominant position of English within the language-in-education policy in the country, and notes that it does not effectively accommodate Botswana's multilingual reality.

Tanzania is similar to Botswana in that it promotes two languages in education, albeit Swahili is used as MOI for the whole of primary education. Mapunda (2022) states that the debate on language-in-education in Tanzania has been preoccupied with the competing positions of English and Swahili and has ignored the majority of Tanzanian languages in the country as these languages have been viewed by policy makers as 'inadequate for education' (Foster, 2024, p. 143). This has led to an inequitable education system in which students, particularly from rural areas who are not regularly exposed to Swahili in their homes, have poorer educational outcomes (Mapunda, 2024). Students across Tanzania also struggle with the abrupt transition to English in secondary school, which has serious implications for the delivery of quality education (Tom-Lawyer & Thomas, 2024). The nature of the transition and the reality of students' linguistic repertoires are not effectively managed or reflected in the materials used for learning (see Barrett et al., 2024; Clegg, 2021). Rugemalira (2013) argues that it is not feasible for an English-only approach to be effective as a MOI in Tanzanian schools. Adamson (2022) highlights how the language-in-education policy in Tanzania creates a culture of fear and shame which inhibits students' engagement with their education, as they are reluctant to contribute to lessons due to fears of their English skills being negatively evaluated by peers and teachers. This language-in-education policy also reinforces a hierarchy between the languages in Tanzania and leads to a situation where 'students are punished for speaking languages other than Kiswahili in primary school and punished for using Kiswahili in secondary school' (Lauwo 2021, p. 231).

In Zambia, Mambwe and Njobvu (2024, p. 630) note that the policy 'gives English supremacy over local languages', and that there are issues with the use of regional languages in classrooms including: the designated regional language not reflecting the reality of students'/communities' language practices; a lack of guidance on how to teach multilingual classrooms; and teaching materials and methods which are designed without considering students' language skills. Banda and Mwanza (2017) also highlight that the use of standardised regional languages in education combined with an early-exit transition to English is not producing desired literacy outcomes for students. They advocate for the inclusion of more Zambian languages and multilingual pedagogies in the classroom to 'counteract the negative effects of monolingual language ideologies and policies as well as bridge home and school multilingual literacy practices and identities' (p. 126). Banda and Mwanza (2021) propose that the current language-in-education

policy is not appropriate for the multilingual reality in Zambia. Mandyata et al. (2023) find that there is a mismatch between teacher training and the reality of the classroom, and that teachers are not adequately prepared to teach in Zambian languages. They also suggest that there has been an unsystematic and unequal implementation of the language-in-education policy across the education sector in Zambia, which creates confusion for teachers.

There are a number of core similarities across each of these countries with regards to the approach taken to language-in-education policy. In each context, English dominates the education system as students progress, with Zambian and Botswanan students moving to English in primary school, and Tanzanian students moving to an English MOI in secondary school. English is therefore given a dominant position in the education system as the valued language of higher levels of education. Importantly, while the policies all allow for multiple languages to be used in education, they do not explicitly allow for multilingual approaches to education, as the approaches remain monoglossic, promoting one language at a time. Crucially, in each country, the majority of languages are not legitimised for use in education (Bagwasi & Costley, 2022; Kula & Mwansa, 2022; Mapunda & Gibson, 2022). In Reilly et al. (2024, p. 214) we suggest that this leads to a *hostile language learning* environment in which ‘children are being encouraged to acquire competence in an unfamiliar language through negative policing of their (more familiar) language practices’.

The research discussed in this section illustrates that a boundary is created between language(s) legitimised for education and the everyday multilingual reality for communities. This paper argues that boundaries provide a useful concept for understanding language policy and, within these policy contexts, this paper seeks to highlight the ways in which the interconnected aspects of language policy – legislation, language attitudes, and language practices (Spolsky, 2004) – intersect and influence the creation and maintenance of interconnected boundaries at various levels.

### 3 Boundaries

According to Stroud (2025, p. 13), ‘boundaries are like death: they are sudden ruptures in social space, as death is a rupture in social time, and they must be made sense of’. This paper argues that understanding boundaries – how they are created, enforced, and experienced – is crucial for understanding how language policies operate. Boundaries are widely prevalent in education systems across the world. The creation and maintenance of boundaries help to uphold the status quo, and perpetuate inequitable systems through practices of exclusion, othering, and marginalisation. In educational spaces, multiple boundaries are created and students must face these boundaries as they engage with their learning. Boundaries influence the choices that are made for education, and they directly influence the learning experience. These boundaries can include boundaries between home and school; between subjects; between periods of school; between year groups; between assessments; between lessons and play. In discussing rites of institution, Bourdieu (1991, p. 118) states ‘all rites tend to consecrate or legitimate an *arbitrary boundary*, by fostering a misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of the limit and encouraging a recognition of it as legitimate’. This paper suggests that *arbitrary boundary* can be a useful concept when understanding language policy and that language-in-education policies may play a role in consecrating or legitimating arbitrary boundaries within education.

The creation of boundaries between languages is well established, with languages being separated, named, and counted following a monolingual ideology (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021; Pennycook & Makoni, 2019). Language boundaries have been maintained by ‘centuries of colonial, racializing verbal hygiene’ (Gramling, 2021, p. 126). As Busch and Kelly-Holmes (2004, p. 6) write, ‘[l]anguage boundaries are imaginary lines that run

an ambiguous course'. Named languages can also be used as a 'technology of bordering and sluicing of populations' (Stroud, 2025, p. 21) in which, following a monolingual perspective, distinct named languages are associated with one group, one geographical location, or one nation (Busch & Kelly-Holmes, 2004; Phillipson, 2003). Mignolo (2018, p. 112) states that borders 'are everywhere and they are not only geographic; they are racial and sexual; epistemic and ontological; religious and aesthetic; linguistic and national'. So, too, are boundaries created in multiple spaces and times, and for different purposes. Boundaries play an important role in inclusion, exclusion, and in defining people, and space (Lamont, Pendergrass & Pachucki, 2015). Boundary work seeks to highlight 'those acts and structures that create, maintain, and break down boundaries' (Fisher, 1989, p. 162 cited in MacMynowski, 2007, p. 3). Boundary work is crucial work as we must recognise that the construction, the maintenance, or the breaking down of boundaries, are not neutral objective acts, but social and political acts that can reinforce, inequitable systems of power and can oppress, isolate and exclude (Windle et al., 2020; ).

The creation of boundaries is also increasingly relevant in discussions around language-in-education policy and multilingual pedagogies. Translanguaging, as defined by Otheguy et al. (2015, p. 281), is 'the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages'. Translanguaging practices therefore allow speakers to utilise their linguistic repertoires in ways which challenged traditionally 'boundary' oriented ways of speaking. From an ideological viewpoint, a translanguaging epistemology also enables us to critique and question the value of viewing languages as bounded entities. Otheguy et al. (2015, p. 291) further state:

Languages are not true linguistic entities because their boundaries are established on non-linguistic grounds. Rather, they are groupings of idiolects of people with shared social, political, or ethnic identities that, once so grouped, are described using linguistic terms that tend to give the mistaken impression that the grouping was based on linguistic grounds in the first place.

For the purposes of this paper, what is important to note here is how crucial boundaries are to the creation and maintenance of different named languages and, as Otheguy et al. (2015) note, that those boundaries are multiple. They are not simply boundaries based on linguistic grounds, but boundaries across a range of social and political categories.

Language-in-education policies help to maintain linguistic boundaries by legitimising a limited number of named languages as suitable for education and by excluding other named languages, unnamed languages, as well as fluid multilingual practices. The 'monolingualising' of education systems (Heller, 1995), leads to the creation and promotion of boundaries based on a monolingual habitus. This approach to language policy ignores lived multilingual realities (Reilly et al., 2022) and is part of the creation of artificial monolingual spaces of education.

The language-in-education policies in Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia can be viewed through the lens of coloniallingualism. This term was developed by Meighan (2022, p. 146) to describe an approach to language which 'covertly or overtly upholds colonial legacies, imperial mindsets, and inequitable practices' and which privileges 'dominant colonial histories, knowledges, languages'. The dominance of English in the language-in-education policies is a consequence of coloniality (McKinney, 2020). So, too, is the dominance of monolingual approaches and a 'monolingual bias' (Makalela, 2016, p. 187), which leads to the categorisation of the African linguistic situation in terms of European concepts of language as discrete bounded entities. Makalela and Aparecido da Silva (2023, p. 2) have suggested that these approaches are 'mimics of the Western enumeration of languages' which do 'not favor the sociolinguistic matrix of fluid multilingualism prevalent in the Global South'. This has contributed to the 'monolingualising' of African education (Heller, 1995; Kretzher & Kaschula, 2022) in which a monolingual habitus

(Gogolin, 1997) has been created and maintained, and in which monolingualism is held up as the norm and the most valid way of being and doing language.

This positioning of languages in education can be considered a result of the spread of colonial oneness ideologies in which monolingualism – in European languages – and western epistemes are viewed as the only valid forms of language and knowledge (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021). These ideologies stem from nation-state building in 19th century Europe, in which a ‘monolingual nation-state’ (Beck, 2018, p. 236; see also Anderson, 1991) emerges as the norm and ideal situation, and in which languages are viewed as individual, distinct, countable objects (Childs, 2016, p. 35; Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021). In post-independence Africa, monolingual approaches to language policies were viewed as an essential, politically neutral and unifying approach (Wolff, 2017). This then perpetuates systems of inequity in which some language and literacy practices are valued, and others are stigmatised (García, 2006; McKinney & Christie, 2021; Windle et al., 2020).

The dominance of monoglossic conceptualisations of language has informed language policy and planning across Africa, particularly within language-in-education policy (Banda, 2009; Kiramba, 2018). This has resulted in the artificial monolingualising of education systems and perpetuates systems of inequity in which some language and literacy practices – monolingual, European – are valued and others – multilingual, African – are stigmatised (McKinney, 2020; see also Flores & Rosa, 2015). As Savski (2024, p. 372) writes, the ‘notion of a static, bordered linguistic repertoire is seen in particular to legitimize the already prevalent monolingual bias in social imaginaries of language, particularly in education’. Colonialism was a project of boundary creation. This includes the creation of geographic/national boundaries (Gbenenye, 2016), racial boundaries (Flores & Rosa, 2017), and linguistic boundaries (Pennycook & Makoni, 2006). The creation and maintenance of boundaries is a core aspect of a monolingual approach to education which is a legacy of mono-epistemic colonial ideologies (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021), and which is a necessary factor in maintaining inequitable education systems. This reinforces oneness ideologies and perpetuates the belief in the value and ‘naturalness’ of monolingual approaches to education. This paper discusses these oneness ideologies through the perspective of boundaries and boundary making.

## 4 Methods

The paper discusses the findings from linguistic ethnographic work conducted in each of the three countries. A linguistic ethnographic perspective was adopted as this is an effective method for gaining a detailed understanding of how multilingualism is operationalised in institutional contexts and can provide a nuanced perspective on how language is viewed and is used by individuals as they navigate the educational space (Costley & Reilly, 2021; Perez-Milan, 2015; Unamuno, 2014). Ethnographic work was completed in iterative stages between 2020 and 2022 by teams of in-country researchers in two field sites per country. The data collection teams for each country were Professor Gastor Mapunda, Edna James, Hassan Dasi and Salvatory Kaijage in Tanzania; Professor Mompoloki Bagwasi, Dikosha Dikosha and Phetso Mmolao in Botswana; and Dr Joseph Mwansa, Martha Mwandia and Chileshe Mwansa in Zambia. Data collection involved interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, classroom recordings and observations. Participants in the project included primary school students, teachers, parents, community members, district education officials and other education stakeholders. Classroom recordings and observations were conducted in primary school classrooms in each field site.

Classroom recordings and observations sought to collect data on language use. This provided information on how language is used in the classroom, whether the official monolingual policy is adhered to in practice, and how pupils’ language use is, or is

not, managed by the classroom teacher. Interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires provided additional self-reported information on language use inside the classroom. These three methods also provided information on language use outside of the classroom – in the home and community – to provide an understanding of how children’s everyday language practices are reflected in the school space. These three methods also provided information on language attitudes generally and specifically in relation to what languages should be used in education.

In total, 29 classroom recordings, 52 interviews, and 18 focus groups were conducted in Zambia; 20 classroom recordings, 55 interviews, and 18 focus groups were conducted in Tanzania; and 48 classroom recordings, 243 questionnaires, and 8 focus groups were conducted in Botswana<sup>2</sup>. Data collection was conducted multilingually, in which researchers and participants were free to draw on their whole linguistic repertoire during their participation in the project (see Costley & Reilly, 2021; Reilly et al., 2023b for further discussion of the researching multilingually approach). Data was transcribed, translated and collaboratively analysed using an iterative qualitative coding and thematic analysis by the wider project team (see Richards & Hemphill, 2018)<sup>3</sup>. This involved repeated stages of individual coding by team members and collaborative, online data analysis sessions. Through this process of individual and collective coding, our collaborative thematic analysis was used to highlight the key themes present in the data across each of the three country contexts. The data selected and discussed in this paper are those extracts for which the theme of Boundary/Boundaries emerged.

Ethical approval for the research was granted by all participating universities, and research permits to conduct the research were granted by the relevant authorities in each participating country. Prior to involvement in the data collection, potential participants were given an information sheet and details about the project and their participation explained. Participation in the project commenced after receiving active informed consent from participants. If participants took part in multiple methods (e.g. interview and focus group) permission was sought for each method.

## 5 Findings

This section presents and discusses the ways in which boundaries are constructed and viewed in education across the three countries through analysis of the interviews and focus groups with education professionals, students, and parents. The focus of this section is on what the data highlights with regards to the different types of boundaries which are constructed and maintained through language policies. The main boundaries discussed are 1) languages as bounded, separate objects; 2) boundaries between the home/community and the educational space; 3) geographical boundaries between different areas.

### 5.1 Boundaries between languages

A key part of understanding boundaries is in understanding how they are maintained. Extract 1 below illustrates the ways in which the boundaries between languages are maintained in the Tanzanian education system. The interview with a district education officer highlights the directions which teachers are given when dealing with multilingual

2. COVID-19 restrictions meant that conducting interviews was not feasible during data collection in Botswana. This also affected the amount of classroom observation/recording that could be conducted in each country.

3. As part of our team’s approach to researching collaboratively we have co-authored multiple outputs together with team members indicating which publications they want to be involved with. This also accounts for the different academic currencies and value of different types of publication for individuals working in different contexts. Permission has been given from the project team for this paper to be a sole-authored publication.

classroom contexts. The interview discussed the challenges that teachers face when attempting to teach students who are unfamiliar with Swahili, with the education officer stating that despite these challenges, as an education official his role was to advise teachers to follow the official policy.

Ila sasa sisi kama wasimamizi tunapokaa na wale walimu wa madarasa ya chini tunawashauri zaidi kutokana na sera ya elimu ambayo ipo tusifanye hivyo kwa maana ya kuwafundisha kwa kuchanganya lugha ya asili na lugha ya Kiswahili.  
*But as representatives we advise the teachers of the lower classes to abide with the existing language policy. We should stop them from mixing up the community language and Swahili while teaching.*

Extract 1. Education officer, Tanzania <sup>4</sup>

This education officer here describes their own position as ‘representatives’. They act as representatives of the education system and the government’s education policies and plans. In this way they are representatives, and enforcers, of the language-in-education policy. Part of their role involves ensuring that the policy is followed and ensuring that the language boundaries which are inherent within the policy are maintained. Mapunda et al. (2024) highlight that in Tanzania, the force of monolingual policies and oneness ideologies means that teachers are not given any formal training on how to engage with multilingual pedagogies and are often encouraged to maintain the monolingual MOI despite an awareness of its negative pedagogical outcomes.

The data highlights the different ways in which language boundaries are created and maintained. Extract 2 provides a quotation from the same education officer as above, in which he highlights how teachers deal with students who do not abide by the monolingual Swahili-only policy in schools. This quotation highlights that multilingual practices are not legitimate within the school spaces and that language boundaries can also be maintained through punishing students and reinforcing the boundaries through violence.

Yani kule nilivyoenda mara ya mwisho walimu walikuwa wanatumia kulazimisha kutumia lugha ya Kiswahili kwa adhabu ndogondogo kulingana na umri wao pia ile ya kuvaa vibao na kuwapa vitabu pia ili waelewe kwamba hiki kinatamkwa lakini changamoto ipo bado.

*When I went last time, the teachers used to force the use of the Kiswahili language for minor punishments depending on the age of a child. Also that of wearing blocks and giving them books as well so that they may understand how to pronounce but the challenge still exists.*

Extract 2. Education officer, Tanzania

The punishment described here involves giving students wooden blocks to wear around their neck throughout the day, as a punishment for speaking a language other than Kiswahili. Children are punished for not maintaining the appropriate language boundaries in the educational space. Children are being forcibly taught about the boundaries between languages, and the temporal and spatial boundaries which dictate when and where particular languages are suitable for use. This is all done under the auspices of the oneness ideology present in the language-in-education policy. These punishments are to ‘help’ the children acquire skills in Swahili that they will need to succeed in their education.

The threat of punishment is also evident in Botswana. Extract 3 is a focus group with primary school pupils who are discussing what languages they are permitted to use in the classroom.

P: Ha titshara a go buisa ka Sekgoa o kgona go bua ka Sekgalagadi o le free hela kana o dira jang?

4. Transcriptions are verbatim, with any English translations given in italics.

*When the teacher speaks to you in English are you free to speak in Sekgalagadi or what do you do?*

ST: Ke bua ka Setswana. *I speak in Setswana.*

P: O bua ka Setswana? *You speak in Setswana?*

ST: Ee mma. *Yes mam.*

P: Ha o bua ka Sekgalagadi? *What if you speak in Sekgalagadi?*

ST: O a mpetsa. *S/he beats me*

Extract 3. Student focus group, Botswana

The ways in which language policies are enforced in the classroom provides an additional layer of complexity with regards to the construction of the spatial and temporal boundaries in the educational spaces, and what linguistic resources are acceptable in those boundaries. Boundaries of linguistic acceptability are developed through the imposition of the language-in-education policy. While here children report that they could use Setswana to respond to a teacher who has spoken in English, they would not be permitted to use Sekgalagadi – the language they would most commonly use at home. This could be because both English and Setswana are legitimised by the language-in-education policy in Botswana, while the other languages of Botswana are absent. More seriously is the reported consequence of speaking Sekgalagadi in the school space – corporal punishment. This again points to a hostile language learning environment (Reilly et al., 2024) in which physical violence is used to teach children to observe the acceptable boundaries for classroom language use, and to ensure that certain aspects of their repertoire, and certain named languages, are not used in the educational space.

## 5.2 Boundaries between home and school

The second type of boundaries this paper focuses on emerging from the data are the boundaries which are created between the home/community and the school. Extract 5 is from an interview with a parent in Zambia. Here they are responding to a question regarding how language use may differ between the home and the school.

Eeh tukutituti muwufupi tukupusana, ndiwafuma walemba iciwemba kokoni cizungu, kootukulandavye icinamwanga ampela

*Yes we can say that, in short, we differ, when they do their work in Chibemba and English at school, here at home we just speak Namwanga that's all*

Extract 4. Parent of a primary school student, Zambia

The school and the home are set up as distinct spaces which ‘differ’. The school space is associated with Chibemba and English – two languages which are legitimised by the language-in-education policy – and which are not associated with the home space. The home space is associated with the ‘familiar’ language Namwanga. There is a clear boundary between the home and the school which is viewed along the linguistic boundaries. The difference between these spaces is reinforced by the linguistic practices that are acceptable in each space. The home is also reported to be a monolingual, Namwanga-only space. Students are therefore navigating the boundaries between two monolingual spaces in which their own emerging multilingual repertoires are not fully permitted to exist in either space.

A similar distinction between a monolingual environment in the school and a monolingual environment in the home is found in the data from Tanzania. In Extract 6, a community member discusses the differences between each of these spaces.

Hawawezi kuongea vizuri Kiswahili kwa sababu milaya humu ni ya Kisukuma. Lugha ya Kiswahili, wanaipata wakiingia shuleni, ndiyow anapata Kiswahili wakitoka ni Kisukuma tu. Hasa ndiyo maana hawaelewi mara kwa mara

*They can't speak Swahili well because the culture here is Sukuma. They only get Swahili when they enter school, and when they are outside the school they use Sukuma only. That is why they*

*often do not understand (Swahili).*

Extract 5. Community member, Tanzania

We see here again the spatial boundaries that are viewed through linguistic boundaries. There is a boundary line established between the school and the home, and when physically crossing that line, the linguistic resources acceptable within the boundaries change. Students only get Swahili upon entering the school space, and outside of the school 'only' use Sukumu. As above, we see monolingual ideologies at play here as each space is viewed as monolingual, and children must learn to language within these monolingual boundaries. This can lead to a lack of engagement with school, as highlighted by the following quotation (Extract 6) from a primary school teacher in Tanzania:

Ee changamoto nyingine niliyoiona huko darasani kwa wanafunzi wasiojua Kiswahili ni kwanza wanachukia shule wanachukia shule yaani wanakuwa watoro kutokana na lugha yaani kutojua lugha ya Kiswahili

*The other challenge I observed in class for students who do not know Kiswahili is that; they hate school, they hate school so much that they become absent due to language, that is not knowing the Kiswahili language*

Extract 6. Teacher, Tanzania

The boundaries which are created between the school and the home also feed into individuals' beliefs about what languages are suitable for use in each space. Extract 7 features an excerpt from a community focus group in Tanzania, in which one participant explains their views regarding what languages should be used for education.

Mwalimu mimi nakwambia hivi, hii lugha ya Kisukuma, ya Kinyiramba, ya Kidushi, mtoto wangu aiache nyumbani, atamkuta mwalimu anasemaje, ayakute ya huko huko ya Kiswahili, ya mwalimu, ya taifa aijue ya huko huko haya ni kama matumizi tu. Lugha yangu ya Kisukuma, lugha yangu ya kuzaliwa, ya kikabila, mwingine mnyiramba hawezi kuzungumza kwa watu, mwingine mnyaturu hawezi kuzungumza kwa watu. Sasa na huyo mtoto aje huku shuleni aiache huko huko tu nyumbani kwa maoni yangu. Aseme Kiswahili si amfundishe mwalimu, hivi huku kuna haya na haya na haya na haya asimwambie tena Kisukuma! Mimi ni maoni yangu

*Teacher, I am telling you this, my child should leave at home these languages - Sukuma, Nyiramba, and Dushi. At school my child will find the teachers who will tell them what language to speak. Let him find there about Swahili, about the teacher's language, and about the national language. My Sukuma language, my mother tongue, my ethnic language - a Nyiramba speaker, a Nyaturu speaker cannot speak to other people in their language. Thus, let the child come to school and leave the language (Sukuma) at home. Thus, my opinion is that let them speak Swahili which they will be taught by the teacher. The teacher will tell them what is there at school, but not Sukuma again! These are my opinions.*

Extract 7. Community member, Tanzania

The boundaries which are created between the school and the home, for this community member, means that students should 'leave' certain aspects of their linguistic repertoire 'at home'. The image of a child leaving a language at home is indicative of a bounded, monoglossic view of language that would suggest the child is unable to access all parts of their linguistic repertoire once they have crossed the threshold to the school. However, the creation of these boundaries may also serve important purposes for the use of the 'languages other than Swahili'. Because the school is the space for Swahili, the home is able to be a space for Sukuma and the Sukuma language is maintained as a language of the family, and community. While not letting children use their full linguistic repertoires in the school - as seen from the discussions of punishment above - may be viewed in a negative light, by establishing and maintaining the boundaries between the school and the home, and ensuring these boundaries are following along linguistic boundaries, it

ensures that the home space is able to remain a space in which Swahili does not dominate.

### 5.3 Geographical boundaries

The final boundaries which emerges from the dataset are geographical boundaries. As in the boundaries between the home and the school, geographical boundaries also affect individuals' attitudes regarding what languages they want to see in the school space albeit in different ways. In Extract 8, a parent in Zambia responds to a question regarding what languages they want their children to be taught in.

Researcher: Uzyengamwapilweamaka, acitundu cicinomungazumilizya awana ukuti wasambilila?

Researcher: Ninshimwingafwaila uku balasambilila mu cinamwanga?

Parent: Pantu area yabenamwanga

*Interviewer: If you had a choice which language(s) would you want your child to learn in at school?*

*Parent: If I had a choice since I live in a Namwanga speaking area I would prefer children use Namwanga.*

*Interviewer: Why would you want him/her to learn in Namwanga?*

*Parent: Because it is a Namwanga-speaking area*

Extract 8. Parent of a primary school student, Zambia

This parent clearly states that they would like their child to be learning in Namwanga as they are living in a Namwanga-speaking area. The boundaries between home and school are subsumed within the broader boundary of the geographical area which is associated with being Namwanga-speaking and that is the dominant factor which influences the choice of language for MOI for this parent. This could also highlight a desire to weaken the boundary between the home space and the school space and to allow the language of the home to become the language of the school as this would aid in children's engagement with learning, may make them more comfortable, and may allow parents to be more actively engaged in supporting their children while they are in education. Here, monolingual ideologies are still present. Similar to the emergence of one-nation one-language monoglossic ideologies, here one language is being associated with a particular region and a particular people. Establishing these geographical boundaries, and again viewing them along the lines of linguistic boundaries, helps to establish and maintain an important cultural identity for individuals in this community.

However, this monolingual categorisation and boundary-making of a 'Namwanga-speaking' area does not necessarily reflect the reality of language use in the everyday lives of the people who live in this space. This is effectively illustrated by Extract 9, which is an interview with a parent in Zambia.

Nga nazana umwinamwanga nkawomvya icinamwanga, nga muwemba nanti umu Swahili akuwomvya iciwemba niciSwahili...Tukawomvya naconyekailindiwazana umwina mwanga umuvwanzya mu ciNamwanga nye.

*If the shopkeeper speaks Namwanga, I use Namwanga, if they speak Bemba or Swahili, I use Bemba or Swahili...We use Namwanga too. When you find the one selling speaking Namwanga you speak to them in Namwanga.*

Extract 9. Parent of a primary school student, Zambia

Here, this individual highlights the multilingual reality of their life and the various aspects of their repertoire that they may have to draw upon depending on who they are speaking to. Being in a 'Namwanga-speaking' area clearly does not mean that Namwanga is the only language spoken in the area. The boundaries that are created are therefore not necessarily reflective of the 'lived multilingual realities' (Reilly et al., 2022) but are created to serve other important social, cultural, and political functions.

## 6 Discussion

This paper has illustrated that language-in-education policies can function as tools of boundary creation. They contribute towards the maintenance of *arbitrary boundaries* (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 118) legitimising colonial ideologies and inequitable hierarchies between languages and language users. The main questions that this paper sought to address are:

- 1) What boundaries are constructed through language-in-education policies in Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia?
- 2) How are these boundaries maintained and enforced through the implementation of language-in-education policy?

To answer the first research question, within the data across all contexts, we see language boundaries being imposed on classroom settings as multilingual language practices are stigmatised and learners are punished when they do not follow a monolingual way of languaging. There are also clear boundaries established between the home and the educational space, with parents stating that the dominant, 'official' languages which are accepted in education have little place in the home, while the language practices present within the home are not viewed as being of value past the school gates. Finally, we see close connections being made between particular geographic regions and the language and cultural identity of the people within those regions. These first two boundaries are directly linked to the language policies and the ways in which they are enforced. The final boundary is indicative of the wider monolingual ideologies in which the policies operate, and which they reinforce.

In answer to the second research question, boundaries are maintained through the controlling of individuals' linguistic practices in educational spaces such as through the use of punishments. They are maintained by an education system which implements a monolingual language-in-education policy and thus creates a monolingual habitus (Gogolin, 1997) through which children are socialised into particular ways of languaging and into monoglossic language ideologies which promote a separation and hierarchisation of languages.

By looking at how teachers, pupils, and parents talk about language, we can see how monolingual ideologies of languages as bounded, separate, countable entities are developed and reinforced. This highlights that the creation of boundaries between named languages is, in part, a dialogic act that is constantly in progress to reaffirm the oneness ideology present in the education space. In formal education contexts, children are acquiring many forms of knowledge. Among these is knowledge about what languaging practices are legitimate within formal spaces such as the school. The classroom space, and the rules which children engage with – which are enforced by the teacher in an attempt to implement a monolingual policy – teach them specific language ideologies. Through their interactions in the classroom, they learn which languaging practices are valid and which are not.

Across all of the boundary-making which is occurring, a monolingual habitus and oneness ideology is present. The boundaries work towards establishing monolingual language practices and monolingual ways of being and thinking about language as being the goal. Even when it is acknowledged that forcing children to operate monolingually in the classroom may not be the most effective method of engaging them with their education, and even when this is enforced through physical violence, this is still maintained as the optimum strategy for doing language in education. So prevalent are the monolingual ideologies that these are also evident when individuals create boundaries around the home and broader regions in which they live. These too are created to be monolingual spaces as that is the norm that is promoted as the best way to be. These ideologies are so strong that this is the case even when the lived multilingual reality may not reflect this monolingual boundary creation.

All of the boundaries which are present in the data are linked. Boundaries between home and school, and between geographic regions are all maintained and are conceptualised through boundaries between languages. This suggests that to challenge inequitable practices in education which are reinforced by language-in-education policies which reinforce monolingual boundaries, a wider perspective must be taken. Language-in-education policies are not only about language, but relate to wider social, political, and cultural realities. To bring more multilingual approaches into education, linguistic boundaries are not the only ones which must be broken. As Tyler (2023, p. 140) argues: 'language in the broader community life of the school is an important aspect of any language policy'.

Through examining data from these three contexts, the various ways in which boundaries are implemented has been illustrated – they are constructed and implemented through language ideologies, through language policing, and through monoglossic language-in-education policies (Windle, de Jesus & Bartlett 2020, p. xi-xii). These boundaries create an inequitable experience of education in which the majority of languages are excluded from the school space, and in which the socially realistic multilingualism (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021) and lived multilingual reality are made invisible (Bagwasi & Costley, 2022; Kula & Mwansa, 2022; Mapunda & Gibson, 2022).

The boundary creation present in the education and community contexts discussed perpetuates colonial ideologies of languages as separate, named, countable entities (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021; Pennycook & Makoni, 2019) and reinforces the value of monolingual ways of being. The monolingualising of education systems is achieved through boundary creation and through the stigmatisation of students' multilingual repertoires. This too reinforces the value of monolingual approaches and the privileging of colonial languages such as English (Meighan, 2022) at the expense of African languages and multilingualisms (McKinney & Christie, 2021).

While this paper has highlighted some of the harmful consequences of enforcing rigid boundaries, it is also important to consider when and in what ways boundaries may be useful. As Gramling (2021, p. 30) notes: '[a] vast array of people find bounded entities and language boundaries to be useful and important in their lay characterizations of language and in their everyday practices of it'. Avineria and Kroskrity (2014, p. 3) also highlight that for communities of language users it may be beneficial to identify as a bounded, unified group. In the data discussed above, we see the potential benefits of boundaries in the maintaining of a linguistic/community identity for groups in particular geographical areas and in the maintenance of minoritised languages as languages of the home (see Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). There are continuing debates amongst translanguaging scholars about the extent to which language boundaries should be rejected and transcended (García et al., 2021; Otheguy et al., 2015) or whether they should be softened (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Cummins, 2021; see also Fuster & Bardel, 2024).

Further 'boundary work' (MacMynowski, 2007) is needed across educational contexts in Africa to establish the ways in which boundaries are created and reinforced, and the ways in which this leads to the exclusion and stigmatisation of learners. When considering language policy, this would contribute to Spolsky's (2021, p. 203) reminder of the need for 'thinking and rethinking rather than counting and measuring and calculating'. Understanding the nature of boundaries, and how they are established, is a key step to begin working towards exploring pedagogies and language-in-education policy approaches that can challenge or deconstruct harmful boundary making (Windle et al., 2020).

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