

## **A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF LANGUAGE LECTURERS' JOURNEY INTO AFRICAN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Post-apartheid policies aimed to promote African languages in higher education, yet lecturers face lack of institutional support and resource scarcity. This qualitative study explores experiences of African language lecturers at South African universities, using Bourdieusian theory to understand broader discourses around language, identity, and power shaping efforts to revalue these languages. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain insights into lecturers' journeys and lived experiences. The findings revealed that their habitus was oriented towards language teaching by familial, socio-political, and educational contexts. In addition, accumulating cultural capital through credentials facilitated academic lecturers' progression while leveraging social capital through professional networks provided them crucial access and advocacy. Within competitive academia, lecturers continuously pursued prestigious positions and various forms of capital. Collaborating with language communities enabled developing localized, culturally validating pedagogies to counter institutional barriers. Technology access empowered effective role performance, research publishing, and career advancement. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by African language lecturers and highlights the need for institutional support, resource availability, and community engagement to promote and sustain African language education in higher education institutions.

### **KEYWORDS**

Language teaching, language lecturers, journey, African languages; Bourdieu

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language represents a powerful social practice embedded within relations of power and hierarchies in society. This makes understanding the experiences of educators who teach marginalized languages a complex sociological matter involving identity, representation and social change. In the South African context, indigenous African languages have suffered historical marginalization through colonial and apartheid policies that privileged English and Afrikaans (Mekoa, 2020).

Yet limited research exists exploring African language lecturers' lived experiences navigating these sociocultural dynamics within higher education. A central contention forwarded by scholars is that progressive language-in-education policies adopted in the post-apartheid period have failed to overcome sustained inequalities where English remains dominant while African languages stay marginalized in practice within higher education (Omidire, 2020; Wildsmith-Cromarty et al., 2023). This enduring disconnects between policy ideals of multilingual advancement versus implementation realities

preserving English hegemony creates a contested terrain for African language lecturers to navigate.

Sociolinguistic research underscores how language represents far more than just a communicative tool - it constitutes a social practice laden with power implications related to identity construction, cultural norms and knowledge production (Fairclough, 2013). As Bourdieu (1991) argues, language operates as a form of 'symbolic power' that reproduces dominant societal beliefs, ideologies and classifications. This makes the policy decisions governing language in education highly charged and contested processes since they privilege certain cultural worldviews and ways of knowing over others.

A few studies have examined micro experiences of educators teaching African languages, foregrounding difficult identity struggles they face (Tyler, 2023). Most studies focus narrowly on language learning without examining the lived perspectives and trajectories of educators teaching these historically marginalized languages (Keet, 2014). And the few studies exploring lecturer views employ frameworks from applied linguistics or cognitive psychology, without sufficiently engaging the sociocultural, identity and equity issues permeating this terrain (Mashiya, 2014). Thus, Mavengano et al. (2022:216) aptly critiques the failure of existing research to capture the "voices from the margin" of those teaching African languages.

Despite progressive policies, the hegemony of English remains deeply entrenched in South African higher education, with African languages often relegated to narrow conceptions of lexical study rather than empowered as vital media of scholarship and learning (Milligan et al., 2016). Mutongoza et al. (2023) argue that the use of African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education in South Africa remains a vexed issue. This pertains to curriculum presence, resource allocation, research opportunities, career advancement prospects and overall status.

To address these gaps, this study aimed to foreground the sociological dimensions of biography, discourse, power and change that have shaped African language lecturers' professional pathways. In-depth interviews explored the lecturers' habitus, their strategies for leveraging various forms of capital, and how they navigated the hierarchical structures of academia. Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit provided analytical insight into how apartheid-era structures shaped their dispositions, while their individual agency and strategic actions incrementally transformed the field.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In response to the marginalization of African languages, scholar-activists argue for reconceptualizing language education not as technical training but as situated social practice interwoven with relations of knowledge, identity and power (Jain et al., 2021; Ubaque-Casallas, 2021). This entails moving beyond narrow study of lexical forms to critically engage wider sociocultural, historical and political dimensions of language use, policy and status (Ubaque-Casallas, 2021). Such a paradigm aligns with emerging Southern theory perspectives that advocate grounding scholarship in indigenous communities' lived priorities and experiences (Beveridge et al., 2021; Khupe & Keane, 2017). This study supports this reconceptualization by highlighting African language

lecturers' committed efforts to foster socially embedded pedagogies affirming marginalized communities' cultural wealth.

This study draws on Bourdieu's theoretical concepts to explicate the complex sociocultural dynamics that have shaped the journey of university lecturers in South Africa into the field of African language education. Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, capital, and field provide a salient means of illuminating how lecturers' background experiences, strategic actions, and structural barriers have interacted to characterize their pathways into teaching historically marginalized indigenous languages at higher education institutions in the country (Bourdieu, 1986, 1998, 2020; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu conceived of habitus as the set of internalized dispositions, tendencies, forms of knowledge and subjective perspectives that individuals develop based on the various social environments they inhabit and experiences they absorb over their life course (Maton, 2014). In this respect, habitus operates as a kind of internal guidance system that orients actors toward particular practices, worldviews, and stances toward various social and cultural domains. Bourdieu saw habitus as shaped by one's position within various fields of social life. As individuals move through different social spaces over time, they internalize the norms, expectations, and forms of knowledge that are valued and rewarded in those contexts. As Bourdieu states that the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences...and the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences (Bourdieu, 2020). This leads to the formation of durable dispositions that generate perceptions, appreciations, and practices that align with the structures of the environments one inhabits. For example, an individual from a working-class background who enters into a high-status professional field like law or medicine will gradually absorb new manners of speaking, acting, and forms of cultural knowledge that allow them to operate competently in that field. However, traces of their working-class habitus may linger, shaping subjective perceptions in subtle ways. In this way, habitus provides a conceptual link between objective social structures, like class, and subjective experience and action. It is a key mechanism for the reproduction of inequality, as habitus aligns individual aspirations and worldviews with their objective chances in the social order. But habitus can also be transformed through experience in new social environments and fields over time.

This apartheid-inherited language hierarchy within the educational field in the context of this study resulted in what Bourdieu (2007) terms a "cleft habitus" for lecturers upon entering academia. This generated tensions and necessary negotiations between their own personal commitment to and valuing of African languages based on their upbringing, and the institutional logic that actively devalues these languages as inadequate for higher-order functions. Their accounts surface the complex identity work and acts of strategic resistance required to foster African language pedagogy within a broader educational field marked by the coloniality of power (McKinney, 2020). Despite progressive shifts in language-in-education policy with the transition to democracy, the racially defined language hierarchy from the apartheid era remains deeply inscribed in the culture, practices, and structure of South African higher education institutions (Timmis et al., 2021). Thus, lecturers had to contend with ongoing marginalization of African languages that degraded their status, value and utility in the academic space.

Bourdieu's concept of capital captures the assets, power resources and forms of value that actors leverage and deploy to gain advantages, status and mobility in traversing social fields (Grenfell, 2014). Key forms of capital valued and unevenly distributed within the educational field include institutionalized cultural capital like educational credentials, social capital accrued through relationships and networks, and symbolic capital stemming from prestige, honor or recognition (Bourdieu, 1986). In academia for instance, lecturers will have to make agentic efforts to strategically accumulate and convert various kinds of capital to enter and access opportunities within academia throughout their professional journeys. In the same vein, many would further mobilize social capital cultivated through personal relationships with academic colleagues to gain information, mentoring, advocacy, and references that will allow them to transition into more senior/prestigious roles over time.

However, it is critically important to recognize that under apartheid, Black South African academics faced systemic barriers to acquiring and activating certain forms of capital, including limited access to advanced educational credentials, restrictions on international travel to participate in conferences and networks, and segregation from elite research communities – reflecting the wider policies of exclusion of the time (Maphaka & Rapanyane, 2021; Timmis et al., 2021). Critical race theorists have illuminated how such historic restrictions engender durable race-based capital and opportunity deficits that can continue to linger even after formal deracialization of policies, as the benefits of intergenerational capital accumulation remain uneven (Taylor, 2023; Yosso, 2014). For language lecturers such as in this study, overcoming these lingering capital deficits shaped by apartheid will necessitate exercising greater strategic ingenuity, resilience, and determination to leverage available cultural, social and symbolic resources towards establishing African language teaching pathways within historically white institutions. In this case, language lecturers' capital acquisition and activation strategies will demand the exertion of agency within an inherited structure of constraint.

Bourdieu theorized institutions of higher education as operating akin to competitive social fields containing dominant and subordinate positions, differential forms of accumulated capital, and diverse groups of actors - all vying for advantage, power and legitimacy (Grenfell, 2014). Under apartheid, South African universities functioned as racialized social fields marked by discrimination, exclusion and segregation that systemically oppressed Black academics and students (Cloete et al., 2015). Within this broader contested academic field, African language education occupied a particularly marginalized sub-field position characterized by lower status and capital compared to English language teaching and learning. In fact, lecturers will have to carefully and strategically navigate the unwritten rules, norms and standards of legitimacy and validation that preserved hierarchies privileging former colonial languages like English as the primary media of instruction, research and knowledge production (wa Thiong'o, 1986). Lecturers' capital acquisition and activation strategies will demand the exertion of agency within an inherited structure of constraint that continues to privilege certain languages and forms of knowledge over others. They will need to balance adhering to dominant academic norms while also asserting their own voices and perspectives within their teaching and research. On the long run, the exertion of agency will be key for lecturers as they work to acquire and activate various forms of capital within universities that remain shaped by colonial histories and power dynamics.

Pushing back on the deeply embedded devaluation of African languages within what Msila (2024:443) terms the “colonized university” involved forms of resistance to the dominant institutional habitus that continued to denigrate these languages as inadequate for higher-order functions. As Maton (2014) notes, generating change within established social fields characterized by exclusion of certain groups or viewpoints fundamentally requires disrupting and renegotiating the entrenched hierarchies of capital and associated relations of symbolic power and legitimacy. This suggests that African language lecturers, as in the case of this study, will gradually have to foster innovative pedagogies, research programs, community publishing projects, and advocacy platforms that seem to slowly expand indigenous languages' symbolic capital, social acknowledgment, and legitimacy within higher education. This is despite constant pressures of ongoing marginalization and inadequate resource allocation. Their strategic praxis will hint at possibilities for long-term epistemic justice (Fricker, 2017).

In conclusion, applying Bourdieu's theoretical toolkit illuminates how the complex journey of university lecturers into the contested field of African language pedagogy in South Africa has been profoundly sociologically shaped by their early habitus dispositions informed by upbringing and apartheid experiences; the need to be strategic in leveraging available forms of cultural, social and symbolic capital in response to systemic race-based capital and opportunity deficits; and agentic practices aimed at gradually legitimizing African language teaching and scholarship by enhancing its position in the highly unequal social field of higher education. This Bourdieusian analysis enriches understanding of the dialectical interplay between structure and agency that has underpinned professional pathways into African language promotion. It also surfaces possibilities for continued cultivation of innovative counter-hegemonic discourses and practices that can further transform the role and status of historically marginalized languages in the South African higher education space.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative study employed an in-depth, exploratory approach to investigate the experiences of 10 university lecturers who have transitioned into teaching African languages in South Africa. The study aimed to capture rich, nuanced insights into the lecturers' perspectives and meaning making regarding the complex social processes involved in their journeys.

The primary data source for this study was semi-structured interviews conducted with the lecturers. Furthermore, purposeful and snowball sampling methods were used to identify information-rich cases of lecturers with relevant experience teaching African languages at three South African universities. The interviews, lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes each were conducted via MS Teams (an online platform) and digitally recorded with participants' consent. The semi-structured interview guide probed critical influences, motivations, challenges, approaches, perspectives, and experiences characterizing the lecturers' pathways into and within African language teaching in higher education.

The data analysis adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach for rigorous thematic analysis. The audio recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts were iteratively

coded to surface inductive themes elucidating the lecturers' complex journeys. The codes were subsequently categorized into overarching themes. Theoretical concepts from Bourdieu were incorporated as sensitizing frameworks to enrich the interpretation and analysis.

To enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, the study employed several strategies. These included member checks of transcripts, thick description, audit trails documenting analytic decisions, critical reflexivity to interrogate researcher positionality, and triangulation across the sample to corroborate key themes.

The study received university ethics approval (Ethical Clearance number IREC 249/22) and followed protocols to ensure informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and participants' rights.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This study utilizes Bourdieu's theoretical concepts to examine the experiences of language lecturers through their journey into African language teaching. As Schofield et al. (2023) highlight, Bourdieu's sociological toolkit provides a means of investigating how individuals' pathway choices and social mobility opportunities across institutional contexts and careers are enabled and constrained by evolving dispositions, power relations and degrees of capital possession. Thus, the study aims to analyze how the lecturers' accounts portray the interplay between personal interests, structural barriers tied to South Africa's apartheid history, strategic credential and experience accumulation, and gradual navigation through professional spaces that collectively characterize and explain their trajectory into African language teaching within higher education over the years. Examining the interview data through a Bourdieusian lens yielded useful insights into the complexity of personal, sociocultural, and professional dimensions shaping academic career establishment and development. The first theme explores how the lecturers' habitus, or internalized dispositions, were oriented towards African language education based on their upbringing, apartheid restrictions, and evolving pursuits. The second theme demonstrates how the lecturers strategically mobilized and converted different forms of capital - cultural, social, symbolic to access opportunities and progression in their field. The third theme maps their journey entering academia, accumulating academic capital, ascending professional ranks, and in some cases moving between academia and other sectors over time. The themes are analyzed below:

### ***Theme 1: Dispositions shaped by family, schooling, and sociopolitical contexts***

Bourdieu argued that our habitus consists of the dispositions, tendencies, and subjective internalized structures that guide our behaviors, thinking, and orientations towards certain practices or fields (Carlson and Schneickert, 2021). The interviewed participants described various facets of their habitus that steered them towards African language teaching over time. For example, for participant FP3, their initial interest in science was curtailed due to the apartheid system which heavily segregated education at the time. As one of the participants stated:

*“I came at a time where.... yeah, things were very different. It was during the apartheid era, so things were quite different. And so, I ended up choosing languages rather than the sciences” (Participant FP3).*

This above extract exemplifies how our habitus is significantly shaped by the societal conditions, structures, and opportunities (or lack thereof) we are surrounded by growing up. However, it is also important to consider how access to technology may have impacted their disposition (Adedokun et al., 2023). During apartheid, technology access was highly segregated and limited for non-white populations. This lack of technology likely further oriented Participant FP3's habitus away from science fields, which rely heavily on technology, and towards language teaching instead. As Bourdieu argued, our habitus reflects the social order and context we inhabit (Holland-Smith, 2022). Similarly, participant FP1 became a schoolteacher in 1981 after being trained as an educator stating that “In 1981 was when I became a schoolteacher” (FP1). Their family background and schooling steered them towards a teaching habitus from early on. Bourdieu posited that our early upbringing, family life, and education orient our dispositions in certain directions based on available possibilities (Sutopo et al., 2022). For participant FP1, their habitus aligned with entering the teaching profession based on their familial and educational trajectory.

In contrast, participant MP8 described how their deep enjoyment of isiZulu language studies during their undergraduate degree led them to become tutors and eventually full-time lecturers. As explained by MP8:

*“I fell in love with isiZulu to an extent that I was performing very well and then my then lecturer appointed me as a tutor from a very early stage” (Participant MP8).*

This demonstrates how our evolving experiences shape our habitus and interests over time. Participant MP8's positive experiences studying isiZulu oriented their habitus towards academia and teaching isiZulu specifically. Bourdieu argued that habitus evolves as we internalize new experiences (Maton, 2014). For this participant, their undergraduate studies fostered a disposition towards isiZulu that led them into tutoring and lecturing roles. However, technology likely enabled and accelerated this process. Access to computers and software (Adedokun et al., 2019) for tasks like word processing and data analysis made it easier for MP8 to succeed in their isiZulu studies and subsequent teaching roles. The increased efficiency afforded by technology integration in teaching and research helped solidify MP8's habitus as an isiZulu lecturer over time. Similarly, participant FP6 initially trained and worked as a commercial subject teacher but their habitus shifted as they pursued African language degrees and entered academia. As described by FP6:

*“I did typing, accounting, business economics and economics. Yeah, that's what I'm trained.....I was trained to be a language teacher and then I taught briefly for four years before I completed my Honors degree in African languages” (Participant FP6).*

This indicate that obtaining additional educational credentials reshaped participant FP6's teaching disposition and habitus over time. This aligns with Bourdieu's notion of habitus evolving as new experiences and knowledge shape our internal dispositions (Zalewska, 2019). Participant FP6's graduation trajectory realigned their habitus from commercial teaching towards African language education.

Overall, the experiences of participants FP3, MP8, and FP6 provides insights into personal, political and professional factors shaping the lecturers' pathways, and how technology access enabled or hindered the development of their teaching dispositions and habitus historically. Their accounts align with Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus as fluid dispositions shaped by one's location within various social fields (Maton, 2014).

### ***Theme 2: Leveraging multiple forms of capital***

Bourdieu used the concept of 'capital' to describe the resources, assets, prestige, and power individuals can leverage to gain advantages within a particular social field (Cheng, 2020). He delineated various types of capital, including cultural (in institutionalized and embodied forms), social, and symbolic capital (Gilleard, 2020). The interviewed participants described drawing upon different forms of capital to enter and progress within the field of African language teaching. For example, participant MP2 highlighted how they leveraged institutionalized cultural capital in the form of educational credentials to move from a teaching assistant role into a lectureship position. As stated by MP2:

*"I started as a teaching assistant and when I registered for Masters, that was when I became a sessional lecturer for IsiZulu"* (Participant MP2).

Bourdieu conceived institutionalized cultural capital as formal credentials, qualifications, or titles that carry symbolic value and prestige, especially within academic fields. Participant MP2 strategically drew upon their Masters credential, a valued form of institutionalized cultural capital, to gain a lecturer position and higher status within their university. Similarly, participant FP7 pointed to how their diploma and tutoring experience provided symbolic capital that allowed them to gain a junior lectureship early in their career. As described by FP7:

*"Since I was already doing my Diploma in Language Practice, that gave me an experience and also a platform to know and how to teach languages. So, after that, I got an opportunity to be a junior lecturer"* (Participant FP7).

Bourdieu and Wacquant argued that symbolic capital refers to the accumulated prestige, reputation, or perceived competence which allows people to gain advantages in certain fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2013). It is evident that participant FP7 leveraged their diploma credential and tutoring experience as valued symbolic capital within academia to access a more prestigious role in their field of work. Some interviewed participants also described tapping into social capital, which Bourdieu conceived as resources and networks of support gained through professional/group affiliations and relationships. For example, MP4 transitioned from being a schoolteacher to a university lecturer by drawing upon social capital through their professional networks and contacts, as explained by MP4:

*"I joined the university on contract where I had done some contract work for them in the past and they needed somebody to teach methodology. So, I then in 2005 joined the university where then.....That's when the transition from teacher to lecturer became, you know that was the terminology changed. I am no longer a teacher subject advisor, I am now lecturer"* (Participant MP4).

The case of participant MP4 demonstrates how accessing and utilizing social networks can provide individuals with social capital that enables career transitions. As a schoolteacher, MP4 was able to leverage connections with university academics to



secure a lecturing position in higher education. This institutional transfer from school to university was facilitated by MP4's personal networks, which provided access to information about job openings, references, and advocacy from trusted contacts. By mobilizing and deploying social capital accumulated through relationships, MP4 was able to make a significant career shift from secondary to postsecondary education. This underscores the value of cultivating professional networks and social connections as a means of opening up new occupational pathways. The strategic activation of social capital through networks was the key enabler for MP4 to traverse institutional boundaries and take on a new role as a university lecturer. Furthermore, FP6 gained early opportunities as a tutor due to their symbolic capital and prestige as a high-performing language student. As stated by FP6:

*“Before I became a language lecturer, I started by being.....when I was an undergraduate student, I used to be a tutor, a language tutor for that matter and I used to tutor English and IsiZulu. I then also went further to go and work for the Matric Excellence where I used to teach IsiZulu to Grade 12 learners and then since I was already doing my Diploma in Language Practice, that gave me an experience and also a platform to know and how to teach learners languages”*  
(Participant FP6).

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is exemplified in the case of the above lecturer, whose academic excellence as a student afforded them symbolic prestige in the educational field. By consistently demonstrating high levels of competence, effort and ability in their studies, the lecturer was able to build up symbolic capital based on their scholarly dispositions and knowledge. Their embodied cultural capital as an outstanding student was converted into symbolic capital in the form of prestige, reputation and recognition by both peers and lecturers. This prestige in turn translated into access to tutoring roles and opportunities, as the student's academic excellence led to them being viewed as well-qualified to support other students. Their symbolic capital opened up advantaged positions such as tutoring through which they could gain further resources and capital.

Bourdieu argued that symbolic capital and prestige are key mechanisms through which individuals get ahead in educational systems and settings (Weinreb and Yemini, 2023). This case highlights his proposition that individuals who accumulate valued cultural capital through demonstrated academic competence and excellence can mobilize this as symbolic capital to assume advantageous roles, resources and status. It demonstrates how symbolic prestige grounded in scholarly aptitude and achievement can be leveraged by individuals to access privileged positions in the social hierarchy of the schooling system.

In summary, this lecturers' experiences align with Bourdieu's concept of capital, showing how they mobilized their cultural, social and symbolic capital in strategic ways to access opportunities and progression within African language education over time.

### ***Theme 3: Entering and navigating the academic field by African languages' lecturers***

Bourdieu used the metaphor of a 'field' to describe contexts or institutions such as academia which function as competitive spaces with their own rules, hierarchies, forms of capital, and systems of dominance (Papatsiba and Cohen, 2020). He conceived

academia and educational institutions as operating like fields where various actors and groups jostle for status and capital. The interviewed participants' accounts provide insight into how African language lecturers entered and navigated the broader field of academia over their careers. However, it is also important to consider the role of technology access in enabling or constraining their navigation of academic fields. Participant FP1 described progressing from schoolteacher to university lecturer over time, stating that:

*"In 1981 was when I became a schoolteacher...yea. When I became a lecturer.... what year was that? Ehmm.... I think it was in, yea it was in the ....90's...yea late 90's"* (Participant FP1).

This trajectory was likely enabled by access to academic technologies like research databases, data analysis software, presentation tools and more. Lack of technology access historically would have hindered lecturers' ability to accumulate academic capital and progress through institutional hierarchies.

The professional journey outlined in the above account aligns with Bourdieu's conceptualization of academic fields as competitive spaces where actors jockey for capital and higher status over time. The individual's movement from school teaching into the more prestigious role of university lecturing in the late 1990s mirrors Bourdieu's notion of capital accumulation and convertibility providing mobility within broader academic fields. As a schoolteacher, the individual occupied a position of lower status and capital in the academic field. By leveraging social capital through networks to secure a university lecturing job, they demonstrated the convertibility of capital, using social relations and connections to transition into a higher status academic position. This represents trajectory within the broader field as capital accrued in one area (social networks) was converted into mobility up the institutional hierarchy from school to university.

Macfarlane and Jefferson argued that academic fields have their own structures and hierarchies, with university positions conferring more capital and status than school roles (Macfarlane and Jefferson, 2022). The case of the concerned participant mirrors this conception, as over time the individual competed in the academic field (African languages) and drew on accumulated capital to transition into higher status university lecturing in the late 1990s. Their professional mobility and capital convertibility maps onto Bourdieu's depiction of academic fields as spaces of struggle for better positions, resources and prestige over time. Similarly, participant FP6 detailed moving from undergraduate tutor to senior lecturer, explaining that:

*"I started by being...a tutor, a language tutor...I was a student and then started tutoring as a postgraduate student and then after tutoring then started to..... I got a contract as a lecturer"* (Participant FP6).

This upwards mobility was facilitated by technology integration in teaching and research. Tools for creating learning materials, assessing students, collaborating with colleagues and publishing research (Oparinde et al., 2024) allowed FP6 to effectively perform their roles and ascend academia's ranks. Lack of technology access would have obstructed their capital accumulation and field navigation. In contrast, participant MP7 described leaving academia for publishing, then later re-entering university teaching. As stated by FP6:

*"I worked at one university for five years, that was in 1992. I worked there for five years. And then I got tired because I knew everything there and I was still quite young then. So I left. I went into publishing, so I wasn't publishing for over close to 20 years" (Participant FP6).*

Their ability to exit and re-enter academia was aided by transferrable technology skills. Maintaining digital literacy and technical expertise allowed MP6 to retain academic capital that could be reactivated later to transition back into higher education. Overall, the lecturers' accounts aligned with Bourdieu's concept of field, revealing how African language lecturers entered academia, built up various forms of capital over time, progressed through ranks, and in some cases moved in and out of academia as a field. The narratives of this lecturer demonstrate how professional pathways are shaped by the competitive logics, hierarchies, and capital flows within academic fields.

In conclusion, the analysis utilized Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field to examine interview data on the theme "odyssey into African language teaching". It revealed how lecturers' habitus was shaped by their background; how they strategically leveraged capital; how they navigated the academic field throughout their careers; and how technology enabled capital accumulation and convertibility to facilitate field navigation. The analysis provides an in-depth Bourdieusian perspective on the experiences and pathways of these educators in South Africa.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal how lecturers' habitus, shaped by their diverse household, sociopolitical, and experiential backgrounds, played a formative role in shaping their orientations toward African language pedagogy. This aligns with Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus as the subjective internalized structures that guide our thinking and practices based on one's location within broader fields of family, schooling, and work (Maton, 2014). The analysis demonstrates the fluidity and evolution of habitus across the life course as individuals accumulate new capital and experiences, which resonates with research on how habitus can be transformed through new experiences (Costa & Murphy, 2015; Ingram, 2018).

The lecturers' habitus valuing linguistic and cultural diversity was initially shaped by their multilingual family and community settings but was reinforced or challenged by their experiences in the educational field. The findings highlight the mismatch between the lecturers' habitus valuing African languages and the hierarchical language stratification inherited from colonialism and apartheid within the educational field, where English and Afrikaans dominated. This aligns with Bourdieu's concept of fields as sites of struggle over various forms of capital, and mirrors findings from studies on the marginalization of indigenous languages in colonial education systems (Ramlal, 2021; Trinick et al., 2023). The findings of this study draw on Bourdieu's notion of agency among dominated groups, showing how lecturers leveraged their habitus and capitals to challenge the marginalization of African languages and promote inclusive curricula and pedagogies. Their actions are framed as small acts of resistance within everyday praxis. This resonates with research on how educators can engage in resistance and decolonizing pedagogies (Edwards & Shahjahan, 2023; Shahjahan et al., 2022).

The study findings also acknowledge the ongoing structural constraints and the force of symbolic power, with English remaining the dominant language of instruction and assessment despite policy shifts. This resonates with Bourdieu's ideas about the symbolic power of dominant groups and the persistence of social hierarchies, as well as research on the hegemony of English in postcolonial contexts (Al-Kahtany & Alhamami, 2022; Ulum & Köksal, 2020).

In summary, this discussion effectively situates the findings of this study within Bourdieu's theoretical lens, drawing connections between lecturers' experiences and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, fields, capital, and symbolic power. In addition, it situates the results within the broader context of efforts to transform language education and decolonize curricula in South Africa and other postcolonial settings.

## CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explored the experiences of university lecturers transitioning into teaching historically marginalized African languages in South Africa. The key findings revealed how biographical backgrounds, strategic actions, and sociopolitical constraints interacted to shape pathways within this contested academic field. In summary, multilingual upbringings positively predisposed lecturers towards African languages, despite apartheid policies suppressing their use in curricula. Later tertiary studies fueled commitments to affirming subjugated epistemologies. However, English dominance persists at universities, creating ongoing barriers despite progressive policies.

Furthermore, applying Bourdieu's concepts showed lecturers' habitus, informed by formative experiences, oriented them towards advancing African language education. Strategic leveraging of capital enabled entering academia and gradually legitimizing African language teaching and research. Within the hierarchical academic field, lecturers' small acts of resistance have slowly increased acknowledgement of African languages. This study's limitations include the small qualitative sample. Future researchers should incorporate more participants across diverse settings and newer lecturers without apartheid experiences. The recommendations include universities directly allocating resources towards multilingual curriculum development, materials production, and research opportunities to strengthen African language education. Academia must also better recognize lecturers' community engagement efforts to revitalize subjugated knowledges.

In conclusion, this study provides insights into lecturers' efforts in establishing African language higher education amidst complex sociolinguistic transitions in South Africa, informing policies and practices to empower historically marginalized languages within institutions.

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