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State of the Art
Migrants' Relational Experiences with the Welfare State at the Street Level: A Focus on the Role of Language

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While previous research has highlighted the significant role of language in conditioning migrants' access to key institutions of the welfare state, the question of how individual migrants experience linguistic disadvantage has been less in focus. Drawing on a relational approach, the article moves beyond the idea of language barriers as a static structure of (in)equality or a matter of individual shortcomings. It demonstrates how language policies and language ideologies, and their entanglements with more general trends in welfare policies and ideologies, shape migrants' relational experiences with the welfare states and their representatives, and what are the implications of such interactions – or the lack of interaction. Empirically, it builds on qualitative data collected in Belgium and Finland, showing how language barriers and discrimination can result in Kafkaesque administrative processes that produce both material and affective hardship for migrants in these national contexts.

Keywords: Language, migrants, relational approach, street-level, welfare state.

Introduction

The emerging but scarce literature investigating the production of social asymmetries through language in the context of migration related diversity has highlighted the challenge that managing diversity represents for welfare state institutions that implement public policies, especially in conditions of chronic underfunding and understaffing of these institutions (Csata and Marácz, 2021; Scheibelhofer *et al.*, 2021). In her paper juxtaposing the perceptions of intra-European migrants and street-level institutional actors, Holzinger (2020) shows how the neglect and downplaying of, and insufficient attention to the challenges posed by diversity for institutional strategies may lead to linguistic discrimination. Furthermore, linguistic discrimination may also take the form of an institutional strategy and become a manner of contesting migrants' deservingness of, and access to social rights in an atmosphere critical towards migration and migrants (also Ratzmann, 2021). In such strategies the dominant language functions as a source and medium of symbolic power, which serves to privilege some groups and exclude others (Johansson and Śliwa, 2016; Netto *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, scholarly debates have also pointed to the transformative potential of linguistic diversity in welfare institutional contexts defined by multilingualism as an active social practice that counteracts different forms of subordination (Hall and Valdiviezo, 2020; Gustafsson *et al.*, 2023).

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The question of how individual migrants experience and make sense of linguistic disadvantage and linguistic discrimination remains largely unaddressed in research (see however, e.g. Scheibelhofer *et al.*, 2020). In this article, we address this gap and argue that language can play a key role in migrants' experiences of undeservingness and non-citizenship, while also forming a substantial barrier to social rights. By introducing a relational approach, we move beyond the idea of language related solely to individual capacities, rather recognising the lived experiences of local enactment of policies and practices of language at the street-level (see also Simola *et al.,* in this thematic section). In this view, linguistic disadvantage is not a mere matter of institutional strategies, but also constructed in human interaction or lack thereof.

Empirically, we build on qualitative data collected as part of two different research projects in two officially bi- or tri-lingual countries that differ in welfare regimes as well as in their manner of managing multilingualism: Belgium and Finland (see Simola, 2021; see Nordberg, 2020). We draw on two constructed cases that display observations that arise in and travers different contexts of welfare practice in the two countries: unemployment services in Belgium and social and health care services in Finland. Despite their very distinct migration status and background, what all research participants in the two studies have in common is the experience of socio-economic vulnerability, which made many of them search for support of welfare state institutions in their countries of residence. This way, they were also exposed to welfare policies that in neoliberal spirit increasingly stress individuals' self-responsibility for managing social risks and advocating their own 'cases' vis-à-vis welfare institutions regardless of their linguistic capacities to do so (Scheibelhofer *et al.,* 2021; Ying, 2022).

A relational lens on linguistic disadvantage in welfare institutional encounters

Previous research has highlighted the significant role of language in conditioning migrants' access to key institutions of the welfare state, to local labour markets (Johansson and Śliwa, 2016), education (Piller, 2016), social and health care (Holzinger, 2020; Buzungu and Rugkåsa, 2023), and other arenas in which welfare policies are locally enacted. In some countries welfare state institutions have adopted measures such as interpreter and translation services, multilingual information, and digital support to promote accessibility for a linguistically diverse group of users, and there are also examples of how welfare institutions benefit from the multilingual background of their practitioners (Andersson, 2022). In some others, the specific linguistic needs of migrants have largely gone neglected (Mowbray, 2017; Hirvonen and Kinnunen, 2021). Whether such measures are adopted or not is contingent on available resources and the capacities and competencies of service users and providers, but it is also a clear matter of policy approach to linguistic diversity (Blommaert *et al.*, 2005; De Schutter and Robischoud, 2015). Through language policies linguistic disadvantage is linked to other forms of inequality, which highlights the intersecting challenges of linguistic accessibility and social justice (Piller, 2016).

In this article, we aim to look beyond an understanding of language barriers as a static structure of (in)equality or a matter of individual shortcomings. From a relational perspective, the state does not exist as a thing, but rather the state and its institutions are seen as themselves shaped through everyday action and relational contestations

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(Bondi, 2008; Hunter, 2015). Along this line of thought, a relational understanding of state institutions also challenges the idea of concepts like neoliberalism and welfare policy as determining entities (Dobson, 2015). Instead, Hunter (2015) sees the state as differentiated and changeable, calling for analyses that recognise the lived enactments of exclusionary policies and practice, thus bringing together the discursive with lived experience.

Indeed, Dobson (2015: 688) argues for the fruitfulness of rethinking the relation between the individual and the broader social context (also Fortier, 2016). While the discursive level shapes the perception of disadvantaged groups and typically identifies them as undeserving (Schram, 2015; Feldman, 2019; Ratzmann and Sahraoui, 2021), policy is enacted in ambiguous, conflictual, and emotional interaction and local negotiations between people and their ideas (Dobson, 2015: 147; Hunter, 2015). That way, the enactment of language policy and practices also impact on the ways in which, ideas and ideologies materialise in the lives of individuals who encounter – on an asymmetrical basis – institutional actors enacting policies on the street-level (Lewis, 2000; Hunter, 2015; see also Jensen and Danneris, 2019).

By adopting this relational lens, in this article we address interactive institutional encounters where experiences of linguistic disadvantage become linked to experiences of misrecognition, undeservingness, and lack of substantial citizenship. Importantly, linguistic justice is here not viewed as a mere matter of migrants' ability to understand and communicate fluently in the language of the administration, but also pertaining to their needs, as humans, to have their perspectives heard and understood, and being given consideration for the sake of their sense of dignity (Simola *et al.*, 2024, in this thematic section). This means giving serious consideration to people's lived (emotional) experiences when seeking to trace the workings of power (Anderson, 2014: 8; see also Jakimow, 2022).

Data and methods

Empirically, we build on data collected as part of two distinct studies carried out in two different countries, Belgium and Finland. Both studies had a broad focus on migration, citizenship, and local welfare state encounters in a context of precarious labour market situations, but they were conducted independently with different aims and research designs. For this article, we have analysed data from six research participants, three from each national context. The data was selected based on the criteria that issues related to linguistic disadvantage arose in the data as significant for the participants' experiences.

To report our analysis in a manner that allows highlighting our key observations regarding the participants' experiences of linguistic disadvantage, we have constructed two cases, one from each country/institutional context that builds on analyses of the fieldwork conducted with the six research participants. Constructed cases are cases built on a combination of data from various research participants, in this case constructed through a close reading of the materials to identify experiences related to language and presented as coherent stories. It helped us to bring to the fore the experiences and perspectives of several participants without compromising their anonymity (Skorpen *et al.*, 2009; 411), in a situation when the material draws on narrated trajectories and stories from everyday life, rather than interviews accounts of single events and experiences. Notably, in both studies the experiences and feelings related to language were consistent among the participants whose stories were used to construct the cases. The quotes included in the

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paper have either been transcribed directly from English or translated from Finnish transcriptions to English by the authors. All names are pseudonyms and details have been anonymised to protect the participants' identities.

The second author collected the data for the Belgian case as part of a research project that investigated young European Union (EU) citizens' acquiescence to live and work under precarious conditions in another EU country (Simola, 2021). The data includes in-depth interviews carried out in 2014–2015 with university-educated young adults (twenty-three to thirty-four years old) from different EU countries who had moved to the Belgian capital to work but had subsequently experienced unemployment and worked under precarious arrangements of various kinds. Because the participants were often trapped in insecure, temporary, and/or non-wage forms of work, most of them lived through periods of insufficient or no income and were often in need of income support. However, within the Belgian unemployment insurance scheme labour 'activation' policies include stringent work-related conditionality rulings. Furthermore, at the time of the study, the Belgian government had recently launched policies that sought to restrict the conditions of social entitlements for foreign EU citizens in particular (Simola, 2018), and the publicity around these policies increased suspicion towards all intra-EU migrants (Lafleur and Stanek, 2016: 112–114).

The constructed case from Belgium relates to **the context of unemployment services**. It draws on the analysis of experiences of three young adults from Finland who participated in this study. They all recounted in the interview their past or on-going experiences of unemployment and administrative struggles related to the questioning of their eligibility for unemployment benefits in Belgium. Whether or not they were able to provide sufficient proof of employment corresponding to the multifarious conditionality rulings varied: One of the three participants was deemed eligible to unemployment benefits after a process that lasted nine months, one of them was deemed ineligible to unemployment benefits and social assistance after a process of six months, while the last one gave up the process before the final decision. All the three participants had inadequate knowledge of French and Dutch. The interviews with them were conducted in Finnish.

To comprehend EU migrants' struggles within the unemployment administration, it is important to note that this structure is complex. Jobseekers need to deal with three separate bodies. In the Brussels Capital Region these are: *Actiris* – a network of street-level employment offices responsible of labour activation and support of job seeking; *Capac* – a street-level office responsible of receiving the unemployment benefit applications and paying the eventual unemployment benefits; and National Employment Office (*ONEM*) – responsible for unemployment benefit decisions and controlling and evaluating jobseekers' efforts to find work. The Brussels Capital Region is an officially bilingual administrative region, where public officers are obliged by law to offer service in French and Dutch. However, today it is a superdiverse metropolitan area, which everyday realities do not correspond to the two traditional linguistic communities (Janssens, 2008). While the institutions with scarce resources obviously cannot attend to everyone's specific linguistic needs in such an environment, it is striking how, at the time of the study (2014–2015), the regional administrative bodies were turning a blind eye to the prevalent linguistic diversity and the legitimacy of language related needs altogether. Only since 2018, there has been a limited number of social interpreters available for the job seekers' first few interviews at *Actiris*, assisting in nine languages, including English. *Actiris* has also produced a series of

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YouTube videos in multiple languages that explain the procedure and the documents required (residence permit, work permit), while also highlighting that *Actiris* offers service only in the official languages. The help now provided is explicitly based on the assumption that the customer will quickly acquire sufficient skills to be able to manage their future dealings with the unemployment administration in French or Dutch.

The Finnish case builds on data collected in 2013–2018 by the first author as part of a longitudinal ethnographic study on newcomer 'stay-at-home-mothers'' citizenisation in the capital region of Finland. This data includes in-depth interviews and observation diaries related to the participants' encounters with local welfare state institutions. While they were of different national backgrounds, the majority had a forced migrant background, and all of them used public social services due to a structurally vulnerable position in Finland.

The Finnish welfare state is characterised by an imaginary of socio-economic equality, building on an ethos of full employment and dual breadwinners. Welfare and employment policies are marked by the equal responsibilisation of men and women, also parents with small children, to actively aim for full-time labour market participation. Meanwhile, the restructuring of welfare services with increasing projectification and de-professionalisation of services has created a gap between policy ideals and everyday realities of professional welfare service support at the street-level (Nordberg, 2015, 2020).

Language policy in Finland differentiates between the national languages Finnish and Swedish, the separately mentioned languages Sámi, Romani, and sign languages, and all other languages (The Constitution of Finland, section seventeen). According to the constitution, languages used in public authority interaction are Finnish, Swedish, and in some cases Sámi. Other language speakers have the right to interpretation and translation in situations affecting their basic rights and when initiated by authorities. Hence, costs are covered by the state. However, this regulatory framework does not provide clear guidelines on the responsibilities to arrange interpreting nor to the qualifications of interpreters (Tallroth, 2012; Karinen *et al.*, 2020; Nordberg and Kara, 2022; Kara and Nordberg, 2023). In the study, participants who spoke basic English could access some information online but had to rely on interpreters in institutional encounters. However, particularly in healthcare settings interpreters were not always offered.

The Finnish constructed case plays out in **social and health care services**, a central bureaucratic arena for the research participants. The case is based on the analysis of interviews and observations with three women from North Africa, the Middle East, and Caucasia. At the time of fieldwork, they were mothers with small children outside paid work, regularly in need of maternity and child health care, and occasionally in need of social work and employment services. Their situations were defined by a temporal limbo, as they did not speak Finnish or Swedish well enough to see themselves finding a job when their parental leave was finished, yet could not attend language classes without child care. Thus, they all balanced between a decision to care for their children at home or place them in day care, potentially opening the door for further education and/or the labour market (Nordberg, 2020). One participant was highly educated, two had only basic education. Two of them were married while the third was a single parent, reflecting the diversity of the broader study. They all shared the experience of isolation from the majority society, an experience that was closely related to their insufficient knowledge of Finnish language. All interviews were initially interpreter-mediated, while later also English and very basic Finnish was used with two of the participants.

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Relational experiences of linguistic disadvantage and discrimination

The Belgian Case

Minna is a Finnish woman in her thirties with a master's degree in international politics and three years of prior work experience from Finland. She is fluent in English and in German but had very basic knowledge of French and none of Dutch prior to her move. She arrived in Brussels for an internship and her subsequent employment record was composed of temporary jobs and freelancing. She explains how she was, after some months, suddenly dismissed from a company in the French-speaking Wallonia:

> [E]ven though I did the actual work in German, they told me that I was not allowed to use German at the workplace because the others could not understand it ... [M]y direct manager ... I felt that his most important objective was always to show that he was the boss. So everything I did was wrong ... but because at that point my French was pretty bad, I could not defend myself in any way ... Then a few days before they sacked me, the manager ... gave me a paper in which he had defined how I could become 'more Belgian', that I should speak better French and adapt to the team ... And then I was asked to come to the CEO's office first thing in the morning and at tenam I was already unemployed ... it was a really hard experience. I never imagined that I could be fired. I've always been an overachiever and [...] I felt really lost. I cried for two days, although I didn't even like that job that much ...

Minna started a process of frantic job search and sent out hundreds of applications. Nevertheless, her unemployment lasted over a year, and she got in contact with the unemployment administration. During her first contact with *Actiris*, the officer told her that she should return with an interpreter, as her level of French was not sufficient. Yet, at the time, Minna did not have networks with people willing and able to act as interpreters, and she was neither able to pay for interpretation. Thus, she had to manage through the administrative processes by herself.

> Minna: It was quite horrible, I mean they can really make you lose your spirit and of course they make it really clear that you're a loser.
>
> Anna: Mm. How do they do that?
>
> Minna: Well first it's the language that is so bureaucratic and difficult to understand if you're not a native French-speaker. And I think they somehow take advantage of that, or at least they do not do anything to help you. They don't speak English, they are not allowed to speak English. [...] [Although] I speak some French [...] the unemployment bureaucracy is so complex, probably even for a native-speaker. [...] And then you must queue for five hours in some office [refers to Capac], and there when you try to make it clear that you're doing everything in your power to find work. And somehow no one believes you!

Minna realised that the officers sometimes declined communicating in English even though they had some knowledge of the language, which was in line with the policy guiding officers to offer service only in French and Dutch. At the same time, she felt that her insufficient knowledge of French positioned her in the eyes of the officers in the category of 'poorly integrated migrants', which conflicted her self-understanding as a highly qualified EU citizen, unemployed against her will. Minna repeatedly described difficulties in understanding and being understood as the key aspect defining her

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encounters with the floor-level officers, while the underresourcing of the unemployment administration also shaped her experience of certain humiliation. *Capac*, for instance, offers service in an enormous open office with hours-long queues, and the office is in one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Brussels – Gare du Nord. This was apt to reinforce Minna's sense of being deemed undeserving. Altogether, Minna's description of the bureaucratic process shows how the substantial communication problems, the dismissive and indifferent attitude of street-level officers, and the sense of rush in the actual service encounters provoked in her further feelings of anxiety, frustration, and powerlessness:

> Sometimes I managed with French – but it really depended on the officer – to explain this complex background of mine [. . .] My Belgian work experience was not enough, and then my work experience in Finland needed to be transferred here. [. . .] I had to have [all my old certificates and payslips] translated into French and pay all the translation costs, like 200 euros [. . .] And when I queued to the desk [in Capac] the officer was always different, and you always had to explain your case. And it is not only the fact that the system is complicated, but also the advice you get is often contradictory. So, they told me that the previous officer had been wrong, and I should do it differently. So, I really didn't know what to do, I had zero euro of money and I had to pay my bills, and once I just started to cry in there like "I have done everything you asked me to do and brought you every dam paper you asked me to bring, just tell me what to do!" And even after this whole process I still didn't know if I was entitled to this support or not.
>
> Anna: It sounds like you had a rough year . . .
>
> Minna: Yes, yes, I did. [. . .] That you must fight for your rights and to be heard. And, even though I consider myself as a relatively proactive and strong-willed person, I felt defeated and crushed in the face of all this . . .

Minna's feeling that no-one cared whether her rights and needs were met added to her experience of the process being chaotic. When the long process finally resulted in a negative benefit decision on grounds that Minna was not able to understand, the unprofessional advice she then received further reinforced her sense of lost dignity:

> When I received the decision from ONEM that I will not get any money from anywhere, at first, I just couldn't believe it. So, I called Eupen [a city in the Germanophone region of Belgium] because the officers speak German there. And the officer said just like: "yes, this is indeed the situation". That you should perhaps marry someone Belgian or maybe get pregnant, so in that case you might get something from the society. And then I asked like: "What should I do then?" And the officer said: "You could go to some church; they could probably give you some food".

On a material level, the denial of benefits undermined Minna's ability to continue her professional project in Belgium. However, she explained that working abroad was her dream and that she was not ready to give it up at that point. Thus, she lived through the year of unemployment by accumulating debt with family and friends. Finally, she found employment in a company where she worked for three years. However, in this company she was offered only temporary contracts, which kept her on guard, experiencing constant uncertainty. Though she described abusive working conditions, she felt unable to contest these conditions, because she desperately wanted her contract to be renewed to avoid unemployment. Finally, she had a work-related burnout, after which she decided to return to Finland. She found permanent employment with notably better conditions, but she described how feelings of mistrust and fear of failure followed her long after.

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The Finnish case

Layla is a Somali background woman with one child. She has a basic education and had worked as a shop owner in Somalia before she was forced to migrate. When we first met, she was in her late twenties and had been living in Finland for two years. She had a continuous residence permit, and her daughter Nida was one year old. Nida has special needs and Layla was afraid to go to public places with her, like playgrounds and parent-child groups. She had asked for help from the social welfare office but was denied help on grounds she did not understand. Only after another two years was she able to get a day-care place for her daughter and attend language classes. During Nida's first three years, Layla was very isolated due to her lack of local language skills, and the shame she felt among other parents due to Nida's behaviour in public. She felt that the public officials did not understand her situation.

> They told me that my child needs me at home to be with her, because she has these difficulties. But they don't understand how hard it is, and that to manage, I need someone here to help us. And if I don't learn the language, I can't help her with her schoolwork when she's older, and I can't talk to her friends.

Layla also experienced difficulties in interacting with health care workers, something which added to her sense of not being in control and being deemed undeserving as a mother and a citizen. In addition to her cognitive disability, Nida has another medical condition that requires regular care, something which led to stressful situations in which Layla not always felt safe:

> Layla: She's in a serious situation and I've been taking her to the health centre almost every day. They put a spray in her mouth, but I don't know what's wrong with her, I still don't know, but at night she can't breathe. They take blood samples several times a month, but I don't know what for and what the results are.
>
> Camilla: Have you asked for an interpreter to come with you?
>
> Layla: Only once, when I went to the doctor, was there an interpreter. He said she had anaemia and gave us a medicine, this spray. After that the interpreter never came again. They say you'll be fine with Finnish, it's important to learn Finnish, but I'm afraid that I'll do the wrong thing for my girl at home, because I don't have any idea what's wrong. She has had this problem for eight months. I am really tired.

The excerpt shows that despite the regulatory framework on public service interpreting pertaining, in practice the right to interpretation is conditional to the discretion of individual workers. Thus, being refused an interpreter caused anxiety and prevented Layla from being involved in care decisions regarding her daughter, while she also felt ashamed for not having learnt how to manage her every-day life in Finnish.

At one point of fieldwork, when Layla was deeply frustrated and worried, the researcher accompanied her to the local health care centre, together with an interpreter hired for the research project.

> We took a queue number and Layla and the interpreter quickly spoke to a helpful administrative secretary who understood the problem with the interpreter and that it was pointless for both the

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> doctor and Layla if they couldn't understand each other. She promised to make a note that Layla always needs an interpreter, but that it was impossible to arrange one for today's appointment. The secretary said that they always try to book an interpreter when there is a risk of misunderstanding, but she implied that it was the family's responsibility (observation diary).

It is unclear how Layla's language troubles could have gone unnoticed during her previous appointments, and the excerpt also raises the question how a person, who does not know the language, could be expected to understand their right to interpretation and translation.

One year later, Layla was pregnant again; the children's father lived abroad. Otherwise, her situation had not changed. She had tried to attend language classes, but it was difficult as Nida had been ill a lot. Layla shared more experiences of being left without interpretation, causing a sense of lacking respect for her right to self-sufficiency and a voice. Once, the researcher went with her to the maternity clinic, that time without an interpreter.

> Meeting at the clinic at eight forty-five am. The maternity care nurse has promised to book an interpreter, but the interpreter never arrives. The issue today is social insurance paperwork that Layla must bring to the social insurance office with a certificate of pregnancy. [. . .] There was sugar in her urine. She must go to another health care centre for a sugar load test. She receives a paper in Finnish with a telephone number. The nurse speaks fast in Finnish about how everything works. I think that she must realise that Layla doesn't understand anything, but she still has to say it all because it is part of the visit to do so. Layla looks at me like a question mark. I start explaining the same things to her in Finnish, in a slow and simple way. She understands [nodding and answering in simple, single words]. I ask the nurse if we can book the appointment right now, because it is not certain that she can do it herself in Finnish. "It has always worked", she says, explaining again in rapid Finnish. The nurse tells me that "we do not usually make these appointments for them". I asked why. She squirms a bit and says something about "not usually" (observation diary).

The researcher is given the role of an interpreter despite having no common linguistic background with Layla. The case of Layla shows how despite formal regulations on language rights and the academicisation and professionalisation of social and health care, in real situations these rights and privileges can go unfulfilled. Layla's experiences suggest that institutional practices around language, like interpreter access, may be determined by the needs of professionals, rather than the aim to guarantee the right to equal care and treatment. It is evident that this often leaves linguistically disadvantaged migrants abandoned, without real opportunities to understand, make their voices heard and participate in matters that affect them.

Concluding discussion

In this article we have brought to the fore some examples of how linguistic disadvantage is experienced by newcomers who find themselves in vulnerable situations and in need of welfare state support and services. Our analysis points to a key role of language in the experiences of arduous, even Kafkaesque, institutional processes that the newcomers feel unable to control and understand. We advance a relational approach that directs the analytical focus on the enactment of the policies and discursive frameworks in interactions

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between newcomers and the street-level welfare state actors. Presenting our constructed cases through this lens, we have shown how inability to understand and express oneself, combined with institutional actors' dismissive, indifferent, or powerless attitudes regarding such troubles, may lead to forceful experiences of powerlessness, undeservingness and lost dignity. At the same time, linguistic disadvantage can also produce lack of substantial citizenship in different national and institutional contexts and among migrants of very diverse backgrounds. While we do not wish to speculate about the motivations of street-level actors – a question not directly addressed in our studies (see however Scheibelhofer *et al*., 2021) – we have wanted to stress the importance of attending these lived experiences as such.

Our findings are in line with previous research showing how individual migrants in different national contexts face linguistic disadvantage that seems inherent to neo-liberal welfare states that have not sufficiently attended to the challenges posed by diversity (Ratzmann, 2021). The constructed cases from the Finnish and Belgian institutional and language policy context demonstrate how linguistic disadvantage produced in migrants' interaction with street-level welfare state actors may lead to disadvantages in other areas of life, too, which are directly related to resources such as education and employment, hence further reinforcing the economic hardship and marginalisation. The findings also resonate with studies showing how depicting migrants outside of paid work as undeserving or 'failed' citizens in public discourse, can make people stuck in stigmatised social categories that are reproduced in institutional encounters (Kampen *et al*., 2013). Yet, what a relational perspective for social policy debates on linguistic and social justice can add to these debates, is a view on how power and exclusionary policies enacted at the street-level are lived and experienced by migrants in and through the interaction with institutional actors representing the welfare state. It further helps to place such experiences in the wider context of people's lives and experiences in other spheres of life, and address their consequences not only on material, but also on social and emotional levels (see also Hunter, 2015; Dobson, 2015). Thus, by highlighting feelings such as powerlessness, frustration, humiliation, shame, and anxiety, we show how linguistic disadvantage in welfare state encounters may also have serious implications on migrants' wellbeing and life chances.

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Competing interests

The authors declare none.

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