

Spoken word choreographies in additional language learning practices in upper secondary school: Entanglements between languaging-and-dancing

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Abstract

There are calls for developing ways to teach language that can inspire and motivate students to study additional languages. While previous research has pointed toward benefits of arts-based activities in language learning, combining language and dance has mainly been studied with younger language learners. Contextualized within the course “Dance with language,” this study explores spoken word choreographies—word- and movement-based choreographies—that combine dance and the learning of Swedish as an additional language at a Finnish upper secondary school. The study engages with new materialist theories to understand languaging as an activity and relational, embodied, and material processes. Using diffractive analysis with comics-based research strategies, the analysis suggests that languaging-and-dancing become entangled through four doings: exploring, re-working, co-creating, and negotiating-and-switching. The spoken word choreographies offer a potentially valuable way to teach language in their move beyond students’ potential restrictions of vocabulary, structure, and grammar in the language to emphasize playfulness and creative explorations as part of language-learning processes. In conclusion, the study proposes that dancing and spoken word, and the combination thereof, bring specific qualities to creating smooth languaging spaces that embrace wild, playful, creative, and unpredictable forces and movements in language-learning practices.

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KEYWORDS

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Recent studies suggest that arts-based activities can support various areas of language learning, strengthen motivation, create enjoyment, and make language pedagogy creative, affective, and vibrant (e.g., Fleming, 2023; Jusslin et al., 2022; Waterhouse, 2021). Adding to this research, this study addresses the combination of language and dance through spoken word choreographies—word- and movement-based choreographies that connect elements of dance and spoken word—in upper secondary education. Spoken word¹ is an oral poetic performance art recited aloud rather than read on a page. It encourages playful language exploration, promotes expression, and offers freedom from language constraints, such as grammar and structure (Arribas, 2019; Burton & van Viegen, 2021; Curwood & Jones, 2022). However, spoken word combined with dance has not been investigated in language-educational settings. Dance can take many forms and styles and extends beyond learning steps, technique, or performing to an audience (Koff, 2021). Combining artistic expression and movements, dance is communicated and shaped through the body, in response to, for example, rhythm, music, or props (Gilbert, 2015). In the language-education field, dance is seemingly attracting researchers' attention (e.g., Greenfader et al., 2015; Sila & Lenard, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021), but teaching language with dance in secondary education is underexplored, and scholars call for more research (Paul & Redmond, 2013). This poses questions on the possible contributions of combining language and dance in secondary education and what effects might unfold in transdisciplinary language teaching.

This study explores spoken word choreographies in a course combining dance and the learning of Swedish as an additional language at a Finnish upper secondary school.² Finland has two official languages: 86.5% of the population has registered Finnish, while 5.2% have registered Swedish as their first language (Statistics Finland, 2022b). Swedish is mainly spoken along Finland's coast. The school is located in an inland city where Swedish is spoken only by 0.5% of the inhabitants (Statistics Finland, 2022a). Therefore, the students rarely encounter the language. The second national language (Swedish in Finnish-speaking schools) is a mandatory subject in primary and secondary education. Still, the interest in studying Swedish in upper secondary education decreases continuously at a national level.³ Moreover, there is an ongoing societal discussion about the mandatory status of Swedish as the second national language in school, given its low prevalence nationally. This raises questions on how Swedish language education should and could be developed, both regarding language policy and pedagogy (Härmälä & Marjanen, 2023). This study addresses the latter by exploring a teaching approach that could contribute to inspiring students to study Swedish.

Against this backdrop, the elective dance course, "Dance with language," was initiated by dance teacher Lotta (Author 2), aiming to motivate students to study Swedish. The study focuses on analyzing spoken word choreographies, a key activity in the course. Experimenting with the logic of spoken word, the choreographies were created in relations between human (e.g., students and teacher) and nonhuman bodies (e.g., texts, films, and papers), intermingling Swedish and Finnish language use throughout the creative, collaborative processes. The fluid boundaries between language(s), art forms, and bodies caught our attention. Questions about how languaging and dancing became entangled—that is, became mutually constituted (Barad, 2007)—in such creative processes set the current study in motion. To acknowledge the relational, embodied, and material aspects of languaging and dancing, we engage with new materialist theories (Barad, 2003, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013).⁴ In this theoretical understanding, languaging refers to doings that involve embodied human beings, materials, places, and spaces (Toohey, 2019). Our exploration is also fueled by a curiosity of what languaging can become in combination with arts-based activities. Against this background, the following analytical questions emerged:

- RQ1. How do languaging and dancing become entangled in the spoken word choreographies?
- RQ2. How can spoken word choreographies contribute to additional language learning practices in upper secondary education?

FROM LANGUAGE TO LANGUAGING

To approach language and language learning as languaging, we engage with new materialist theories, especially the theories of Barad (2003, 2007, 2010) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2013). With their recent entries into applied linguistics and language education research (e.g., Bangou et al., 2020; Guerretaz et al., 2021; Pennycook, 2016; Toohey, 2019; Toohey et al., 2020), these theories radically shake how language and language learning are understood, suggesting that language is distributed across humans, spaces, and materials (Pennycook, 2016).

These theoretical approaches resonate with other advancements in applied linguistics, theorizing language as languaging—that is, as a doing (see e.g., Garcia & Wei, 2014; Pennycook, 2010, 2018; Toohey, 2019). The notion of languaging has been used in various ways in the applied linguistics literature. It has been used to refer to a “process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (Swain, 2006, p. 97), a view connected to Vygotskian thinking of language as a mediating tool for human cognition and thought. Another use of the term has been inspired by the ideas of human cognition not as an individual property but rather as enacted—that is, enactivism (Varela et al., 1991/2016)—and emphasizes embodied participation in different “languaging activities” (Thibault, 2017, p. 76). Further, researchers have added the prefix “trans” to emphasize the multilingual and multimodal nature of meaning making in today’s world (Wei, 2018).

Recent studies using new materialist and posthumanist approaches understand languaging as activities involving not only embodied human beings but also materials, places, and spaces; hence, favoring the active verb form “languaging” (Pennycook, 2018; Toohey, 2019). In this thinking, language is inseparable from its materiality and from the assemblages that it is part of. The theories of Barad (2003, 2007) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2013) fuel our understanding of languaging as an activity not restricted to humans but as a process happening in the entanglements between human and nonhuman bodies. There are similarities—yet also differences (Hein, 2016)—in their philosophical thinking in emphasizing a relational worldview. Yet, few studies have used these theoretical approaches in language education research, although the number is growing (e.g., Bangou et al., 2020; Thorne et al., 2021; Toohey, 2019; Toohey et al., 2020). The research has mostly engaged with Deleuzo–Guattarian perspectives, and the Baradian perspective has not been equally explored (Gurney & Demuro, 2023). Next, we unpack how we understand languaging using these theories.

Languaging as intra-acting

We understand languaging as intra-acting, building on Toohey’s (2019) proposal that the verb form of languaging “may be more appropriate for a view in which language users (all of whom are material) are in intra-action with many other materials, all of whom are intra-acting and becoming” (p. 944). Intra-action is a core concept of Barad (2007), whose theory moves beyond a human-centered stance, suggesting that knowledge is created in relations between human and nonhuman bodies. For Barad (2010), entanglements are not about “the intertwining of two (or more) states/entities/events, but a calling into question of the very nature of two-ness” (p. 251). Being ontologically different from interactions requiring the existence of independent entities, intra-actions do not separate subjects and objects and happen in the relations emerging in the in-betweens. Thus, these theoretical notions decenter humans as the center of the world, doing things to materials; humans and nonhumans become agentic in languaging processes.

Nevertheless, the critical stance toward human centeredness is important to discuss in relation to language use and learning. The acknowledgment of the agency of nonhumans neither indicates getting rid of the human nor that the material is privileged over the human (Barad, 2003, 2007). Hence, it is not about an either/or distinction (either humans or nonhumans), but a both/and (both humans and nonhumans). This view has been overlooked in applied linguistics and language education research due to cognitive and discursive-laden perspectives. For example, an intra-active approach to language pedagogy recognizes the relations between humans and nonhumans and their mutual transformations (Guerrettaz et al., 2021). It emphasizes that languaging is material and emerges from materiality (de Freitas & Curinga, 2015; MacLure, 2013). As such, this perspective offers ways to acknowledge the nonhuman bodies that matter in languaging.

Languageing as striated and smooth spaces

We engage with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987/2013) notions of striated and smooth spaces to explore the effects of the entanglements of languageing and dancing on language pedagogy. Understanding languageing as both striated and smooth spaces, the striated spaces include syntactic, semantic, and phonological aspects (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013), while the smooth spaces include "the creative, divergent, or 'wild' ways people actually use language" (Toohey, 2019, p. 943). As such, "striated spaces are hierarchical, rule-intensive, strictly bounded and confining, whereas smooth spaces are open, dynamic and allow for transformation to occur" (Tamboukou, 2008, p. 360). These spaces are also relevant for dancing: Striated spaces can encompass structured movements, technique, and dance styles, while smooth spaces can entail improvisations, spontaneous movements, and explorations. The spaces are, however, contrasted with each other, with Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2013) reminding us that the spaces exist in mixture. A smooth space is constantly translated into a striated space, which, in turn, is reversed into a smooth space. Thus, the qualities of languageing as simultaneously striated and smooth produce opportunities for communicative doings, intra-actions, and explorations (Korpinen, 2024; Toohey, 2019). Reading Barad's (2007) and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987/2013) theories through each other provides opportunities to consider languageing as simultaneously abstract, ideational, embodied, and material (see MacLure, 2013; Toohey, 2019).

A performative approach to languageing

Understanding languageing as intra-acting and striated and smooth spaces emphasizes a performative approach, suggesting that knowledge/knowledging are constantly performed anew, differently, and always in-becoming (Østern et al., 2023). Seen from both Baradian and Deleuzo–Guattarian (1987/2013) perspectives and consistent with the aforementioned conceptions of languageing, languageing is a becoming, indicating that language "is not a finished product—a completed thing, object, or determined set of practices—but rather a *confluence of practices, ideas and artifacts caught at particular times and places*" (Gurney & Demuro, 2023, pp. 135–136, emphasis in original). Moving beyond a pedagogy that seeks control and predictability, this theoretical approach enables perceiving language pedagogy as emergent and unpredictable (Guerrettaz et al., 2021).

By putting these theoretical notions of languageing to work, this study attends to relations and tensions when language(s), art forms, bodies (human and nonhuman), and spaces come together in spoken word choreographies. While we recognize that the Baradian and Deleuzo–Guattarian theories have distinct differences (Hein, 2016), we submit that reading them together can become productive for language pedagogy, as they provide opportunities to think of languageing as material, embodied, and relational (Gurney & Demuro, 2023).

DANCE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Although not new in educational and artistic practices, the integration of dance and language learning has only recently garnered more attention in empirical research. Research has mainly focused on younger children. Studies have found that creative movement improved vocabulary in preschoolers (Sila & Lenard, 2020) and second-language speaking skills in primary students (Greenfader et al., 2015). In contrast, studies using similar theoretical approaches to languaging as in this study have unpacked how integrating language and dance in primary education involved co-exploring alternative ways of communicating (Korpinen & Anttila, 2022) and can activate smooth languaging through playfully exploring words, phrases, and complex verbal constructions and developing a sense of grammar (Korpinen, 2024). Introducing dance in second-language learning can also facilitate embodied interaction among linguistically diverse students (Anttila, 2019) and open possibilities for immersing children in language and culture (Zhang et al., 2021).

Fewer studies have focused on secondary students, with some exceptions. Paul and Redmond (2013) found that Hispanic dances (e.g., salsa) embedded language learning in a cultural context and supported high school students' intercultural competence and language skills. Additionally, dancing can be part of students' language-learning practices, even without an explicit combination with language instruction. Adult students "dance" by using multiple semiotic resources to communicate ideas in intercultural contexts (Nguyen & Pennycook, 2018) and combine sounds with dance moves to resolve linguistic issues in peer communication (Harrison & Chen, 2021).

To summarize, research suggests that combining dance with language learning can support different language skills. Research that theoretically resonates with our study presents a holistic language-learning approach, by embedding language use in broader communicative practices and showing that dance enables playful explorations of language. Older students noticeably remain an understudied group. Pedagogically combining dance and language learning does not need to be restricted to children, as some studies illustrate that dancing can come spontaneously to older language learners. As such, the current study contributes knowledge about what happens if dance is combined with upper secondary school students' additional language-learning practices.

SPOKEN WORD CHOREOGRAPHIES

With roots in outside-of-school practices, spoken word poetry has entered classrooms, attracting researchers' attention due to its pedagogical potential. Fisher (2005) stated that "what began as a grassroots effort to share poetry and writing in coffee houses and small performance spaces is becoming a culture for young people [as they] are listening for the words that incite and inspire" (p. 128). Spoken word combines poetry and performance, including writing and orally performing your poetic texts for an audience (Burton & van Viegen, 2021; Curwood & Jones, 2022). The art form tends to encompass rhythm, rhymes, repetition, improvisation, and wordplay, often communicating strong messages.

Spoken word and dance share many similarities, for example, rhythm, repetition, and improvisation. The body is highly important in spoken word and dance (Burton & van Viegen, 2021); both activate the whole body using vocal musculature and sound, lungs and breathing, eyes and gaze, small or large body movements, or even being in stillness.

We use the notion of spoken word choreography for this cross-artistic combination, recognizing that the combination can be executed in many ways: writing individually or collaboratively, composing texts with various sources, creating movements individually or collaboratively, using text as voiceover or recited aloud by the dancers, and performing live on stage or recording the performance. The notion of choreography, therefore, permeates the whole phenomenon of spoken word choreographies, including all human and nonhuman bodies that contribute to producing them. Thus, we understand choreography as a relational practice, expanded beyond the limits of dance (Østern, 2018).

THE BECOMING AND ANALYSIS OF THE SPOKEN WORD CHOREOGRAPHIES

The idea to combine dance and Swedish language had lingered in Lotta's mind long before she proposed the course "Dance with language" to the principal at the upper secondary school where she worked as a dance teacher. The Swedish language and dance had strong connections for her, as she learned the language through dancing during her youth. For her, it was a matter of asking "what happens if" (Taylor, 2018) language and dance are combined, which methodologically can be understood as an intravention. Diverging from interventions that draw conclusions on pre- and postmeasures, understanding the dance course and its related research as an intravention means that we did not strive to determine whether dance improved students' language learning. Our interest lies in what happens if languaging and dancing come together and what they can contribute to pedagogical practices.

Lotta invited Sofia (Author 1), Kaisa (Author 3), and Niina (Author 4) to do research within the course. They were currently working on the research project *Embodied language learning through the arts* (2021–2024), and Lotta's what-if question was intriguing to them. Lotta was an artistic partner in the project and had previously collaborated on a similar project with Sofia (e.g., Jusslin & Höglund, 2021).

The upper secondary school was arts oriented and offered multiple arts subjects (e.g., dance, music, visual art, and theater) that anyone could attend without being enrolled in a specific study program. The course, held in 2021, invited participants regardless of language or dance background, emphasizing that the most important aspect was an interest in movement and language learning. The course encompassed 20 dance lessons. Lotta spoke primarily Swedish during the lessons, often repeating instructions and questions in Finnish to aid students' understanding. Creating spoken word choreographies turned into a central course activity.

Altogether, 19 students participated in the course and gave informed consent to participate in the study. They came from all years (Years 1–3). When reporting their dance and language backgrounds, most students had dance experience, whereas four students had no or only minor experiences in dance. Most students studied Swedish according to the intermediate-level syllabi, and four students according to the advanced-level syllabi. The students reported varied attitudes toward the Swedish language, but nobody reported disinterest in Swedish, likely contributing to their participation in the course.

The spoken word choreography activity

The spoken word choreography activity lasted six lessons of 75 minutes each (see Table 1). Although spoken word typically involves writing your own poetic text, Lotta experimented with the logic of spoken word. First, the students watched the dance documentary *Juck* (phonetically "juk [thrust]") as homework and chose three Swedish sentences each from it that spoke to them. *Juck* is a dance and performance group based in Sweden, working with expanding notions of femininity and gender in their artistic work.⁵ In their film (17 minutes), the dancers—dressed in schoolgirl uniforms—dance with aggressive movements, expressing empowerment, and claiming space. The film included voiceovers, poetically expressing issues of femininity; for example, "Femininitet är ett ord som vi kan fylla med precis vad vi vill [Femininity is a word that we can fill with whatever we want]." Lotta chose the dance documentary because she wanted to show how dance can engage with societal issues. She wanted to "boldly shake" the students and create a dialogue about empowerment, personal space, and equality. When introducing this homework assignment, Lotta had not planned to work with spoken word choreographies. The idea came when she considered how to work with the sentences the students had chosen. As such, the sentences chosen from *Juck* started the spoken word choreography activity.

Lesson 1 served as an introduction to spoken word choreographies, which was unfamiliar for most of the students. After discussing the experiences of watching *Juck*, Lotta showed two examples to give an idea of what spoken word choreographies could be.⁶ After having written the chosen sentences on

TABLE 1 Overview of the spoken word choreography teaching sequence.

Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5	Lesson 6
Discussing the dance documentary <i>Juck</i>	Creating a spoken word choreography based on the movement materials	Rehearsing the choreography	Rehearsing the choreography in the chosen space with the audio recordings or read-alouds	Video recording performances	Watching spoken word choreographies
Watching two examples of spoken word choreographies		Choosing a space for the choreography	Audio recording sentences		
Writing sentences on paper		Choosing how to combine dance and text (recording or read-aloud)			
Individually creating movement material to the sentences		Choosing costumes			
Creating student groups randomly		Audio recording sentences			
Placing the groups' sentences in an order					

paper, the students started individually exploring movements in relation to them. Next, they created four groups of four to five students and arranged the groups' sentences in a specific order, assembling a poetic text. During Lessons 2–4, the student groups choreographed their individual movements to a group choreography. They moved around in the school to find a specific place for their choreographies, created voiceovers of their poetic texts, and chose costumes for the performances. The spoken word choreographies were video recorded during Lesson 5, and finally, the students watched the video recordings during Lesson 6.

Assembling data

There was an ongoing process of assembling data in intra-active relations among the students, the teacher, researchers, material objects (e.g., sentences, speakers, audio recordings, costumes, and face masks), and places (e.g., in and outside the dance studio; Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020). The lessons were recorded with a GoPro camera, placed on a tripod when the students worked in the dance studio or worn as a body-mounted action camera by Lotta when moving between the student groups as they worked in different places in the school. It was difficult to record in these different places in the school, as other students moved in such areas. Therefore, we did not have video recordings of the student groups' whole creative processes of creating spoken word choreographies, which can be considered a limitation of the study. The video recordings focused on the process of creating the spoken word choreographies, whereas the spoken word choreography products also resulted in video recordings. We also took photographs of various parts of the process.

Other data encompassed the students' diaries (mainly in Finnish, but also in Swedish), written throughout the course. The purpose of the diaries was both for the students' learning and research. They wrote about, for example, Swedish language use and learning, dancing, and spoken word choreographies. Twelve students participated in group interviews that were audio recorded (four students per group). The groups received questions they were asked to discuss without the teachers and researchers. Students not participating in the interviews (e.g., those who could not attend that lesson) wrote about similar questions in their diaries.

In addition to these data, our embodied engagements in the researched practice are understood as embodied data (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020). As the teacher of the course, Lotta engaged bodily in all lessons, establishing personal relationships with the students. Sofia participated in two spoken word choreography lessons and discussed the making of the spoken word choreographies with the students in Swedish. As she was an "outsider" in the school, she was still rather unfamiliar to them.⁷ Lotta and Sofia wrote diaries based on their experiences, thoughts, and feelings during the course. Our researcher-bodies, memories, feelings, and experiences are thus resources in the research; we are part of the data (Østern et al., 2023). The analysis started when the course was completed, and the data were generated.

Analytical engagements

To explore how languaging and dancing became entangled in the spoken word choreographies, we performed a diffractive analysis with comics-based research (CBR) strategies. *Diffractive analysis* means reading theory and data through each other, and the notion of diffraction can be metaphorically explained as waves (e.g., water, light, or sound) that "combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading out of waves when they encounter an obstruction" (Barad, 2007, p. 28). More specifically, diffractive analysis focuses on differences to explore their effects, rather than focusing on sameness and identifying patterns, codes, categories, or themes (Mazzei, 2014). As such, a diffractive approach enabled us to identify how languaging and dancing became entangled in ways that made a difference in the spoken word choreographies.

First, we collectively went through and discussed all the data, constantly engaging with the theory presented earlier. We identified events in the data where languaging and dancing seemingly became entangled (e.g., the creation of voiceovers). Next, entanglements can be made visible by making agential cuts in the data (Barad, 2007). We made agential cuts to "freeze" the events, create "a temporary separation between entanglements" (Bozalek & Fullagar, 2022, p. 30), and explore differences in the entanglements between languaging and dancing. The agential cuts were enacted in the different data types (e.g., video recordings and group interviews), which became connected through each other in a process of breaking them open and bringing them together (Barad, 2007; Mazzei, 2014). This process led us toward four doings in which languaging and dancing became entangled, which all authors agreed upon.

Such an analysis was not, however, a straightforward process without difficulties, partly due to the critical question of what constitutes languaging, which is a relevant—and somewhat difficult—question when studying languaging as material and embodied doings (Gurney & Demuro, 2023). We grappled with such difficulties by revisiting theories and data collectively to (un)make sense of them. We sought to explicitly pinpoint how humans and nonhumans made a difference in the languaging and dancing processes. Nevertheless, analyzing and reporting the entanglements in merely verbal language became insufficient, leading us to work with CBR strategies (Kuttner et al., 2018, 2021) to further analyze and showcase the embodied, material, and verbal elements of the entanglements. Comics have similarities with graphic transcripts previously used in research on interaction (e.g., Skedsmo, 2021). They can manipulate time and rhythm and communicate complex ideas, doings, and narratives in other ways than text alone can provide (Kuttner et al., 2018, 2021). Comics offer "nonlinear, tangential, and multilayered possibilities for conveying complex information and a multiplicity of perspectives"



FIGURE 1 Illustration of comics conventions.

(Kuttner et al., 2018, p. 401), which, we argue, mixes well with a diffractive approach that is non-hierarchical and focuses on exploring differences that make a difference. Additionally, comics can be created with multiple types of data (Kuttner et al., 2021).

After having identified four doings in which languaging and dancing became entangled in the data, the CBR strategies allowed us to think differently about the agential cuts we had already made. Comics are a way to report the data and analyses in publications, but for us, they became an important way to enact and further develop the diffractive analysis with multiple types of data. Sofia and Kaisa worked collaboratively with creating the comic strips. They selected data that stood out in events where languaging and dancing became entangled, creating “temporary separations” (Bozalek & Fullagar, 2022, p. 30) between the entanglements. Selecting data for the comics was part of the analytical process, since it meant a revisiting of already made agential cuts, and making new ones, in the various data types: Photographs and screenshots from videos to showcase embodied actions and material aspects and quotes from interviews and diaries to give voice to the participants.⁸ The data selection meant that some parts were included while some were excluded (e.g., we worked with data from all students, but only created comics from videos of three groups), which resonates with comics’ nonlinear and multilayered approach. During this process, Sofia and Kaisa analytically discussed what effects the entanglements might have. Once the comics were drafted, the analytical segments were written in connection to each comic strip. Diffracting and analyzing the comics was an iterative process. The comics were drafted, discussed, analyzed, evaluated, and revised in multiple iterations, until all authors agreed that the comics and related analytical segments were completed.

This iterative comics-creation process made visible aspects that might otherwise not have been made visible. Thus, the comics serve both to enact and report the analysis (Kuttner et al., 2018, 2021). They showcase the four doings including verbal communication, embodied actions, and material surroundings, and provide contextual information (e.g., location) of the spoken word choreographies (Kuttner et al., 2021). However, the comics are not exact records of linear events (Laurier, 2014) but showcase events that made a difference when languaging and dancing became entangled.

The analysis resulted in four doings in which languaging-and-dancing⁹ became entangled in the spoken word choreographies. Figure 1 exemplifies our use of speech bubbles and narration boxes. For language ideological reasons, we show the original use of Swedish and Finnish languages in the comics: gray text for Finnish and black text for Swedish. In the sidebars, we present English translations and connect them to the comics with asterisks (*). When reporting interview data, blurred black-and-white screenshots from the video recordings serve as the background to illustrate student discussions and the context of the dance studio during the interviews.

ENTANGLEMENTS BETWEEN LANGUAGING-AND-DANCING

Next, we unpack how languaging-and-dancing became entangled through four doings in the spoken word choreographies: exploring movements with sentences from *Juck*, re-working sentences-

The students discussed their experiences of watching *Juck* and wrote their three chosen sentences from *Juck* on paper, before exploring movements with the sentences (see Figure 2). Many students started first spontaneously translating the sentences from Swedish into Finnish. The entries into exploring movements with the sentences were imbued by possibilities and friction, seemingly related to students' previous dance experiences. Trying out and improvising movement materials happened quickly for students with previous dance experience. As they explored different movement possibilities, sentences-and-movements became entangled. For example, the sentence "Problemet är att vi inte alltid förstår det [The problem is that we don't always understand it]" (see Figure 2) produced soft and slow movements, while a sentence like "Jag är stark [I am strong]" called for stronger movements (see Figure 4), such as flexing biceps or clenching fists, and intra-actions (Barad, 2007) with the space, such as stomping on the floor. The exploration happened through constantly (re)visiting and (re)reading the sentences.

In contrast, there was friction when students with little or no dance experience began exploring movements with the sentences, as discussed in the group interview (see Figure 2). Not having the same embodied knowledge of dancing as their more experienced peers, they entered a somewhat new or unknown space. The space for creating and improvising movements with sentences was seemingly meant to be smooth, with creative and open-ended possibilities for doing movements. Nonetheless, perhaps it had some confining boundaries of a striated space (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013), as some students experienced challenges in creating and improvising movements with the sentences. Their movements lingered, emerging from a rather long moment of being and standing in stillness.

The negotiations of different interpretations and expressions of the sentences happened individually but in relation to the social, material, and embodied practice in the dance studio. For example, the students saw, sensed, and experienced how peers and the space of the dance studio intra-acted and how sentences-and-movements became entangled in the movement explorations. Further, the entanglements of sentences-and-movements encompassed the words—or semantic constants (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013)—of *Juck*, and intertextuality and understanding of the Swedish sentences became prerequisites when working with the sentences. However, the students' movements were seemingly not influenced by the aggressive, harsh, and fierce movement material used in *Juck*. There were no humping and aggressive movements, and the students' expression of femininity became softer than in *Juck*. Using movement material from *Juck* was not the assignment, but it was possible to do so. The contrast between the movement material in *Juck* and the doings in the dance studio was perhaps produced by the students' experiences of perplexity and strangeness when watching *Juck*, as they discussed in the whole group discussion at the beginning of Lesson 1 (see Figure 2).

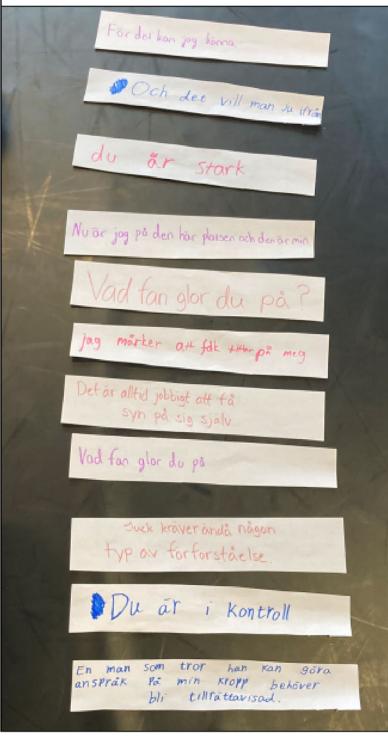
Taken together, the entanglements between languaging and dancing when exploring movements with sentences from *Juck* produced iterative movements and intertextual relations. They were produced through revisiting, (re)reading, and (re)negotiating the sentences to explore movements.

Reworking sentences-and-movements with(in) spoken word choreography


The comic strip in Figure 3 presents choreographic reworking processes from individual sentences-and-movements to collaborative small group choreographies.

During Lesson 2, the students assembled the individual sentences, which they had composed into a poetic text at the end of Lesson 1 (see Figure 3), and associated movements to a small group choreography, which produced entanglements between languaging-and-dancing. Group A in Figure 3 arranged their sentences in a specific order during Lesson 1 and started teaching their sentences-and-movements to each other during the following lesson. During Lesson 2, the order of the sentences caused friction, as the individual sentences-and-movements rubbed against each other. The friction called for re-working to make the sentences-and-movements fit together in the group's spoken word choreography. In a way, the sentences-and-movements had to be (dis)entangled in the shift from individual sentences-and-movements to a collaborative spoken word choreography. It seemed like both the words

LESSON 1: GROUP A'S SENTENCES COMPOSED TO A POETIC TEXT*



LESSON 2: A STUDENT TEACHING THEIR MOVEMENTS TO THE SENTENCES



TRANSLATIONS:

***SENTENCES:**

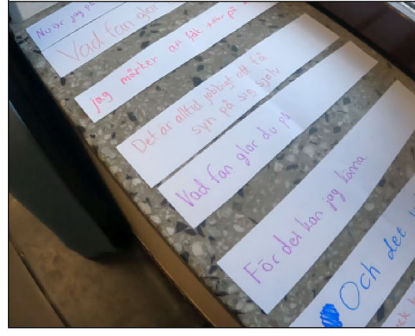
- Because I can feel it
- And you want to get away from that
- you are strong
- Now I'm in this place and it's mine
- what the hell are you staring at?
- I notice people looking at me
- It's always difficult to notice yourself
- what the hell are you staring at?
- Juck still requires some kind of pre-understanding
- you are in control

****AND THEN IT CAN CONTINUE**


*****SENTENCES:**


- Now I'm in this place and it's mine
- what the hell are you staring at?
- I notice people looking at me
- It's always difficult to notice yourself
- What the hell are you staring at?
- because I can feel it
- And you want to get away from that
- ...

RE-WORKED ORDER OF SENTENCES IN THE POETIC TEXT***



FILM OF GROUP A'S SPOKEN WORD CHOREOGRAPHY PERFORMANCE: "VAD FAN GLÖR DU PÅ?" REPEATED TWICE IN THE CHOREOGRAPHY WITH FACES TURNED TO THE CAMERA.





******"WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU STARING AT?"**

FIGURE 3 Reworking sentences-and-movements with(in) spoken word choreography. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

and the movements, and how they were choreographed separately and together, made a difference in creating the spoken word choreography.

More specifically, Group A changed the order of the sentences in their poetic text (see Figure 3). Different reworkings included changing the opening sentence from “För det kan jag känna [Because I can feel it]” to “Nu är jag här på den här platsen och den är min [Now I am in this place, and it is mine]” and using the sentence “Vad fan glör du på? [What the hell are you staring at?]” that appeared twice in the poetic text with similar movements, sharply turning faces and gazes toward the camera and freezing for a moment. Therefore, the collaborative processes required reworking movements in



FIGURE 4 Co-creating with the voiceovers through repetitions and overlaps. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

relation to the sentences, but also reworking sentences in relation to the movements. The reworkings encompassed students’ understandings of the Swedish sentences and interpretations of their meanings.

As such, reworking sentences-and-movements with(in) the spoken word choreography entailed choreographing of languaging-and-dancing. It became evident that the spoken word choreography activity became a smooth space for the students’ collaborative processes, as it allowed creative and experimental (see Toohey, 2019) explorations of sentences-and-movements.

Co-creating with the voiceovers

The comic strips in Figures 4 and 5 illustrate how the voiceovers—created to voice the poetic texts in the spoken word choreographies—made a difference in the entanglements between languaging-and-dancing.

The voiceovers were created mainly through collectively audio recording the poetic text. Through their voices, the students played with pitches, rhythms, repetitions, and tempos, seemingly tasting the language when creating the voiceovers and (re)producing the poetic texts. For example, Group B voiced a sentence that appeared only once in their poetic text using repetitions and overlaps: “Du är stark, du är stark, du är stark, du är stark [You are strong, you are strong, you are strong, you are strong]” (see Figure 4). This repetition became choreographed into languaging-and-dancing: The students repeated and overlapped the words, moved their arms from above the head downwards at different tempos while clenching their fists and flexing their biceps, expressing a symbol of strength. As such, the voiceovers made the students (re)visit the sentences-and-movements to experiment with different elements characteristic of spoken word (e.g., repetition and pitch).

The voiceovers became a replacement for music and students experienced them as songs that made a difference when choreographing, exemplified in a student’s diary entry in Figure 4. There were, however, frictions in the entanglements between languaging-and-dancing when



FIGURE 5 Co-creating with the voiceovers through tempo, rhythm, and pauses. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

choreographing the movements with the audio recorded voiceovers. Group A tried out their choreography with the voiceover playing through a speaker. The audio recording and its tempo and rhythm kicked back at them, either too fast or too slow, calling for rethinking the placement and length of pauses (see Figure 5). This led to iteratively moving between audio recording the voiceover anew and trying it out with the movements. The rhythm and the tempo of the languaging mattered in making the voiceover fit together with the dancing, but also the dancing to fit together with the voiceovers. Additionally, in Groups A and B (see Figures 4 and 5), all students participated in voicing the poetic text, which might have contributed to the students' ownership of the poetic text—as spoken word traditionally entails performing a poetic text one has written.

Taken together, choreographing languaging-and-dancing entailed co-creating with the voiceovers as an intra-active part of the spoken word choreographies; it was not and could not be a mere add-on. The voiceovers were produced by the sentences-and-movements while simultaneously producing the sentences-and-movements. This relationality produced something new in the becoming of the performances that were to be video recorded.

Negotiating-and-switching between and with languages, places, and materials

The comic strips in Figures 6 and 7 showcase negotiating-and-switching that occurred between and with languages, places, and materials when creating the spoken word choreographies. The choreographic processes encompassed intermingled Swedish and Finnish language use, stretched the boundaries of the classroom, and intra-acted with different materials.



FIGURE 6 Negotiating-and-switching in between Swedish and Finnish and places. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Group C particularly stood out in relation to how different languages, places, and materials restricted and created new possibilities for their spoken word choreography. During Lesson 2, the group choreographed their sentences-and-movements in a narrow staircase and negotiated wild ideas for the video recording of their performance (see Figure 6). As such, they worked creatively, wildly, and experimentally, entering their choreographic processes as a smooth space. Starting from the top of the stairs and imagining the camera filming beside it from below, the performance would show one of the students falling. Lotta did not reject their creative idea yet tried to find a safe way to execute the fall. When choreographing, the students explored their sentences-and-movements with the staircase, with one student voicing their poetic text (see Figure 6). She voiced the sentences in Swedish and used Finnish for the movements but quickly switched to providing the movement descriptions in Swedish



FIGURE 7 Negotiating-and-switching to the cafeteria. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

when encouraged to do so by Lotta. When not finding the words for particular movements, she moved in between Swedish and Finnish.

During Lesson 3, the danger of the falling-down idea and the narrow stairs that restricted the movements led the group to search for another place (Figure 6). Apart from the staircase, no other place seemed inviting to them. Lotta encountered the group in the hallway, discussed the place with them, and enabled their idea to go to the cafeteria.

The cafeteria provided the students with new possibilities for their spoken word choreography, but also required them to renegotiate it in relation to the material environment (see Figure 7). The choreography was eventually executed in intra-action with the cafeteria that encompassed tiled pillars, tables, and chairs. The pillars became part of the choreography and, for example, hid the students

during different parts of the performance (see Figure 7). The choreography still ended with a student falling down to the floor, but in a different and safer way than on the staircase. Group C's choreography thus became extended beyond their human bodies to include the place, which had an important role in structuring the final version of the choreography. In addition, the costumes and materials were important for the group. For example, the students wore black face masks to express being silenced (see Figure 7).

Altogether, the negotiating-and-switching pushed and pulled the spoken word choreographies into different directions. Entanglements between languaging-and-dancing were set in motion through doing sentences-and-movements in Swedish and Finnish, and by the need to (re)think and (re)choreograph with places and materials as they intra-acted with the spoken word choreographies.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we explored spoken word choreographies in a course combining dance and additional language learning in upper secondary school. In what follows, we discuss the results in relation to the analytic questions: (RQ1) How do languaging and dancing become entangled in the spoken word choreographies? and (RQ2) How can spoken word choreographies contribute to additional language learning practices in upper secondary education?

Languaging-and-dancing creating smooth languaging spaces

In response to the first analytical question, we identified four doings—exploring, reworking, co-creating, and negotiating-and-switching—in which languaging-and-dancing became entangled and were, in different ways, produced by a multiplicity of human (e.g., students, teachers) and nonhuman (e.g., *Juck*, costumes, texts written on papers, and places) bodies. The four doings that entangled languaging-and-dancing were not straightforward processes but were permeated with tension, friction, and a need to develop new ideas. The doings suggest that the spoken word choreographies allowed students to work creatively with Swedish, while they were grappling with the somewhat complex topics of feminism, equality, and power. Through this activity, the young students took a stance and exercised agency when languaging-and-dancing. The spoken word choreographies moved beyond students' potential restrictions in the Swedish language (e.g., vocabulary, structure, and grammar) to emphasize playfulness and creative explorations as part of language-learning processes. The used approach to spoken word choreographies deviates from writing your own poetic texts and can enable an inclusive and less prescribing way to work creatively with an additional language. Since the poetic texts for the choreographies were created based on pre-existing sentences, the risk of being held back by, for example, syntactic and vocabulary constants in the language was lower. Instead, the focus lies on semantic constants, which can be amplified and expressed through the movements. As such, the spoken word choreographies allowed the students to enter smooth languaging spaces (see also Korpinen,) and to play with language in “creative, divergent, or ‘wild’ ways” (Toohey, 2019, p. 943) through and with dancing.

In allowing a smooth languaging space, we propose that working with spoken word choreographies has the potential to make language-learning practices not only creative, but also personal. The Swedish language was integrated into a setting that was familiar and enjoyable to most students, where their explorations of languaging-and-dancing could start from themselves. There was no predetermined, correct way of interpreting and composing the sentences that became poetic texts entangled with movements. The interpretations and compositions could be different, personal, and (re)negotiated, emphasizing a performative understanding that poetic interpretations are not static but in-becoming (Höglund & Rørbech, 2021; Jusslin & Höglund, 2021). Additionally, creating spoken word choreographies might contribute to students' development of understanding in an additional language, which

echoes previous findings that transformation across and in between forms of expression (e.g., language and dance) requires deep exploration and an understanding of the text(s) (e.g., McCormick, 2011).

Making language use personal for the students does not, however, indicate a human-centered perspective where language is the property of humans (Pennycook, 2016). Languageing was not—and could not be—only about the words, but was produced in relation to different bodies, materials, and places that contributed to communicating messages in the spoken word choreographies. The activity focused on what to do with the selected words, rather than on how many words students learn or use, enabling in-depth and exploratory work with language. As such, the doings of the spoken word choreographies can possibly contribute to creating ownership of the language through linguistic, embodied, relational, and material means, echoing studies about spoken word poetry (Arribas, 2019; Burton & van Viegen, 2021).

We acknowledge that languageing can be a smooth space without arts-based activities, but argue that dancing and spoken word, and the combination thereof, bring specific qualities to creating and embracing smooth languageing spaces, which can contribute to a rethinking of language pedagogy. Dancing embraces wild, playful, and unpredictable forces and movements in language-learning practices; the bodies (human and nonhuman) are not controlled, but rather let loose. Seen from a new materialist perspective (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013; Toohey, 2019), we suggest that the arts have the potential to strengthen the embodied and material aspects of smooth languageing spaces. Additionally, the playful features of an arts-based activity like spoken word choreographies embrace the unknown and do not strive toward “correctness” in the language—to striated languageing spaces (Korpinen,). As such, the smooth languageing spaces of arts-based activities can contribute to doing language teaching pedagogy otherwise. Against these aspects, we argue for the importance and value of allowing and creating smooth languageing spaces in language-learning practices in upper secondary school, as it might contribute to motivating and inspiring language learning.

Pedagogical considerations for language teaching in upper secondary education

In response to the second analytical question, the discussion above about smooth languageing spaces is relevant to the investigated educational level, especially in relation to the need to develop new ways to teach Swedish as an additional language. While playful and creative approaches to language teaching might contribute to motivating and inspiring students in language learning, there might also be emotional benefits for students (Jusslin et al., 2022). Upper secondary education can be a stressful period as it can put pressure on students’ performances and grades for upcoming applications to higher education. For example, in teaching practices, additional language teaching in Finland is mostly oriented toward succeeding in the final matriculation exam—emphasizing striated languageing spaces. In contrast, doing language teaching differently with smooth languageing spaces of arts-based activities can have the potential to benefit students holistically. This is particularly interesting given that some students had no previous dance experience but still expressed that the spoken word choreographies had an added value for their language use.

Taking a critical look at our focus on entanglements between languageing-and-dancing, we can problematize the doings against terms of two-ness or intertwinements of separate entities (Barad, 2010). Languageing and dancing can, indeed, stand on their own as completely nonrelated phenomena, which is most often the case in formal educational settings. However, in spoken word choreographies, they cannot, which emphasizes that both languageing and dancing, and entanglements thereof, are crucial to creating a spoken word choreography. The pedagogical approach of spoken word choreographies is cross-artistic (spoken word and dance) and transdisciplinary (language, dance, and poetry). It is new and somewhat different from what is encountered in most language-learning classrooms. Nevertheless, this study is neither about “designing ‘better’ curricula or ‘good teaching strategies’” (Toohey et al., 2020, p. 6), nor does it claim that spoken word choreographies result in specific language-learning outcomes. To make such a claim, another research design and theoretical and methodological

approach would be needed. Instead, the study is about (re)imagining what effects might unfold from teaching language from a cross-artistic and transdisciplinary perspective. Based on our study, we propose that this can bring new ways to teach language that focus on smooth languaging spaces—which always exist in a mixture with striated languaging spaces—agreeing with previous research that suggests that the arts can make language pedagogy become creative, holistic, and vibrant (Fleming, 2023; Waterhouse, 2021).

It is important to note, however, that the spoken word choreography activity was implemented by a dance teacher, professionally trained in dance. All teachers, especially language teachers, might not feel prepared to teach a language with dance in a cross-artistic and transdisciplinary way (Zhang et al., 2021). It might be difficult to trust in and immerse oneself into creative and collaborative processes. The spoken word choreography activity went beyond striated languaging spaces with predetermined, rule-intensive, and bounded ways to use and learn the language. For this pedagogical approach to have an effect on language pedagogical practices, teachers must be given the tools to implement them in practice. Accordingly, preservice and in-service teacher education have important roles in providing student teachers and teachers with opportunities to try out different and creative ways to teach language. Even though there can be difficulties in arranging such teaching approaches, it would, in any case, be valuable to offer diverse ways to learn additional languages in upper secondary education.

CONCLUSION

This study proposes that spoken word choreographies create smooth languaging spaces and can contribute to new perspectives on language teaching, which has been called for by scholars within applied linguistics and language-education research (Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Pennycook, 2016). This proposal is imbued by thinking with new materialist theories (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013), which are rather new in language-education research. The study adds to new materialist perspectives on languaging by showcasing how arts-based activities—and particularly dancing—can strengthen the embodied and material aspects of languaging. Although this study contributes knowledge about how language teaching with dance can embrace smooth languaging spaces in secondary education, this educational level remains largely understudied. Thus, there is still a need for future research to delve into arts-based approaches to secondary language education to gain more insight of their pedagogical potentials and challenges. Moreover, this study presents a somewhat new analytical approach by combining diffractive analysis with CBR strategies. We hope that this combination can fuel and inspire future work on how diffractive analysis and CBR can unfold explorations of verbal, embodied, and material elements in language-education research. Taken together, through exploring entanglements of languaging-and-dancing in spoken word choreographies, we suggest that there is pedagogical value in providing room for playful, creative, and embodied additional language-learning practices in upper secondary education.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ For example, Amanda Gorman's inauguration poem *The Hill We Climb* is a spoken word poem (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ055illiN4>).
- ² Upper secondary school in Finland is on average a 3-year education. Most students begin at the age of 15–16.
- ³ A decreasing number of students choose Swedish as the second national language in the final matriculation exam in upper secondary school (Matriculation Examination Board, 2022). The only mandatory subject in the exam is the first language.
- ⁴ In applied linguistics, Barad's (2007) agential realist theory and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987/2013) philosophy of immanence have, despite their differences (Hein, 2016), been gathered within the larger notion of new materialism(s).
- ⁵ For information about *Juck*, see <https://www.juck.org/about>
- ⁶ Lotta used DIVIDED (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJn4gkbbVAA>) and SOUP (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwff7dvjNv0>) as examples.
- ⁷ Sofia also participated in two lessons outside of the spoken word choreography activity and Kaisa participated in one.
- ⁸ All participants gave informed consent to publish photographs and screenshots from the videos where they could be identified.
- ⁹ Following new materialist typographic elements, we used hyphens to showcase relationality in entanglements and parentheses for dual meaning.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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