

1 Language practices, ideology and beliefs, and management and planning

LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE NEWS

A fifty-six-year-old Turkish woman was refused a heart transplant by clinics in Hanover on the grounds that her lack of German (common among *Gastarbeiter*) made the recovery process dangerous. The clinic defended the decision: the patient might not understand the doctors' orders, might take the wrong medicine and might not be able to get help if there were complications. The state minister for health said (*Sunday Telegraph*, August 27, 2000) that in future in similar cases they must find a more practical solution. Doctors and hospitals make language policy when they decide how to deal with language diversity.

Many stories deal with similar cases. Some involve public signs, outward evidence of language policy. In the Old City of Jerusalem, there are trilingual street signs, with the changing order of languages (English, Arabic or Hebrew at the top) tracing the recent history of the city (British Mandate, Jordanian or Israeli rule). But other Israeli cities have signs only in Hebrew and English. After years of litigation, the courts recently ruled that street signs in cities with a mixed Jewish-Arab population should include Arabic. Half a world away, Transit New Zealand agreed to add Māori to English road and place signs (*The Dominion*, March 2, 2000; for more on Māori and New Zealand, see the section beginning on p. 200). Quebec law requires that all public signs be in French, permitting the addition, in smaller letters, of a translation into another language. In Wales, Carmarthenshire County Council decided that place and road signs should be in Welsh only. Swansea City Council disagreed: "As a council we have a policy of bilingual signs . . . if we are going to make Swansea a tourism centre we have to attract people of all nationalities" (*South Wales Evening Post*, March 3, 2000; for more on Welsh, see the section beginning on p. 81).

The language of public signs may seem a trivial local matter, but language issues can lead to major conflicts. At the end of June 2001, with the fighting in Macedonia continuing, the Council of Europe

urged the Macedonian government to grant ethnic Albanians “the use of the Albanian language in Macedonian courts, schools and administration” (Agence France Presse, June 28, 2001). A real language war was possible.

Perhaps languages do not often cause wars, but language has certainly been a major factor in what Horowitz (2001: 1) calls deadly ethnic riots, which he defines as attacks by civilians belonging to one ethnic group on civilians from another group. The riots may be communal, racial, religious, linguistic or tribal. Horowitz lists a number of recent examples of linguistic riots: Assam in 1960 and 1972, Sri Lanka in 1956 and 1958, Ranchi in 1967, Mauritania in 1966, Karachi-Hyderabad in 1972 and Bangalore in 1994. Assam, a state in the north-east of India, tried to make Assamese its official state language, in the hope that this would favor natives in obtaining positions (Horowitz 2001: 208f.). The 1960 riots came in the midst of the campaign. The Assam Language Act made Assamese compulsory. The learning of Assamese by Bengali immigrant Muslims partly vitiated the effect of the law, so that ethnic tensions and violence continue (Misra 2000).

National language policy is a regular topic. China recently passed a new language law that bans the use of foreign words and the misuse of Chinese. According to the law, Putonghua is to be the officially legal language of China, its standard spelling and pronunciation to be required of all radio announcers, teachers and civil servants (*The Straits Times*, Singapore, November 17, 2000). In August 2002, the Turkish Parliament, applying for admission to the European Community, had passed laws abolishing the death penalty and permitting the use of the Kurdish language in broadcasting and education. The same month, the US Supreme Court agreed to rule on a law requiring libraries receiving federal funding to use software to filter out pornography and obscenity. On November 15, 2002, the Russian Duma (lower house of parliament) easily passed a law, saying that the “alphabets of the Russian Federation’s state language and the state languages of the republics of the Russian Federation are based on the Cyrillic alphabet” (*Reuters*). On November 14, 2002, the lower house of the Yugoslav Parliament passed a resolution urging all state and local self-government institutions, public companies and educational, cultural and media institutions to use Cyrillic (Tanjung News Agency). On November 21, 2002, Associated Press reported that Turkey’s broadcasting authority had authorized up to forty-five minutes a day of radio broadcasting in Kurdish or other regional languages.

Because of the centrality of language to education, many of the stories concern the choice of language as the medium of instruction in

schools. In November 2000, the voters of Arizona approved Proposition 203, based on an earlier initiative in California, which replaced bilingual education with immersion English education. In Malaysia, there was debate over a threat to existing Chinese-medium schools (Agence France Presse, June 23, 2001), a new plan announced by the Ministry of Education to improve the teaching of English (The Malaysian National News Agency, May 17, 2001), a new Islamic radio station which planned to broadcast twenty-four hours a day in English, Bahasa Melayu and Arabic (*New Straits Times*, July 7, 2001) and a bitter public controversy over a government decision to start teaching mathematics and science in English after twenty years in which they had been taught in Malay, with a compromise decision to teach the subjects in English as well as Mandarin in Chinese schools (*Malaysia General News*, October 29, 2002). In Ghana, the minister of education decided that the use of the vernacular in the first three school years should be abandoned and English used instead (*Africa News*, August 16, 2002). After three decades of debate, the Tanzanian Parliament decided to switch the language of secondary schools from English to Kiswahili (Xinhua National News Service, January 16, 2001). In South Africa, a provincial education department said schools could not refuse to admit English-speaking students because they would upset the language balance against Afrikaans (*News24*, South Africa, January 15, 2003).

Businesses, too, are involved in language policy. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa supported Zimbabwe's policy that dairy imports from Zambia must have instructions on the packages written in Shona and Ndebele, the official languages of Zimbabwe (*Times of Zambia*, July 10, 2001). With increasing globalization, more and more translation engines are being announced giving multilingual access to the web; these include a platform called Prolyphic to make web translation faster (*Business Wire*, July 10, 2001) and a website platform originally in French and already available in English that is now planning to add capacity in German, Spanish and other languages (*The Gazette*, Montreal, July 9, 2001).

Churches are not exempt. A Roman Catholic priest in Wezembeek-Oppem, a town near Brussels in the Dutch-speaking Flanders region of Belgium where the large French-speaking community has special rights to use its language (see pp. 164ff.), was removed from his parish by the cardinal for refusing to allow French-speakers to celebrate Mass in his church (Associated Press, December 30, 2002).

While very current, the topic of language policy is, of course, not a new one; two stories in the book of Genesis fit the definition. Adam, it will be recalled, took on the task of naming the animals in the

Garden of Eden, a role now regularly assigned to national language academies. And God, faced with the behavior of the people at Babel, “confounded their tongues” and decreed (and implemented) individual plurilingualism and social multilingualism. As a general rule, I will use the term multilingual to refer to a society in which a number of languages are used, and the term plurilingual to refer to the usually differentiated skills in several languages of an individual member of such a community.

WHAT ARE THE DATA?

There is no shortage of stories about language policy, but how do they translate into data that might build a theory? I was speaking recently with a neighbor about the data in our respective fields. He is an archeologist who excavates sites, noting the location of every potsherd that he finds. After chemical analysis of the objects, he uses statistical techniques to determine the original source of the clay. He compares these quantified empirical data with information in the Talmud about Galilean villages and is then ready to make generalizations about the trade relations between contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish villages. I tried to explain the problems we face in language policy. Some countries record their language policy in their constitutions or in law; others do not. Some implement their written policies; others clearly do not. Some countries can provide data about the number of people who speak various languages. Others do not even ask that question in their national census. When the question is asked, it is asked differently. In the United States, for instance, the census asks how many people grew up in a home where a language other than English was spoken; in Canada, it asks how many people are proficient in English. How, given all this uncertainty about basic data, can we attempt to derive generalizations that reach the reliability that my archeologist friend would expect?

The first sociolinguists who tackled questions concerning language policy and planning were troubled by these questions, but were more concerned with solving the language problems of developing nations. Some of their work, such as the pioneering studies of the language situation in East Africa, made efforts to build databases. A second wave of scholars in the field became more concerned with developing models of linguistic human rights on the basis of which they could encourage international groups to adopt specific policies. What was missing, however, was a systematic attempt to gather usable data on

language policies at all levels. This book takes advantage of the fact that such an attempt is now being made.

WHAT IS LANGUAGE POLICY?

Visitors to the Canadian city of Montreal in the early 1960s may have been puzzled by the apparent imbalance between the widespread public use of English in signs and large stores and the fact that 80 per cent of the population spoke French. Forty or more years later, it is now obvious that French has achieved a more appropriate public use. The linguistic landscape is now overwhelmingly French. Behind this change in public practice, there was a determined and explicit policy change, a set of managed and planned interventions supported and enforced by law and implemented by a government agency.

Other changes in practices of language choice are harder to account for. In a tiny isolated village in Papua New Guinea, where the ninety inhabitants spoke Taiap, a language unrelated to any other, Kulick (1992) found that children under the age of ten no longer spoke the local language in spite of continued isolation. Instead, all now used Tok Pisin, a New Guinea English-based creole spoken by their bilingual parents. The adults were unaware that their own language-use pattern had changed over time, from monolingual Taiap to regular code-switching bilingualism between Taiap and the Tok Pisin brought back to the village by young men after work in distant plantations. In adult language practice, Kulick discovered, only Tok Pisin was used in meaningful communication with children, while Taiap was used only for meaningless baby-comforting talk. This case appears to be a change in practice that cannot be attributed to any explicit policy decision – the parents were amazed when they noted the change in their children's language practice – but rather to alterations in situation, conditions and pressures of which even the participants are unaware.

To make sense of these cases and others, a useful first step is to distinguish between the three components of the language policy of a speech community: its language practices – the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its linguistic repertoire; its language beliefs or ideology – the beliefs about language and language use; and any specific efforts to modify or influence that practice by any kind of language intervention, planning or management.

Haugen (1966b) suggested that the field could be organized under four headings: the first two were selection of a norm when someone

has identified a “language problem,” and codification of its written (or spoken) form, its grammar and its lexicon. Kloss (1969) called selection “status planning” and codification “corpus planning”. The other two headings Haugen proposed were implementation (making sure that a policy is accepted and followed by the target population) and elaboration, the continued modification of the norm to meet the requirements of modernization and development.

In Quebec, the language problem in the 1950s, as one could understand by looking at language practices, was that a French-speaking majority was required to learn English in order to communicate with the largely monolingual English-speaking minority, who effectively controlled the business life of the province. Taking advantage of their political power, the French-speakers set out to change this policy. A series of laws limited access to English-language schools and required the use of French in many public functions. Working through political and governmental agencies, a change in language practices was managed by interventions referring specifically to language matters, but which had major economic, political, social and cultural causes and consequences (see below, p. 195).

However, in Gapun, there was no explicit management that led to changes in language policy. Rather, it was associated with the return to the isolated village of young men who brought back with them from the plantations two sets of items of value: a “cargo box” of physical objects and proficiency in a new language that marked their added status. It was the new language that was most easily shared with the other villagers, for language is a special kind of economic good, something that is available to be learned by anyone exposed to it and that gains rather than loses value the more it is shared with others (see below, p. 89).

From these cases, it follows that language and language policy both exist in (and language management must contend with) highly complex, interacting and dynamic contexts, the modification of any part of which may have correlated effects (and causes) on any other part. A host of non-linguistic factors (political, demographic, social, religious, cultural, psychological, bureaucratic and so on) regularly account for any attempt by persons or groups to intervene in the language practices and the beliefs of other persons or groups, and for the subsequent changes that do or do not occur. Fishman, Solano and McConnell (1991: 28) pointed out that “it is easy to be misled and intellectually impoverished by studies that examine only a small handful of variables whereas the circumstances of the real world actually involve very complex interrelationships between much larger numbers of variables.” A

simple cause-and-effect approach using only language-related data is unlikely to produce useful accounts of language policy, embedded as it is in a “real world” of contextual variables.

Linguistic ecology

A useful metaphor for the contexts is ecology, defined by Haugen (1971) as “the study of the interactions between any given language and its environment.” Haugen himself recognizes an earlier use of the term in Voegelin, Voegelin and Schutz (1967) and also Voegelin and Voegelin (1964), which suggested that, “in linguistic ecology, one begins not with a particular language but with a particular area.” The notion was foreshadowed in Trim (1959), who traced it back to Bloomfield (1935: 345) and Paul (1909: 37–45). People and societies are the environment. The metaphor of ecology must be handled very cautiously, as Michael Halliday remarked in his AILA Gold Medal address in Singapore (December 16, 2002), for it is far from clear what are the units of a language ecology, and there is no reason to argue from a need to preserve biodiversity to a need to preserve diversity of named languages.

Linguistic ecology needs to be looked at in a post-genome approach where nature and nurture are no longer artificially divided (see Spolsky 2001). Language forms a cultural system (building on certain basic biological components such as design features derived from body shape and structural features that are determined by brain structures), a system of unbelievable complexity and magnificent flexibility (anything I say can be and is interpreted and misunderstood in myriad ways, but we more or less get by). We acquire these language practices in constant “constructive interaction” (the term from Oyama 2000) with our social environment, both human and natural, so that changes in language variables (and so in languages) are most likely to be associated with non-linguistic variables.

Trim (2002) reminds us that the dynamic forces at work in the everyday activity of language communities are far more powerful than conscious, ideologically motivated policies. Language evolution is to be explained not just by small random variation strengthened by geographical isolation, but also by including functional and social selection. Nettle (1999: 79) proposes that different “ecological regimes favored different kinds of social networks, which in turn produce different-sized linguistic groups.” The activating factor in his model is “ecological risk,” managed by non-industrial societies by forming social networks that reduce diversity as people communicate with each other. The greater the ecological risk, the more interaction and

so the fewer languages there will be in a country of given size and population. The change from hunter-gatherers to farmers and herders reduced linguistic diversity, as did European expansion and industrialization. It is changes in society that affect linguistic diversity, so that it is social policy rather than language policy that is needed to maintain it. Mufwene (2001: 17) reinforces this with a very striking metaphor: seen as a species, a language is parasitic, “whose life and vitality depend on (the acts and dispositions) of its hosts, i.e. its speakers, on the society they form, and on the culture in which they live.”

Intervention (management, planning)

In studying language policy, we are usually trying to understand just what non-language variables co-vary with the language variables. There are also cases of direct efforts to manipulate the language situation. When a person or group directs such intervention, I call this language management (I prefer this term to planning, engineering or treatment). The language manager might be a legislative assembly writing a national constitution. About 125 of the world's constitutions mention language (Jones 2001), and about 100 of them name one or more official or national languages with special privileges of use. Or it might be a national legislature, making a law determining which language should be official. Or it could be a state or provincial or cantonal or other local government body determining the language of signs. It can be a special interest group seeking to influence a legislature to amend a constitution or make a new law. It can be a law court determining what the law is or an administrator implementing (or not) a law about language. Or it can be an institution or business, deciding which languages to use or teach or publish or provide interpreters for. Or it can be a family member trying to persuade others in the family to speak a heritage language.

But language policy exists even where it has not been made explicit or established by authority. Many countries and institutions and social groups do not have formal or written language policies, so that the nature of their language policy must be derived from a study of their language practice or beliefs. Even where there is a formal, written language policy, its effect on language practices is neither guaranteed nor consistent.

In all this, I assume that language policy deals not just with named languages and varieties but also with parts of language, so that it includes efforts to constrain what is considered bad language and to encourage what is considered good language (see chs. 2 and 3).

Language and language practices

Language practices is a term that encompasses the wide range of what Hymes (1967; 1974) called the “ethnography of speaking.” Spoken language consists of concatenations of relevant sounds that form meaning-bearing units which themselves combine into meaningful utterances. Variations in the system may not change the meaning, but will be interpretable by listeners as identifying the origin or social level of the speaker (Labov 1966). This kind of variation has long been recognized in vocabulary; five hundred years ago, the first English printer wondered how to write the word for “eggs” and whether to prefer the southern *eggys* or the northern *eyren* (Caxton 1490). Speakers of American English wonder why Englishmen call a doctor’s office a surgery, and Englishmen laugh that Americans walk on a side walk.

By language practices, then, I mean the sum of the sound, word and grammatical choices that an individual speaker makes, sometimes consciously and sometimes less consciously, that makes up the conventional unmarked pattern of a variety of a language. Varieties can be categorized and labeled. At the highest level is a language, an identified cluster of language varieties that we label English, or French or Navajo. Trying to be more precise, we might distinguish American English from British English and from Jamaican English, or New York English from Boston English. The process of categorization is not simple – almost all of the languages and language varieties named in Grimes (2000) have several names – but is deeply embedded in the social context. Language practices include much more than sounds, words and grammar; they embrace conventional differences between levels of formality of speech and other agreed rules as to what variety is appropriate in different situations. In multilingual societies, they also include rules for the appropriacy of each named language.

When members of a speech community (any group of people who share a set of language practices and beliefs) hear, or when sociolinguists analyze, a piece of discourse, they can identify not just the meaning, but also evidence of specific choices made in the course of speaking that characterize the age, gender, social class, probable place of birth and education, level of education and other facts about the speaker and his or her attitude, and provide clues to the situation and context. These choices are governed by conventional rules, not unlike grammatical rules, which are learned by members of the speech community as they grow up.

Language policy may refer to all the language practices, beliefs and management decisions of a community or polity. Consider a

westernized primary-school classroom. Pupils quickly discover which language choices (and language items, too) are appropriate and which are discouraged or punished. They learn that the teacher has the privilege of determining who speaks and when and of judging how appropriate is the form of speech to be used, as well as the permitted topics. When these practices are spelled out by some external authority or taught explicitly by the teacher, this is an example of language management.

Levels

Language policy may apply at various levels of generalization. It might be at the level of an individual linguistic unit ("Don't use that ugly nasal vowel!" "Don't use that dirty word!" "Speak to me in full sentences!") or refer to labeled varieties which are clusters of units ("Don't use dialect!" "Say it in English!").

Language management may apply to an individual linguistic micro-unit (a sound, a spelling or the form of a letter) or to a collection of units (pronunciation or a lexicon or a script) or to a specified, named macro-variety (a language or a dialect). Given that languages and other varieties are made up of conventionally agreed sets of choices of linguistic units, a policy-imposed change at one level necessarily is connected to all levels; switching a lexical item is a potential step towards switching a variety. Many language purists consider borrowing a word from another language to be the first stage of language loss. But this is not necessarily the case – a receptive and flexible language like English probably benefits from its ability to borrow words.

Often, neighboring dialects are close enough to their neighbors to be mutually intelligible. Sometimes political borders divide this chain, so that mutually intelligible bordering dialects might be classified as belonging to two different languages, such as French and Italian. In the same way, political concerns regularly lead to disputes over whether a variety is one language or two. Using purely linguistic criteria and mutual intelligibility, linguists claimed that Serbo-Croatian was a single language, but Pranjković (2001) and other Croatian linguists had no doubt that Serbian and Croatian are as distinct as the Scandinavian languages. Urdu is intelligible to speakers of Hindi, but takes formal vocabulary from Arabic and Persian. Hindi, on the other hand, borrows vocabulary from Sanskrit. Here, too, the political aspect was critical in deciding how to categorize the varieties.

If we were to take a language, identified as such by having a distinct agreed name, as the basic unit of study, we would be forced to prejudge many central questions. If, on the other hand, we consider