

## Language planning

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(Received: 5.01.2013, Accepted: 2.02.2013)

### **Abstract**

Language planning, in one way or another, is as old as human civilization. Every time that one polity invaded the territory of another, the language of the conqueror was imposed on the conquered. The Romans imposed their language across the civilized world as they knew it. In the 21st century, the practice of language planning has become increasingly sophisticated. English, as the result of a series of fortuitous accidents has become the international language serving many activities. At the same time, it has led to an explosion in English language teaching, an activity also not based on wise decisions or wise planning.

**Keywords:** English; language planning; language teaching; education.

### **An early example**

The Ottoman Empire was initially founded in 1299 in northern Anatolia by Turkish tribes under Osman Bay. With the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmed II, the Ottoman state became the Ottoman Empire. The Empire (covering parts of Asia, Europe and Africa) reached its peak at 1590. The long-lived Ottoman dynasty lasted for more than 600 years, until 1922, when the monarchy was abolished. Ottoman Turkish (a Turkic language heavily influenced by Persian) was the official language of the Empire. The Empire recognized three influential languages: Turkish (spoken by the majority of Muslims except in Albania and Bosnia); Persian (only spoken by the educated); and Arabic (spoken mainly in Arabia, North Africa, Iraq, Kuwait and the Levant). In the last two centuries, usage of these languages became limited -- Persian served mainly as a literary language for the elite; the low rate of public literacy (about 2–3% until the early 19th century; only about 15% by the end of 19th century)

ordinary people had to hire special scribes to communicate with the government. The ethnic groups (Armenians, Greeks, Jews) continued to speak their own languages within their families and in their neighborhoods. In villages where two or more communities speaking mutually unintelligible languages lived together, the inhabitants often spoke each other's language. In cosmopolitan cities, many non-ethnic Turks spoke Turkish as a second language (see, Encyclopedia of the Middle East: [www.mideastweb.org/Middle-East-Encyclopedia](http://www.mideastweb.org/Middle-East-Encyclopedia) [retrieved December 2012]).

### **Language planning in the present**

Of course, this situation does not represent *language planning* as the term is used at present. The field is a relatively new addition to the anatomy of academia, having come into existence in the years immediately following World War II -- a period marked by the beginning of the break-up of European colonial empires and the emergence of new nations, particularly

in Africa and Asia. Initially called *language engineering*, the discipline emerged as an approach to creating programs for solving “language problems” in newly independent “developing nations.” Language planning was perceived as being done using a broadly based team approach from an objective, ideologically and politically neutral technological perspective in which the identity of the planners mattered little as long as they possessed the required range of technical skills. The intellectual link between language planning and *modernization/development* insured that the implicit assumptions in language planning reflected assumptions in the social sciences that have subsequently been subject to re-evaluation and revision. Especially striking in hindsight is the optimism of early language planners; they demonstrated an underlying ideological faith in *development* and *modernization*. In early language-planning research, practitioners were seen as having the expertise to specify ways in which changes in the linguistic situation would lead to desired social and political transformations (i.e., supporting the development of unity in the socio-cultural system, reducing economic inequalities and providing access to education). The belief in economic and social progress was perhaps best expressed in Eastman’s introduction to language planning (1983) in which language planners are depicted as being at the forefront of fundamental shifts in the organization of global society:

Modernization and preservation efforts are seemingly happening everywhere, to provide all people with access to the modern world through technologically sophisticated languages and also to lend a sense of identity through encouraged use of their first languages (Eastman, 1983, p. 31).

### **Consider terminology**

The terms *language planning* and *language*

*policy* are frequently used, in both the technical and the popular literature, either interchangeably or in tandem. However, they actually represent two quite distinct aspects of the systemised language change process.

*Language planning* is an activity, most visibly undertaken by government (simply because it potentially involves such massive changes in a society), intended to promote systematic linguistic change in some community of speakers. The reasons for such change lie in a reticulated pattern of structures developed by government and intended to maintain civil order and communication, and to move the entire society in some direction deemed “good” or “useful” by government. The exercise of *language planning* leads to, or is directed by, the promulgation of a *language policy* by government (or some other authoritative body or person).

A *language policy* is a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the society, group or system. Only when such policy exists can any sort of serious evaluation of planning occur (Rubin, 1971); i.e., in the absence of a policy there cannot be a plan to be adjusted. *Language policy* may be realised at a number of levels, from very formal language planning documents and pronouncements to informal statements of intent (i.e., the discourse of language, politics and society) that may not at first glance seem like language policies at all. Indeed, as Peddie (1991) observed, policy statements commonly fall into two types: *symbolic* and *substantive*. The first articulates good feelings toward change (or perhaps ends up being so nebulous that it is difficult to understand what language-specific concepts may be involved), while the latter articulates specific steps to be

taken. This brief paper concerns itself primarily with language planning. Complex motives and approaches, and large populations, are involved in modern states, and language planners have, up to the present time, most often worked in such *macro* situations.

### The early practitioners

During the early or classical period of language-planning development, emerging specialists believed that their new understanding of language in society could be implemented in practical programs of *modernization* and *development* having important benefits for *developing societies*. This early period was characterized by an extensive growth in research by a small number of authors (e.g., Fishman, 1968; 1971; 1972; 1974; Rubin & Jernudd, 1971; Rubin & Shuy, 1973) because the field was perceived to have practical significance for the newly independent post-colonial states (particularly in Africa) as well as theoretical value in providing "...new opportunities to tackle a host of...novel theoretical concerns..." (Fishman, Ferguson & Das Gupta, 1968: x) in sociology and political science since "...few areas are more fruitful or urgent with respect to interdisciplinary attention..." (1968, pp. x-xi). Early practitioners believed that language planning could play a major role in achieving the goals of political/administrative integration and sociocultural unity (Das Gupta, 1970, p. 3).

Thus, a major focus of this early research involved analysis of the language-planning needs specific to newly independent states. It appeared that:

- 1) language choice and literacy were significant in the processes involving 'nationalism,' and
- 2) language maintenance, codification

and elaboration were significant in processes of 'nationalism' (Fishman, 1968).

This linkage of language planning with development and modernization – essential for the early emergence of the field – was influenced by modernization theory (e.g., Rostow, 1960); consequently, early research focused primarily on the role of language planning in developing societies. Consideration of the question of exactly who the planners were and what impact their views might have on the goals set to solve language problems has been raised only much more recently (by, among others, Baldauf 1982; Baldauf & Kaplan, 2003; Zhao, 2011). By the 1970s, it had become apparent that language problems were not unique only to developing nations, but that they also occurred as "macro" (i.e., state-level) language problems and situations in polities worldwide. Despite the early optimism, in less than twenty years, by the mid 1980s, disillusionment with language planning – due to several factors – was widespread (Blommaert, 1996; Williams, 1992). Since the late 1990s, language policy and planning principles have also been increasingly applied in "micro" situations (for example, in relation to language problems in communities, schools, organizations and companies; see, for instance, Canagarajah, 2005; Chua & Baldauf, 2011).

Ricento (2000, p. 196) has suggested that research in language policy and planning can be divided into three historical phases:

- decolonization, structuralism and pragmatism (1950s, 1960s);
- the failure of modernization, critical sociolinguistics (1980s, 1990s);
- a new world order,

postmodernism, linguistic human rights (21st century).

An important change in language planning since the 1980s lies in the recognition that language planning is not necessarily an aspect of development but rather that it implicates a broad range of social processes including at least migration and the rise of nationalism in Europe and Central Asia. Migration constitutes one reason for the increases in the numbers of people worldwide who are learning languages and – consequently – for a significant increase in concern with language-in-education planning.

As a consequence of the recent developments in language planning, two immediate issues arose:

- 1) How should the discipline of language planning be taught in academic institutions? and
- 2) How can language planning be undertaken without recognizing the inherently political nature of the enterprise?

These concerns raise the question of what one can do when trying to explicate the social forces that influence language change, and the kinds of language change motivated by social forces. These questions, in turn, reveal that the basic concerns are really all about political preference; language planning – a subset of sociolinguistics -- is actually constrained and defined by politics, since language policy invariably implicates someone's social and/or political choice. Much language planning – past and present – has been undertaken by government and has been conceived primarily as a top-down activity espousing “a set of views, beliefs, ideas and so forth, subscribed to by a specific dominant social group (class,

language, gender, race or ethnicity...) to maintain the existing social order...” (Webb, 2006, pp. 147-148; see also, e.g., Pennycook, 2000; Phillipson, 1992; Tolefson, 2002). If politics were to be excluded from sociolinguistics, there would be nothing to teach (Webb & Du Plessis, 2006). Indeed, the issue lies largely in the metaphors used to define the values; but metaphors over time accrue a coating of popular opinion often creating counterproductive effects (Larson, 2011).

Thus, it appears that language planning is essentially a political activity; given that perspective, the practice of politics is an inherent part of the development and eventual implementation of any language plan. Language Planners cannot be absolutely neutral individuals, separating their planning self from any practical activity. Rather than separating one's scholarly self from one's partisan self – an activity akin to becoming partially pregnant or partly virginal – would it be possible instead to examine political behavior as a part of the human makeup and then to study that political behavior without necessarily instantiating a line of action? Students of language planning should be free to select a course of action appropriate to the given situation and the given population. In doing so, however, those students should be made aware of the probable consequence of the path chosen as well as the probable consequences of choosing a different path or of opting for the status quo by choosing no path at all. The basic principles of doing so were explored and articulated by the Prague School linguists in the early years of the 20th century. While the principles were clearly articulated, application was not well developed; however, contemporary exercises do exist -- see, e.g., Neustupný & Nekvapil, 2006.

A language plan in the absence of an implementation plan is a useless bit of academic research – truly an exercise for the Ivory Tower. And a language plan in the absence of the recognition of the political implications of such a plan may resemble the proverbial road to hell, paved with good intentions. In brief, it is impossible to remove politics from the classroom or from the implementation of any language plan; whether those politics are captured in a partisan stance is another matter, but once the camel's nose is in the tent it may be virtually impossible to recover any space. Doing language planning involves the interaction of three groups of actors: people with expertise (e.g. linguists and applied linguists), people with influence (e.g. people with high social standing) and people with power (e.g., national leaders and high placed officials). Furthermore, they show that the success or failure of a particular language planning initiative may hinge on political decisions; this is an important lesson for all those involved with language planning to understand. Given the normal complexity of any language-based problem, the members of any group organized to undertake a language planning activity (or even to undertake a language-planning activity as a purely academic exercise) are obliged to inform their funding sources, whether governmental or not, of their individual and collective biases. The funding sources, especially governmental funding sources (since governmental funding inevitable derives from public monies), are entitled to know the planners' views of language in general and of the language(s) implicated in the planning activity. In addition, unexpected 'political' complications can arise that can undermine the basis for a language planning project. In short, language planning is a profoundly political activity, and 'politics' cannot simply be omitted from such studies. That being so,

there appear to be at least five basic reasons why language planning, in its political guise, is likely to fail:

1. In the normal context, languages are commonly disseminated primarily through educational systems, but educational systems often suffer from several constraints:
  - a) Education is commonly funded through the annual national budget; consequently, the education sector competes with all other government departments for a share of available national funds. In many polities, education falls significantly below other departments in the order of priority allocations – e.g., compared with those concerned with defense, with the legal system, with international affairs, with business and industry, and so on – consequently receiving a more limited fund allocation, since education in general does not often attract high priority budgetary attention.
  - b) Education is often subject to a slow decision-making process, of necessity operating through many levels of bureaucracy and through a large segment of the population and consequently through an extremely large number of potential pressure groups.
    - i. collective teachers who rarely represent a coherent focus but rather, in reality, belong to different cadres trained at different times through different educational philosophies and representing different economic realities,
    - ii. deeply layered school administrations (and consequently administrators) also differing in

- experience, training, and needs,
- iii. local governmental bureaucracies also differing in experience, biases, training, and economic conditions,
  - iv. different economic functions in society that may be seen to depend on supplies of workers needed to meet pragmatic needs now and in the future and to reflect rapidly changing markets,
  - v. parents focus on their expectations for their children and their views of what aspects of education are most important, and ultimately
  - vi. the children to be taught -- commonly perceived to constitute a homogeneous group requiring a standardized educational content delivered over a standardized time in a standardized format, but in fact differing widely in attitudes toward specific languages, in attitudes toward education, in economic realities and in personality types.
2. Language planning strives to make choices among languages and – with each language selected – planning must consider:
    - a) popular attitudes toward each language, as well as popular attitudes toward literacy in general and literacy in any particular language (i.e., the national language, local vernaculars).
    - b) its suitability for wide-spread usage (i.e., whether it is judged to be a standard or a sub-standard variety [e.g., a Creole, a pidgin]),
    - c) its “value” in the eyes of users (i.e., whether its users are deemed to be superior, equal, or inferior to the most powerful group),
    - d) its range determined by:
      - i. location of large clusters of users (i.e., within the polity or elsewhere [in neighboring polities or in distant ones; e.g., Standard French in African or Asian dependencies]),
      - ii. biases toward the language, toward its lexicon, toward the perceived relative complexity of its syntax (i.e., the aversion to tone languages by speakers of non-tone languages).

The relative bias may be further complicated by the fact that colonizers and missionaries created new languages by applying translation practices to existing languages and by reworking indigenous languages – through translation and standardization – into the colonizers’/missionaries’ models derived from languages the colonizers/missionaries knew.
  3. The logistics of the situation, considering the real distance from the legislative seat to the places where implementation is likely to occur, the relative cost and the relative ease or difficulty of movement between the legislative seat and the distant implementation loci, and any differences between attitudes at the urban center versus those in the outlying and/or rural areas.
    - a) The real logistic issues in transporting standardized textbooks and other teaching supplies from the site of production (at or near the urban center or even outside the polity) to the distant and/or rural periphery.
    - b) Similarly, the feasibility of the movement back and forth of

inspectors, other agent of the national interest, and agents responsible for assessing success or failure and for instituting remediation in program structure, syllabus, or personnel.

4. Whether the national language is indeed the language of students, teachers and administrators in the periphery.
  - a) Determining whether the language(s) recognized at the periphery (as opposed to the standard language recognized at the urban center) possess an orthography, whether that orthography is the same as that of the standard language, and whether literacy is as well developed at the periphery as it is for the standard language at the urban center, or for that matter for any language other than the national language.
  - b) Determining whether differences from the standard exist in local dialects of the national language or in minority language(s) used by the student-population and the parent-populations and their attitudes toward the official language, the official governmental structure and its language habits.
  - c) Determining whether the teachers at the implementation loci are native speakers or L2 speakers of the standard national language that constitutes the medium of instruction (i.e., determining whether their fluency in the medium of instruction is adequate to teaching that language to children for whom it may be an L2 or an Ln).
5. More purely political matters; e.g., the attitudes of the dominant political

party to the language and its users in comparison to the attitudes of the minority party (or minority parties) to the language and its users – in short, the probability that a legislative proposal is likely to survive, likely to be funded, and likely to be allowed to continue uninterrupted for a sufficient trial period.

No known extant language plan actually considers the large and complex set of variables summarized here. However, there is yet another matter that needs to be considered – whether the proposers of the plan can expect to find a consensus of opinion across the polity in support of the proposed language plan/modification -- in short, has anyone asked the speakers in the community what they think about the plan? Any political structure may be divided into two quite different camps, each determined to show that the opposition's approach is seriously flawed while their approach is the correct one, since there are likely to be broad differences of opinion on whether to tax, what to tax, whom to tax, for what to tax in order to develop the resources necessary to fund the activities essential to allow any plan to be implemented.

In many countries, language-in-education planning has become central in efforts to deal with this massive movement of people (Tollefson, 1989), resulting in a range of new questions, which are in need of attention:

- What should be the role of migrants' languages in education and in other official domains of use?
- How are local languages affected by migrants?
- What should be the status of new

varieties of various *linguae franche*?

- How can acquisition planning be most effectively carried out?
- What factors constrain acquisition planning?

A second concern in language planning has emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the realignment of political boundaries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia – a phenomenon giving rise to the emergence of new states in which language issues are intimately linked with ideological and political conflicts. Also, these issues are central to the efforts of such new (or re-emerging) states to establish effective local institutions (see, e.g., Hogan-Brun, *et al.*, 2007). The language planning choices made by state planners, legislative bodies, and citizens are likely to play an important role in the management of political conflict in these new or re-emerging states for decades to come.

A third area of current research lies in the movement to deconstruct the ideology of monolingualism that has pervaded much language planning research (Williams, 1992), exactly because the focus has been on the monolingual state – one polity/one language/one culture. Emerging research involves a re-examination of traditional assumptions about the costs of multilingualism and the benefits of monolingualism. The linking of multilingual policies and democratization (Deprez & du Plessis, 2000) has also become an important part of political debates elsewhere.

The movement for linguistic human rights offers another significant point of view. While some language planning scholars have advocated mother tongue-promotion policies (e.g., Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), others have linked language rights to

political theory and to efforts to develop a theory of language planning (e.g., Cooper, 1989; Dua, 1994; May, 2001). Calls for expansion and implementation of language rights can be expected to continue, with language planning research heavily involved in the development of a better understanding of the role of language rights in state formation, in international organizations, in political conflict, and in a variety of other social processes. Similarly, recent research on the links between language planning and social theory, long advocated by Fishman (1992) and Williams (1992), can contribute to deeper understandings of language rights and to new research methods (Ricento, 2006). Current research examines the ways in which language planning processes are constrained by constitutional and statutory law (Liddicoat, 2008).

The failure of early or classical language planning activities to achieve their goals in many contexts and the intimate connection between early language planning and modernization theory meant that language planning was subject to the same criticisms as was modernization theory generally, including at least:

- the fact that economic models appropriate for one place may be ineffective in any other places;
- the fact that national economic development will not necessarily benefit all sectors of any given society, especially the poor (Steinberg, 2001);
- the fact that development generally fails to consider local contexts and the conflicting needs and desires of diverse communities; and
- the fact that development has a homogenizing effect on social and cultural diversity (Foster-

Carter, 1985; Worsley, 1987).

A second assumption underlying the work in the early period of language planning was an emphasis on *cost-benefit analysis*, *efficiency* and *rationality* as criteria for evaluating plans and policies. An emphasis on the technical aspect of language planning led Jernudd and Das Gupta (1971) to argue that planners may be better able than political authorities to apply rational decision-making in the solution of language problems. Such attempts to separate language planning from politics reflected not only a belief in the skills of technical specialists, but also a broader failure to link language planning with political analysis – the failure to acknowledge that language planning is fundamentally political is central to subsequent critiques of language planning.

A third assumption was that the nation-state is the appropriate focus for language planning research and practice, since language planning is a tool for political/administrative and socio-cultural integration of the nation-state, a view that had two important consequences:

- 1) the main actors in language planning were assumed to be government agencies, and thus most research examined the work of such agencies;
- 2) many researchers adopted a top-down perspective, limiting their interests to national plans and policies rather than to local language practices.

Another problem in early language planning was its failure adequately to analyze the impact of local contexts on national policies, partially the consequence of an emphasis on technical rather than political evaluation of policies as well as a general separation of language planning from political analysis. As Blommaert (1996, p. 217) argues,

language planning "...can no longer stand exclusively for practical issues of standardization, graphization, terminological elaboration, and so on. The link between language planning and sociopolitical developments is obviously of paramount importance...." Failing to link language planning to politics resulted in a situation in which planners could not predict the impact of their plans and policies. Language planning specialists in the early period believed that unexpected outcomes could be avoided as long as adequate information was available, but more recent scholarship assumes that unexpected outcomes are a normal feature of highly complex social systems:

- where linear cause-effect relationships between language and society do not apply and
- where social groups may have covert goals for language planning (Ammon, 1997).

The more one examines the language planning situations with which one is familiar (or that one reads about in the literature), the more apparent it becomes that policy aspects of such planning (as opposed to the cultivation or the implementation aspect) are only secondarily a language planning activity; primarily, they are a political activity (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2007). Language planning is often perceived as some sort of monolithic activity, designed specifically to manage one particular kind of linguistic modification in a community at a particular moment in time. Language planning has tended to concern itself with the modification of one language only, having largely ignored the interaction of multiple languages in a community as well as multiple non-linguistic factors — that is, the total ecology of the linguistic environment. Language planning is really

about power distribution and political expediency; it is about economic issues, and it is about the distribution of time and effort of administrators, scholars, teachers and students. Although a concern with *theory* suggests that such policy decisions should be based on data about learners and community language needs (see, e.g., Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; van Els, 2005), in fact policy decisions are not about the needs of any given community, nor are they about the needs of learners. They are, rather, about the perceptions of language(s) held in the Ministry of Education and to some extent in the generally perceptions of the society at large. Policy decisions rarely take into account such matters as learners' age, aptitude, attitude or motivation. They tend to be top-down in structure, reflecting the opinions and attitudes valued at the highest levels in the planning process; they are rarely about the linguistic needs or desires of any given society or community. Indeed, the least important factor in such planning decisions may well be the needs and desires of the target population (Kaplan, 2004).

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**Note:**

The major scholarly journals in the field are:

- *Current Issues in Language Planning*
- *Language Planning*
- *Language Problems & Language Planning*

Articles also frequently appear in:

- *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*
- *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*