Language Policy in Education: Practices, Ideology, and Management

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Abstract

By the middle of the twentieth century, the field of language education had moved from suggesting new methods to considering the implications of linguistics and in particular psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics to the task of developing proficiency in additional languages. Later developments in language policy, considering not just actual language practices and ideologies but also attempts to manage the practices and ideologies of others, provided a new focus by making clear the basic importance of family language policy and the complexity of agencies attempting to manage school language policies. Within the many communities that make up modern nations, ideologies concerning the relation between language and identity and religious beliefs have been recognized as major motivations. The realization that there are many putative managers, individuals, and agencies at all levels from family and nation and beyond (e.g., human rights, globalization) has made clear the complexity of negotiating an agreed language education policy and the difficulty of dealing with status and corpus problems. Part of the gap has been filled by the growth of a neighboring field of educational linguistics. But in spite of the growing evidence-based knowledge about language education, implementation of such obvious principles as teaching in a language the pupils understand continues to be blocked by ignorance and inertia.

Keywords

Language Policy • Language practices • Language beliefs • Language management

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Introduction

This chapter deals with the intersection of two recently developed fields, educational linguistics and language management. The discussion here recognizes that the various approaches to modifying the linguistic proficiency of individuals or groups depend on the formulation and evaluation of a theory of language policy relevant to the communicative and identity demands of a specific language community and the selection and implementation of empirically tested methods of language teaching, learning, and assessment. It thus challenges those approaches which focus on narrow aspects of the complex tasks involved, such as innovative methodological developments claimed to be panaceas, or those simple universal assumptions such as reliance on a popular belief that either monolingualism or bilingualism is universal or appropriate for all. Instead, this chapter opens up a wide range of relevant disciplines to explore language policy in education: sociolinguistics for its theories and techniques of studying patterns of language use, psycholinguistics for its exploration of the conditions of learning in general and language learning in particular, language pedagogy for its theoretical and practical investigation of language teaching, and language assessment for its treatment of methods of determining the nature of language proficiency.

Early Developments

While in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries language education was considered a matter of proposing new universal methods, by the middle of the twentieth century, there were claims for more scientific approaches to the field. In the early days of what was happily labeled as applied linguistics, the label tended to be taken literally, so that new linguistic theories suggested the need to change language teaching methods. Comparing grammars (contrastive analysis) was for a while the main approach of applied linguistics (Spolsky 1979); later, after the Chomskyan revolution, one scholar even proposed transformational drills to replace the minimal pair drills of the structuralist period. By the 1960s, however, psychology and psycholinguists had become the driving force, a development celebrated by

Rivers (1968). This remained the situation for several decades, so that Spolsky (1989) drew most of its 70 or so conditions from linguistics and psycholinguistics.

My introduction to the idea of language policy came during a fellowship at the National Foreign Language Center in 1990–1991, where Richard Lambert argued for the need to develop a language policy for the USA. During that year, I had long conversations with Elana Shohamy, and on our return to Israel, we proposed a language education policy for Israel, our discussions leading to a research project and a book (Spolsky and Shohamy 1999). By the time the second edition of this *Encyclopedia* was published (Corson 1997), the field had been moving from psychological to sociological and political concerns, with the *Encyclopedia*'s first volume devoted to *language policy and political issues in education*. About the same time, Spolsky (1999b), after some introductory chapters, headed its first substantial section "Social Factors." It is thus not inappropriate that the first chapter of the first volume of the third edition of the *Encyclopedia* should be charged with introducing the field of language policy in education.

The term "language policy" is ambiguous; I distinguish between language policy as a field and a language policy which is usually a document produced in the course of language management. Language policy has three interrelated components:

1. *Practices* – What is the "normal" or "practiced" language behavior of the community in different sociolinguistic domains?
2. *Beliefs and ideologies* – What do members of the community think is appropriate or desirable language behavior?
3. *Management* – How do interested parties attempt to influence the practices or beliefs of the community?

Education being one of the most important domains of language management, language education policy became a critically important issue in most multilingual polities. It shows up most clearly in choice of a language of instruction and the inclusion of additional languages in the curriculum and is made especially complex by the number of levels of managers, ranging from regional organizations such as the European Community through national governments and their interested ministries, local governments and local school boards (an estimated 15,000 in the USA alone), school administrators (principals, curriculum directors), teachers, and parents' committees. Business groups, religious leaders, newspapers, and other media also attempt to manage or influence school language policy.

Major Contributions

The Practice of Language Education Policy

Fishman's (1965) classic question was "who speaks what to whom where and when?" Today, most of us live in multilingual societies, and we develop appropriate language proficiencies to handle our environment. In every speech community, there

are rules about language use, when to speak and when not and which variety to use. When we can, we vary language according to our interlocutor.

At the family level, bilingual parents choose which language to speak to their children. Parents who want their children to learn a second language may hire a nanny or tutor to look after their children and provide a native-speaking model. A common and less expensive alternative is the au pair. Another solution is to send children of immigrants to family members in the home country.

Beyond the family, preschool education can be focused on language education, such as the New Zealand *kōhanga reo* (language nest). Elementary schools commonly cover the age range from six until puberty and may be under various levels of public and professional control, privately established, or under religious control, in which case they may teach the sacred language. Some schools start teaching in the language of the home; more commonly, school systems choose a language of instruction according to their governance. Public elementary education favors the national language, provided there are qualified teachers. For example, while Parisian French was required in France from the time of the French Revolution, it was not until late in the nineteenth century that there were enough teachers to implement it (Ager 1999). While most educational research supports teaching initially in the home language, this is rarely implemented (Walter 2003, 2008). In many cases, pupils and even teachers speak a dialect or vernacular other than the official language, though textbooks are seldom available in it.

Some schools follow bilingual programs. In Montreal, even before the adoption of the federal bilingual policy, parents persuaded the Protestant school board to introduce transitional French-English elementary education, importing teachers from the Caribbean and Africa (Lambert and Tucker 1972). Some Jewish schools in Montreal offered education in French, English, Hebrew, and Yiddish; a similar multilingual pattern (with Spanish instead of French) was reported in Mexico City. In China, schools are expected to teach Pǔtōnghuà (Mandarin) even when they permit the use of the topolect (e.g., Cantonese, Hokkien, Shanghainese) or a minority language such as Tibetan, Mongolian, or Uygur as language of instruction (Bessette 2005; Spolsky 2014a). Some countries (e.g., Finland, Israel, the USA) provide up to a year of instruction in the national language for new immigrant children; others assume new immigrant students will acquire the national language in everyday communicative practice outside of school.

At the secondary level (often more independent than elementary schools), the language of instruction is commonly the national language. Recently, there has been a trend to teach a foreign language (especially English) during elementary school. In much of the world, English is the favored foreign language; to counteract this, the European Union calls for the teaching of two foreign languages (Phillipson 2003). The teaching of classical languages (Latin and Greek) – typical in Europe until the twentieth century – has been reduced or has disappeared. Language proficiency is commonly tested at the end of secondary school and required for admission to

tertiary education, building up the power of the testing industry as a gatekeeper (Shohamy 1993, 2001).

At the tertiary level, classes are usually taught in the national language, but there is increasing pressure to use an international language, again typically English, especially in the sciences and business (Ammon 2001). This is largely influenced by the fact that scientific publication is now mainly in English, which students are expected to be able to read.

In some countries, governments provide classes in the national language for immigrants – for example, the *ulpan* in Israel (Spolsky 1999a) and similar programs in Canada – but usually nonacademic adult language education is in private hands. Private language teaching depends on popular demand; Berlitz, for instance, is reported to have over 500 company-owned or franchised branches in 70 countries, 75% of them teaching English.

Another major branch of language education is provided by defense agencies (Brecht and Rivers 2012). In the USA, the Defense Language Institute is reported to do more language teaching than all other institutions; its English Language Institute teaches soldiers from 100 nations, and its Monterey school teaches over 40 languages to students in intensive 24–64 week courses. The US Department of State Foreign Service Institute is responsible for teaching 70 foreign languages to employees of 40 government agencies.

Given the number of institutions and languages involved, and the varied nature of students and teachers, it is virtually impossible to describe all the many language education practices – the contexts, the time available, the age, and the commitment and learning ability of students; the expertise and experience of teachers; the availability of textbooks and media; and all the possible methods – that have been tried. This helps explain why a multivolume encyclopedia is needed to cover the topic.

Ideologies and Beliefs that Influence Language Education Policy

The learning of one or more language varieties depends on exposure to the language practices of the community, which depend in turn on the beliefs of the members of that community. Beliefs may provide motivation for language policy or reflect the power of a variety within a speech community. Fishman (2006b) describes his own home where Yiddish was the main language, though it did not offer benefits in their English-speaking environment; English was permitted only for schoolwork and guests. There is tension between benefits (such as the belief that English leads to economic success) and the beliefs of a heritage community or religious commitment, for language serves not just for communication but also to mark membership of an identity group.

The impact of language ideologies or beliefs (Fishman and Garcia 2010; Silverstein 1998) is most obvious at the family level, where the choice of a language

in which to speak to a child is determined by the values that family members assign to language varieties. In an immigrant family, members may believe in the greater value of their heritage language or of the standard language of the environment and choose to speak to babies and young children in one or (if they are not limited by a belief in the worth of monolingualism) both. For monolingual parents speaking the same language, unless their belief has been modified by an external manager (like the early childhood teachers who persuaded young Māori mothers to speak English to their children in the 1950s or the successful "Speak Hebrew campaign" to which Jewish immigrants to Israel were exposed), the normal practice will be to speak that language to their children.

For each speech community, level, or domain, there are similar ideologies that help explain practices. One of the strongest is what de Swaan (2001) labeled as the "Q-value" or communicative potential of the variety, namely, the number of people you can expect to communicate with when you speak this variety. Its Q-value refers to the number of speakers, as a first or additional language, who understand it, explaining why the number of native speakers is often not as important as the number of proficient second language speakers; thus, while there are more native speakers of German than of English in Europe, English has a higher Q-value because it is used by more Europeans as a second language. This potential usefulness is often the strongest factor in situations where communication is significant, such as in business and industry or in the military or government. A counterforce to this communicative value is the importance of identity: an emotional value assigned to a language spoken by parents or other family members. Thus, children from elite homes might pick up the languages of servants in the house for communication and the language of grandparents for the emotional connection.

In the classic study of motivation for language learning, Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguished between what they called instrumental and integrative motivation, the former referring to learning a language in order to communicate in it and the latter to learning in order to identify with and become a member of the social group that speaks it. One of the strongest beliefs about language is its role in asserting identity with others who speak it (Wright 2004). It is one of the most obvious markers of difference between "we" and "they," proclaiming identification with a group or defining stigmatization as an outsider. This claim is driven by the belief that as children and adults acquire communicative ability, they become more effective members of communities, a process labeled as language socialization (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986).

The belief in the close relationship of identity and language underlies the equally close relationship that is assumed between language and nation (Anderson 1991). The motto of the Indonesian national movement at its conference in 1928 was *Satu nusa, satu bangsa, satu bahasa*: one land, one nation, one language, aiming to unify the speakers of over 700 languages. This principle was at the heart of the ideology developed by Cardinal Richelieu in founding the Académie Française with its role of centralizing French culture and language, replacing the many regional varieties and languages such as Occitan, Breton, Picard, and Angevin with a single standard

language (Cooper 1989). The close relationship between language and nation became a major ideological principle of national independence movements from the nineteenth century and continues to be powerful.

The French imperial monolingual hegemonic ideology is not uncommon, although historically it has been challenged by supporters of diversity and multilingualism. Under British rule in India, there was strong pressure for education in English, but its problems and failures supported those who favored the use of local languages (Evans 2002). When India became independent, the divisions into states and the separation of Pakistan implemented the notion of territorial monolingualism, an ideology that did not recognize the enormous linguistic complexity.

Local territorial pressures help account for the limited multilingual ideology of Switzerland, where the recency of federation allowed the assignment of language policy to cantons, and in Belgium where political pressures are relieved partly by accepting local autonomy and territorial language policy. Changes of ideology also may be seen in totalitarian China and Russia. While China has long believed in the value of Putonghua as a unifying variety, there have been periods of accepting the multilingualism of the regional Han languages and even of the non-Han minority languages. A similar belief in the usefulness of recognizing some minority languages as a method of spreading socialism was prevalent in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, but reversed by Stalin. Before independence, South Africa struggled with the claims of Afrikaans and English, ignoring the 25 or so other language spoken indigenously (Malherbe 1978); in the new constitution, nine of these languages have been included in the official list, but the highest value is still given to English and Afrikaans (Heugh 2003; Kamwangamalu 2000; Mesthrie 2002). It is hard to overcome the ideology of national monolingualism.

Another powerful and relevant belief is the sacredness of a chosen religious language. Hebrew was kept alive as a language of literacy for two millennia after it was no longer a vernacular (Spolsky 2014b, c). Qur'anic Arabic as the language of Qur'an was chosen as the language of national identity where regional varieties were spoken (Suleiman 1994, 2003). For many hundreds of years, the Roman Catholic Church insisted on Latin as the language of prayer; there are many who still regret the decision of Vatican II to allow the vernacular for the mass.

There is a belief nowadays that English is and should be the language of science. A hundred years ago, however, this role tended to be filled by German and before that by French and earlier Latin.

Language Education as Language Management or Planning

Language management (called language planning by many; see Tollefson, chapter "► Language Planning in Education," this volume) developed as a field of study in the 1950s with the work of Haugen (1959) who studied a century of efforts to deal with the conflict over choice of school and official language in Norway. In the 1960s, the period that Jernudd and Nekvapil (2012) call the classical period, linguists started

to offer advice to politicians and bureaucrats who were facing similar problems in new nations, in selecting among a number of languages after independence had removed the necessity to use an imperial or colonial language.

In the period after the Second World War, as more colonial empires split and more countries became independent, language management at the national level became a matter of considerable significance. A number of linguists, though not trained in the process of language management, assumed that their knowledge of language would be relevant, and sharing the enthusiasm of social and economic planners, they began to offer advice. At this stage, the main emphasis was on national language policy.

Language management now has a wider scope. In all speech communities or in the various domains that make up a speech community, there are some who wish to modify the language practices or beliefs of others; these are the managers. There are two further useful distinctions. In *simple* language management (Neustupný 1970; Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003), the agents are individuals who are dissatisfied with their own language proficiency and take steps to modify it by taking classes or using a dictionary or in some other way. Second, in *complex* language management, the manager may also be outside the domain or community, as when a government tries to manage family language use.

In fact, commonly a number of putative managers are attempting to influence the language practices of participants in a community or domain. National language management is handicapped by this complexity, when it ignores the beliefs of members or leaders of a minority group. Educational language management controls the classroom, but besides the teachers who are participants in the domain, there is a complex set of other putative managers, including the national government, its educational agencies and bureaucrats at national and regional levels, school boards and the parents or publics they are assumed to represent, school principals, and curricular committees, all outside the domain but aiming to influence the classroom teacher who is the direct manager. This helps explain why simple "top-down, bottom-up" models fail to deal with all the forces involved.

Research in the field has generally ignored this rich array of managers and asks simple questions about the failure of implementation of national language plans and policies (Baldauf 1994; Kaplan and Baldauf 1997). But Williams (2008) has traced the Welsh case and shows activities at the various levels of government and non-governmental groups that have provided the opportunity for successful Welsh regeneration since devolution. In spite of the strength of government support, the various schemes depend on the activities of many different agencies, in the private as well as the government domains. Malaysia, where the Malay language policy was restricted to government and education leaving commerce to move from Chinese to English, reveals that non-governmental levels are critical.

In fact, some of the most interesting issues in language management occur when there is a direct conflict between managers at various levels. The maintenance of Hasidic Yiddish among followers of some rebbes shows the power of religious leadership to work against government preference for standard

national languages. Māori activists started classes and schools that required immersion in Māori. Minority language activists have a double task: to persuade their own members to continue to speak a language with less power or usefulness and to persuade majority governments to permit or even support their use of their language or variety.

Language management in the private sector typically depends on the business owners. In factories, such as those studied by Nekvapil and Nekula (2006), international firms need to find a way for communication between management and workers, with one solution being the use of bilingual foremen. A much more complex pattern emerges among multilingual employees in international banks in Luxembourg: Kingsley (2009) has shown how banks select languages according to the needs of customers or according to the nature of the group of interlocutors, with English as a common choice when native speakers of several languages are involved. Many firms also offer several languages of clients; to attract tourists, stores commonly exhibit signs proclaiming that "English is spoken here." Answering services and call centers may choose to offer more than one language: Many government and private institutions in Israel offer Hebrew or Arabic and some add Russian or English.

Active language management typically involves one of two main processes: the choice of a language variety (called "status planning" in classical language policy) and selection of the appropriate form (called "corpus planning"). It is status planning when a government or an institution declares a language variety to be *official*, though the term needs finer definition. Official can refer to the language to be used by government offices in communicating with the public or to be used by the public communicating with the government. It may call for candidates for public office to be able to use the language; this was true of the regulations of many newly independent nations and was recently the center of a controversy over a requirement that candidates for president of the Navajo Nation in the US Southwest must be proficient in the Navajo language. Official language policy may also refer to the language of public signs, whether governmental or private. In English-speaking nations, the fact that English is official is not usually stated explicitly; thus, New Zealand passed laws making Māori and New Zealand Sign Language official languages, but the legislation does not mention English.

National government policy may also call for the use of a specific language of instruction in schools, following the model established by the Jacobins during the French Revolution. This may occasionally be written into law, but more usually it is a matter of regulation or under the authority of a ministry of education. The teaching of other languages (international or minority) is often a decision of the education ministry, although it may also be encouraged by a regional supranational organization or by laws affecting minority rights.

Language management includes not only the choice of a variety (status) but also its form. The invention of printing led to the standardization of letter forms for most languages. As Fishman (2006a) points out, corpus decisions very often have status reasons. The switch from one alphabet to another, such as the Turkish change from

Arabic to Latin (Lewis 1999) or the Soviet requirement that minority languages use the Cyrillic alphabet, had political motivations: In Turkey, Kemal Ataturk was engaged in a major campaign of modernization and Westernization, and in the Soviet Union, it was a continuation of the Russification policy of the Czars. In many cases, spelling reform is a political issue. Fishman (2006a) argues that there were four underlying principles governing most changes in the form of language. The first and most powerful of these was the search for "purity," fighting an opposing pressure that he calls "vernacularity" or "folksiness." Believers in purity condemn the use of foreign words. The opposite tendency is noticeable especially among linguists who favor the naturalness of African-American Vernacular English, who accept the diversity of World Englishes (Kachru 1986), or like Katz (2004), who prefer lively dynamic Hasidic Yiddish to the purity embraced and preached by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. An even more extreme version of purity is the search for what Fishman calls "uniqueness," making sure the language includes no borrowings at all. The opposite tendency is what he calls "Westernization," the acceptance of vocabulary for technical terms from international languages. A third approach that Fishman (2006a) recognized was the preference for the classical variety of the language, especially likely to occur when it has religious significance, as in the case of Arabic, Hebrew, and Sanskrit. For each of these, there is a traditional sacred text which that can be appealed to as the model of purity. The opposite trend Fishman (2006a) calls "panification," the effort to unite related languages into a single variety.

Language Management and Educational Linguistics

Although I began my career as an applied linguist, I became disenchanted with the term. My solution was to propose the field of educational linguistics, defined as the juncture of studies of language and education and including aspects of linguistics relevant to education and aspects of education concerning language (Spolsky 1974, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1985, 1990, 1999b; Spolsky and Hult 2008). The term has been picked up by a number of universities and scholars in the field (Hornberger 2001).

The field of language education is prima facie an example of language management, for it specifically attempts to modify the language practices and beliefs of its students. At the same time, language management is a subfield of linguistics relevant to education. Thus, the relationship is symbiotic, each forming part of the other – policy and management are a basic part of language education, and educational linguistics provides a compendium of methods to manage language practices and beliefs. Spolsky and Hult's (2008) handbook contains 44 chapters, the major section headings being foundations, linguistically and culturally responsive education, language education and policy, literacy development, language acquisition, language assessment, and relations between research and practice.

Language policy in education can be studied as a distinct field, but as this chapter has tried to show, it is closely related to the language policy of the community as a whole. As one might expect in a complex ecological system, the components influence each other and are influenced in turn. A school language policy is not independent but influenced by the political, national, religious, economic, and ideological environments in which it is developed and which maintain a constantly changing set of pressures. This complexity helps explain the regularity of reform proposals and new plans to solve language education problems.

Future Directions

The growing academic interest in language education policy and its basis in educational linguistics and language policy have opened up the field of practice to major improvements, but they continue to be distant, as governments and educational systems ignore their lessons. A good proportion of the children of the world still suffer from instruction in language that they do not speak or understand; educational authorities assume that more testing will somehow produce better learning; and many nations wracked by famine and war cannot afford to train and select teachers or provide them with the needed conditions. Too often the main lesson of school for many children is that it is a waste of time: Too many adolescents are turned into terrorists and murderers by ignorant parents and inadequate schools. Knowledge grows (and these volumes show its major growth in critical areas), but the inability or reluctance to implement what we have learned continues to have tragic results.

Cross-References

- ▶ Language Education Planning and Policy by and for Indigenous Peoples
- ▶ Language Education, Pluralism, and Citizenship
- ▶ Language Planning in Education
- ▶ Language Policy in Classrooms and Schools

Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

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Terrence Wiley: Bilingual Education Policy. In Volume: Bilingual and Multilingual Education

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