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# Language Planning in Education

James W. Tollefson

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## Abstract

Language planning in education refers to a broad range of decisions affecting the structure, function, and acquisition of language in schools. This chapter reviews the history of language planning in education, major contributions of past research, current research, problems and difficulties facing the field, and future directions. Early developments are categorized into two major periods, distinguished by a focus on the role of language planning in “modernization” and “development” on the one hand and critical analysis of power and ideology on the other. Major contributions emphasize work by pioneers in language planning, such as Joshua Fishman and Charles Ferguson, who laid the foundation for subsequent work on language maintenance and shift, bilingualism and diglossia, and a host of related topics. Subsequent developments shifted attention to language and ideology, tensions between “standard” and “nonstandard” varieties, globalization and the spread of English, language maintenance/revitalization, and bilingual approaches to education. Work in progress includes new developments in research methodologies, new conceptual frameworks such as interpretive policy analysis and the ecology of language, and changing understandings of language policy and planning. These new understandings have led to increasing use of qualitative research methods such as ethnography. Important challenges facing the field include efforts to integrate language planning with other social sciences and to build more direct links between research and the practice of language planning in education. Finally, this chapter examines future directions, including the role of language planning in economic inequality, language plan-

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J.W. Tollefson (✉)

Department of English, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA

e-mail: [tollefo@u.washington.edu](mailto:tollefso@u.washington.edu)

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ning in non-state institutions such as the World Bank, and development of new research methodologies.

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### Keywords

Language ideology • Language planning • Language rights • Language revitalization • Language research methodology

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## Introduction

*Language planning* refers to deliberate efforts to affect the structure, function, and acquisition of languages. Particularly important are decisions about the medium of instruction. Language planning may take place in schools and other institutions, in families and workplaces, or in any social group – including virtual communities – in which verbal communication takes place. When official bodies, such as ministries of education, undertake language planning, the result may be *explicit language policies*, which entail statements of goals and means for achieving them. In education, the most important language policy decisions are about the choice of medium of instruction. Language policies may also be *implicit*, which refers to social rules for language use that regulate language learning and language behavior in institutions and social groups. Understanding explicit and implicit policies requires attention to language ideologies, as well as the interconnections between state, institutional, and classroom policies and practices. Together, language policy and planning (LPP) constitute a field of study as well as a field of social practice (McCarty and Warhol 2011). This chapter summarizes research on the role of LPP within education, with particular emphasis on status and acquisition planning.

## Early Developments

LPP emerged as a distinct field of research in the 1960s. The term “language planning,” initially used in Haugen’s (1959) study of the development of standard Norwegian, referred to both corpus planning and status planning. Corpus planning entails efforts to affect the structure of language varieties and includes processes such as standardization, graphization, purification, and terminology development. Status planning involves efforts to affect the status of language varieties, such as decisions about which varieties should be used in government, the media, the courts, schools, and elsewhere. Later, acquisition planning was identified as a third major area, involving efforts to affect language learning in schools and other institutional settings.

The initial period of development in the field of LPP took place through a series of influential publications in the 1960s and early 1970s (Fishman 1972, 1974; Fishman et al. 1968; Rubin and Jernudd 1971). Much of this early research in LPP focused attention on devising a conceptual framework for LPP and on a limited range of practical concerns, primarily involving language planning in newly emerging nation-states. Thus in its early years, LPP was closely linked with “modernization” and “development” programs in “developing” countries, and it was heavily influenced by modernization theory. Although LPP in education was not the major focus of the earliest research, it soon emerged as a central concern, because corpus planning issues such as language standardization and script reform as well as many status planning decisions necessarily involve educational institutions. Also, it was widely believed that LPP in education could play a significant role in the processes of political and sociocultural integration that were crucial for new states formed with the end of colonialism in Africa and Asia (see Fishman et al. 1968). Thus, by the mid-1970s, LPP research examined such central educational issues as the role of vernacular and standard varieties in schools, bilingualism, teacher training, and the education of linguistic minorities.

Early LPP in education shared three key assumptions with modernization and development theory. The first assumption was an optimistic belief that LPP in education would benefit ethnolinguistic minorities, for example, with policies intended to ensure they learn the language(s) used as medium of instruction. A second key assumption was that technical experts in LPP should play a central role in formulating and implementing efficient, rational plans and policies. This separation of LPP from the political process reflected a belief in the skills of LPP specialists and an emphasis on the technical aspects of corpus planning. A third assumption of early LPP in education was that the nation-state should be the focus of research and practice. The main actors in LPP were believed to be government education agencies (especially at the national level), and thus a top-down focus on state authorities dominated early LPP research.

During the 1980s and 1990s, a critique of early LPP focused on the impact of the local context on national policies and the limitations of a technical rather than

political emphasis in LPP, as well as on the failure of many language plans and policies to achieve their stated goals. Critics argued that the early approach was flawed in several ways. First, it underestimated the complexity of sociopolitical systems in which cause-effect relationships between plans and outcomes are highly complex, and social groups often have covert and competing goals. Second, by focusing on national plans and policies, early research did not fully explore the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of communities affected by LPP in education, particularly the processes by which local communities can challenge or transform national plans when they are implemented at the local level. Third, an optimistic belief in the value of LPP for integrating linguistic minorities into national political and economic systems could not be maintained in the light of research on contexts such as apartheid South Africa, where the white minority government promoted mother tongue instruction and used both status planning and corpus planning as tools of apartheid. Similarly, in other states in sub-Saharan Africa, LPP in education helped to address the immediate problem of national integration (e.g., in Tanzania), but often the outcome was a small elite in control of educational systems that largely ignored the educational needs of masses of the population with limited political power. Summarizing the impact of this critique, Blommaert (1996) stated that LPP “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” (p. 217).

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## Major Contributions

The early period of LPP research explored in detail the relationship between language structure and language function on the one hand and various forms of social organization (ethnic groups, nation-states) on the other (e.g., Fishman 1974; Fishman et al. 1968). This work provided an important foundation for subsequent research on language maintenance and shift, as well as on language and identity. A particular achievement was a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to the maintenance or loss of minority languages in communities in which a powerful standard variety dominates educational institutions. In addition, the connections between LPP and micro-sociolinguistics, articulated in detail in Fishman’s (1972) expansive volume on the sociology of language, demonstrated that macro-level policies of the nation-state are linked with micro-level issues such as interaction in educational settings and languages distributed in situations involving bilingualism and diglossia.

The subsequent critique of LPP shifted attention to questions of ideology, power, and inequality. Based on a growing body of empirical studies in widely varying contexts in the 1990s and early 2000s, this research made important advances in language and ideology; the role of non-standard varieties in education; globalization, the spread of English, and language maintenance and revitalization; language rights; and bilingual approaches to education.

## Language and Ideology

Although the term “ideology” has many meanings in LPP, it generally refers to commonsense notions about the nature of language and communication (Woolard 1992), particularly implicit or unstated assumptions about language that determine how human beings interpret events. Various ideologies of language have been examined, including linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralism, and internationalization. Standard language ideology, which refers to a “bias toward an abstract, idealized homogenous spoken language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class” (Lippi-Green 1997, p. 64), has received particular attention. In many contexts, LPP in education plays a central role in imposing standard language ideology, by rewarding users of standard varieties and imposing sanctions against those who use other varieties. Ongoing research on language ideologies demonstrates that policies and practices in education are often shaped by ideologies of planning authorities and politically powerful groups rather than by empirical research on the educational value of alternative policies and practices.

## Nonstandard Varieties in Education

One consequence of standard language ideology is that nonstandard varieties, including regional dialects, varieties used by poor or working-class students, and pidgins and creoles, are often excluded from use as medium of instruction. Policies that exclude nonstandard varieties from the schools are often justified on pedagogical grounds, namely, that they allegedly interfere with effective instruction in the standard. However, research on this claim (e.g., Gándara and Hopkins 2010) has found clear evidence that the use of nonstandard varieties can have a positive effect on the acquisition of standard varieties, as well on students’ participation, self-esteem, performance on standardized tests, and overall academic achievement. Despite these research findings, however, language policies in many educational contexts continue to restrict the use of nonstandard varieties.

## Globalization, the Spread of English, and Language Maintenance and Revitalization

A major concern in LPP is globalization, the unprecedented spread of English, and the associated loss of languages worldwide (Nettle and Romaine 2000). Two central questions in this research are the role of planning bodies in these processes and the possibilities for language maintenance and revitalization. Several scholars have argued that the spread of English is the direct result of LPP by UK and US authorities (Phillipson 1992), whereas others argue that English has been widely adopted for

instrumental reasons because it serves important social functions (see Spolsky 2012).

In contrast to analysis of the increasing use of English, research on language maintenance and revitalization examines the factors that contribute to language maintenance or shift and to the processes that may facilitate language revitalization (Fishman 1991, 2001). Work in the US Southwest is particularly important, as scholars have examined successful efforts to maintain Navajo and use it as a medium of instruction (McCarty 2002). Similarly, the revitalization of the Māori language in New Zealand has offered an opportunity for scholars to identify factors that facilitate successful language revitalization (May and Hill 2005).

## Language Rights

Research on language rights has expanded in recent years, fueled in part by the attention to human rights in international organizations such as the United Nations and European Union. As a result, a large body of research has focused on conceptual and theoretical issues in language rights and on the challenges of implementing language rights guarantees (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Increasingly, language rights in recent years have been the focus of heated discussion. Wee (2011), for example, argues that “group rights” based on language and culture are founded on essentialist conceptions of “language” and “ethnicity” that are incommensurate with the complexities of contemporary translanguing practices (Canagarajah 2013) and identity. Even supporters of language rights have criticized the limited impact of language rights in education, in which “rights” often contribute little more than “marvelous human rights rhetoric” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2002, p. 179) that does not materially improve the lives of linguistic minorities.

More fundamentally, the past two decades of research in LPP have led to the collapse of the idealized vision of the linguistically homogenous nation-state, accompanied by a critique of the notions of “standard” and “nonstandard” varieties as fixed entities with distinct boundaries. The traditional link between one language and one identity, which is based on the belief that different languages are distinct systems with clearly demarcated boundaries, and which has frequently served as a rationale for policies to suppress minority languages, has been widely rejected in LPP. Instead, research has turned attention to heteroglossic home and community environments, hybrid linguistic repertoires that are commonplace worldwide, and plurilingual regions and contact zones where multiple varieties, often without clearly demarcated social or linguistic boundaries, are spoken by individuals and groups in complex relationships of domination and subordination.

Many case studies of such zones have appeared (e.g., the multilingual Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, the Andean region of South America, Native North America, and many urban areas worldwide), with many scholars concluding that traditional conceptions of “language” and “dialect” do not apply to the contemporary

complexities of everyday linguistic life. In response, new LPP conceptual frameworks have been proposed that incorporate the concepts of linguistic ecology, heteroglossic home-community environments, and hybrid communicative repertoires. Such approaches have been used to explain difficulties in implementing language rights in some regions. In the Caribbean Coast region of Nicaragua, for example, Freeland argues that language rights discourses “need deconstructing and reinventing. . . Indeed, it may be that. . .the idea of ‘language rights’ should be abandoned in favor of a broader concept like ‘linguistic citizenship’” (2013, p. 109). Such research demonstrates that even groups that agree on the importance of language rights may have different notions of what “rights” may mean. Research on new forms of citizenship emerging under globalization may help LPP scholars address these important issues (McGroarty 2002).

## Bilingual Approaches to Education

Emphasis on the use of standard varieties in schools, grounded in standard language ideology, leads in many contexts to monolingual approaches to education, in which students’ complex linguistic repertoires are ignored and a target-language standard is imposed. As early as the mid-1990s, Phillipson (1992) and others argued that there is virtually no research supporting the claim that exclusive use of the target (standard) language is the most efficient way to promote language or subject matter learning. Moreover, research on English-only instruction exploring its impact on students’ dropout rates, social isolation, progress in subject matter instruction, and other variables finds significant advantages for the use of students’ home varieties (Gándara and Hopkins 2010; Tollefson and Tsui 2014). Nevertheless, despite such extensive research supporting multilingualism in education, policymakers and practitioners in many contexts continue to favor monolingual approaches.

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## Work in Progress

A major focus of current work in LPP is research methodology (Hult and Johnson 2015). This work examines such questions as: What research issues are most important? What research methodologies are appropriate for different research questions? What forms of evidence are persuasive? What are the ethical responsibilities of scholars engaged in LPP research? The focus on research methodology is in part a response to criticisms of the research process. For example, as early as 1999, Smith pointed out “from the vantage point of the colonized . . . the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p. 1). Thus some LPP scholars advocate a “critical method” in which an examination of their relationship to “others” who are the focus of research is at the

center of the research process (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001). Such reflexive research is becoming the standard in the training of LPP scholars.

A related focus of current work is the effort to elaborate an emerging set of new concepts for LPP. Since its initial formative stage, LPP scholarship has developed a range of conceptual frameworks, including the distinction between formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Rubin and Jernudd 1971); status, corpus, and acquisition planning (Haugen 1959); cost-benefit analysis (Rubin and Jernudd 1971); interpretive policy analysis (Wright 2005); top-down and bottom-up policymaking (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997); and the ecology of language. In 2004, Jones and Martin-Jones (2004) argued that LPP theory should seek to integrate macro and micro perspectives, specifically state and institutional policymaking processes on the one hand and local practices in classrooms, families, and other social groups on the other: “It is by situating. . .local practices within the wider social and institutional order that we can gain the deepest insights into the processes of cultural and linguistic reproduction” (p. 67). Accordingly, work by scholars such as Canagarajah (2013) and Ramanathan (2013) have sought to build a new LPP paradigm that integrates the micro-level analysis of classrooms and other “local” institutions and groups with the macro-level analysis of power, inequality, and state/institutional processes. As more LPP scholars have taken up this effort in recent years, LPP has been increasingly characterized by attention to the implicit language policies and practices of everyday life. Indeed, a new understanding of LPP has emerged, with LPP understood as “the complex of practices, ideologies, attitudes, and formal and informal mechanisms that influence people’s language choices in profound and pervasive everyday ways” (McCarty 2011a, p. xii).

Thus, current research focuses less attention on the actions of state authorities, which were the primary concern during initial development of the field, and more attention on the language practices of everyday life, less on specific and defined ethnolinguistic groups and more on hybrid and multiple identities, less on nationalism and the nation-state and more on transnationalism and cosmopolitan citizenship, less on language conflict and more on networks and mobilities, and less on linguistic imperialism and more on the instrumental value of English. Indeed, LPP research increasingly rejects the traditional distinction between macro and micro social “levels,” arguing instead for a new theoretical framework that reflects the dialectical relationship between state and institutional policies on the one hand and the (often implicit) policies and practices that organize everyday language use on the other. This important change in focus has been accompanied by increasing use of ethnographic and other qualitative methods (McCarty 2011b).

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## Problems and Difficulties

Despite its many advances, LPP research faces several challenges, in particular integrating LPP with other social sciences and linking research with policy and practice.



## **Integrating LPP with Other Social Sciences**

More than two decades ago, Williams (1992) articulated the disappointing failure of LPP and sociolinguistics to be sufficiently linked with other areas of the social sciences. For example, the paucity of sociological research on language is particularly striking, given the belief among LPP scholars that language is central to many social processes. Nevertheless, some theoretical work in LPP has begun to forge links with other areas in the social sciences. Particularly important is research that links LPP with political theory and political economy. Ricento et al. (2014) explicitly identify ways that LPP could benefit from cross-disciplinary collaboration with political theorists. For example, whereas LPP scholarship generally prioritizes empirical analysis of particular contexts, political theory seeks to understand normative statements and judgments that underlie the prioritization of language varieties; perhaps an emerging conceptualization of “normative language policy” will be helpful for LPP scholars to gain insight into the underlying processes of status planning. Subsequently, Ricento (2015) examines English as a “global language” within a political economic framework. One potential contribution of this approach is that it is critical of ideologically and politically motivated claims about the possible benefits of learning English or other dominant languages. Instead, a focus on the political economy of language clarifies that language skills do not substitute for material advantages, and indeed a focus on language learning may distract from more fundamental economic disparities that cannot be overcome through language study. Influenced by Marxist and other approaches to the analysis of socioeconomic class, such work potentially offers renewed understandings of the role of language in the systematic social reproduction of inequality.

A second potentially productive connection is between LPP and the legal framework for language plans and policies (Wiley 2002). For example, the body of law on free speech in the United States is crucial to understanding debates about state efforts to restrict languages other than English and other stigmatized varieties in schools. Supporters of policies favoring multilingualism and language diversity often rely on the constitutional protection of speech as a basis for promoting languages other than English in state institutions. Similarly, in the Philippines, ongoing policy debates about bilingual education must be viewed within the long history of constitutional regulation of the role of English, Filipino, and other languages. With more scholars trained in a broader range of the social sciences, there is reason to hope that LPP will increasingly influence – and be influenced by – political theory, legal theory and analysis, and other social scientific research.

## **Linking Research with Policy and Practice**

In its infancy, LPP was widely viewed as a practical discipline with immediate application to policy and practice (see Fishman et al. 1968). Since the 1990s, however, many LPP scholars have not directly engaged with the practical application

of their research. Indeed, some scholars have been critical of the failure of LPP to influence language policies in schools (see Cummins 1999). More recently, renewed interest in engaging with policy and practice seems evident, as public engagement has become part of the training of young LPP scholars. For example, Hult and Johnson's (2015) guide to LPP research includes a section on "public engagement and the LPP scholar" that provides practical advice on interacting with schools, participating in public policy debates, communicating with political leaders and policymakers, and managing media relations. An additional factor encouraging scholars' focus on practical implications of their work is that recent reductions in university funding have led to increased applications for outside funding, which often requires explicit attention to the effects of research on policy and practice in schools.

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## Future Directions

With the continuing expansion in LPP research, new and unexpected directions are likely to emerge. Two areas that should receive serious attention are LPP and economic inequality and the impact of non-state institutions.

## LPP and Economic Inequality

Since the 1990s, research on LPP in education has focused on its role in creating and sustaining inequality, particularly the ways in which LPP in education is used by dominant groups to sustain their systems of privilege, not only through explicit policies but also by commonsense practices that help speakers of dominant varieties achieve the highest levels of success in schools. For example, work on "governmentality," which refers to discourses, practices, and patterns of language use as techniques by which individuals and institutions shape public behavior and enact programs of government, focuses attention on the link between everyday language use and sustained inequality (see Pennycook 2002). This research, which shifts attention away from explicit policies adopted by the state, implicitly acknowledges Fishman's early recognition of the interconnections between state/institutional policies and everyday interaction. From this perspective, discourse analysis and various approaches to interaction analysis and micro-sociolinguistics should be incorporated into LPP research.

LPP also includes explicit attention to economic analysis of language, though this line of research remains underdeveloped. Grin (2015), for example, examines the economics of English using key concepts from economics, such as "value," "efficiency," resource "distribution," and "fairness." A major problem with the economics of language is that relevant data on language (e.g., speakers' language abilities, rates of language learning, and correlations between language learning and changes

in income) are often not available. A second issue, as Grin points out, is that policy decisions about language are ultimately political rather than economic issues. Nevertheless, expanding the capacity of LPP research to address issues of language and economic inequality should be a major focus of future empirical research.

## The Impact of Non-state Institutions

While research on state educational institutions continues, equally important is study of the increasing role of multinational corporations and other global institutions that affect LPP in education. Work by Alidou (2002), for instance, on the World Bank's influence on education in sub-Saharan Africa, offers a model for this research. How are state education ministries constrained by policies of the World Bank and other global institutions? How are decisions of such global institutions implemented at the local level? How can local educators, students, and their families shape the policies that affect them? These are important questions for research in this direction.

Finally, any future directions for research are likely to take place against the backdrop of continuing development of new conceptual and theoretical frameworks in LPP, with the likelihood of continued expansion in the use of ethnography and other qualitative research methods.

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## Cross-References

- ▶ [Language Policy in Education: Practices, Ideology, and Management](#)

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## Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

- Bernard Spolsky: [Investigating Language Education Policy](#). In Volume: Research Methods in Language and Education
- Francis M. Hult: [Discursive Approaches to Policy](#). In Volume: Discourse and Education
- Kate Menken: [High-stakes Tests as De Facto Language Education Policies](#). In Volume: Language Testing and Assessment
- Katherine Mortimer: [Discursive Perspectives on Language Policy and Planning](#). In Volume: Discourse and Education
- Teresa L. McCarty: [Ethnography of Language Policy](#). In Volume: Research Methods in Language and Education
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