



Afterword

Language policy and planning processes in post-colonial Timor-Leste: struggles and alliances within and across scales

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Abstract

The aim of this Afterword is to foreground and discuss some of the key themes emerging from the four studies in this special issue. I first consider the critical ethnographic approach to language policy and planning adopted in the studies, and the attention to language policy processes unfolding on different scales of social and institutional life. This is followed by my reading of the ways the authors present the different actors creating, appropriating, reframing or resisting national and language-in-education policies in Timor-Leste. The last part is devoted to the analysis of discourses and practices of particular social actors taken here as ‘language policy arbiters’ (Johnson and Johnson in *Lang Policy* 14(3):221–243, 2015).

Keywords Language policy and planning · Language-in-education policies · Post-colonial · Timor-Leste · scales

Introduction

This special issue on “Developing language and literacy policy in a global age: The case of Timor-Leste” builds on and extends prior transdisciplinary collaboration, along Global South/Global North lines, between Estêvão Cabral, an East Timorese researcher, who works in the field of political history, and Marilyn Martin-Jones, a sociolinguist, who has a primary interest in multilingualism and language policy-making processes (e.g. Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008, 2018). Here, Cabral and Martin-Jones have managed to assemble a special group of authors who have conducted detailed ethnographic research in Timor-Leste and who provide us with highly relevant and up-to-date critical reflexions on language discourses and processes in

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Timor-Leste. They have investigated the processes involved in the reintroduction of the Portuguese language in the country and the design and implementation of a new language-in-education policy after Independence in 2002, with Portuguese and Tetum as co-official languages. Espousing this broad unifying approach, the authors shed light on the language policy processes at work in different sectors of education: In the first article, Ildegrada da Costa Cabral focuses on language policy and classroom practices in primary education; in the second article, Alan Carneiro devotes his attention to language ideologies in teacher training in the context of cooperation between Brazil, Portugal and Timor-Leste; in the third article, Trent Newman focuses on language ideologies and practices underpinning the intellectualisation of Tetum in higher education, and, in the final article, Danielle Boon, Edegar da Conceição Savio, Sjaak Kroon and Jeanne Kurvers focus on language policy and practices in adult literacy education, and in local community contexts.

My aim in this Afterword is to foreground and discuss some of the key themes emerging from the four studies in this special issue. I first consider the critical ethnographic approach to language policy and planning adopted in the studies, and the attention to language policy processes unfolding on different scales of social and institutional life. This is followed by my reading of the ways the authors present the different actors creating, appropriating, reframing or resisting national and language-in-education policies in Timor-Leste. The last part is devoted to the analysis of discourses and practices of particular social actors taken here as ‘language policy arbiters’ (Johnson and Johnson 2015).

A critical, ethnographic approach to language policy and planning

Taking into account the methodological and theoretical approaches adopted in the four articles in this issue, one can conclude that their authors belong all to the same school of thought, within the sociolinguistics of multilingualism. For some time now, Martin-Jones and her colleagues have been contributing to the promotion of critical, interpretative and socio-politically oriented approaches to language and multilingualism (e.g., Heller and Martin-Jones 2001; Heller 2007; 2018; Martin-Jones 2007; 2015; Martin-Jones and Martin 2017). They have also been nurturing new voices that take up these approaches, within which multilingual practices are viewed as social practices that are imbued with language ideologies (Heller 2007).

The four studies in this special issue are ethnographically-oriented, drawing on different strands of ethnography, including linguistic ethnography, ethnography of language policy and multi-sited ethnography. Within this broad ethnographic framework, the authors underscore the post-structuralist view of language policy creation, interpretation and appropriation (Johnson 2009) as processes that occur in tandem at different layers, scales or levels¹ of social and institutional life, hence the need to take a multi-layered/multi-scalar and critical interpretative approach to fully

¹ These are the three terms that occur most in the sociolinguistic literature. Here I will employ the term ‘scale’, following Blommaert (2007).

understand and explain them. The four articles included here fall broadly within this analytical framework, linking language policy creation, interpretation and appropriation processes with social, cultural, political and economic forces operating on different scales of social and institutional life in Timor-Leste. This is, in part, realised by combining the analysis of policy documents and historical accounts with ethnography, where special attention is devoted to processes and to social actors operating on different scales. As a result, primary school teachers and students, adult literacy tutors and learners, teacher trainers and trainees, university lecturers and cooperation actors are presented in these studies as agentive language policy planners, who use different strategies and actions to comply, accept, adapt and recast language policy (cf. Johnson 2009).

The historical, ethnographic and narrative analyses of different dimensions of the Timorese educational context offered in this special issue add to and expand our understanding of language policy and planning (LPP) as ideologically motivated processes (Ricento 2000; Heller and Martin-Jones 2001; Blommaert 2013), operating on different scales and involving different social actors (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997; Ricento and Hornberger 1996; Hornberger and Johnson 2007; Blommaert 2007, 2013; Johnson 2013).

Different actors appropriating, enacting, reframing or resisting national and language-in-education policies in Timor-Leste

The detailed ethnographic and narrative accounts provided in the four articles in this special issue show how different actors appropriate, enact, reframe or resist instances of official language ideologies, discourses and policies. The authors also show, in a very convincing way, how participants' discourses and practices reflect their personal educational biographies and social trajectories as well as historical and contemporary political discourses on the management of multilingualism in Timor-Leste.

To frame the analysis offered in this section, I start with a brief summary of the language policy-making processes in Timor-Leste presented in the Introduction and carried forward in each of the articles. On Independence in 2002, Tetum and Portuguese were constitutionally established as the two official languages of Timor-Leste and the main languages of formal education, whereas Indonesian and English were defined as working languages within the civil service, alongside the two official languages (cf. Constituent Assembly 2002). In contrast, despite the statement that the other local languages of the country should be valued and developed by the State, the Constitution was silent regarding their place and role in official arenas, including education.

During her research, Da Costa Cabral found that, overall, primary school teachers assume their officially assigned role as facilitators of the implementation of the Tetum and Portuguese language-in-education policy and share the belief that these languages are legitimate official languages of Timor-Leste. This stance is consistent with the ideological view of both Portuguese and Tetum being emblems of Timorese identity, hence their construction as 'partners' and 'allies', a partnership that is also

thought to be a *sine qua non* condition for the development of Tetum. However, Da Costa Cabral also found that there are some teachers who perceive Portuguese and Tetum differently. For this group of teachers, Portuguese should be the legitimate language of teaching and learning primarily because it is regarded as better suited for knowledge building allegedly because it is more developed and has ‘logical rigour’ when compared to Tetum. In contrast, Tetum is conceptualised as a language for scaffolding knowledge-building, one that can only serve as a pedagogic resource in the teaching and learning of/in Portuguese.

The same range of contrasting perceptions are also reported in the article by Newman. As a matter of fact, Newman found that some university lecturers perceive Tetum as illegitimate as an academic language, allegedly because it is assumed to be an underdeveloped language, lacking in lexical resources for academic and scientific communication. For this group of lecturers, Portuguese, English or Indonesian are better equipped as languages for academic and scientific communication. In contrast, other university lecturers disagree with this view of Tetum as ‘lacking’ and ‘limited’ and, through their own discursive practices, they show how this language can be flexibly used as a lingua franca for academic and scientific communication in multilingual Timor-Leste. This pragmatic view, and the practice of flexible multilingualism, is particularly relevant in a context where, for the majority of university students, Tetum is the strongest resource within their communicative repertoires, while Portuguese, English or Indonesian are, as yet, weaker resources.

In contrast with the tendency to give primacy to Portuguese over Tetum in primary and in tertiary education, Boon et al. show, in their article, that in adult literacy education, Tetum is the *de jure* and *de facto* language of instruction and literacy development. It is also the most socially valued language amongst adult literacy tutors and programme participants. However, in a few regions, Tetum is competing with or complemented by other local languages as the medium of literacy education.

The accounts of research participants’ perceptions and practices in the three sectors of education considered in this special issue seem to indicate that in primary and tertiary education there is a lack of settlement in the discourses articulated by different actors over the status of Tetum as a language of formal education. At the same time, there seem to be more convergent pro-Tetum perceptions and practices in adult literacy education. This is substantiated in the observation in the final article, by Boon et al., that the language-in-education policy in adult literacy, with Tetum as the medium of instruction and language of literacy, “resonates quite well with the sociolinguistic realities ‘on the ground’, and with the language values being expressed by participants in the different regions included in the two studies”. Their findings and conclusions seem to suggest that while the status of Tetum as a language of national communication and education has been overwhelmingly acknowledged by the wider population, in rural and urban areas, the status of Portuguese (and also English and Indonesian) as languages of communication and education is mainly supported by those whom Da Costa Cabral calls ‘social elites’. These include key groups of politicians, civil servants, university lecturers and teachers in urban areas.

Moreover, the finding by Boon et al. that Tetum was consensually perceived by adult literacy participants as the most valued language in Timor-Leste (as compared

with Portuguese and Indonesian), and as the ‘most useful language’ for the future of their children and for the future of the country, contrasts sharply with the general perception of colonial and local languages in other post-colonial contexts. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, there is a general tendency (among the wider population as well as among the elites) to assign greater value to former colonial languages than local languages, since former colonial languages are regarded as the resources for socio-economic mobility and gaining access to power. This makes them the preferred languages for the education of new generations (cf. Bamgbose 2000; Heugh 2008; Chibutane 2018). Given the significance and value assigned to Tetum in Timor-Leste, and the contrast with the views of local languages articulated in post-colonial settings in sub-Saharan Africa, it would be worthwhile conducting further research of this type in Timor-Leste in order to build on this finding and to identify the specific factors that are contributing to the shaping of these language values.

The legacies of the political history of Timor-Leste

The political history of Timor-Leste has had a substantial influence on contemporary language ideologies, discourses and practices. As we saw in the Introduction to this special issue, the key dimensions of this history are the long years of Portuguese colonialism, twenty-four years of Indonesian occupation and Resistance to that occupation. The choice of Portuguese and Tetum as the co-official languages of Timor-Leste at independence, at a time when knowledge of Indonesian was widespread, with the language being used in formal arenas, including in education, has to be understood, at least in part, with reference to this wider historical and socio-political context.

During the Resistance to the Indonesian occupation, Portuguese and Tetum were ideologically constructed as the languages of resistance, and as Cabral and Martin-Jones (2008) have shown in empirical detail, they were the most used languages of literacy during the years of the Resistance. As a consequence, at Independence in 2002, the first government of Timor-Leste, led by FRETILIN (*Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente*—The Revolutionary Front of an Independent Timor-Leste) promoted these two languages, a policy that can be taken as the final realisation of the ideological vision pursued during the struggle against the Indonesian occupation. That is, instead of adopting the language of the latest occupier, who had caused deep wounds that were still fresh, the ruling elites opted for that of the previous colonial power, Portugal, who had supported the Resistance to Indonesian occupation, along with the nations in Africa which had adopted Portuguese as an official language. This explains the ideologically loaded slogan “reintroduction of Portuguese in Timor-Leste”. Nevertheless, given the currency of Indonesian in Timor-Leste at the time, this language was defined as a working language within civil service, alongside English, Portuguese and Tetum. The statement by Xanana Gusmão, quoted by Da Costa Cabral in her article, indexes this ideological, but in some way embarrassing, choice of Portuguese as one of the official languages of Timor-Leste: “Portuguese is our historic identity which was paradoxically assigned to us by colonial presence” (Xanana Gusmão, first President of Timor-Leste).

The ideological position taken by FRETILIN regarding the choice of Portuguese, a former colonial language, as an official language and as a nation-building symbol had also been taken before by the leadership of other independence struggles in former Portuguese colonies such as FRELIMO (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique / Mozambican Liberation Front*²), the movement that fought for the Independence of Mozambique and supported the Timorese Resistance to the Indonesian occupation. During the struggle for independence, FRELIMO adopted Portuguese as the unifying language (Katupha 1994) and after Independence in 1975 this language was declared the official language and the language of national unity and development. Therefore, in both post-colonial contexts, the language of the former coloniser, Portuguese, has been adopted and used ‘in the service of social change’ (Ricento 2006: 4).

Individual biographies and educational trajectories

The socio-political transformations that have shaped the specific history of Timor-Leste have given rise to diverse educational biographies and social trajectories. Taking into account the language, place and time of education, the Timorese population includes, among others, (i) those who were educated in Portuguese in Timor-Leste during the final years of Portuguese colonial rule; (ii) those who were educated in Portuguese in Portugal and in other countries where Portuguese is an/the official language, including Mozambique, just before or during the Indonesian occupation; (iii) those who were educated in Indonesian in Timor-Leste and in Indonesia during the twenty-four years of occupation; (iv) those who were in exile in Australia and in other English speaking countries and were educated in English; (v) those who have been educated in Portuguese and Tetum in post-independent Timor; and (vi) those who have not had opportunities to receive much meaningful formal education and have mainly remained attached to Tetum and other local languages. All these groups include citizens who were involved in the struggle for political independence from Portugal and in the Resistance to the Indonesian occupation as well as those who served the Portuguese and Indonesian occupiers. As can be perceived from this sociolinguistic mosaic, while there are East-Timorese who have been educated through the medium of Portuguese, Indonesian and English, there are none who have received all of their education in Tetum, hence the need to intellectualise this language in order for it to serve as a language of academic and scientific communication. This pressing issue is very well illustrated in the article by Newman.

As the studies in this special issue show so clearly, the language practices of Timorese citizens, and their discourses about different languages, are indexical of their diverse educational biographies and social trajectories. For example, we see why Dr. Daniel Santos, one of the participants in the study by Da Costa Cabral, argued that Portuguese should take precedence over Tetum as language of education. He had been educated in Portuguese up to secondary level, then in English at

² Frelimo has been the party in power in Mozambique since Independence in 1975.

undergraduate level in Indonesia and in Australia at doctoral level. For him, Portuguese has a long history as the language of formal education, being equipped with didactic and logical rigour as well as rigour of linguistic expression, characteristics that he perceived as lacking in Tetum. In her article for this special issue, Da Costa Cabral did not explore Dr. Santos' attitudes towards English, but he would probably identify himself with this language, as well as backing its status as a working language in the Timorese context, due to his own linguistic socialisation. We also see why Prof. E., an university lecturer, who was one of the participants in the study by Newman, preferred to use Indonesian and not Tetum in her classes, given that she had not had the opportunity to develop Tetum as a resource for tertiary-level teaching and for knowledge-building. She had been born in Indonesia and educated in that country through the medium of Bahasa Indonesia. In addition, we see why the lecturers from the physical sciences disciplines who took part in Newman's study perceived Indonesian and English as more suitable for academic and scientific communication than Tetum. They had been educated in Indonesian and/or in English and had mostly had access to teaching and learning materials in these languages. They all regarded Tetum as not being sufficiently well adapted for these purposes.

All these cases show how individual biographies and educational trajectories have shaped citizen's language attitudes and perceptions in Timor-Leste.

Agency and power: the role of language policy arbiters

We know from a range of recent research (e.g. Hornberger and Johnson 2007; Johnson and Johnson 2015; Tollefson and Pérez-Milans 2018) that social actors situated on different scales of social and institutional life have different degrees of investment in LPP processes. In other words, some language policy agents have more power to direct language policy and planning processes than others, depending on the scales on which they are positioned.

This observation has led Johnson and Johnson (2015) to advocate the notion of 'language policy arbiter' to refer to influential players in the context of language policy making and enactment in education. These authors define a language policy arbiter as "any language policy actor (potentially: teachers, administrators, policy-makers, etc.) who wields a disproportionate amount of power in how a policy gets created, interpreted, or appropriated, relative to other individuals in the same level or context" (Johnson and Johnson 2015, p. 225). Given their disproportionate amount of power and influence, language policy arbiters may open or close spaces for multilingualism and multilingual education. Although the notion of 'language policy arbiter' was initially applied to certain agents within different sectors of education, it can be extended to other agents influencing national or other levels of policy-making, including international aid or cooperation agencies (e.g., Chimbutane 2017).

The studies in this special issue offer strong evidence in support of the view that there is differential distribution of power in language policy and planning, with some players acting as language policy arbiters. In the ethnographic descriptions and narrative accounts presented here, we see a range of policy arbiters at work in Timor-Leste. They include: cooperation agencies and their representatives, members

of the pro-Independence party, FRETILIN, civil servants in the Ministry of Education, university lecturers, primary school teachers, teacher trainers and adult literacy tutors. In this section I foreground a few examples of agents acting as language policy arbiters, either supporting or constraining language policy and planning processes in Timor-Leste.

In his article for this special issue, Carneiro argues that the reintroduction of the Portuguese language in Timor-Leste, and the design and implementation of language and educational policies after independence, should not be taken as a neo-colonial project, but as materialisation of a vision of a group of Timorese social actors who had struggled to build political hegemony over time. He argues that one should not overlook the influence of Portugal and Brazil on the choice of Portuguese, rather than Indonesian or English, as the co-official language of Timor-Leste alongside Tetum. As Carneiro points out, in relation to his account of the positioning of a representative of the Brazilian cooperation, the alignment of Brazil and Portugal with the official language policy of Timor-Leste was a matter of public record. By making that alignment public, along with their role as language policy arbiters, they were investing their capital as powerful states in the process of legitimating the Timorese pro-Portuguese language policy and at the same time backing the ruling social elite who had created the conditions for that choice.

This language policy choice was followed up by the direct involvement of the Brazilian and Portuguese cooperation agencies, and their representatives, in the promotion and expansion of the use of the Portuguese language in this country, including through the training of Timorese Portuguese language teachers. Despite this public alignment between Brazil and Portugal over the promotion of Portuguese in Timor-Leste, Carneiro presents detailed evidence showing that they were not, in fact, aligned regarding the variety of Portuguese that should be promoted and disseminated in this country, that is, the Brazilian or European Portuguese variety. The divergence is clearly documented in relation to the teacher training field, where we find actors in the service of the Portuguese cooperation agency, such as a powerful coordinator of the Portuguese cooperation, ‘imposing’ the use of the standard European variety of Portuguese while at the same time avoiding the dissemination of the Brazilian variety. As a strategy to materialise this agenda, this coordinator established the deployment of Brazilian trainers to the teaching of subjects other than the Portuguese language, while Portuguese trainers took charge of the training related to this specific area of the language curriculum. This is an example of a language policy arbiter operating on a specific scale—that of teacher training.

The language practices and ideologies of local language policy arbiters in Timor-Leste is also discussed in the article by Newman. As this author argues, negative attitudes expressed by university lecturers toward Tetum as a language for academic purposes could jeopardise the governmental efforts to support the intellectualisation of this language. By constraining this language planning activity, these lecturers are acting as language policy arbiters within the academic field, in particular given their position as potential role models for their students.

More specifically, Newman shows how some university lecturers in his study portray Tetum as a deficient language for academic and scientific purposes, while favouring English, Indonesian or Portuguese. However, most of these lecturers find

themselves having to use Tetum or to mix Tetum with English, Indonesian or Portuguese to communicate disciplinary content to their students as Tetum is the language that most of these students understand best. Given their prestigious and powerful role within the academy and in the wider society, a take-home message that these lecturers may be passing to their students is that the official policy that declares Tetum as a language of education alongside Portuguese is inappropriate, since they regard it as a language that is not ready to be used in higher education. This positioning of Tetum epitomises the colonial construction of endogenous local languages as dead ends educationally and economically, a discursive construction which also serves to legitimate the hegemonic position accorded to exogenous colonial languages, including Portuguese. Although (university) students should not be seen as uncritically taking up the discourses and practices of their masters, we should not overlook the fact that educational settings "...serve as spaces within which specific languages (national, official languages) and specific linguistic practices (ways of speaking, reading and writing) come to be inculcated with legitimacy and authority" (Martin-Jones 2007, p. 172). Acting as language policy arbiters, lecturers such as the ones portrayed in Newman's article are contributing to the discursive construction of English, Indonesian and Portuguese, and not Tetum, as the legitimate and authoritative languages for academic and scientific purposes in Timor-Leste, despite the fact that outside the academy, East-Timorese citizens continue to skilfully draw on their multilingual repertoires, making ample use of Tetum, to address the local and global issues and needs that emerge in their daily lives.

Closing remarks

Together, the Introduction and the four articles in this special issue of *Language Policy* make a significant new contribution to the critical ethnography of language policy and planning processes. They do so in the following ways: By documenting the political and historical context in which the specific language-in-education policies in Timor-Leste have been forged, up to and including the current global conditions for language policy-making in newly independent nation-states; by providing detailed accounts of the specific, situated ways in which these language-in-education policies have been created, interpreted and appropriated, adapted or merely resisted in different sectors of education—in primary education, in teacher education, in universities and in adult literacy programmes; by describing and analysing in close detail the diversity of language and literacy practices observed in these sectors of education, in local community settings and linguistic landscapes; by examining the ways in which language ideologies are articulated in different language policy documents, in interview or focus group data; by revealing the different language ideological orientations of social actors with different biographies and educational trajectories; and by showing how some key actors become language policy arbiters, due to the affordances associated with their positioning on specific scales of social and institutional life. The rich set of studies presented here provide ample evidence to support the view of language policy-making as a site of struggles where agents, who are positioned on different scales, exert more or less influence over the representation and use of different linguistic resources and associated forms of social, cultural, political and economic capital.

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