# Language planning for diversity in foreign language education

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Studies in language policy and planning (LPP) for the teaching and learning of foreign languages have been under-represented in LPP scholarship. This under-representation is especially the case for studies of policy and planning for foreign languages other than English outside the English-speaking world. Foreign language education in much of the world has become synonymous with the teaching and learning of English, with other languages having at best a marginal position, especially in schools. This article presents an introduction to a thematic issue of Current Issues in Language Planning examining policies that seek to expand the diversity of foreign language education beyond its narrow focus on English.

## Introduction

In a study of publication trends in language policy and foreign language education, Hult (2018) concluded that research on foreign language education is lacking in language policy and planning (LPP) journals. He based this conclusion on a survey of the use of the phrases 'foreign language' and 'modern language' in the titles or abstracts of publications as indexed in *Linguistics and Language Behaviour Abstracts*. He found that very small percentages of articles in LPP journals included these terms, with *Current Issues in Language Planning* having the highest inclusion of articles with a focus on 'foreign languages' (at 6.5%, or 27 articles) over the period 2000-2017, although none contained the term 'modern languages'. The other LPP journals surveyed – *Language Policy* (2000-2017) and *Language Problems and Language Planning* (1977-2017) – had far fewer. He also found an even lower inclusion of LPP articles in the two language education journals he reviewed. Hult's study was not designed as a rigorous review of the focus of the journals but rather it aimed to gain a general sense of the ways in which language education and LPP intersect in academic publications. His study did not investigate which languages were in focus in the articles he investigated. However, my replication of his study reveals that only two articles published in *Current Issues in Language Planning* during that period were specifically focused on languages other than English, and a mere eleven more made mention of other languages in addition to a main focus on English, with the remainder focusing exclusively on English as a foreign language. The low number of papers reveals that the study of LPP for foreign language education is strongly English-language focused. In fact, the situation is actually more biased towards English than the present replication of Hult's (2018) study would indicate. If one also includes all studies of English language education in countries that are considered as belonging to Kachru's (1985) 'expanding circle' countries – that is in countries in which English language education could be understood as foreign language education – the predominance of English is increased, with a total of 12.5% of articles in the journal focusing on LPP for English language teaching..

In English-speaking countries, LPP for foreign languages obviously focuses on languages other than English and LPP studies do address other languages (see for example, Coffey, 2016; Hunt et al., 2005; Lanvers et al., 2021b; Liddicoat, 2020; Mitchell, 2011; Scarino & Papademetre, 2001). Some of this research can be found in LPP journals and some articles in *Current Issues in Language Planning* have specifically addressed LPP for foreign languages in English speaking countries (Baldauf, 2004; Copland & McPake, 2022; East, 2008; Ellis et al., 2010; Hatoss, 2004; Payne, 2006; Spence, 2004). Much of this research has focused on the instability of foreign language education in the English-speaking world and the failure of policy to establish sustained education in foreign languages. However, if one considers non-Anglophone countries, research on foreign languages other than English is very limited, with only one such study published in *Current Issues in Language Planning* in the period 2000-2017 (Payne & Almansour, 2014). There is however some research on this topic, mostly published in languages other than English, and this research indicates the fragility of foreign languages other than English in many parts of the world (e.g. Goto et al., 2010; Koishi, 2011; Rong, 2005; Sugitani, 2010; Yabusaki, 2007; Ying, 2013).

As a loose characterisation of the field, LPP research on foreign language education tends to fall into two main research foci: research on the expansion of English as foreign language education and the attendant problems this brings, and research on the contraction of education in other foreign languages, usually—but not exclusively—focusing on English-speaking countries. This thematic issue of *Current Issues in Language Planning* seeks to address the lack of research on LPP for foreign languages other than English by focusing specifically on policies that address the teaching and learning of languages other than English outside the English-speaking world.

## Monolingual and multilingual approaches to foreign language provision: Scoping the dominance of English

In a highly multilingual world, it would seem logical that language-in-education policies would promote the teaching of a diversity of languages to expand the linguistic resources available within a country. In this case, one would expect policies that favoured a range of languages being taught in school and

universities. In Anglophone countries, multilingualism has been the usual approach to foreign language education policy as in most such countries there is no single language that is an obvious choice for a monolingually focused policy. The extent of this monolingualism varies across different countries. In New Zealand, school-level foreign language learning is concentrated in five main languages: Chinese, French, German, Japanese and Spanish (East, 2021). In Australia over 140 languages are offered in schools, although six main languages account for the majority of enrolments: Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian and Japanese (Liddicoat & Curnow, 2009). The diversity of languages offered at university level may be higher than in schools, although this is not always the case, as fewer languages are available at university level in Australia than at school level (Liddicoat, 2020). This diversity in language programs does not, however, reflect a robust situation in Australia. In fact, overall levels of language learning in Anglophone countries are in decline and policies for foreign language learning are often less robust than in other countries (Lanvers et al., 2021a). On factor contributing to this decline appears to be the predominance of English as the usual foreign language in the rest of the world and a perception that multilingualism is unnecessary for English-speakers (Lanvers, 2011).

However, where there is a lingua franca that can support communication across multiple language groups, an alternative possible policy approach becomes available, and that is the teaching of this single lingua franca. In this case, one might expect that policies would favour the widespread teaching of this language as the main educational focus of foreign language learning. The increasing global dominance of English as language of international communication has made monolingually focused policy a viable option for many countries. These differing policy responses to the reality of multilingualism represent poles on a continuum and it is possible to have other policy settings along this continuum; for example the widespread learning of a lingua franca together with diversified learning of other languages, a policy approach that is found in some countries, especially in the European Union (Kowalonek-Janczarek, 2019; Pilhion, 2008). Decisions to favour a multilingual or a monolingual language-in-education policy may demonstrate quite different understandings of the educational? purpose of language teaching and learning in schools and universities. Decisions to favour a single lingua franca often reflect a view of language learning which presupposes that communication is a purely linguistic event and that communication through any language provides equal benefits for the learner (and consequently for the nation). They may represent a view of language as a decontextualised communication system that can be deployed effectively in any context in which the language is shared with interlocutors. Conversely, decisions to favour diversity often reflect a view that languages are contextualised in the cultures and lived experiences of their speakers and that each language offers different possibilities for understanding others, their cultures, their epistemologies, and their experiences (Liddicoat, 2018). In such a view, learning a particular language is seen as giving privileged access to, and insight into, a particular group and as constructing different communicative, interpersonal, and other connections between speakers than would be afforded by a lingua franca.

Language-in-education policies may also respond to non-linguistic factors. A monolingual foreign language policy makes possible a more streamlined implementation process. Teachers can be educated to teach the single language, thus creating a large pool of teachers that can be allocated easily to schools, a single curriculum can be developed, and materials prepared to address the curriculum, a single assessment system can be used to evaluate learning outcomes. This in turn has consequences of the level of economic resourcing that the implementation of the policy will require. Implementing multilingual foreign language education policies is more complex. Teacher education programs need to prepare teachers to teach a range of languages, and these teachers need to be matched across schools so teacher mobility becomes more of a challenge when not all schools teach the same languages. Curricula, materials, and assessment regimes also need to be prepared for a range of languages. All of these elements have implications for resourcing. The more languages that are made available, the more complex the implementation process is likely to become.

The ways that nations respond to the complexities of highly multilingual policies can been seen in language policy provisions in Australia responding to the high levels of diversity of language programs in schools. Some of this complexity has been offset by adopting generic approaches to language provision and teacher education, in which resources have been devoted to ‘Languages’ as a generic

teaching area rather than to specific languages. Many teacher education programs have switched from offering teacher education for teaching French, German, etc. to offering teacher preparation classes for teachers of all languages, which provide instruction relating to general principles of language teaching and learning that students must then apply to the specific languages they will teach (Kleinhenz et al., 2007). Similarly, in curriculum development there has been a long-term approach to developing generic curricula for languages education in which curriculum documents outline general features of the language curriculum but delegate to teachers the operationalisation of this curriculum in a particular language (Scarino, 2014). More recently, a national curriculum has been developed for specific languages but only for a small subset of the languages most commonly taught in schools (Scarino, 2019). Such strategies represent ways of simplifying and streamlining implementation, but they do also have disadvantages in that they do not always give adequate support to the language specific issues that emerge in education.

Decision-making about the provision of languages in universities and schools are also influenced by hierarchies of perceived values that are attached to languages. In any country where multiple languages are represented in language-in-education policy, the selection of languages to be studied as 'foreign' languages represents a selection of those languages that are considered to be useful, according to the ideological framing of utility that exists within the local context.

In many countries, as a consequence of neoliberal ideas of utility (Piller & Cho, 2013; Shin, 2016; Smith, 2021), English has been identified as *the* useful language for all learners and other foreign languages have been relegated to the periphery, with the consequence that diversity of language learning programs has disappeared at the levels of practice and policy. As a result, in many parts of the world, foreign language education has become something of an English- language monoculture, especially at the school level, with other foreign languages struggling to find space in educational programs. In the language-in-education policies of many countries, English specified as the single foreign language that all students will study. This policy is often reinforced by including English in admissions examinations for entry to, or graduation from, university. In other countries, language policies are less specific about mandating English; they mandate the study of a foreign language but do not specify the language to be studied. However, the result is nonetheless widespread study of English, often to the exclusion of other languages. This is the case in many parts of Asia, where policies mandate the study of an unspecified foreign language, but where English is chosen as the default language because of its ideological construction as the most useful foreign language. In some cases, the policy may mandate the study of any foreign language, but policy advice recommends that English be the normal choice, for example in Japan (Liddicoat, 2013). It may even be the case that when policy explicitly mentions other languages, these are not available in practice. For example, Tonga's *Education Policy Framework* states:

> All Tongans will be literate in both Tongan and English. Students will also have opportunities to learn other languages, including French, Japanese and Mandarin (Tonga Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 36).
>
> Current opportunities to learn languages other than Tongan and English (French, Mandarin, Japanese and German, for instance) will be maintained (Tonga Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 39)

However, there are no Tongan curricula for any of these languages other than English and it does not appear that any of these languages is offered in schools in Tonga (Liddicoat, 2023). This predominance of English reflects a reality that English as the dominant language of international communication has become the main language learned in schools and universities in most parts of the world. The predominance of English in LPP publishing therefore reflects the hegemonic position of English with language education.

## Increasing diversity of foreign language education

Some countries or regions have explicitly addressed the issue of the predominance of English in their language-in-education policies; for example in Europe a model of learning two languages has been

established (European Parliament, 2009) in which, while English is usually the first of the languagese to b taught, some languages have found a place as the second of these languages, although others may be excluded or find it difficult opening up spaces for teaching and learning in formal education (Hancock & Hancock, 2021). China's Belt and Road initiative also appears to be opening up spaces for other languages in education alongside English (Han et al., 2019). Some of the articles in the present volume discuss the situation of foreign languages other than English in China since the introduction of the Belt and Road initiative, and these articles and other studies make it clear that such languages do not replace English but exist alongside it. As the policy is relatively new, its overall impact on the profile of language learning is difficult to discern but it does not appear to challenge English as the dominant and dominating language of education.

Turning now to the articles in this volume, Cruz Arcila, Solano-Cohen, Rincón, Lobato Junior, Briceño-González provide a particularly apt first contribution by problematising Anglonormativity in language-in- education policies. They argue that, in Colombia, the hegemony of English has been central to shaping nation-wide policies, supported by neoliberal economic ideologies, but that other languages also play a significant role in socioeconomic development. They examine a university program in Colombia that adopts a specifically multilingual policy requiring students to study French, Italian, Portuguese, and German alongside English. They argue that their examination of the social representations that are constructed around languages reveal a broader picture of the possible motivations and meanings of foreign language learning and the relationship of language learning to socioeconomic development. Their study highlights the need to problematise and deconstruct the dominant ideologies of English as the language of progress, economic growth and international communication and they argue that there is a need to resignify language-in-education policies that over-emphasise the instrumental value of language learning and narrow down possibilities for the forms that such learning takes.

The next three articles examine the LPP situation for teaching foreign languages other than English in China. These first two papers reveal aspects of the impact of the Belt and Road initiative on foreign language teaching and learning and show some of the moves that are happening to increase the diversity of foreign language offerings, but also show some of the issues and problems such initiatives face.

Lu and Shen examine the issue of diversity of foreign languages education in China by examining how students perceive the differences between English and other languages as contributing to their linguistic capital, and the consequences of such perceptions for how they exercise their agency as language learners at the micro level. They argue that for students of foreign languages other than English, English remains nonetheless the main focus as the language that contributes most directly to the acquisition of linguistic capital, and that other languages make a more peripheral contribution. The value of such languages is thus seen in terms of their addition to English, as going beyond the more restricted English-Chinese bilingualism of other students and potentially preparing them to access higher-level positions that require more complex forms of multilingualism. The conclude that foreign language policies that promote multilingualism as they exist in China may contribute to the dominance of English rather than enhancing linguistic diversity in education.

An and Zheng examine the development of more diverse foreign language policies in China by examining the development of an elective Arabic program at a Chinese university. The focus their study on three groups of LPP actors—people with power, people with expertise, and people with interest—to examine how these groups exercised agency during the development of the program. They examine how space was opened for Arabic in the language policy of the university as the result of dialogic negotiation among different LPP actors in response to changes in China's macro-level LPP in relation to the Belt and Road initiative. They argue that students, as invisible voices in the LPP process, exercise considerable influence in programs such as the Arabic program, which are elective and which have to co-exist with English as a required and dominant language. They argue that while other actors may open up educational spaces for other languages, it is students who ultimately hold the power to ensure the sustainability of such spaces.

Tao's study investigates how new curriculum documents designed for the teaching of Russian in China

construct an ecological environment in which Russian language teachers are able to exercise their agency to create new educational approaches for the teaching of Russian. She argues that teachers of Russian experience the new policy for teaching Russian in a number of different ways. Macro-level policy exerts a strong influence on their agency, but only in some aspects of their work. At the meso level, universities' responses to the macro-level policy may open up or close down the ideological and implementational spaces in which local actors enact their agency. There may thus be conflicts between what teachers wish to achieve in responding to new policy setting and what they can do at the local level to implement these wishes.

The final paper by Poudel and Choi approaches the issues of diversity from a different perspective examining the interactions between foreign language learning and other forms of linguistic diversity in education in Nepal. argue that promoting diversity in language education in Nepal is highly complex because of multiple contradictory discourses concerning teaching and learning of languages. Their study examines the views of policymakers, head-teachers, teachers, students, and parents and argue that ideological framing of globalisation, neoliberal marketisation and nationalism have shaped language policy decisions and localised practice of language education. They observe that English-only monolingualism-in-practice has become the norm schooling in Nepal and that this norm conflicts with macro-level policies promoting linguistic diversity, with Chinese emerging more recently as a marginal language of education in addition to English, sustained by some of the same neoliberal rationales that have supported the hegemony of the English language in education. They also observe that the teaching and learning of foreign languages is in conflict with the teaching and learning of local minority languages, with foreign languages impinging on the educational spaces made available to such languages in practice, if not in policy.

These papers show a tension between the place of English in language-in-education policy and prospects for diversity of language teaching and learning. While they do show some positive signs of the opening up of new spaces for language learning in some contexts, they also reveal that these spaces may be precarious and that diversity is not assured, even if policies seem to support it. They indicate that in educational spaces, foreign languages other than English may remain peripheral and that their inclusion may not in fact challenge dominant hegemonies. However, as Cruz Arcila et al's paper reminds us, there is always scope to contest the hegemonic discourses that inform existing policy setting.

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