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Macro-language planning for multilingual education: Focus on programs and provision

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Macro-language planning for multilingual education: Focus on programs and provision

This overview identifies some common features of macro-level language planning and briefly summarises the changing approaches to the analysis of macro-planning in the field. It previews six language-in-education planning responses to linguistic diversity presented by the contributors to this issue. The cases show how macro-planning can either fail to recognise diverse ethnolinguistic identities or work to acknowledge them. Three common themes in language planning for multilingual education can be identified from the contributions: (i) top-down definitions of what counts as mother tongue can have both intended and unintended outcomes; (ii) language planning responses to linguistic diversity can work to reinforce or promote social exclusion; and (iii) the acknowledgment of diversity and minority language rights needs to flow through from statements of intent to implementational level – the site where bottom-up meets top-down planning.

Keywords: macro-language planning, language-in-education planning, multilingual education, top-down language planning, education programs and provision

Introductory overview

Language planning has traditionally been seen as operating at macro-levels, most typically in the form of big-picture, national initiatives by governments. More recently, there has been greater recognition that other levels are important since language planning is carried out not only by governments but also by different social groups and individuals (Kennedy, 2011). Indeed, language planning can be usefully perceived as operating along a continuum. The contributions to this issue focus on the macro-end of this continuum. They assess how six language-in-education planning efforts around the world are responding to multilingualism and ethnolinguistic diversity.

While definitions of language planning at the macro level have tended to reflect

the epistemological influences of their era, they broadly agree on certain common features: First, macro-language planning attempts to influence language behaviour on both an individual and a societal level (see for example Cooper, 1989); second, it is deliberate but not always overt (see for example Rubin & Jernudd, 1971); third, it is purpose-driven and future-oriented but may have contradictory goals (see Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997); fourth, macro-language planning may even be unplanned and can have unexpected outcomes (Baldauf, 1993); and fifth, macro-language planning discourses cannot be understood in isolation from their social context or the history that produced that context (Cooper, 1989; Tollefson, 1991).

Influenced by critical theory and postmodernism, language planning studies have shifted towards the critical analysis of the role of ideologies (see for example Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1994) producing “more nuanced and contextualised historical descriptions of events and practices” (Ricento, 2000, p. 18). Postmodernist applied linguists have challenged the notion that language is a fixed code (Makoni & Pennycook, 2006; Pennycook, 2006), suggesting a notion of language as sets of discourses shared by overlapping communities of speakers. This perspective calls into question whether the relationship between languages can be planned at all (Ricento, 2006). The connection between ideology and language planning has also become a focus of attention (Giroux, 1981; Luke, McHoul, & Mey, 1990; Tollefson, 1986; 1991; 1995) and Gramsci’s notion of hegemony has enjoyed renewed interest in the study of the language ideologies that underlie macro-language planning decisions (Ricento, 2000).

A major goal of macro-level language planning research within contemporary paradigms is to examine its historical bases. This goal is driven by consistent evidence in the research literature that both language policy and planning are social, historical

processes that are inseparable from social, cultural, economic and political concerns arising from their historical context (Pennycook, 2000). Much discussion of macro-language planning has taken place in the effort to analyse language problems that arose in the context of decolonisation and modernisation in post-colonial settings. The view of language planning as the product of its history and social context provides a means of linking past with present policy, planning and practice, enabling an understanding of the conditions under which present language planning operates and the social-historical forces that drive it.

Language-in-education or acquisition planning is arguably the most important site for macro-level language planning. Not only are schools the formal transmitters of languages but also the education sector transmits and perpetuates culture (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). Acquisition planning is directed at language education programs and language teaching for various purposes. The choice of language in the educational system confers power and prestige on the language concerned through its use in formal instruction. Not only is there a symbolic aspect to this power and prestige but there is also a conceptual aspect referring to shared values and worldview expressed through and in that language (UNESCO, 2003). Many scholars have demonstrated the importance of medium-of-instruction and literacy planning in the educational achievement of the learner (see for example Corson, 1990; Heugh et al. 2012, Spolsky, 1986; Tollefson & Tsui, 2004). Tollefson (1991) in particular has shown how medium-of-instruction planning can reinforce social inequality (see also Tollefson & Tsui, 2004). As Heller and Martin-Jones (2001) also show, language planning decisions in multilingual educational settings are often rooted in wider power relationships and the social, economic and political interests of dominant groups. The outcomes of these

decisions can have significant social impact and can work to reinforce the power and privileges of some, while restricting the educational and life opportunities of others.

The articles in this issue use many of these perspectives to examine language planning and its discourses in multilingual educational settings. The authors all take a macro-view, surveying the multiple effects of language planning on programs and provision. They analyse the consequences of decisions that are often made for more politically pragmatic reasons than sound educational ones. A common feature of the contributions that emerges is the highly elastic concept of mother tongue and the way it is defined by language-in-education planners. The papers show that the term mother tongue is deeply ideological, highly politicised and dependent on context. Definitions and understandings of what constitutes a mother tongue vary according to official responses to managing linguistic diversity and they are often manipulated for political purposes. As numerous studies of macro-level language planning have shown, decision-makers rarely have specialised linguistic expertise (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2007). Language and language-in-education planning at macro-level are essentially political processes in which decisions are made by politicians and typically implemented by actors and agents in Ministries of Education and other official bodies.

Language-in-education planning in response to linguistic diversity

The articles in this issue each illustrate a type of language planning response to linguistic diversity. Three common themes in language-in-education planning for multilingual education can be identified from the contributions. The first theme is that top-down definitions of what counts as mother tongue can have both intended and unintended outcomes. The second is that the policy decisions treating linguistic diversity as a problem can work to reinforce or promote social

exclusion; and the third is that the acknowledgment of diversity and minority language rights needs to flow through from statements of intent to implementational level if it is to become a reality. The final paper tackles a vital question in macro-language planning research, can researchers commissioned by language planning agents maintain their independence and objectivity and how involved or detached should they be?

Top-down definitions of the mother tongue and their consequences

The way that governments define mother tongues at the level of policy is an important aspect of language in education as such definitions can have consequences for language learning and use. Singapore represents a classic example of top-down, centralised approaches to language planning in multilingual educational settings. Ng's article analyses the social, cultural and educational consequences of the English-knowing bilingual policy in Singapore. Since independence, Singapore has pursued a policy of multilingualism, decreeing Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English to be the four official languages. Mandarin Chinese was designated the official mother tongue of the Singaporean ethnic Chinese, a decision that glossed over the presence of a number of varieties of Chinese spoken in Singapore's ethnic Chinese communities.

The English-knowing bilingual policy made it mandatory for all Chinese students to study English as a 'First Language' and Mandarin Chinese as a 'Mother Tongue Language' in Singapore schools. Ng shows how English, now a powerful and prestigious majority language in Singapore, has come to replace the range and functions of Mandarin Chinese. Over the years, Singapore has seen more and more Chinese Singaporeans adopting English as their home language. Ng shows that there has been a concomitant decline in the Chinese literacy of these students, despite the avowed intention of official educational planners to cultivate the learning of the mother tongues

in schools. As Ng observes, the emphasis on English in the school curriculum has meant that younger Chinese Singaporeans are aligning themselves with an English-speaking identity rather than a Chinese-speaking one. As the linguistic capital of Chinese declines in this age group, Ng concludes that language-in-education planners should re-emphasise the importance of the mother tongues as a vital feature of the educational system in order to maintain additive bilingualism in Singapore and reduce the risk of marginalising Chinese-educated Singaporeans.

Language planning and social exclusion

In linguistically diverse settings language can be a crucial consideration in nation-building. In contexts where language groups do not necessarily correspond with national boundaries it is potentially divisive as well. When language planning fails to take account of certain language groups it can become an instrument of social exclusion. This is the case particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where negative perceptions of multilingualism still serve to diminish the status of African languages, presenting them as a problem rather than an asset (Bamgboṣe, 2011).

Chiatoh's contribution examines the case of Cameroon, where language planning is also carried out in classically top-down fashion. Chiatoh shows how historically the selection of languages for use in the education system has been motivated more by politics than by the quest for educational quality. After the amalgamation of the French and British administered colonial territories into the Republic of Cameroon in 1961 an official bilingual policy declared English the official language for Anglophone and French for Francophone Cameroonians. However, as Chiatoh argues, successive post-colonial governments have failed to respond adequately to the communication needs of its citizens. The linguistic diversity of the country continues to be posed as a potential threat to national unity, providing convenient

justification for the continued use of English and French in formal education. These languages therefore continue to enjoy high status, regarded as the best and most neutral languages of instruction, and their speakers enjoy the privileges and opportunities that come with elite social standing.

As with Singapore, the choice of official languages in Cameroon is driven by political pragmatism. In fact, as Chiatoh points out, the Cameroonian state is more bilingual than its citizens themselves and the vast majority of Cameroonians almost never use the official languages. Despite various declarations, legal provisions and initiatives, indigenous Cameroonian languages have not gained in status and language planning projects promoted by religious and other outside organisations are either short-term or never get beyond the experimental stage.

Language planning and identity politics

Languages are not just tools for communication but are also powerfully connected with questions of individual and group identity. Language planning responses to the presence of multiple mother tongues can therefore become caught up in questions of identity politics. Dupré's study of the complexities involved in mother tongue education in multilingual Taiwan illustrates the relationship between language planning and identity politics par excellence. After decades of Mandarin promotion at the expense of aboriginal and local Taiwanese languages, the 1980s saw the rise of a movement for Taiwanisation, calls for the revitalisation of local languages and the promotion of linguistic equality. Yet the curriculum initiative for mother tongue education that commenced in 2001 is widely thought to be ineffective because it is geared towards the languages of local majorities rather than students' own mother tongues. The dominance of Mandarin as the language of instruction and public life and increasingly English as an international language mean the Taiwanese mother tongues are reduced to the status

of second languages in the curriculum, regarded as having no particular value in the linguistic marketplace. In Dupré's view, Taiwanese politicians and curriculum planners have failed to address either inter-ethnic tensions or curriculum issues in a way that has made language revival meaningful. In Taiwan language planning has failed to resolve the question of how to balance national identity with ethnolinguistic equality (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997, p. 203).

Discrepancies between language planning discourses and their implementation

It is not uncommon to find language planning situations in which governmental discourses may be supportive of linguistic diversity, but the implementation of these policies does not fully operationalise such discourses (Bamgboṣe, 2000). The case of Sweden – with its highly developed lobby groups and social democratic structures – demonstrates that it is possible to plan effectively for the positive recognition of diverse ethnolinguistic identities in education. Sweden has a long tradition of mother-tongue education and makes generous provision for linguistic minorities compared to other European states (Cabau, 1998; Nygren-Junkin, 2008; Spiliopoulou Åkermark & Huss, 2006). Progressive legislation and lobbying from language minority activists, rights-based bodies and other organisations have contributed to the official recognition of five national linguistic minorities and Sweden has ratified the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. The 2009 Language Act established Swedish as the principal language in Sweden and also guaranteed the rights of members of national minorities to learn and use their languages. However, the so-called “Swedish model” also illustrates the interrelated factors that impact on provision and the delivery of programs in multilingual settings, particularly in today's highly mobile and globalised societies.

The dramatic increase in mass migration to Sweden has highlighted discrepancies between top-down planning and bottom-up implementation in the state

school system. Despite generous provision for mother-tongue schooling in a range of educational formats, Cabau outlines some serious deficiencies in curriculum planning, resourcing and teacher supply that undermine its provision in public schools. In addition to implementational problems, Cabau identifies several other social and discursive factors that work against mother-tongue schooling in the public system. Among these, the hegemony of English in Sweden has contributed to reduced enrolments, a problem exacerbated by the low value placed on minority languages by students themselves and in society in general. Cabau also notes that curriculum discourses emphasising the sentimental reasons for learning one's mother tongue cut little ice with students today in view of the instrumental appeal of acquiring dominant European languages. In Cabau's assessment, the rising number of independent bilingual schools indicates that macro-language planning has not met minorities' aspirations for instruction in both minority and majority languages.

Language-in-education planning and minority language rights

The recognition of language rights for minority language communities has had a significant impact on language-in-education policy and planning. An example from Slovenia demonstrates a successful approach to language planning in multilingual settings. Education planners have taken a language rights-based approach by investing in bilingual education for Hungarian minorities in Prekmurje and for Italian minorities in Slovene Istria. Lukanovič and Limon describe two forms of bilingual education that have developed in these border areas and present some results of their research into how successful these bilingual models have been as well as the perceptions and attitudes of local people towards the two models involved.

The two models that are compared present examples of maintenance-oriented approaches to bilingual education. In Prekmurje schools are bilingual with instruction in

both Slovene and Hungarian, whereas in Istria schools may use either Slovene or Italian as the medium of instruction with the other language taught as a subject. In terms of provision, there are separate schools for Italian and Slovene speakers, with second language instruction in Istria and two-way bilingual schools for mixed groups of students in Prekmurje. The authors of this study are cautious about passing judgment on these programs; in fact, they deliberately refrain from it. However, these models of bilingual education demonstrate that it is possible to sustain national linguistic identity while also adopting a positive approach to the rights of ethnolinguistic minorities.

Test results show that a higher proportion of students in the Prekmurje model achieved or partly achieved the educational goals set out in the curriculum. The Prekmurje model also attracted more parental satisfaction than the Istrian one. Despite the fact that some doubts were expressed in both communities about the model applied in their area, both examples demonstrate that well-resourced, additive approaches to bilingual education can be a successful outcome of language planning that is committed to recognising the linguistic rights of linguistic minorities.

The role of language planning researchers

Macro-level language planning traditionally relies on the work of researchers in establishing the language situation. Such research may provide facts, figures and other demographic information about language use and literacy but it can also have an ethical dimension that adds complexity to the nature of the research. The final contribution by Kroon and Yagmur presents their findings from a nationwide survey of the sociolinguistic situation in Suriname, a highly multilingual former Dutch colony on the Caribbean coast of South America. In common with Cameroon, the former colonial language – in this case Dutch – is entrenched in the education system, where it is the nationwide medium of instruction. However, major Surinamese languages are not

formally integrated into the curriculum. Statistics show that for large numbers of Surinamese students the result is poor acquisition of literacy skills, low academic achievement and high dropout rates, problems that can be seen in countless former colonial education systems.

In 2005 the Ministry of Education decided to investigate whether Surinamese mother tongues had a role to play in ameliorating this situation and commissioned the authors to undertake a sociolinguistic survey as a basis for future language planning. The authors discuss the challenge of being involved in research designed *to support* language planning as compared to research *on* or *about* language planning. They ask to what extent it is possible for researchers to maintain objectivity and independence when they are asked to do research for the purposes of language policy development. In Suriname we see the classic post-colonial dilemmas played out – how elites preserve their power and status by supporting the use of colonial languages, and how indigenous languages are marginalised and looked upon as inferior. Kroon and Yagmur also raise the question of whether and how language planning researchers can address this sense of inferiority and advocate for change.

Concluding comments

The contributors to this issue depict six macro-level responses to linguistic diversity in vastly different educational settings. They show that when language planning flows from top-down, centralised, non-consultative decision-making processes motivated by political pragmatism, it invariably results in unsatisfactory provision for the ethnolinguistic minorities involved. When education planners choose to remain officially blind to linguistic diversity or to treat it as a problem that requires adjustment or resolution, a mismatch may arise between policy intent and outcomes. Discrepancies can also arise between policy statements and on-the-ground implementation. The

acknowledgment of diversity and minority language rights needs to flow through from statements of intent to implementational level – the site where bottom-up meets top-down planning. When planners are motivated by the desire or pressure to promote social inclusion, tolerance and/or cultural integration, the resulting programs and provision can be beneficial for minority groups. The contributions to this issue demonstrate the central role of language-in-education planning in embracing or overlooking ethnolinguistic diversity and language rights.

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