

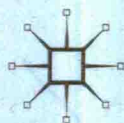
LANGUAGE POLICY AND LANGUAGE PLANNING

FROM NATIONALISM TO
GLOBALISATION

SUE WRIGHT



2nd edition



Language Policy and Language Planning

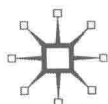
From Nationalism to Globalisation

2nd edition

Sue Wright

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palgrave
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In loving memory of Colin Wright (1945–2014)

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1

Introduction

This is a book about language planning and language policy, and naturally deals with the core issues of the discipline. There is, of course, much on the legal process of making a language official (status planning). There is also discussion of the linguistic changes planned in language institutes or among elite model givers (corpus planning). There is inevitably consideration of the policy measures and management, which ensure that the chosen and planned language is taught and learnt in school (acquisition planning). However, there is also more. There is reflection on political events, economic and social processes, which are not always seen as within the scope of the subject. My argument is that, although formal language policy making and language planning is a relatively recent development in terms of human history, as an informal activity it is as old as language itself, plays a crucial role in the distribution of power and resources in all societies, is integral to much political and economic activity and deserves to be studied explicitly from these perspectives.

My thinking on language policy and language planning (LPLP) was also moulded by M.A.K. Halliday's seminal 1990 lecture at the Ninth World Congress of Applied Linguistics. He suggested that

Language planning is a highly complex set of activities involving the intersection of two very different and potentially conflicting themes: one that of 'meaning' common to all our activities with language, and other semiotics as well; the other theme that of 'design'. If we start from the broad distinction between designed systems and evolved systems, then language planning means introducing design processes and design features into a system (namely language) which is naturally evolving. (Halliday 2001: 177)

This led me to wonder at what point there is conscious use of certain language forms for particular ends. It seemed to me to occur very early on in the language making process. From such a perspective it seemed possible to broaden out from LPLP interpreted narrowly as status, corpus and acquisition planning to see it as a field of enquiry that can range over the whole human activity of making meaning and conveying our meaning one to another. Studying the discipline from this perspective starts one on a journey where the limits are difficult to define.

One can argue that 'natural' language always has an element of 'design', at least in the sense that language is rule bound. Without being in agreement on the semantic load of our phonemes we could not communicate. Language works because all the members of a speech community accept the conventions. The choices that have been made are arbitrary. The links between signifier and signified are sustained by normative behaviour (which invests these sounds with these meanings within a particular community) and prescriptive behaviour (which differentiates the language of one group from the language of another and which avoids fracture within the group). A language exists ultimately because the community wills it, and the relationship between 'naturally evolving system' and 'designed system' is a constant tension.

From a social perspective, we could also say that communities exist because they have the linguistic means to do so. In other words, language is the means by which we conduct our social lives and is foremost among the factors that allow us to construct human communities. The importance of language for human beings as social animals is that it opens up the future to planning, it permits the past to become shared experience from which learning can take place and it allows cooperation in joint ventures, with all the advantages of scale that implies. As such, language plays a major role in the constitution of groups, and normative behaviour (observing language rules) and prescriptive behaviour (enforcing language rules) are central to the process.

It is in this broad sense that I am interested in LPLP and want to investigate how human beings have acquired, manipulated and negotiated language varieties to further their purposes, to consolidate their groups and to celebrate their individual characters. I want to respond to Ó Riagáin's criticism of sociolinguistics:

The power of state language policies to produce intended outcomes is severely constrained by a variety of social, political and economic structures which sociolinguists have typically not addressed, even

though their consequences are profound and of far more importance than language policies themselves. (Ó Riagáin 1997: 170–71)

In order to respond to this challenge, it will be necessary to enquire within the political and social sciences, acquire information from economics and law, and set the events and processes that affect language choice and change within a historical framework. The approach needs to be highly interdisciplinary. We all know how risky it is to go beyond one's own training, but perhaps, as Ó Riagáin points out, in the LPLP context, it may be even riskier not to do so.

1.1 What is language?

There are, however, perhaps two preliminary areas of enquiry to engage with before moving to the main concerns of the book. The first is the fundamental question 'what is language?' What are we planning when we plan language? There are two main schools of thought on the nature of language. One is the scientific tradition that holds that there is a real world 'out there' that can be understood and described in language and which finds expression in positivism in the nineteenth century and in some forms of structuralism in the twentieth. The other is the belief that the speaker/writer is an autonomous subject who, through free will, determines what will be said and meant. In this view language is a constant process of reinvention. From humanist and romantic thinkers of the nineteenth century to some postmodern theorists of the present there is a current that holds that individuals created language from their own individual experiences and for their personal communication needs and that each set of language practices frames reality for those who use them.

The language as system tradition can be traced to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), widely recognised as the originator of structuralism and the father of modern linguistics. De Saussure conceived of language as *langue* and *parole*, where the latter is the performance of individual speakers with all the idiosyncrasies of their idiolects and is an imperfect and incomplete reflection of the former, which is the ideal system and for which it is possible to produce a formal description. De Saussure did not go so far as to conceive language as a system with *a life of its own*, but he did claim that *langue* is not completely present in any speaker, but *exists perfectly only within a collectivity* (de Saussure 1916: 14). So, although in his conception, language should not be reified and seen as existing independently of speakers, it can be an imagined system which represents the totality of what all its speakers do. De Saussure

was concerned to promote linguistics as a science, and for this purpose, advised study of the ideal, normative¹ structure that could be dealt with as an abstraction, rather than the nebulous and changing idiolects of individuals. He is famously reported to have said 'Language is speech less speaking' (de Saussure 1916: 77).

The idea of an abstract, self-contained conceptual system, a system of incontestable, normatively identical forms was very attractive to those engaged in nationalist language planning. Nation builders needed the single standard language that could be employed, taught and acquired throughout the national space and which would build the national community of communication felt to be key for the creation of a homogenous national group (Wright 2000a, May 2001). Nationalist language planning entailed the imposition of language sometimes from outside and always from above and nationalist language planners were thus at ease with the concept of language as system, although the subtlety of Saussure's reasoning was mostly lost among those it influenced.

The concept of language as system has been challenged by all those who see the human language facility as essentially creative, and therefore divergent and heterogeneous. The Russian linguists, Medvedev, Voloshinov and Bakhtin, were among the first to refute any objective ontological status for language.² Voloshinov pointed out that a view of language that stressed structure and system to the detriment of creativity and evaluation of meaning did not reflect how language actually works:

The basic task of understanding does not at all amount to recognizing the linguistic form used by the speaker as the familiar, 'that very same', form, the way we distinctly recognize for instance, a signal that we have not quite become used to or a form in a language that we do not know very well. No, the task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding it in a particular, concrete context, to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e. it amounts to *understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity* (Voloshinov 1994: 33, my italics)

Medvedev, Bakhtin and Voloshinov insist upon the social aspect of language, the need to consider the essentially dialogic nature of language. All utterances are in accordance or in response to what has been said or written before. All utterances are dependent on the context in which they are uttered. All utterances are evaluated and interpreted by their recipients. Thus every utterance becomes 'a responsive link in

the continuous chain of other utterances which, in effect, constitute the continuity of human consciousness' (Morris 1994: 5).

In this interpretation language can only exist in performance, and it survives by being taken up and reiterated in subsequent performance. The continuous chain of utterances that results constitutes ongoing human consciousness, with meaning being created and recreated in every dialogic event.

In other words, the understander, belonging to the same language community, also is attuned to the linguistic form not as a fixed, self-identical signal, but as a changeable and adaptable sign. (Voloshinov 1994: 33)

This conception of language as ongoing dialogue, learnt by being understood in context, constantly renegotiated and subtly changed in an active and responsive context, is now the dominant paradigm in linguistics although the concept of language as system underpins research carried out in the Chomskyan tradition³ and poststructuralist and postmodern thinkers such as Lacan, Foucault, Derrida and Kristeva take a complex position on the dichotomy of language as independent system and language as performance.⁴

However, although the debate among linguists on the ontological nature of language may have veered to the Bakhtinian view, this position is not universally accepted. The general public has been schooled in a public education system that presents codified, standard language as the norm. Political elites reify language and act as if it were a free standing discrete system, because it is difficult to manage anything but systematised language in education, the law and governance. National standard languages are messily entangled with group identity and loyalty.

This dichotomy is central to this present book and clarifies many of the key issues: the tensions as nation builders impose an ideal linguistic system on heterogeneous populations; the struggles as elites try to direct and control *lingua francas*; the disagreements as activists attempt to revive languages on the verge of extinction. An understanding that language is conceived both as designed system and as contextually bound performance is central for any consideration of LPLP.

1.2 Why are there so many languages?

The second question is the Babel question. If language is the prime means by which human beings became social animals, what is the origin of the

extreme and profligate diversity of human languages? George Steiner wonders:

Why does *homo sapiens* whose digestive tract has evolved and functions in the same complicated ways the world over, whose biochemical fabric and genetic potential are, orthodox science assures us, essentially common, the delicate runnels of whose cortex are wholly akin in all peoples and at every stage of social evolution – why does this unified though individually unique mammalian species not use one common language? (Steiner 1998: 52)

Why do human beings speak thousands of different, mutually incomprehensible languages? The disadvantages are clear. Steiner (1998) mentions just three: tribal societies that have withered inwards, isolated by language barriers even from their near neighbours; contempt, fear and hatred caused by the inability of human beings to understand each other; and linguistic atomisation in Africa, India and South America which prevented indigenous peoples making common cause against foreign invaders. There are others: a brake on the transmission of ideas and technologies; the opportunity costs where plurilingualism requires translation and interpretation; difference that can be made to serve discriminatory systems. In this view, the 'destructive prodigality', the 'implausible variety' and the 'crazy quilt' of our linguistic systems creates 'zones of silence' and 'razor edges of division' (Steiner 1998: 56–8).

How can we explain the fact that human beings of identical ethnic background living on similar terrain under similar climatic and ecological conditions, often organised in similar communal structures, with similar kinship systems and beliefs speak entirely different languages? Steiner says that he puts the question repetitively because, for a long time, no linguist seemed to find the question worthy of discussion or comment. One scholar who has attempted an answer is Peter Mühlhäusler. Working in the Sapir-Whorf tradition,⁵ Mühlhäusler maintains that different languages cause different perceptions of the world and reflect 'thousands of years of human accommodation to complex environmental conditions' (Mühlhäusler 1996: 270). The insights within each language, acquired over millennia, are complementary according to this interpretation. Each language may be understood as a provisional interpretation of 'a world so complex, the only hope for understanding is to approach it from as many different perspectives as possible' (Mühlhäusler 2001: 160).

Although the argument is attractive, the supporting evidence is thin. The examples that Mühlhäusler and others give of different ways of perceiving the world are never radical and always appear translatable, for example, different perceptions of colour, different ways of expressing kinship and showing respect in social relationships, different ways of expressing number and mass.

Another response to Steiner's question comes in the work of D.C. Laycock. He suggests that languages are different simply because people prefer it that way. A distinct and singular language contributes to their sense of self. Amassing evidence from Melanesia, he shows how change in linguistic usage is initiated within groups to differentiate one from another. The most telling example of how diversity is planned rather than accidental is the case he cites of the Uisai dialect of Buin where all the anaphoric gender agreements have been switched, so that female become male and vice versa. There is, he suggests, no known linguistic mechanism that would explain this; it must have been done deliberately to create particularity. Such desire to differentiate may also explain why relatively small groups in Melanesia appear to have little difficulty in preserving their language. Laycock suggests that:

Once the process of diversification was well under way, Melanesians cannot but have become conscious that linguistic diversity had advantages as well as disadvantages, in clearly distinguishing friend, acquaintance, trading partner and foe. (Laycock 2001: 171)

The idea that language can be a tool for inclusion and exclusion is central to this book. Language builds human societies, solidarity and cooperation but it also plays a crucial role in the distribution of power and resources within a society and among societies. In non-democratic societies it serves to mark class and caste acquired through non-linguistic means; in democratic societies it is power itself, since authority in a democracy derives ultimately in a leader's ability to *persuade* the electorate to accord that authority.

1.3 Identity and communication

Steiner was focusing on the communicative purpose of language in his essay; Laycock was emphasising the role language plays in group identity. These two functions of language can be complementary. With their ability to communicate, human beings can build communities, which then provide, among other things, a powerful source

of identity for their members. If the group with which one needs to communicate is also the group to which one belongs then there is no conflict and these two functions can work symbiotically. This may be the case in small traditional communities which are self-sufficient, do not seek to break their isolation and have no contact imposed by the wider world. It may be the case among those who feel patriotic allegiance to their nation state, speak the national language and do not need to move out of national circles for any of the key activities in their lives.

For many, however, communicative and identity functions are not fulfilled by one and the same language. Where economic or political pressures cause the speakers of one language group to come into contact with the speakers of another and then to function at whatever level within the latter's linguistic environment, the former group is constrained to some form of linguistic accommodation, either language shift or societal bilingualism. Throughout history, conquest and colonisation have led to situations where one group has imposed language use on another to incorporate them or to exploit them. Indeed Appel and Muysken (1987) argue convincingly that the political history of the world can be retold in terms of language contact and conflict. At the present time the phenomenon of globalisation has meant that more and more people find themselves needing to communicate or access information outside their primary language group. This is leading to a situation where increasing numbers are functionally bilingual, with their language of group identity different from the language that they need in most of their acts of communication.

One can argue that the desire to ally communicative competence and group identity lies at the heart of language planning whether it is conceived as overt policy making or develops informally in the general governance of social groups. Such a desire is central to nation building, where national leaderships encourage linguistic convergence and assimilation within national groups and regulate their permeability to outsiders. Such a desire is key in the campaigns for maintenance and revitalisation of threatened languages, where activists advance the argument that language is a vital component in a group's identity. Such a desire may exist within a transnational corporation trying to build a corporate identity and requiring linguistic accommodation from its employees. In the flows and exchanges of global networks, those who acquire the language of the other or a hybrid language of contact will see the relationship of their identity and communicative competence altered.

1.4 The development of LPLP as a discipline

As a subject of academic enquiry LPLP appeared first in the age of nationalism. Language planning was an integral part of nation building and, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, intellectuals in the United States, France, Germany, Italy and to a lesser extent Britain produced a rich literature on the subject. The work of the Germans, Herder and Fichte, was particularly influential in the elaboration of the role of language in ethnic nationalism. Renan in France convincingly reconciled language and the theories of civic nationalism. The ideas of German Romantic nationalism and the theories of French Republicanism inspired a ferment of interest among those who aspired to the status of independent nations. Language was at the heart of nationalism. In the struggle for independence, it could be enlisted to define the ethnicity of the group and, after independence, it could be fostered to provide the statewide community of communication that nationalism seemed to require. Scholarly activists in the many groups seeking to exit from the rule of the British, Ottoman, Russian, Austro-Hungarian or French empires laboured to codify, standardise and disseminate a single language for the group, which could then be presented as part of the evidence for its claim to a separate polity. After independence was achieved, it was the role of the school to eradicate dialectal differences and to promote this single 'national' language as the medium that permitted the business of the state and united its citizens in a single community. Naturally, this body of language policy and planning literature is highly committed, and the work should be interpreted in the context of its campaigning and polemic origins and purposes.

After the Second World War, LPLP established itself in the universities as a recognised subject of academic enquiry. The language needs of the new 'nations' founded in the wake of decolonisation brought about renewed interest in the philosophy and strategies of nation building. The concept of 'one language, one people, one state' was, of course, particularly problematic in the postcolonial world. All frontiers are to some extent arbitrary, but those in postcolonial states were often completely arbitrary, following lines of latitude and longitude rather than natural barriers and long-standing tribal borders, and bringing together groups who were rivals for power and had no basis for conceiving themselves as a single people. Among the many and complex problems left by the departing colonial powers were a requirement to solve the logistics of communication in order to govern, an urgent need to weld disparate groups into a homogeneous whole and the necessity to modernise, to

provide the minimum needs of the population. Each of these seemed to have a language dimension and to need speedy intervention in terms of LPLP to produce a solution. Joshua Fishman, a key figure in LPLP studies who began his work in this era, thought the fluidity of the situation in the recently decolonised countries made them 'an indispensable and truly intriguing array of field-work locations for a new breed of sociolinguists' (1968: 11). As Fishman predicted, the developing countries were of great appeal to sociolinguists who were 'interested in the transformations of group identity in general and societal (governmental and other) impact on language-related behaviour in particular' (Ricento 2000: 10). In the discipline during this period there was a general belief in the effectiveness of LPLP. Joshua Fishman along with Joan Rubin, Bjorn Jernudd, Jyotirindra Das Gupta, Wilfred Whiteley and Einar Haugen, other leading LPLP researchers of the era, exhibited a degree of optimism⁶ that 'language problems' could be solved. In this they reflected the contemporary tendency to believe in the power of human agency to solve problems and thus in the power of language planning.

The second phase in postwar LPLP research was framed by a reaction against too optimistic a belief in progress. In many states newly freed from colonial government, modernisation and democratisation stalled and led to a rejection of Western solutions seen as neo-colonialist. In the West itself, a widespread questioning of the establishment and of hierarchical structures took place. All established traditions seemed to be under attack. In the academic world, research methodologies, in particular, came under scrutiny. Were they the tools of white racists, capitalists or male supremacists promoting worldviews, which confirmed their position? Those who thought they were and who saw themselves as marginalised by the dominant ideologies in the international research community developed methodologies to reflect a greater variety of world views.

New disciplines: Feminist studies, Black studies, Cultural studies, Development studies, appeared on the curriculum. Within the established disciplines, there was a critical analysis of approaches, which led to change. In LPLP, the focus on the linguistic dimension of modernisation and nation building was eclipsed, and many researchers and scholars turned their attention to the social, economic and political effects of language contact, concentrating particularly on issues of advantage/disadvantage, status and access. In accordance with the mood of the times, there was a fundamental review of the terms of the discipline. Many were seen to be ideologically laden. In many ways the questioning of assumptions was helpful, and concepts such as bilingualism,