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Epistemological and Theoretical Foundations in Language Policy and Planning

Michele Gazzola
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CHAPTER 1

Epistemological and Theoretical Foundations in Language Policy and Planning: Introduction

Abstract This introductory chapter reviews the historical development of the field of Language Policy and Planning (LPP), outlines the structure of the book, and introduces conceptual concerns and challenges that circulate throughout the chapters. The authors review the foundations of the field in classic language planning theory and examine the evolution of disciplinarily and interdisciplinary approaches. Chapters in the book examine (socio)linguistic foundations, critical empirical research, the public policy approach, modern corpus planning, LPP and technology, and language revitalisation.

Keywords Language policy · Language planning · Epistemology · Theory

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1 An Interdisciplinary Field of Research

Language policy and planning (LPP) is an interdisciplinary field, which relies on contributions from the humanities and social sciences, and thus demonstrates robust theoretical and epistemological diversity. While it emerged from sociolinguistics (Haugen 1964) and the sociology of language (Fishman 1972), LPP research is characterised by a marked multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity with researchers leveraging the theories and methods from their disciplinary homes to examine LPP documents, processes, and impacts. Examples include (socio)linguistics (Hult 2010), economics (Grin and Vaillancourt 2015; Gazzola and Wickström 2016), political theory (May 2008; Sonntag 2009), legal theory and analysis (Kochenov and de Varennes 2015), educational linguistics (Johnson 2013), and anthropology (Hornberger 1988). This multidisciplinarity was the motivation for the annual *Multidisciplinary Approaches in Language Policy and Planning Conference* founded in 2012 and convened by Thomas Ricento. As well, edited volumes by Hult and Johnson (2015), and Grin et al. (2022) represent diverse research methods and approaches in LPP, including chapters on political theory, legal theory, ethnography, corpus linguistics, economics, media studies, and demography (among others).

Early language planning research in the 1960s and 1970s (sometimes called 'classic LPP') was marked by objectivism and a growing yet inchoate batch of theoretical and methodological tools (e.g., Rubin and Jernudd 1971). At that time, the goal of LPP was mainly to help policy makers standardise and modernise indigenous languages in postcolonial settings and to select one or more official languages (typically the languages of the former colonial powers) to promote economic development and nation building (Fishman et al. 1968; Fishman 1974). Solutions for language problems were the focus—for example, what status to grant colonial languages in postcolonial nations—and language planning frameworks, models, and conceptualisations were developed and proposed. Language planning definitions focused on problem-solving and deliberate interventions. For example, Rubin and Jernudd (1971) argue that

> language planning is *deliberate* language change; that is, changes in the system of language code or speaking or both that are planned by organizations that are established for such purpose or given a mandate to fulfil such purpose. Language planning is focused on problem-solving and is characterised by the formulation and evaluation of alternatives for language problems to find the best (or optimal, most efficient) decision. (Rubin and Jernudd 1971, xvi, emphasis in the original)

It was an experimental time in the field, with scholars relying on the tools from various disciplines to analyse language planning. As Fishman (1977: 33) reflects, the primary aim of early language planning projects was to demonstrate "the feasibility of studying language planning processes" rather than testing specific hypotheses or evaluating the effectiveness of particular research methods. This early work engendered edited volumes like *Language Problems of Developing Nations* (Fishman et al. 1968), *Can Language Be Planned?* (Rubin and Jernudd 1971), *Language Planning Processes* (Rubin et al. 1977), and the foundation of the first journal in the field in 1969, i.e., *La monda lingvo-problemo* ("The world language problem" in Esperanto), which in 1977 was renamed *Language Problems & Language Planning* (and still exists under this name). Most of the contributions were conceptual proposals, descriptive accounts of language planning projects, strategies for implementing language planning, and historical investigations of particular contexts and communities. The goals and methods of early language planning research were influenced by an interest in excluding sociopolitical variables in the objective science of language planning.

Responding to post-enlightenment objectivism, the focus on the rational individual, and the view of LPP as a technical and instrumental problem-solving task, Tollefson (1991) proposed the historical-structural approach, which incorporated critical social theory and introduced a different epistemological orientation to the field. Contrasted with earlier optimistic assumptions that language planning could solve language problems, Tollefson focused on how language planning led to systemic inequality. His critique of early language planning research, accompanied by an innovative new vision for LPP research, marked an epistemological and theoretical turning point. A number of scholars have examined power issues hidden behind language policies that accompanied attempts at modernisation and economic development of developing countries (e.g., Phillipson 1992). Multiple publications have taken up this critical perspective, which is also a defining feature of the current iteration of the journal *Language Policy*.

These contributions gave rise to Critical Language Policy (CLP), which is sometimes portrayed as neo-Marxist (Fishman 1994), since it relies on critical social theorists like Bourdieu (1977), Habermas (1973), and Giddens (1979), and/or postmodernists like Foucault (1972) (see Grin 2022 for an overview of the differences and commonalities between these different approaches). Neo-Marxism and postmodern critical social theory focus on how power circulates in society, often outside of conscious human control, thus minimising the role of human agency in social

processes. For example, Bourdieu argues that the agent is "not the producer and has no conscious mastery over their actions" (p. 79). Similarly, Foucault (1978: 95) argues that while counter-discourses are representative of the inevitability of resistance, "this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power". Critiques of critical language policy scholarship (e.g., Ricento and Hornberger 1996), emphasise a more robust consideration of human agency in LPP processes. Furthermore, reacting to the monolithic determinism and hegemony in language policy creation, Hornberger (2005) focuses on how language policies play an important role in providing implementational and ideological spaces for multilingualism (cf. Fishman 1994). An empirical focus on how individuals create, interpret, and appropriate language policies across diverse contexts and levels of institutional authority helped engender an epistemological orientation that both accepted the impact of the researcher on the research context and based claims on empirical research of LPP processes.

Johnson and Ricento (2013) describe the beginning of the 1990s as a third phase in the history of LPP research, which is characterised by an increasing reliance on discursive and ethnographic methodological approaches (Barakos and Unger 2016; Pennycook 2006; Tollefson and Pérez Milans 2018; Wodak 2005). The development and the application of ethnographic methods are notable during this phase, shifting the focus of language planning from the macro- to the meso- and micro-levels, e.g., within specific speech communities. The ethnography of language policy reveals "the agents, contexts, and processes across the multiple layers of language policy creation, interpretation, and appropriation" (Johnson 2013: 44). Contributions in this area often study the tensions and contradictions between the general objectives of a formal language policy and the observed practices on the ground, especially in education (see Hornberger and Johnson 2011; McCarty 2015).

While Johnson and Ricento (2013) portray the different eras as "phases" in the evolution of LPP research (see also Lo Bianco 2010), in reality many different approaches evolved in tandem, both together and independently, including classic approaches, which continue to this day. Starting in the 1990s and increasingly since the 2000s, for example, a distinct research tradition with significant connections to early LPP scholarship was developed. Researchers from economics, rational choice theory, and public policy studies reintroduced, updated, and expanded concepts and tools from policy analysis into LPP (see Vaillancourt 1985; Pool 1991; Grin 2003; Wickström 2007; Gazzola 2014). This tradition

questions the neo-Marxist argument that LPP is primarily or exclusively focused on the hegemonic promotion of the ruling class's interests, and argues that official government-driven LPP can be democratic, diversity-oriented, and aimed at reducing inequalities. This raises the question of what policy design theories and implementation instruments, as well as evaluation methods, are best suited to promote multilingualism and social justice, and how to assess the costs and the benefits of different LPP measures. For example, efforts to produce a national, comprehensive, multi-interest language policy to address language problems of minority and majority communities (as opposed to entrenching inequalities) through a combination of bottom-up and top-down processes were done in Australia in the 1980s (Lo Bianco 1987).

Another interesting development in the study of language policy during the last two decades is the result of political philosophers' and political scientists' work. Starting in the 1990s, but more intensively since the 2000s (e.g., Kymlicka and Patten 2003; Van Parijs 2011), political philosophers and theorists have focused on language in society and the corresponding policies. One focus within the debate has been the moral justifications underpinning language policy, especially in the area of the rights of linguistic minorities and equity in international communication. The debate among political philosophers has been structured along the liberal/multiculturalism divide—that is, following either the liberal tradition represented by philosophers such as John Rawls (1971), or the communitarian/multiculturalist tradition inspired by the work of thinkers such as Charles Taylor (1992). This research area is sometimes referred to as 'linguistic justice' (see Morales-Gálvez and Riera-Gil 2019; Alcalde 2018; De Schutter 2007 for extensive reviews; see also Branchadell 2005 for a discussion about the relationships between this strand of literature and research in LPP from a public policy perspective). The issue of power in language policy, in particular, is the object of an important tradition of papers published by political scientists interested in the politics of language (see Laponce 2006; Cardinal and Sonntag 2015; Kraus 2018; May 2011; Ives 2015). These contributions find their roots in research carried out by some major political scientists such as Karl Deutsch, Stein Rokkan, and Jean Laponce in the areas of multilingualism and linguistic diversity between the 1950s and 1980s (see Laponce 2004 for a survey).

As a result, LPP has become not only multidisciplinary but also increasingly interdisciplinary, or even transdisciplinary (Halliday 1990). The chapters in this book reflect this diversity, and they present some of the

distinct theoretical and epistemological positions within LPP research, as well as some recent theoretical developments, notably at the intersection between LPP and information and communication technology. The book deliberately focuses on the contributions of academic research, but this of course does not mean denying the relevance of the theoretical and epistemological input of practitioners in language policy (a point to which we will return in the conclusions).

Chapter 2 by Johnson considers the epistemological and theoretical foundations of critical empirical approaches in LPP research, with particular attention to ethnography and discourse analysis. It traces early language planning research from the 1960s and 1970s to developments in the 1980s and 1990s that reflected a broader trend in sociolinguistics and the language sciences more generally, towards critical conceptualisations that focused on power in language and language learning. A growing critical perspective was, then, influential for a new generation of LPP scholars in the 2000s, 2010s, and 2020s who leveraged disciplinary research methodologies to study LPP processes. Much of this work has focused on how language policies impact educational opportunity and equity for speakers of minoritised and marginalised languages. Chapter 2 considers the findings from ethnographic and discourse analytic studies and the value of these contributions to the field. Both the criticisms of critical approaches and the limitations of ethnography and discourse analysis are discussed.

Chapter 3 by Gazzola presents and discusses the public policy approach to LPP. The chapter critically examines the idea according to which everyone (including single individuals) can make language policy, and it emphasises the differences between (individual) language practices and (public) language policy. It argues that the government (at different levels, from the local to the national, and even supranational) is the central agent in the language policy process. In the chapter, therefore, language policy is presented as a particular form of public policy that can be examined using the policy cycle model, which is the standard analytical framework in public policy studies. The model comprises several stages, namely the emergence of a language issue in society, followed by agenda-setting, policy formulation and adoption, implementation, and finally evaluation. The chapter presents these five stages of the cycle, the relationships between them, and clarifies how the various disciplines involved in LPP can contribute to their study. It also presents some concepts that are central in the design of language policies, such as programme