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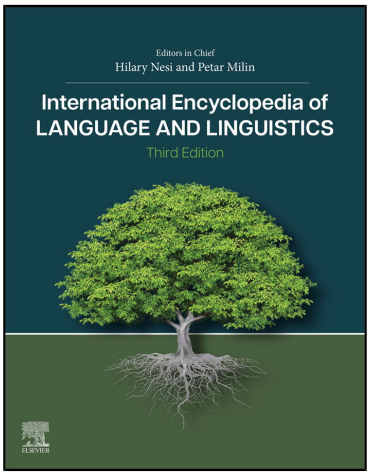

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Language Policy and Planning: Emerging and Evolving Approaches

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Key Points

- Language policy and planning (LPP) is a form of behavior toward language.
- It has developed over centuries, but only arose as an academic specialty in the Western context in the 1960s.
- Contemporary LPP is characterized by several distinct approaches that may complement each other.
- These approaches are shaped above all by cultural, geographical, political, and economic variables.

Abstract

This article outlines the development of Language Policy and Planning (LPP). It maps out various LPP approaches as they have emerged in history, but also devotes attention to the most recent ones including the public policy approach. The article addresses the mutual relationships between approaches and demonstrates that LPP is a contextualized enterprise that is shaped by cultural, geographical, political, economic, and other variables.

Introduction

Language Policy and Planning (LPP) refers both to what people (experts, politicians or even laypersons) do with language, and to an academic field that deals with those activities. Sometimes the label Language Planning and Policy is used interchangeably. The activities and related policies may concern the status of language (e.g., what language or its variety will become official language of a country or corporate language of a large company), the corpus of language (e.g., the development of a consistent terminology) or the acquisition of language (e.g., how to ensure that a chosen official or corporate language were acquired by the inhabitants of a country or employees of a large company respectively).

Status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning are distinguished accordingly (Cooper, 1989; Kloss, 1969). Another useful notion structuring the field is the distinction between the policy approach and cultivation approach (Neustupný, 1970/1974), corresponding roughly with status and corpus planning.

The origin of LPP is usually connected to the break-up of the colonial system in the 1960s when newly emerged countries needed to solve many urgent problems including those concerning language and communication – then, this field and practical activities were called Language Planning. This expression is still used by many and promoted by the titles of the influential journals *Language Problems and Language Planning* and *Current Issues in Language Planning*. Another expression, Language Policy, that is, without the component 'planning', is a more recent coinage for the field, promoted, e.g., by another influential journal, *Language Policy*.

Though it is possible to distinguish between 'language planning' and 'language policy' in specialized discourse (Hornberger, 2006), these two concepts are intertwined to such a degree that Language Policy and Planning (LPP) has become common label for the field. Other general names included 'language engineering' (see several papers in Fishman, 1974), not used any longer, and 'language management', quite popular today, though theorized in different ways by different scholars (see, e.g., Jernudd & Neustupný, 1987; Spolsky, 2004).

Most recently, the field has been enriched by another coinage, that is, the general label Language Policy and Management (see Kimura, 2023). Of course, the choice of varying labels is not arbitrary, but correlates with how the specialists see language, society, and the relationships between them, and with the socio-linguistic processes on which they focus.

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A Brief Note on the Long History

Language is not a mere tool and communication is not merely its self-evident and unproblematic use. This is why people not only *use* language or several languages but also *relate to* languages and communication, that is, they note language phenomena, evaluate them (not rarely negatively), decide on the use of this or that language here and now or in a long time-perspective, and the like. Behavior toward language is thus a natural phenomenon which might have been with humans early in their history, at least in the human recorded history; various forms of LPP represent only various degrees of organization of this phenomenon, evolving from relatively simple ones to highly organized.

In the introduction to their book, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) give examples of LPP from antiquity and the early Middle Ages mentioning measures enabling communication between the invaders and the subjugated inhabitants as a prerequisite for successful expansion of the then empires in Europe and the Arabic-speaking world. Cooper (1989) gives another pre-modern example, the founding of language academies, of which the French Academy – founded in 1634 – was among the most eminent and influential. Nekvapil (2011) continues the history of LPP with the characterization of European national movements of the 19th century, such as the Czech or Norwegian movements, in which linguistic demands had a vital role, language being a symbol of national identity.

The extensive LPP activities in the former Soviet Union of the 1920s and 1930s represent another milestone in the history of LPP – here the questions of literacy and the development of writing systems for dozens of hitherto unwritten ethnic languages were among the main issues. Obviously, highly organized LPP activities are connected to or are an aspect of extensive and complex social processes such as the building of a strong monarchy (the case of the French Academy), emancipation of the dominated nations (European national movements) or the rise of a huge multilingual state (Soviet Union). Further examples include the formulation of the functionalist theory of standard language, the main achievement of the Prague School LPP, which was the response to the situation in the Czech lands after the break-up of the Austrian-Hungarian empire in 1918.

Finally, the modernization of developing nations after the decline of the colonial system in the 1960s led to large interventions in the language situations of those countries and was crucial for the birth of LPP as an academic discipline in the Western world.

LPP as an Academic Discipline – The Early Phase

The first sentence of the first published introduction to language planning reads: "Language planning is a branch of sociolinguistics" (Eastman, 1983, p. ix). Indeed, the beginnings of LPP and sociolinguistics co-incide and some of the major protagonists of sociolinguistics, among them Joshua Fishman and Charles Ferguson, were also deeply involved in LPP. After all, correlations of social and linguistic variables underlay the research on LPP. However, LPP as just one aspect of social planning to achieve modernization of the developing nations, mostly former colonies, was not confined within the boundaries of mere (socio)linguistics. The social variables had to be understood broadly enough to include economic, political, demographic, social psychological, and other social factors involved in 'decision-making' about language (Rubin & Jernudd, 1971, p. xiii). This approach is well represented by the joint volume *Can Language Be Planned? Sociolinguistic Theory and Practice for Developing Nations* (Rubin & Jernudd, 1971), one of the most important outputs of the early LPP. Here, LPP or 'language planning' is characterized as follows:

> Language planning is *deliberate* language change; that is, changes in the systems of language code or speaking or both that are planned by organizations established for such purposes or given a mandate to fulfill such purposes. As such, language planning is focused on problem-solving and is characterized by the formulation and evaluation of alternatives for solving language problems to find the best (or optimal, most efficient) decision. In all cases it is *future-oriented*; that is, the outcomes of policies and strategies must be specified in advance of action taken. (Rubin & Jernudd, 1971, p. xvi)

The book offered a rich research agenda that has remained in place until now. Among its topical items are: the focus on 'problem-solving' or 'decision-making' connecting LPP with general theories of planning, a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary perspective required by the complexity of LPP, the idea of LPP as a process with stages such as fact-finding, planning (goals, strategies, outcomes), implementation and feedback, and the emphasis on the study of the broad social context including interests of those conducting LPP. Overall, the early LPP of the 1960s and 1970s was crucial for the further development of LPP and gradually became perceived as classical.

Critique of the Classical Approach

Though many aspects of the founding period were still in place (the classical or neoclassical approach was still quite vital), the 1980s and 1990s witnessed numerous and varied critical voices. Critique was motivated by the growing feeling that the academic discipline of LPP, in contrast to the initial optimism, contributed relatively little to the change of linguistic situations of developing nations, or that LPP might have even been controversial, conducive to the social divide of societies (see the title by Tollefson, 1991, "planning language, planning inequality").

As a result, the scope of LPP was enlarged considerably and the research focus of the scholars dealing with LPP shifted. The analysis of interests and related phenomena gradually gained a prominent role. It was not rare for those involved in LPP to tacitly

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presume that language planners acted in the interest of the whole state or nation, which enabled them to concentrate on important technical matters of the language planning enterprise without paying due attention to the political dimension of their planning activities. However, as formulated aptly by Jernudd and Neustupný (1987) in the title of their now classic paper, the crucial question is: "language planning: for whom?". That is, as society is not a social monolith, rather, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of multiple interest groups, each having a distinct idea of how the processes and outcome of LPP should look, and a struggle between these ideas and their bearers can be presumed.

Consequently, analysts have to accept that the processes and outcomes of LPP are determined by ideologies, including language ideologies, to which the language planners subscribe, either tacitly or openly. Additionally, asserting interests requires power, otherwise it would be difficult for the planners to make their plans operative. The analysis of power relationships thus became a further prominent analytical approach characteristic of this phase of LPP.

Finally, multiple interests include foregrounding the interests of speakers of minority languages or less-used languages. Discourse on language ecology (Mühlhäusler, 1996) and language rights (Paulston, 1997) emerged in response to this and related issues. Logically, revealing further relevant connections also led to a gradual enlargement of the initial geo-political or geo-economic focus of LPP, that is, in addition to developing nations, so-called developed nations were included.

Critique of the 'Critical Turn'

Baldauf and Hamid (2018) summarized the development of LPP to date and distinguished five 'schools of thought': the classical school, the language management theory school (in the vein of Jernudd & Neustupný, 1987), the domain focused school (represented by the works of B. Spolsky starting with Spolsky, 2004), ethnographic LPP, and finally, critical LPP. This classification offers a useful overview of the whole field pertinent for comparative purposes. Nekvapil (2016) departs from the perspective of Language Management Theory (LMT) and draws attention to valuable features of LMT, particularly in comparison to Spolsky's domain approach (see also Sanden, 2016). Putting an emphasis on epistemological issues, Grin (2022) notes that the distinction between critical and non-critical approaches to LPP is crucial for the development of the whole field and argues for a pervasive analytical distinction between 'language policy' and 'language politics' and their balance in particular analytical work.

A long-term critique of the 'critical turn' in LPP has become a characteristic feature of the public policy approach. This approach may represent another phase in the development of this field, though it follows up on the main tenets of the early phase of LPP, declaring itself not a new *turn*, but a *return*. A recent extensive handbook (Gazzola et al., 2024) is an eloquent and representative example of this analytical framework.

The contributors to the handbook envisage LPP as a variant of public policy with five-stage public policy cycle involved in problem-solving, that is, the emergence of a language issue, agenda-setting, policy formulation and adoption, implementation and finally evaluation of the results achieved (in the form of feedback). Those subscribing to the public policy approach acknowledge the merits of critical approaches for the development of LPP, but at the same time they emphasize that these merits overwhelmingly concern only one of the five stages of the public policy cycle, that is, agenda-setting – here in particular, the important issues of interests, power, ideology, hegemony, inequality, and related discourses have their place. On the other hand, the core of the public policy approach lies in policy formulation, that is, the identification and selection of the concrete means or measures best suited to the achievement of the set goals.

By definition, the public policy approach focuses on language policies formulated in the *public* sphere, with the aim to serve the citizens of a democratic state. The public policy approach thus excludes private agents such as corporations from its scope and leaves aside language-related issues such as the establishment and use of corporate languages. By the same token, the goings-on in families are also excluded, meaning that, for example, the decisions on the use of languages in bilingual families are not taken as resulting in 'policy' but in a kind of 'practice' (which of course may somehow reflect a particular policy implemented by the state). It is the state and particularly the government and its surrogates at the national, regional and local level who are the central agents in creating policies. However, even though LPP processes are oriented overwhelmingly top-down, the bottom-up direction is also included in the degree to which the state actually upholds democratic principles.

Cultural and Other 'Big' Contexts and Differences

Though often presented in a universal tone, LPP is a contextualized enterprise shaped by cultural, geographical, political, economic, and other variables. The first thing to note is that the field is dominated by English (note that in the present article I have referred only to publications written in English thus far) and the production in many other languages either doesn't exist or is very difficult to access. Non-English introductions to LPP, such as Marten (2016) in German, Ndimande-Hlongwa (2009) in isi-Zulu, or Škiljan (1988) in Croatian are rare. The recent extensive Chinese LPP output published in mainland China is almost inaccessible internationally, particularly due to its publication language, Chinese (though Chinese journals devoted specifically to LPP such as 中国语言战略 *China Language Strategies* or 语言战略研究 *Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning* include English abstracts). Only occasionally do translations arise, which was the case already with an Indonesian volume (Moeliono, 1986) or a recent Chinese one (Li, 2015).

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With its initial focus on developing nations, geographical differences, combined with other differences, particularly political and economic ones, were built in the foundations of LPP from the very beginning and later were acknowledged as an important research focus leading to the establishment of the series *Language Planning in …* (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1999). Political contexts matter heavily. Recall that the public policy approach to LPP has grown from and aims at societies that are guided by the principles of liberal democracy, thus the functioning of LPP in many countries worldwide must be explained by taking into account other approaches including local ones (see Zhou, 2023; He & Mao, 2020 for China).

Pérez-Milans and Tollefson (2018) draw attention to the limits of the current LPP due to its orientation on the European philosophical and political-philosophical traditions and call for the interpretation of basic notions such as language, nation, state or language rights in the spirit of Confucianism or Daoism; otherwise the account of some features of LPP in China, South-Asia or Japan might be misleading. They also plead for a closer collaboration of Western-based scholars and those based in non-Western areas which could contribute to a more global shape of LPP (for the practical aspects of such a challenge see Smakman et al., 2024).

Conclusions and a Look in the Future

Though presented in chronological sequence, the above 'schools of thought'or approaches to LPP shouldn't be taken as sharply separated entities, rather, they represent specific instances of 'developmental types' (Neustupný, 2006) and oftentimes their position with respect to the time axis can be characterised as 'co-existing realities' (Jernudd, 1996). Constituted by specific theoretical backgrounds, methodologies and sets of concrete methods (Hult & Johnson, 2015), they certainly don't represent interchangeable alternatives, but they may overlap or complement each other to varying degrees.

The strength and limits of the public policy approach have been indicated already. It is a comprehensive framework capable of integrating much of critical and ethnographic LPP, placing them somewhere at the beginning of the five-stage public policy cycle (also possibly in the last stage of feedback). Language-related issues outside the public sphere are left for all other approaches.

A contested point is 'practice' which is fully integrated in the concept of policy in Spolsky's domain approach, being an integral part of it, but as such is rejected by the public policy approach. Language Management Theory (LMT) focuses both on simple and highly complex metalinguistic activities, as it is obvious from its notions of simple and organized language management (Dovalil, 2022). LMT could thus effectively operationalize practice through 'simple language management' and show how it connects to 'organized language management', including the individual stages of the public policy cycle. Note also that though LMT is a sociolinguistic enterprise in origin, it has been enriched by some concepts from public policy studies (see Kimura, 2014), the crucial theoretical source for the public policy approach to LPP introduced here.

Overall, it can be seen that the field of LPP is evolving vigorously, which is also documented by the ever-growing corpus of publications (see, e.g., Ricento, 2016, the four-volume collection of the essential papers published in English to date). Why is this the case? There may be two main reasons. The first one is the intrinsic development of the academic field and its response to other academic fields including continuing influence of postmodern thinking with its humanistic or, in contrast, rationalistic ideologies (Neustupný, 2006).

The second reason, presumably even more important, is the growing demand for LPP as a practical endeavour. This demand is conditioned particularly by globalization, migration and the rise of new state formations or the re-arrangements of old ones. These processes manifest themselves as the spread of English, the endangerment of small languages, the (dis)empowerment of new and old minorities, language teaching and testing, the growing (de)standardization of languages and communication, the rise and influence of supranational organizations including companies and the military, or the spread of information through new technologies. Having a linguistic dimension, many of these processes are worthy of thorough analysis leading, if needed and possible, to concrete proposals from the part of LPP.

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