

# LANGUAGE PROBLEMS OF DEVELOPING NATIONS

*Joshua A. Fishman*  
*Charles A. Ferguson*  
*Jyotirindra Das Gupta*  
Editors

JOHN WILEY & SONS, INC.  
New York • London • Sydney • Toronto

1968

Jiri V. Neustupný

## SOME GENERAL ASPECTS OF "LANGUAGE" PROBLEMS AND "LANGUAGE" POLICY IN DEVELOPING SOCIETIES

### THE NEED FOR A GENERAL THEORY OF LANGUAGE PROBLEMS AND LANGUAGE POLICY

Language problems and language policy have been widely discussed with regard to individual languages. Yet very few attempts have been made either to give a *full* and systematic account of problems and policies in one language, or to go beyond the boundaries of a single language and find *cross-cultural constants*. No doubt, every speech community presents quite irrecursive problems and policies. The idea of considering language problems of developing nations more generally presupposes the existence of one or more constants recurring in all included specific cases.

The absence of systematic analyses of language problems and language policy in individual languages and the failure to identify explicitly constants across the boundaries of individual languages are connected with the absence of attempts to formulate a *general theory* in the field. Difficulties begin with the concepts of "problems," "policy," and "language." The descriptive level is confused with the prescriptive one. There is no model on which a systematic description may be passed. And prescriptions far more frequently belong to the sphere of actual politics than to the sphere of political science.

If we claim that the general theory should begin by elucidating the concept of "language problems," this does not mean that it would be expedient to offer a narrow and necessarily arbitrary definition including some and excluding other clearly related phenomena. On the contrary, we should try to map the area as extensively and intensively as possible. For example, along with the group of well known "language problems" like the relationship between different languages within a nation (especially the relationship between the national language and other languages), literacy, orthography, etc., which may be called conscious problems, there should be enough room in our theoretical system for "language prob-

lems" of which the speech community is not fully aware, which have not become a target of language policy, and which are still capable of contributing largely to the tensions within the society. I am referring to such problems as language patterns connected with a certain type of family—problems that reinforce that type of family—language patterns connected with nonindividualistic social psychology, etc. Such problems are probably not given adequate attention at present; to exclude these problems from our field because they are unconscious would lead to arbitrary cuts, first, because the boundary between conscious and unconscious is not clear, and second, because there is permanent fluctuation between the two types. A guide to sound prescription for language policy should, of course, start with language problems that are important political issues, but it should also include consideration of problems society is not paying attention to, but that are relevant in any respect. Another necessary task for the general theory of language problems and language policy is to encompass previous approaches that used different terminology but dealt basically with the same material: "language culture" of the Prague School [1], the first structural contribution in this field, can serve as one example, and "language situation" [2] can serve as another one.

This essay attempts a sketch of some basic concepts with special reference to constants within developing societies. The discussion is based on the experience of a linguist. A similar attempt by a political scientist would be welcome, for political science alone can be responsible for illuminating the use of the previously mentioned concepts of "problems," "policy," and other important pillars of the theory, such as a model for the actual process of implementation of a language policy. Only cooperation between linguistics and political science, which still leaves much to be desired, can save the field from the vulgarization of laymen, and what is perhaps still more harmful, the quasi-expert, but actually naïve judgments of "pure" linguists and "pure" political scientists.

## LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

### AND COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

Any general consideration of language problems and language policy can hardly evade the fundamental problem of the notion "language" and its place in the overall structure of culture and society. Famous as this problem is, after de Saussure, it would be difficult for professional linguists to maintain that it has ever acquired wider comprehension and sympathy among representatives of related social sciences. Even for linguists, of course, much remains to be elucidated, as the constant reiteration of the language/parole problem in the pages of linguistic literature suggests. Nevertheless, some relatively final conclusions may be drawn, and among them are (a) the necessity to distinguish between *patterns* (sys-

tems) and *processes* in which these patterns are manifested (realized), and (b) the necessity to distinguish, within the sphere of patterns, between "la langue" or the "language code" and the *neighboring social patterns*.

A theory of "language" problems should, of course, follow these conclusions rather than be influenced by the general meaning of the word "language," which either includes, without differentiation, verbal processes as well as the language code and perhaps even other patterns manifested in the verbal processes, or excludes everything except the language code. A theory of "language" problems should differentiate between the different patterns manifested in verbal processes—as far as this is possible [3]—but on the other hand, as has been stressed several times (e.g., by Skalička and Hymes [4]), it should not exclude any of them from its perspective. Moreover, they should always be considered in connection with the wider class of communication. COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS may then be divided into VERBAL (or "LANGUAGE") and NONVERBAL communication problems; verbal include LANGUAGE CODE PROBLEMS and SPEECH PROBLEMS. This scheme probably still needs substantial correction and amplification, but even in this form it may be fruitful in showing the inner complexity of the sphere of "language" problems. At this point I would especially like to stress that preoccupation with language code problems such as the relationship of different codes within the same language block [5], problems of the standard or official language, problems of orthography, of the choice between variants within the same code, of honorifics, or vocabulary, etc.,—at the expense of speech problems and nonverbal communication problems—is especially dangerous. History can supply dozens of examples of reforms of language codes that failed because they did not comply with the problems of other communication patterns and were not accompanied by corresponding policies. Hence the first thesis of this paper is: *There is a necessity to think of "language" problems in the broad context of communication problems, and to include in "language" problems besides language code problems also the problems of speech* [6].

## EVALUATION OF "LANGUAGE" PATTERNS:

### THE PROBLEM OF MOTIVATION

A conscious solution of a "language" problem, the "language" policy, cannot have any starting point but the comparison of two or more states of "language" patterns, one real, and the others potential. One of the patterns is evaluated as "better," or preferable in comparison to all other patterns. Thus it is clear that the evaluation of "language" patterns is an inherent and inevitable part of the process of any "language" policy.

It is perhaps not an exaggeration to claim that theoretical linguistics, at present, pays but slight attention to the problems of evaluation of even

those communication patterns that are its traditional constituents [7]. It is true that the language code, the center of traditional linguistics, is most difficult, though not impossible, to evaluate among all communication patterns, and that older linguistics has not always had a happy hand in this respect (cf. so-called primitive languages, the evaluation of language types, etc.). As a consequence, value judgments are at present virtually tabooed in linguistics. On the one hand, there is surely no doubt that no evaluation is possible in the abstract, without regard to other patterns. The necessity to oppose irresponsible judgments based on nationalism or the feeling of real or supposed economic or cultural superiority still exists. On the other hand, it would be foolish not to recognize the fact that certain features of "language" patterns in relation to other patterns can be, and often really are, evaluated.

While evaluating the "language" patterns, it is expedient to distinguish between *arbitrary* (unmotivated, undetermined) and *motivated* (imposed, determined) features [8]. An absolutely arbitrary feature, because it has no relation to features of other patterns, is not subject to evaluation and is equivalent to any other arbitrary feature. Some parts of the language code and, to a lesser degree, of other communication patterns are surely arbitrary. Mostly, however, even the language code, perhaps much more than has been assumed, is affected by motivational relations and thus comprises motivated features that can be evaluated. Features of communication patterns may either be motivated or motivating, or both at the same time. They can be motivated either by another feature of "language" patterns (e.g., parallelism in a speech pattern motivates parallelism in a code pattern), by a feature of the social pattern (e.g., the structure of the family motivates speech patterns within a family), by biological and other conditions of verbal communication (e.g., language universals motivated by the technical problems of transmission of signals), or, in the majority of cases, by several features of different order simultaneously. *Primarily motivated* communication features may *secondarily motivate* the primary feature (e.g., the honorific system, primarily motivated by social structure, may secondarily influence the retention of that part of the social structure). Besides this, it is possible to conceive, at least in theory, of a relation in which it is difficult or impossible to state which of the two motivational directions is primary and which secondary. This is a frequent case within the language code (cf. my remarks on typology in "First Steps . . .," 1965, *passim*) but a full description of this phenomenon is still missing.

Of paramount importance in this context is whether any features of the language code exist that motivate primarily features of other patterns. Often we are forced to meet a very general assumption that the language code has a basic position within the whole social structure and widely motivates other social patterns. This assumption seems to be a conse-

quence of all kinds of Whorfian theories that exert important influence on nonlinguists. If these theories were true, such motivational relations might become a basis for a far-reaching evaluation of the language code and a starting point for extensive language policy.

Attention has, however, often been drawn to contrary evidence, from which three points are of special importance. First, there is the question of the direction of the motivation: is it the code pattern that is primary? Second, the relation of the motivation can be assumed only where there is a congruity of two independently detectable features in two different patterns. For example, the existence of singular and plural should first be proved independently for both language and culture, before the relation is proclaimed to exist. Third *it should be questioned whether in many cases it is not features of speech rather than language code patterns that are to be considered as the motivating elements.*

The whole complicated mechanism of the motivational relations which are the basic premise for any evaluation has, however, not yet been fully described. Hence it is most difficult to make relevant judgments about the evaluation itself *and it is necessary to call for wider attention to these problems before any prescriptive approach to the "language" problem can be accepted.*

I would like to indicate only one warning here. It concerns the evaluability of so-called *petrified* features [9]. For instance, at *first* there normally exists a motivational relation [foreign cultural elements] → [foreign language code elements]; with the assimilation of the cultural elements, the relation, however, weakens or entirely disappears, even though the "foreign" elements within the language code may preserve their special position and thus become petrified features. A fully petrified feature becomes, of course, arbitrary and cannot be subject to evaluation. The language code and also speech patterns are especially full of weakened (partly petrified) motivational relations and the *degree of petrification* should therefore be carefully studied before any evaluative judgment is made.

## THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION

Let us diverge, for a moment, from the conceptual line PROBLEM—EVALUATION (ATTITUDES)—POLICY IMPLEMENTATION to consider the degree of uniformity of this line in different developing societies. Is it possible to find any constants occurring nonaccidentally in the languages of developing nations? In other words, are there any language problems peculiar to developing societies? This question might be answered on a purely *empirical* basis affirmatively, but the meaning of our question is whether the obvious coincidences are in connection with the fact that the societies in question are *developing* societies.



I have tried to show, in a paper entitled "First Steps toward the Conception of 'Oriental Languages,'" that there are some features of languages spoken in the developing societies that are connected with other nonlinguistic features of these societies. The obvious fact of complex "dialectal" stratification which can hardly be taken out of the context of a highly segmented society with low social mobility may be quoted as an example. This fact deeply affects the whole structure of developing languages (a term which I have proposed for such languages), commencing with their phonology (coexistent phonological systems, etc.) and stretching over to their morphology (high degree of morphological synonymity), vocabulary, and syntax. No doubt, the highly developed synonymity, which is different from *functional*, meaningful synonymity, presents important language problems in the process of standardization alone. This is only one example of a typical problem for developing languages. It shows clearly that the question of cross-cultural constants in language problems is a valid one.

However a few mere examples will not suffice. The task of the day is the compilation of a complete list of problems in the developing languages, and this presupposes a complete list of all features of these languages which are connected, that is, in a nonpetrified motivation relation in the sense of the preceding section of this paper, with other developing features of the corresponding social structures, because all such features are likely to fulfill some function outside the language itself. This shows the special importance of the theory of developing languages for the theory of language problems.

In the previously mentioned paper I was mainly concerned with the language code. Now, from Section 2 of this paper it follows that, as with language code, this approach may be applied to speech and communication patterns in general. If any features of the communication patterns can be found that are motivated by developing features of the social structure, they will be called *developing features of communication* and we can therefore speak of developing communication.

Since I intend to pay special attention to the developing features of communication elsewhere, let us limit ourselves to the following examples. It is the underdevelopment of *dialogue* that has important social connections and thus constitutes, in my opinion, a major language problem. There is, of course, dialogue in any society, but its distribution in certain situations is connected with features of the social structure. Dialogue as a form of verbal entertainment in developed societies corresponds to monologue in developing societies; a "party" where all individuals are equal and take the same part in verbal behavior corresponds to a gathering with one narrator and his audience. It is not difficult to discover the older (developing) pattern in nineteenth-century Europe, especially in her less developed parts, and follow its change, as in the

family dialogue, during the first half of this century. It is probably obvious that the lesser proportion of dialogue is connected with a lower degree of individualization in developing societies, and it can present important problems, for instance in the sphere of administration (democratic discussion, etc.).

A few other examples may be helpful to illustrate the idea of developing communication. It will probably be agreed that certain features of communication patterns within a developing family, such as *one-directional communication* and patterns of *distribution of silence* are connected with developing features of family structure. Some of these patterns, in turn, frequently motivate language code patterns, such as systems of family terminology, and are supported by them. Other examples are *speech particularism*, underdevelopment or absence of certain *speech styles*, formalized speech, and a high degree of arbitrary patterning in general.

From Section 3 of this paper it follows that all developing features of communication are subject to evaluation. Their evaluation will be dependent upon the evaluation of the motivating features—the developing features of the social structure. This, of course, is neither to claim that any developing feature of communication becomes, or, seen prescriptively, should become, a "language" problem, nor to try to evaluate any such feature negatively [10]. The concrete evaluation depends on principles (criteria) of evaluation (see Section 5). I hope that *the concept of developing communication will be accepted as one having a basic significance for the solution of "language" problems*. Prior to making decisions concerning communication policy in developing societies one should try to describe as many developing features of communication as possible and evaluate them. If this condition remains unfulfilled, we run the risk that the set of problems treated in the prescriptive part of our considerations will be deficient, and important problems may escape our attention.

#### EVALUATION OF "LANGUAGE" PATTERNS: THE PROBLEM OF CRITERIA

After the discovery of the motivational network consisting of connecting links between communication and other social patterns (cf. Section 3) the whole network is subject to scrutiny according to a limited number of principles (criteria), and the final attitude is determined.

It is interesting to observe that the application of criteria and the resulting attitudes are often really analogous, if not identical, in the case of "language" and other policies within the same society. The general character, for instance, of "language" policy in postwar Japan presents, in its stress on democratization, features analogous to the general

trend in other spheres of Japanese society. On the other hand, as stressed by Shibata [11], the sphere of "language" policy is often partly independent of other policies: the distribution of progressivism and conservatism in postwar Japan's "language" policy does not fully coincide with the distribution in other spheres. This means that different principles are applied in different areas of the network of social structure, and this phenomenon also deserves our full attention since it seems to be specific not only for "language" policy in Japan.

The full typology of principles (criteria) for "language" policy is one of the foremost tasks for future research in this field. At present we are able to quote only four general principles:

1. *Development.* (Does the feature contribute to the development of the society? Of course, not only the economic development is to be considered.)
2. *Democratization.* (Is the feature favorable to the creation of equal opportunities for all members of the society?)
3. *Unity.* (Does the feature reinforce the unity of the society in question?)
4. *Foreign relations.* (Is the feature an obstacle to communication with other specific communities?)

These principles seem to possess different degrees of importance to different social groups pursuing the policy. For example, the most traditional social groups of developing societies will probably not care about development. It may be typical for the attitude of former colonial administrators that the necessity of communication with other communities (i.e., the problem of retention of the former colonial language) is excessively stressed. An authoritative political group in a multilingual country is likely to think about unity first, whereas a party looking for support would prefer democratization. In general, however, democratization and its possible implications for development rarely seem to be favored, because it too often seems undesirable from the point of view of the present economic organization. It will be necessary to obtain a thorough analysis of the attitudes of various social groups with regard to the different criteria implied. R. F. Amonoo [12], who has already correctly identified the four criteria quoted above, also stressed the fact that "... some of these needs run counter to each other." This is undoubtedly an important aspect of the problem: the establishment of dialects of a language as standard languages may serve democratization (all local groups have linguistically equal opportunities) but it may also be undesirable in respect of unity. This fact should be fully realized before any prescriptive work is undertaken. But it is only one aspect of the problem of criteria for "language" policy, the bulk of which still awaits a systematic treatment within a theory of "language" problems and "language" policy.

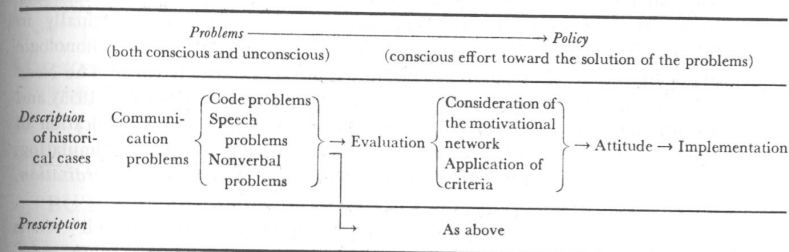
## CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions may be drawn on the basis of the preceding discussion.

1. There is an urgent necessity to develop a general theory of "language" problems and "language" policy.
2. The theory, both descriptive and prescriptive, should be developed not only with regard to language code but, more broadly, with due inclusion of the system of speech and communication in general.
3. As long as "language" policy presupposes a conscious selection from several possibilities, it requires the evaluation of "language" patterns.
4. The evaluation should consider motivational links of communication patterns with other social phenomena, followed by the application of the policy criteria. The attitude formed in this process is materialized in the execution of the policy.
5. The communication systems of developing societies share "language" problems that define them as a special field in the theory.

Some of our conclusions are schematized in Table 1.

TABLE 1



There are implications of these conclusions for the systematic descriptions of "language" problems and policies in individual communities: it will be necessary to widen the range of problems, to consider the whole sphere of links between the communication patterns and other social patterns, and to describe the functioning of the criteria as well as the mechanisms for the execution of the policy. The main implication for the theory of developing "language" problems is the need for a fuller description of the shared features, the constants in the developing communication systems. At the same time, our conclusions show the necessity for further elaboration of the theory: many particular problems (e.g., the question of the execution of the policy, which presents complicated but recursive mechanisms, involves a number of legal problems, etc.)

still need to be inserted or added. The theory will undoubtedly be enriched by concurrent work in individual languages, but such work will, in turn, never be valid until the theory is reinforced.

## NOTES

1. Thèses présentées au Premier Congrès des philologues slaves, originally in *TCLP*, 1 (1929), p. 27, reprinted in J. Vachek's *A Prague School Reader in Linguistics*, p. 56. Cf. also B. Havránek, *Studie o spisovném jazyce*, Praha, 1963.
2. *Materialy k diskussii "Problemy izučeniya jazykovoj situacii v stranax Azii i Afriki."* Moscow, 1965.
3. It is not always possible to keep "*la langue*" and "*la parole*" apart. Cf. our remarks on vagueness of the opposition in Neustupný, "On the Analysis of Linguistic Vagueness," *Travaux linguistiques de Prague*, 2 (1966), p. 49.
4. V. Skalička, The Need for a Linguistics of "*la parole*." Originally in *Recueil linguistique de Bratislava* 1, 1948, reprinted in J. Vachek (ed.), *A Prague School Reader in Linguistics*, 1964. D. Hymes, The Ethnography of Speaking. In *Anthropology and Human Behavior*, 1962.
5. For this term see J. V. Neustupný, First Steps Toward the Conception of "Oriental Languages," *Archiv orientální*, 33 (1965), p. 85 *et sequ.*
6. To my knowledge D. Hymes' recent work "The Ethnography of Speaking" and his Introduction to *The Ethnography of Communication*, offer the best foundations for further development in this field and the reader will also recognize how much my own approach owes to him. Future research should perhaps include still more of the classical *membra disiecta* relevant to the theme, to say nothing of such contributions as those of P. Trost, "Bemerkungen zum Sprachtabu," originally in *TCLP*, 6 (1936), reprinted in Vachek's *Reader*; Trubetzkoy's chapter "Phonologie und Lautstilistik" in his *Grundzüge* (1939); and Skalička's already cited "The Need for a Linguistics of *la parole*." Two Prague discussions on style (1941 and 1955) and their continuation (cf. K. Hausenblas, on the Characterisation and Classification of Discourses, *Travaux linguistiques de Prague*, 1964, p. 67-83) are equally stimulating.
7. There are interesting exceptions; cf. Punya Sloka Ray, *Language Standardization*, 1963.
8. Trubetzkoy in 1939 in the chapter cited calls this opposition "konventionell" versus "naturegegeben." I have called it, in a more concrete context, "dialect" versus "style" (cf. Neustupný 1965, fn. 6, p. 86).
9. This term was coined in Neustupný 1965.
10. The wide distribution of the talent of narrative, though often clearly a developing feature, will probably never be evaluated as undesirable.
11. Takeshi Shibata, Kokuji ronsō no shinpoha to hoshu, *Asahi shinbun* (yūkan) (February 4, 1966).
12. R. F. Amonoo, Problems of Ghanaian langue francae, in J. Spencer (ed.), *Language in Africa*, 1963, p. 80. The same conclusion is inherent in the second part of the Third Report of the Leverhulme Conference (cf. *Language in Africa*, pp. 133-135), 240-248.