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# Theory and practice in language management\*

J.V. Neustupný

This paper addresses the distinction between theory and practice networks and the ways in which theory can be made more useful for language management practitioners. With regard to the dissemination of knowledge of language management theories, one should not forget that many of these theories contain components that are a direct reflection of their authors' interests. Therefore, rather than teaching practitioners a set of concepts of a language management theory, it is more rewarding to acquaint them with the basic strategies that govern more than one of these theories. Six examples of such strategies are proposed.

**Key words:** language management, theories of language management, theory networks, practice networks, interests

## Theory and practice

Theory is important to the practice of language management.<sup>1</sup> It has become increasingly important, as both practice and theory have expanded in scope. And the scale of that expansion has been vast.

Jyotirindra Das Gupta, a political scientist who made a significant contribution to the language planning stage of language management, entitled an early paper 'Practice and Theory of Language Planning: The Indian Policy Process' (Das Gupta, 1976). In his account, theory amounts to the rhetoric of politicians and government, while practice refers to the implementation of that rhetoric. However, the theory demanded by today's practice of language management is a different construct. It is a system of general strategies on the basis of which the discipline is built. It contains all the general knowledge about language management we possess. It is both systematic and related to other theories - general theories of language, culture and society.

Contemporary theories of language management (of which the Language Management Theory<sup>2</sup> is but one example) are diversely sourced: they appear in

individual theoretical writings as well as cluster within journals and conference proceedings. Introductory texts such as Cooper (1989) or Kaplan and Baldauf (1998) document the wealth of theoretical tools available. There is thus no doubt that theories of language management exist.

Although the work of Einar Haugen, Joshua Fishman, Rubin and Jernudd (1971) and other research results were already on hand in the mid-1970s, the picture of the theoretical framework of language management is much more transparent and extensive today.

Without going into details concerning what constitutes a theory, I should add that a theory is not necessarily a “perfect crime”. Some theories may be simple, consisting of a very small number of theoretical strategies, but efficient. However, the language management theories referred to above are well-established and extensive systems. Let me also emphasize that we should speak of theories (plural) rather than a theory (singular).

Theories vary historically: there are types such as the language-policy type, the language cultivation-type and the language planning-type, and each incorporates a number of approaches. Variation can be seen in theories originating from different traditions. And different socio-economic interests produce different theories. It would be unrealistic to suggest that all these could be merged into a single theoretical system.

### **Theory and practice networks**

Theories are distributed in networks, composed of participants. Basic to the consideration of such distribution is the distinction between processes that develop in THEORY NETWORKS and in PRACTICE NETWORKS. The former networks consist of theorists, the latter of practitioners. A participant can be both a theorist and a practitioner, as in the case of a member of language academy (practitioner) who at the same time conducts research about language management (theorist), or a language teacher who also conducts research in applied linguistics. The two types of networks do therefore overlap. However, there are theorists who have little or no connection with practice networks and practitioners who do not participate in the theory networks.

The theory networks are limited in extent. On the other hand, the practice networks are enormous. Even if only professional language management practitioners stand to be counted, the numbers are impressive: they include employees of language management agencies, media personnel such as editors and proofreaders, cross-cultural communication consultants, speech therapists, literary critics and a huge number of language teachers of all kinds who engage in native and

foreign language teaching. Of course we cannot overlook part-time language managing practitioners such as members of academies, governmental and other committees, various government officials, personnel officers in companies, members of language associations, journalists, politicians and so on. Speakers, who manage language in their everyday speech practice, are also practitioners of language management. Practice networks are language management networks tout court.

### Distribution of the theory

Obviously, theory is easy to find in theory networks. However, it is not the case that all theorists possess the full amount of theoretical knowledge of language management that is extant at a particular point in time. Their knowledge is a matter of degree. Also, the knowledge they possess may be of old vintage, and may not be applicable in the situation in which they intend to use it. Some theorists are well connected with practice, and this may lead to a situation where research is pursued that is directly and practically applicable. But occasionally there may be theorists who possess no active relationship to practice.

Some practitioners are also excellent theorists who actively engage in research. Many others show a profound working understanding of a language management theory. Some practitioners possess the knowledge of theory of a limited range but lack theoretical understanding in other vital areas. For example, language teachers may be well trained in language acquisition and classroom practices, but may be completely naive with regard to social aspects of language teaching that were not included in their training.

It is difficult to imagine that practice networks would take over the theory-generating function. Theory generation is a different task and specialization will occur, whether intended or not.

What is the significance of general linguistic knowledge in this scheme? While linguists, and sociolinguists in particular, may be in a position to easily acquire understanding of language management theories, linguistic training as such does not replace theoretical understanding of language management. Many agencies throughout the world are proud of their committees including 10 percent or more of linguists, but even 100 percent staffing by linguists does not automatically improve the theoretical profile of the agency.

I am aware of only a single paper (Jernudd, 1977) that actually analyses the knowledge of language management practitioners. In this paper, Jernudd comments that all subjects in his Swedish sample graduated from programs, which included courses on language cultivation and correctness, but it is hard to imagine that this would be common worldwide. We know that in many cases, governmental

language management agencies are staffed by career bureaucrats and that probably the majority of language teachers have been primarily trained in literature or the study of grammar and possess no theoretical knowledge of applied linguistics. Even before further empirical research is conducted, we can imagine that many members of the practitioner networks possess LITTLE theoretical knowledge. Much of the extant knowledge is probably “home-made” and is based on experience and/or analogies from related fields (social and cultural policies, and so on.).

### **How should theory be distributed?**

The conclusion to be drawn from these brief remarks would seem to be inescapable: we need more theory for language management practitioners. However, before reaching such a conclusion one should ask what is the wider social context of practitioners who possess theoretical knowledge.

In response to Brian Weinstein’s suggestions (1987), Jernudd and Neustupný (1987) formulated a theory of interests, which specifies that different interests of participants necessarily lead to different management processes. What is the position of a theory as a management tool? This question should be answered after empirical research on language managers is undertaken, but it is possible to make two preliminary observations immediately. First, dominant participants (such as governments) seem to be interested in only some aspects of language management theories. For example, purely technical management rules for teachers (normally taught as language acquisition and as classroom procedures) are welcome, but policies that imply social issues are not. In teaching Japanese as a foreign language, suggestions that interaction rather than sentence formation should be the object of management in foreign language acquisition situations have been presented repeatedly, but they have never raised much interest in either public or entrepreneurial networks. Second, why is it that language teachers themselves seem to be little interested in theories of language acquisition? Is it just difficult to acquire such knowledge, or does it in some way contradict their interests?

### **What to do and how?**

Should our final policy be to disseminate knowledge of language management theories, we should not forget that many of these theories contain components that are a direct reflection of their authors’ interests. For example, theories close to governments may be completely different from those that are proposed by language activists. It would be improper to impose on practitioners theories that

disagree with their own interests. However, the fact that many features of theories are strongly affected by interests does not mean that all features are. Although not entirely interest-free, we can nominate areas that are relatively neutral.

Rather than teaching practitioners a set of concepts of a language management theory, it is more rewarding to acquaint them with the basic strategies that govern more than one of these theories. Examples of such strategies are the following:

1. Look for the social context of all language management acts. Consider issues such as those of social paradigms, interest, power, or language rights.
2. Remember that social management comes before communicative management and communicative management before language management. Do not therefore concentrate on language management alone.
3. Actively pursue management other than in public networks. In other words, do not rely on governmental committees to solve language problems. While involving the government is necessary and beneficial, the interests of the government are one-sided and, in general, cannot represent the wide-ranging interests of all agents concerned.
4. Seek the source of language management in discourse. Language problems start in discourse and it is in order to adjust discourse that solutions are presented.
5. Consider all stages of the language management process (deviation, noting, evaluation, adjustment design and implementation). Noting a deviation, or evaluating it, is not necessarily followed by the formulation and implementation of a policy, but the initial stages of the management process may be of great importance.
6. Think of language management as developing within one of the historical paradigms (Early Modern, Modern, Post-modern). It will be easier to understand what is actually happening in the case under your investigation.

(These strategies, formulated in principle in Neustupný, 1983, have become the basic strategies of the Language Management Theory as developed in Jernudd & Neustupný, 1987).

To stimulate research by practitioners is important. So-called “action research” (Wallace, 1998) suits not only language teachers but also many other language management practitioners.

An important issue is how to develop strategies, which are not language management theory strategies, in order to assist language management practitioners’ work. Many practitioners possess qualifications in law, sociology, economics, linguistics and other areas, which overlap with language management, but lack the competence to apply this knowledge in language management.

## Conclusion

The distribution of theoretical knowledge will be more and more important. In this contribution I have tried to turn the reader's attention to the distinction between theory and practice networks and to the ways in which theory can be made more useful for language management practitioners who are the principal personnel in this important area.

## Notes

\* This paper was delivered by J.V. Neustupný at a language management conference at the Central Institute of Indian Languages on 1 December, 2001. At the time, Neustupný was located at Obirin University in Japan.

1. In this paper the term "language management" refers to all cases of norm deviations, noting, evaluation, adjustment design language and implementation which pertain to problems. It replaces the term "language planning" and extends its scope; in its original usage "language planning" tended to be limited to only some cases language problems (cf. Jernudd & Neustupný, 1987; Jernudd, 1993; Neustupný, 1994).

2. I distinguish here between "theories of language management" and "Language Management Theory". The former refers to any theory of language management including, for example, the Language Cultivation Theory of the Prague School or the Language Planning Theory. The latter is a particular theory expounded in principle in Jernudd and Neustupný (1987) and the subsequent work of these two authors and others.

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