

LANGUAGE PLANNING AND POLICY

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Societal attention to, and interference in, questions of language use is a common phenomenon: complaints about slippery grammar in letters to newspaper editors, spelling reforms, questions of ‘political correctness’, advocacy of ‘plain language’ use in insurance policies, the role of minority languages in education, interpreter training for the courtroom, the development of international terminologies, the selection of official languages – the list seems endless. In sociolinguistics, all these examples are increasingly being treated as part of a more unified field known as **language planning**.

The term ‘language planning’ was introduced by the American linguist Einar Haugen in the late 1950s and refers to all conscious efforts that aim at changing the linguistic behaviour of a speech community. It can include anything ‘from proposing a new word to a new language’ (Haugen 1987: 627). **Language policy** is sometimes used as a synonym for language planning. However, more precisely, language policy refers to the more general linguistic, political and social goals underlying the actual language planning process. Although language planning is a widespread and long-standing practice, only in the 1960s, when a large number of newly independent nations in Africa and Asia faced the question of the selection and implementation of a national language, did language policy and planning emerge as an area of sociolinguistic enquiry.

However, the very concept of language planning as ‘deliberate language change’ (Rubin and Jernudd 1971b: xvi), initiated by human actors, remained questionable for many linguists until well into the 1970s. This is reflected, for example, in the title of a collection which has become a classic of language-planning literature: *Can Language Be Planned?* (Rubin and Jernudd 1971a). Although nowadays linguists accept that deliberate language change is possible, this does not mean that they consider language planning advisable: *It can be done, but it should not be done* remains a common attitude (Fishman 1983). Emphasising the descriptive nature of

linguistics as a science, linguists have often approached language planning and its essentially prescriptive nature with some degree of suspicion and left its execution to politicians and lay people.

12.2 DIMENSIONS OF LANGUAGE PLANNING

Based on the distinction between language as an autonomous linguistic system and as a social institution, the German linguist, Heinz Kloss (1967, 1969), distinguished two basic types of language planning: **corpus planning**, which is concerned with the internal structure of the language, and **status planning**, which refers to all efforts undertaken to change the use and function of a language (or language variety) within a given society.¹

Typical activities of corpus planning include devising a writing system for a spoken language, initiating spelling reforms, coining new terms and publishing grammar books. A central aspect of corpus planning (and language planning *per se*) is **language standardisation**, which can be understood as the creation and establishment of a uniform linguistic norm. Not all languages show the same degree of standardisation, and different types or stages of standardisation have been distinguished:

Unstandardised oral language, for which no writing system has been devised. Examples: Galla (Ethiopia), Phuthi (Lesotho), and so on.

Partly standardised or unstandardised written language used mainly in primary education. The language is characterised by high degrees of linguistic variation in the morphological and syntactic system.

Examples: most of the American Indian languages.

Young standard language, used in education and administration, but not felt to be fit for use in science and technology at a tertiary or research level.

Examples: Luganda (Uganda), Xhosa (South Africa), Basque (France/Spain) and so on.

Archaic standard language, which was used widely in pre-industrial times but lacks vocabulary and registers for modern science and technology.

Examples: classical Greek, classical Hebrew, Latin and so on.

Mature modern standard language, employed in all areas of communication, including science and technology at a tertiary level.

Examples: English, French, German, Danish, modern Hebrew and so on.

(based on Cobarrubias 1983: 43–4)

Status planning, which refers to the allocation of new functions to a language (such as using the language as medium of instruction or as an official language), affects the role a language plays within a given society. The decision to use Hebrew as a medium of instruction in Jewish schools in Palestine from the end of the nineteenth century is an example of status planning. Previously, classical Hebrew had not been used in everyday communication, and its use had been restricted to prayers and religious as well

as scholarly writings. The introduction of Hebrew-medium schools created the conditions for the revival of Hebrew as a common language used in everyday communication. Language-planners distinguish many possible functions a language can occupy in society.

Official: the use of a language ‘as legally appropriate language for all politically and culturally representative purposes on a nationwide basis. In many cases, the official function of a language is specified constitutionally’ (Stewart 1968).

Example: in Ireland both Irish and English have official status.

Provincial: the use of a language ‘as a provincial or regional official language. In this case, the official function of the language is not nationwide, but is limited to a smaller geographic area’ (Stewart 1968).

Example: in the Canadian province of Quebec, French is the only official language (since 1974), while both English and French have official status in the other provinces of Canada.

Wider communication: the use of a language ‘as a medium of communication across language boundaries within the nation (*lingua franca*)’ (Stewart 1968). Examples: Swahili in Kenya and Tanzania, Hindi and English in India.

International: the use of a language ‘as a major medium of communication which is international in scope, e.g. for diplomatic relations, foreign trade, tourism, etc.’ (Stewart 1968).

Example: in medieval Europe, Latin was the major medium of international communication. Today it is English.

Capital: the use of a language ‘as a major medium of communication in the vicinity of the national capital. The function is especially important in countries where political power, social prestige, and economic activity is centred in the capital’ (Stewart 1968).

Example: the provinces in Belgium have either Dutch or French as a provincial official language. The capital Brussels, however, is bilingual.

Group: the use of a language ‘primarily as the normal medium for communication among the members of a single group, such as a tribe, settled group of foreign immigrants, etc.’ (Stewart 1968).

Example: Jamaican Creole functions as a group language among Afro-Caribbean immigrants in Britain.

Educational: the use of a language ‘as a medium of primary or secondary education, either regionally or nationally’ (Stewart 1968).

Example: in Norway, the local dialects are widely used in primary education.

School subject: the language ‘is commonly taught as a subject in secondary and/or higher education’ (Stewart 1968).

Example: French is taught as a school subject in most German high schools.

Literary: ‘The use of a language primarily for literary or scholarly purposes’ (Stewart 1968).

Example: Latin was used as the main language of literary and particularly scientific writing in Europe until the early eighteenth century.

Religious: ‘The use of a language primarily in connection with the ritual of a particular religion’ (Stewart 1968).

Example: religions such as Islam and Judaism require the use of a sacred language (Arabic and Hebrew respectively) for the recitation of religious texts and prayers.

Mass media: the use of a language in the print media and on radio and television.

Example: in Israel, the government determines how many hours should be broadcast in Hebrew, Arabic and foreign languages.

Work place: the use of a language as a medium of communication in the workplace.

Example: although German is the main language used in German factories, Turkish, Greek, Italian and other immigrant languages dominate in certain areas of production-line work.

(based on Cooper 1989: 99–119)

Although language planners separate corpus and status planning conceptually, it is necessary to understand that the two dimensions interact closely with each other (Cobarrubias 1983). The allocation of new language functions (status planning) often requires changes in the linguistic system (corpus planning) such as the development of new styles and lexical items. A good example of the interaction of status and corpus planning is the above-mentioned adoption of Hebrew as medium of instruction in Palestine. The change in language status made it necessary to expand the vocabulary of classical Hebrew in order to provide terms for the teaching of modern school subjects such as chemistry, physics and biology (Rabin 1989).

Subsequently, two more dimensions of language planning have been identified: **prestige planning** and **acquisition planning**. Prestige planning is directed towards creating a favourable psychological background which is crucial for the long-term success of language planning activities (Haarmann 1990). The high prestige which Hebrew commanded as the traditional religious language made explicit prestige planning unnecessary. Prestige planning, however, is vital when the promoted language has previously been limited to low-culture functions (as in the case of diglossia, see Chapter 1). In order to make the promoted status changes socially acceptable, it is necessary to improve the prestige of the respective language. Thus, prestige planning often becomes a prerequisite for status planning.

Efforts to spread and promote the learning of a language are described as instances of acquisition planning. For example, cultural institutions such as the British Council or the Goethe Institute are set up and supported by their respective governments to promote the learning of English and German as a second language in other countries. Another example of acquisition planning is the activities by the Maori community in New Zealand to promote the acquisition of Maori. In the early 1980s, most Maori children had no knowledge of their ancestral language, and linguists identified Maori as an endangered language. In a response to the decline of Maori, so-called ‘language nests’ (*kohunga reo*) were established by the Maori community. In these pre-schools, older Maori-speaking members

of the community worked voluntarily as caretakers and taught the Maori language to the children (Cooper 1989: 157–9).

12.3 THE PROCESS OF LANGUAGE PLANNING

Haugen (1966, 1987) developed a useful framework for the description of the process of language planning. According to Haugen, language planning typically consists of four stages, which can (but need not) be sequential:

1. Selection
2. Codification
3. Implementation
4. Elaboration.

Language planning begins with the possibility of choosing between a number of **linguistic alternatives** (Haugen 1987). To choose certain linguistic forms or language varieties over others, and promote them as being ‘the norm’, is the basis of most language-planning activities. Language planning can thus be understood as a normative response to linguistic diversity.

Selection is the term used to refer to the choice of a language or language variety to fulfil certain functions in a given society: for example, official language, medium of instruction, religious language and so on. Often this means that the most prestigious dialect or language is chosen, as in the case of modern French, which is based on the prestigious dialect spoken in the region around Paris (*Île-de-France*). This is sometimes called *monocentric selection*. However, sometimes language planners have deliberately created a composite of several dialects. A good example of this is the recent standardisation of Basque, a language spoken in the south-west of France and north-west of Spain. Unified Basque (*Euskara batua*) was created from the late 1960s as an amalgam of the four main Basque dialects (Mahlau 1991). Standard Basque is an example of *polycentric selection*.

Codification refers to the creation of a linguistic standard or norm for a selected linguistic code and is commonly divided into three stages: graphisation (developing a writing system), grammatication (deciding on the rules/norms of grammar) and lexicalisation (identifying the vocabulary) (Haugen 1987: 627). Codification is often administered by language academies, as in the cases of French and Basque; however, the examples given below show that codification has just as frequently been the achievement of individuals.

Graphisation of a previously oral language with no written tradition involves many important decisions regarding the selection of a writing system. Should it be logographic (based on words and morphemes), syllabic (based on syllables) or alphabetic (based on the vowels and consonants as individual units)? Should one adopt an existing writing system or create a new one?