

ТІЛ БІЛІМІ ЯЗЫКОЗНАНИЕ

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“Let’s Get on the Same Page”: Clarifying Language Policy Discussions

Abstract. Language is most generally, a systematic way of communication. Language can be linguistic (verbal communication), extra-linguistic (“body language” or sign language), but regardless, both implicitly and explicitly, language is and must be systematic in order to be distinguished from the articulation of random morphemes and/or gesticulations. Beyond its mechanics, language has also been an instrumental tool in implementing ideological agendas, and transforming large swaths of people and communities. The development of nation-states that transcended or cut-across historic ethno-linguistic communities “necessitated” the need for languages of wider communication which would transcend local and regional particularities. As Robert Cooper (1989) writes “Language, of course, can not only be fashioned into a supreme symbol of the common destiny, it can be manipulated to help create the perception of a common destiny” [6]. In light of increasingly complicated geo-political governance systems, this paper looks at Sjaak Kroon’s use of a cube to illustrate how language policy discussions can be organized in linguistics and language education classrooms and research.

Key words: Language policy and planning processes, modeling multilingualism

As a graduate student learning about the language policies in different countries, this area of study seemed straightforward. Look at the national language policy and move down the geopolitical governance system of that place. India has a tri-language policy, Hindi, English, and the state language. Belgium has two official languages, French and Flemish. The United States has no official language policy but 37 states have English-only language policies. Canada operates in French and English. And so on.

Then I was introduced to the concept of World Englishes and Braj Kachru’s argument that although English was imposed in many places as a result of colonialization, English has since been incorporated into the local linguistic system, creating a different variant (not deficient) of English. *Different* and *not deficient* because of the systematic nature of the language changes, reflecting features from the language of the colonized, e.g., Indian English, Hong Kong English, etc. [1]

However, as the world continues to become increasingly complicated, as the states formed in the 19th and 20th centuries continue to splinter

along ethno-linguistic lines, and different policy actors emerge, language policy discussions become challenging to organize. This was evident when I began doing research on the European Union’s (EU) language policy. Question number one, what is the EU’s language policy and how is it defined? In a broad sense, language policies are actions that an institution, organization, or entity takes intervening and imposing a regulation on people’s language behaviors. Companies can have language policies, universities can have language policies, countries can have language policies, etc. The other thing to note is that language policies can be substantive, where there is some corresponding reward or punishment for compliance, symbolic, where there is no enforcement mechanism but it represents some ideal or value, or both.

In the case of the EU, it was important to distinguish that the EU institutions have a language policy (where documents and sessions are supposed to be translated into the official languages of the Member States), the European Court of Justice has its own operating language policy, functioning in French and English, with limited translation, and then there are the more symbolic language

“policies” or statements that it issues regarding the beauty and value of diversity at the official language level. In the case of the EU’s language policies, articles written by Michele Gazzola (2003) and Theo Val Els provided guidance and structure in beginning to organize the discussion. [3,4]

But in general, what I found was that often even among academic literature, there was a confusion about what language policies and legislation described what, etc. leading to further confusion for new entrants into the field like myself. As Padraig Ó Riagáin (1997) observes “Language policy is formulated, implemented, and accomplishes its results within a complex interrelated set of economic, social, and political processes which include, inter alia, the operation of other non-language state policies” [2]. As the complexity of the contexts within which language policies are formulated increases, researchers need new ways to capture or organize that complexity.

What this pointed to was a need to be able to organize and then critically engage on how language policies are produced and implemented, especially as language as a resource and capital is foundational to being able to participate in the “global” of the global economy. One of doing this was to find or create a model or a heuristic that could capture the complexity of the geo-political scales, actors, etc. that language policy production processes are embedded in and influenced by. The rest of this article provides a brief overview of the language policy cube as one way of organizing the discussion for further reflection.

The Language Policy Cube: A Visual Heuristic

As this paper has discussed thus far, it has become increasingly challenging to teach and delineate language policies and their contexts in a clear way. In light of this then, Sjaak Kroon’s use of the cube form to delineate the different levels of governance, area of language planning, and the language’s status can provide one such model [5, 8]. This model can then be adapted to the context of the language and language policy that is being discussed. What the language cube allows the researcher to do is create a visual taxonomy of the different facets of a language policy in a variety of contexts.

The language policy cube. The language policy cube allows language policy researcher-teachers to visualize three areas of analysis, i.e., the geo-political (z-axis), language status (y-axis), and the language planning domain (x-axis). This then allows the researcher to more clearly define what

the object of their study is by fitting their subject (the language policy) into essentially a visual taxonomy.

Because language policies are interventions at some level to change the linguistic behavior of some population, and so, when using the language policy cube, one should determine the z-axis, the geo-political locale, first. At what geo-political locale is the policy under study being formulated? The next question then is what language (or languages as the case may be) is the policy geared towards (y-axis)? The third question is what language planning domains does this policy intervention involve (x-axis)?

When utilizing the three axes, the language policy cube can be modified to reflect the different ways that languages are categorized or their language status in a particular context. Similarly, the different geo-political levels could be modified to include significant contributors or governance structures.

The x-axis: Language planning domains.

Language planning is generally divided into different domains, in which planning activities take place [6]. *Status planning* involves focusing on the importance or position of one language in relation to other languages. This type of activity is most often legislated by a government. In principle, status planning can “focus on any communicative function... aim[ed] at those functions which enable elites to maintain or extend their power, or which give counter-elites an opportunity to seize power for themselves” [6]. The focus here is on making languages “official” through a variety of channels (e.g., the nationalization or standardization of a language).

Corpus planning refers to the standardization of the language in relation to its structure and functionality, and auxiliary code(s) [6,7]. This includes, but is not limited to, activities like corpus building through creating new words/terms and spelling and orthography reforms. This would include attempts to standardize language or spelling for example, through the creation of a dictionary or a particular type of script or graphization.

Cooper (1989) also makes the distinction, arguing that “[W]hen planning is directed towards increasing a language’s uses, it falls within the rubric of status planning. But when it is directed toward increasing the number of users... then a separate analytic category for the focus of language planning seems... justified.” This third category is acquisition planning. *Acquisition*

planning then involves language and education issues (i.e., school, literary resources, media, employment, etc.). [6]

Although actual distinctions between these different planning domains are easier to make in theory than in practice, since implementation of language policies tend to incorporate all these different arenas, policies oftentimes do focus on different domains, which makes these distinctions helpful in clarify policy aims. Moreover, since this is a language policy cube, language planning is one aspect that is captured as part of more holistically learning at “what agent is planning for which language through what target domains.”

Y-axis: Language status. Kroon (2005) defines the y-axis as the “language” or language status being discussed in the language policy [5,8]. Using

nation-state categorizations, these languages are categorized by their political recognition within a nation-state context. Within nation-states criteria like the historical factors that shape and inform majority and minority politics, its citizenry, etc. all inform and legitimize languages. However, language and language categories are fluid. Language categories that are pertinent at one point in time may become analytically obsolete. In this way, the language policy cube can show how language legitimacy changes over time as well.

The z-axis: Geo-political locale. The z-axis is a little more self-explanatory than the other two axes. This axis is intended to reflect the geo-political level that is under focus. In figure one below, there are three levels (regional or local, country, and international).

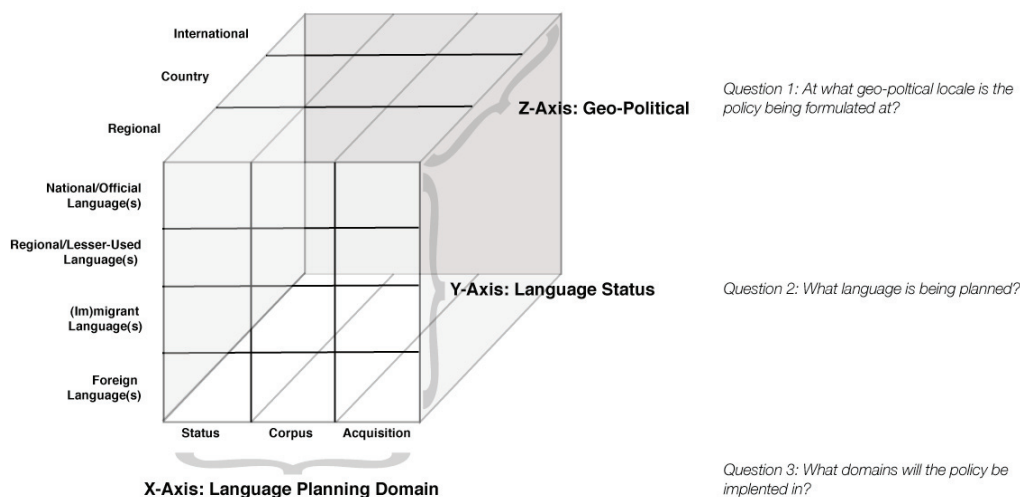


Figure 1 - The language policy cube [5,8]

Looking at these three facets of the language policy-making process (language legitimacy, language planning, and levels of governance), the cube model is an effective heuristic enabling students, researchers, and teachers to develop a systematic way of looking at language policy research and analysis. From here, discussions can extend to problematizing language policy discussions when conducting language policy-related research, particularly in linguistically complex contexts like the European Union, Kazakhstan, India, etc.

References

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Язык вообще наиболее систематический способ коммуникации. Язык может быть лингвистическим (вербальная коммуникация), экстралингвистическим ("язык тела" или язык жестов), но независимо ни от чего язык должен быть систематичным, чтобы исключить артикуляцию случайных морфем и/или жестов. Вне его механики язык является инструментом в осуществлении идеологических программ и преобразований больших рядов людей и сообществ. Развитие этнических государств, которые приумножились или сократились через исторические ethno-лингвистические сообщества, вызывало необходимость в языках более широкой коммуникации, которая превысит местные и региональные особенности. Роберт Купер (1989) пишет, что "язык, конечно, может не только быть вылеплен в высший символ общей судьбы, им можно управлять, чтобы помочь создать восприятие общей судьбы" [6]. В свете все более и более сложных гео-политических систем управления обсуждение языковой политики может быть организовано в языковых образовательных классных комнатах и в лингвистических исследованиях.