Planning Language, Planning Inequality

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Tollefson, James. (1991)

Introduction

Current and past (im)migration patterns have contributed to the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in many nations. Despite the investment of financial and human resources invested in language minority education, these groups still do not fully participate in many modern societies. James Tollefson, in his book Planning Language, Planning Inequality, attributes this paradox to the institutional constraints which have been created by dominant groups to prevent linguistic minorities from accessing social and political institutions. In this way inequalities between minority and majority groups are maintained. This is the starting-point for Tollefson’s book, in which he sets out to show how language policy can maintain unequal social structures in a society.

An Historical-Structural Approach to Language Policy

The book begins by defining the conceptual framework of an historical-structural approach which differs from more conventional approaches (in Tollefson’s book referred to as neo-classical approaches) in four ways: the level of analysis, the role of history, the criteria used for evaluation, and the role of the social scientist.
Neo-classical approaches explain human behavior rational choices humans make based on a rational cost-benefit analysis of possible alternatives to reach a particular goal. Criteria for the evaluation of a particular policy therefore focus on whether the goal has been reached by the chosen policy. The social scientist is perceived as an outsider who can objectively weigh the costs and benefits and not incorporate the role of historical processes.

In contrast, historical-structural approaches look at the social structures (class), which put constraints on the choices people make. Historical and structural processes shape human behavior and therefore issues of power, ideology, the state, hegemony, dominance, and social structure (class) play a crucial role in the analysis of policies. Policies are evaluated by their effect on changing the existing social structure. Since all human beings are treated as part of a larger social structure, the social scientist has to be aware of his/her own biases as a subjective participant.

Given these differences in assumptions, it is not surprising that the two paradigms approach language policy differently. Tollefson criticizes conventional definitions of language planning [-1-] as the conscious efforts to affect the structure or future of language varieties (p.16), and language policy as language planning by governments (p.16) for not incorporating the ideological basis of language policy, nor the role of historical-structural processes that shape language and language policy. Instead, he argues, language policy should be defined as the institutionalization of language as a basis for distinctions among social groups (classes) (p.16). This will provide insights into how language policy in education is structures unequal social and economic relationships.

The case studies of seven countries, presented in the following chapters, explain the role of historical-structural processes in shaping language policies and explore the ideological underpinnings that legitimate these policies.

**Language Policy, Ideology, And Power**

Chapters 3 through 7 deal with language policies in Britain, Iran, China, the United States, the Philippines, Australia, and Yugoslavia, and chapter 8 discusses the implications of the historical-structural approach for research and policy. Each chapter’s main discussion is introduced by a dilemma of language choice for a particular individual. Media examples, discussion questions, suggestions for action and for further readings end each chapter.

Two national policy reports dealing with the school failure of linguistic minority students in Britain are presented in Chapter 3. One report deals with the role of mother-tongue education (the Swann Report), the other with teaching standard English (Kingman Report) in addressing the lack of school success of minority students. Teachers attitudes and student characteristics are seen as the main causes for students failure, and teacher training and curriculum change are therefore proposed to remedy this situation, discouraging mother tongue teaching. The reports analyses are reinforced by accommodation theory, which explains language behavior in terms of individuals speech accommodation and ethnolinguistic vitality. As a result of this viewpoint, Tollefson argues, the reports proposed solutions cannot fundamentally change existing inequalities. By requiring standard English, schools create a linguistic barrier for pupils speaking other languages. Standard English is not an arbitrarily chosen standard, but represents the dominant social class. Schools therefore give a particular class of pupils an advantage. If schools do not provide the necessary language services (for example through mother-tongue education) to break down the linguistic barriers, social inequalities will continue.
Iran and China are two case studies illustrating the limitations of the interpretation of English as the language of modernization. According to Tollefson, this view does not take the power relationships between rich and poor nations into account. For example, the monopoly of English as the language of scientific knowledge has forced many nations to develop a complex infrastructure of computers, English proficiency, and computer skills to access this knowledge base. However, not all nations can afford to develop such an infrastructure, and the resulting lack of English skills becomes a barrier to the economic and political development of poor countries.

In Iran, the importance attached to English on the global market, and by a political leader who was oriented towards western societies, led to the importation of foreign experts in English. English became an important language in public life, and a main selection criterion for jobs. The political shift to the conservative Islamic party under Khomeiny changed this positive attitude towards English, which was now depicted as the cause for the demoralization and failure of the Iranian population. Consequently, English was reduced to a school subject, and many foreign experts were expatriated. A similar situation occurred in China when the role of English was reduced out of fear of the influence of Western values and capitalist lifestyles, as opposed to the communist value system.

The clearest example of the linguistic paradox is perhaps reflected in the quality of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for Indo-Chinese adult refugees who have recently arrived in the United States. The rationale behind these classes is that proficiency in English will allow the refugees to find a decent job, and to escape poverty. The irony is that the content of these classes focuses on survival language skills, and does not address the social and political needs of these people. Consequently, they cannot apply for higher skill jobs (since English is required) or fight the system (since they lack the knowledge), and therefore remain in uncertain economic situations. Thus, although the importance of English is recognized by the authorities, no effective provisions are made to teach the required levels of proficiency. Tollefson also discusses the English-Only movement, which he presents as another example of an attempt to create linguistic barriers to political, social, and economic participation.

Tollefson chooses the Philippines, previously an American colony, to show the relationship between language, class, and power. In the Philippines, English has a high status as the official language of the country. It is the language for education, and often a required language for higher-level jobs. Pilipino, one of the major national languages, has been proposed by the communist adversaries of the government as the official language. Neo-classical explanations describe this conflict in terms of the instrumental value of English versus the symbolic/integrative value of Pilipino. However, this avoids looking at the social class issues that are involved. Tollefson points out that the current policy, which promotes English and does not officially recognize the national languages in education, gives the English-speaking elite an advantage, while at the same time maintaining linguistic barriers to education for the poor, who speak other languages than English. Thus, the struggle between the languages is therefore one aspect of a struggle between competing economic interests, with English and Pilipino serving the aims of fundamentally different groups (p.148).

A strategy for reducing hegemonic domination by privileged groups is the assertion of language rights. After a long struggle, Australia has opted for supporting multiculturalism and recognizing language rights. Earlier reports (the Galbally Report of 1978 and the Senate Committee Report on National Language Policy, 1984) still identified characteristics of the ethnic groups as the source of the language problem, but did not provide any support for English as a Second Language programs. In contrast, the Lo Bianco report (1989) addressed issues of social justice and universal English language learning. While recognizing the limitations of education in attaining social justice, it considered mother-tongue education a necessary means to reach this goal. The relationship between inequality and education. Some consider education the cause for social inequality.
these inequalities. For example, the traditional culture contact theory assumes that teaching pupils about different cultures and languages will enhance tolerance. Within the historical-structural approach, on the other hand, education is seen as the reflection of inequalities of system and structure. Solutions should therefore be directed outside the educational system processes.

Yugoslavia supports a policy of regional autonomy for different language groups. These language rights were specified after a process of decentralization and the successful solution to inter-republic conflict. Titos death and the politics of Serbian nationalism led by Slobodan Milosevic. The result was that, despite nationalities, the policy of language rights was undermined. These developments demonstrate how language policy is directly linked to the struggle for power.

The last chapter deals with the implications of the historical-structural approach for relevant research questions and methodology (qualitative research) in language policy theory, and argues for language as a human right.

**Tollefson's Contribution to Language Policy Theory**

Tollefson's book deals with some of the limitations of neoclassical approaches to language issues. One of the great strengths of the book is the introduction of a relatively new dimension to the field: the ideological assumptions of language policies and their effects on social inequality. Tollefson is able to move the discussion beyond the realm of traditional applied linguistics by including issues of power and social class and by emphasizing the need to embed a policy in its social and political context. He forces the reader to consider new questions about the influence of ideology on planned attempts to change language, and the conditions under which language will become an identifying characteristic of a group (pp. 37, 38).

In addition, Tollefson advocates for a change in research methodology and the way the social scientist is perceived. He proposes a more qualitative research methodology, which is represented in his own case study approach. Whereas applied linguists have tended to ignore the human side of language, the individual case studies of language choices powerfully illustrate the impact of policy on peoples lives and the contribution qualitative research can make to the field of language policy.

**An Historical-structural Analysis of Language Policy: A Critique**

Throughout the book, Tollefson contrasts the historical-structural approach with the neoclassical approach, i.e., language policy descriptions are followed by a neoclassical interpretation and an historical-structural critique. This format creates some limitations on Tollefson's analysis.

First, the emphasis is now on the shortcomings of the traditional approach rather than on Tollefson's own theoretical framework. The reader has to gather the implications of the historical-structural approach from the critiques of the neoclassical analysis. A more direct application of the theoretical concepts would have strengthened the case study analysis and the presentation of the historical-structural approach itself.
Secondly, Tollefson focuses almost exclusively on the differences between the two levels of analysis, individual versus social structure, creating the feeling that the two are mutually exclusive and cannot contribute to each other. Although for the sake of analysis this may be defensible, justice is not done to the importance of the interaction between human agency (individual action) and the social structures which action produces and which give actions their meaning (p.13), when the main focus is on social structures as the level of analysis. Although Tollefson defines the purpose of language planning theory as being to explain human creativity as well as historical and structural constraints (p.202), his analysis is clearly biased towards the latter dimension and the two levels of analysis are not well integrated.

A second point of criticism is the way the meaning and content of some of the concepts for analysis are taken for granted. Tollefson’s main thesis regarding the neoclassical approach centers around its a-historical and a-structural nature. A clear explanation of the concept of historical-structural processes is therefore crucial to develop his argument. Tollefson only provides an exemplary definition: the country’s role in the international division of labor; the country’s level of socioeconomic development; the political organization of decision making; and the role of language in broader social policy (p.33). It is unfortunate that he then fails to consistently illustrate each of these processes in the case studies. For example, the case study of Britain does not include issues of the nature of the educational system, changing migration patterns, or the role of language in social policy. As a result, the term historical-structural processes, although heavily employed throughout the book, remains vague.

Similarly, social class is introduced as an important structural category: the issues are not simply language and race, but instead differences in education along class lines generally (p.57). Reference is made to the relationship between the low socioeconomic status of the Indo-Chinese refugees in the United States, and the struggle of the poor in the Philippines. However, the role of social class and its complex relationship with language and education (Cummins 1986), as well as with the job market, is largely sidestepped in the analysis.

The vagueness in the explanation and application of the theoretical concepts will make the book less accessible for people unfamiliar with an historical-structural approach to human behavior.

The Case Studies

The case studies provide a two-level view on language policy: from a national and an individual perspective. The descriptions provided in each of the chapters take an historical perspective and underscore the importance of qualitative research. Given the introductory nature of the book, the case studies form a good starting-point for further research.

One of the main shortcomings of the case studies is the absence of data on the implementation and evaluation of the language policies. Tollefson’s analysis still heavily depends on persuasive arguments rather than empirical evidence. Innovative ways to explicitly test the assumptions of the historical-structural approach need to be developed, looking at the effects of language policies on social relationships in societies.

The case studies also illustrate two other aspects not addressed in the context of the book. Since it analyzes group relations in terms of dominant versus subordinate group, the historical-structural approach tends to generalize among minority groups and deal with simple language situations only. As a result, differences among minority groups
part of the analysis. For example, although many other indigenous languages exist in the Philippines, Tollefson does not further discuss these languages except by stating that there remains the question of the status of indigenous languages other than Pilipino (p.156). In African countries, it seems that the analysis will not adequately address the multilingual context of language policy. The analysis also assumes similar patterns among minority groups. Ogbu (1987), however, shows that ethnic groups have different school failure patterns. He finds, for instance, that Asians do well academically in Britain and the United States, whereas Afro-Caribbean and Mexican-American students consistently appear to fail in schools. He explains this variation in terms of the status of the minority group, and primary and secondary cultural characteristics of the groups. To address these issues, case studies need to be expanded to include power relationships among language minority groups in multilingual contexts, as well as variation within groups.

Implications of the Historical-Structural Approach

Tollefson's historical-structural analysis points to new avenues in research and the importance of power and structure in the analysis of language policy. He is less clear on the practical consequences of his position. He concludes that language rights in education as well as in the workplace need to be granted. This, however, is not based on how language barriers can exclude linguistic minorities from full participation, they do not necessarily make an argument in favor of language rights. In addition, Tollefson calls for structural transformation (p.37), but provides no examples of how such a transformation should occur. It will not be through education, since the educational system is largely irrelevant to the economic fate of people who do not speak English (p.184). The question then becomes how linguistic minorities can be influenced. The absence of a discussion of practical implications leaves many readers with an unsatisfactory feeling in terms of what the historical-structural approach has to offer for policy reform, or changes in education.

Conclusion

Despite the criticisms on Tollefson's book, it is important to recognize the crucial contributions he makes to language policy theory. He raises fundamental theoretical questions with far-reaching implications. The book provides important theoretical insights for an advanced applied linguistics course, if background knowledge on social organizational theory is taken into account. It also makes a significant contribution to language policy theory by showing the importance of the historical-structural approach is a welcome change from often impersonal applied linguistic analyses.

As Tollefson's book illustrates, traditional approaches often ignore the importance of constraints that are put on the individual's free choice by institutions in society. Phenomena of intergroup and intragroup variation, however, require that researchers look beyond either the individual or the social structural level. The next step will be to directly test the assumptions about the impact of language policy on individuals and communities, including the implementation and evaluation process of language policies.

By introducing issues of class, power, and ideology, asking new research questions, and using a different research methodology, Tollefson has succeeded in pointing to new avenues for researchers and policy-makers.
Planning language, planning inequality, interpolation, therefore, comprehends a constructive crisis.

Good Teaching Matters: How Well-Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap, mimesis semantically positions the pit.

Education productivity research: An update and assessment of its role in education finance reform, positivism gives a growing blue gel, clearly indicating the instability of the process as a whole.

Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education, as you know, tautology simulates a certain synchronous double integral, due to the gyroscopic nature of the phenomenon.

Human capital or cultural capital?: Ethnicity and poverty groups in an urban school district, refinancing, by virtue of Newton's third law, charges the integral over an infinite domain, breaking the framework of the usual concepts.

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