

# A Reflection on the Concepts and the Perceptions of Language Policy

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## Abstract

Decisions around Language Policy and Planning are made around the world, every day, both formally by governments and informally by academics, community leaders, subjects etc. With regard to the underlying concept of what would be Language Policy, this objective essay goes into some points, such as: what are its bases and its assumptions; (1989), Johnson (2013), Ricento (2006), Lagares (2018), among others, seeking to propose a brief theoretical-methodological outline for a better understanding of the area that engenders the country in various instances of social life.

**Keywords:** Language Policy, Language

## 1. Introduction

Discussions about contemporary Applied Linguistics (AL) have identified the transdisciplinary characterization of their research, questioned their field of action, development and objectives, as well as pointed out the various changes and social transformations that reflect indirectly and directly in the practices of constructing and reconstructing knowledge in this area.

Thus, according to the confluence and multiplicity of social and ideological phenomena, which are directly interrelated to an uninterrupted reflection on doing research and (re)building knowledge, many countries adopt a Language Policy designed to favor or discourage the use of a particular language or set of languages.

Although nations have historically used Language Policies more frequently to promote an official language at the expense of others, many countries now have policies designed to protect and promote regional and ethnic languages whose viability is threatened.

In this way, Language Policy is seen as a set of laws, regulations or rules approved by an authoritative body (such as a government) as part of a language plan (Kaplan & Baudalffk 1997). Indeed, while there are linguistic minorities within any country, these minorities are often seen as a potential threat to the country's internal cohesion, as countries also understand that providing language rights to minorities in the long run is also a means of gain the confidence of citizens.

Language policy is what a government does officially through legislation, judicial decisions or policy to determine how languages are used, cultivate the language skills necessary to meet national priorities, or establish the rights of individuals or groups to use and maintain languages.

This small introduction tries to elucidate a small example of Language Policy, which refers to the linguistic issues of a country, which influence and promote several other Language Policies, as guiding documents of language teaching of a country, the social prestige of written language etc., which in turn need not be approved by an authoritative body, since such Language Policies may emerge from a bottom up movement or from a grassroots organization, and not all Language Policies are intentional or carefully planned.

In this way, the scope of the Language Policy varies in practice from country to country. This can be explained by the fact that language policy is often based on contingent historical reasons. Likewise, the countries also differ in the degree of explicitness with which they implement a given Language Policy.

Regarding the underlying concept of what Language Policy would be, what are its bases, assumptions, etc., we will take as base the studies of Cooper (1989), Johnson (2013), Ricento (2006), Lagares (2018), among others. In this way, we intend to propose a brief theoretical-methodological outline of some of the different conceptions that are embedded in the concept of Language Policy, to better understand the area that engender the country's agenda in various instances of social life of the subjects-actors of a community, country, state etc.

## **2. The Theoretical-Methodological Traction**

Decisions around language policy and planning are made around the world every day, both formally by governments and informally by academics and community leaders. These decisions influence the right to use and maintain languages, affect language status, and determine which languages are fed. Language policies and planning decisions have a major

impact on the vitality of language and, ultimately, on the rights of the individual.

Decisions about language policies, requirements and practices have important consequences in all social contexts. Thus, for Cooper (1989), “language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others in relation to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes” (Cooper, 1989: 45).

It can be carried out with official formal governmental sanction or reflected in unofficial and informal practices. Language planning is often done for the express purpose of solving communication problems. However, ill-conceived and poorly informed policies can result in negative impacts on people affected by them.

Traditionally, there are two dimensions of language planning: “corpus planning deals with the selection and coding of standards, such as writing grammars and standardizing spelling; status planning deals with the initial choice of language, including attitudes toward alternative languages and the political implications of various choices (Bright, 1992: 311)”. A second type of important planning that is particularly important for education is known as language acquisition planning (Cooper, 1989). The choice of which languages will be used as a means of instruction is particularly important in the planning of the acquisition, since it is necessary not only to learn the language, but to use it to learn.

Johnson (2013), in his book entitled *Language Policy*, do a conceptual panorama of definitions of Language Policy, in the attempt to arrive at an appropriate synthesis. The first concept mentioned is that suggested by Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), arguing that language is part of a broader process of language planning, that is, the language planning exercise leads or is driven by the promulgation of a language policy by the government (or other authorized body or person). A language policy is a set of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices aimed at achieving planned language change in societies, groups or systems (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997: 11 *apud* Johnson, 2013: 4).

In this sense, language policy through idiomatic issues are seen as a set of laws and regulations precisely approved by a competent body, that is, by a government, characterizing this approval as a language plan. The point is that Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) deal with the adoption of these policies, which is not really necessary. It is possible to emerge language policies that do not need a governmental approval, although, not all formally proposed language policies are necessarily intentional or planned.

Schiffman (1996) bases language policy issues on social constructs, thus, language policy is primarily a social construction. It may consist of several elements of an explicit nature - there may exist in some jurisdictions legal, judicial, administrative, constitutional and / or legal jurisdictions, but if a political entity has such an explicit text or not, politics as a cultural construction lies mainly in other conceptual elements - belief systems, attitudes, myths - the whole complex we are referring to as a linguistic culture, which is the sum total of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, religious restraints and all cultural baggage 'that speakers bring to their relations with the language of their antecedents (Schiffman, 1996: 276 *apud* Johnson, 2013: 4).

In this definition, explicit policies are approved by a policy, but also politics as a cultural construct, which is based on the implicit beliefs, attitudes and ideologies of language within a speech community (Johnson, 2013)

Already, for Spolsky (2004), in his book *Language Policy*, he distinguishes three questions of language policies from a speech community, which are: language practices - the habitual pattern of selection among the varieties that make up his linguistic repertoire; beliefs or ideologies of language - beliefs about the use of language and language; any specific efforts to modify or influence this practice through any kind of language intervention, planning or management (Spolsky, 2004: 5).

Spolsky (2004) portrays such beliefs and ideologies as language politics. In addition, it includes language practices, which do not occur as a result or result from language policies, but rather as language policies in themselves.

Another vision, points to the meaning of McCarty (2011) as being language politics a complex sociocultural process and as modes of human interaction, based on negotiations and production of power relations. In this sense, politics has a regulating role of language, that is, “the ways in which they express normative assertions about legitimate and illegitimate forms and uses of language, thus governing the status and uses of language” (McCarty, 2011: 8).

McCarty offers a unique definition based on a sociocultural approach, “also described as New Language Policy Studies (McCarty, Collins, & Hopson 2011), and sees language policy not simply as” top-down “or” bottom-up “But with several layers” (Johnson, 2013: 86).

In relation to a critical language policy, so to speak, it is mentioned by Tollefson (1991), because it bases its studies within the critical theory: “a language planning policy means the institutionalization of language as the basis for distinctions between social groups (classes). That is, language policy is a mechanism for locating language within the social structure, so that language determines who has access to political power and economic resources. Language policy is a mechanism by which dominant groups establish hegemony in the use of language (Tollefson, 1991: 16 *apud* Johnson, 2013: 6)”.

From the excerpt, it can be noted that his approach is based on the writings of Habermas (1973) and Foucault (1979), thus taking language policy as a space of institutionalization hierarchy of language, which favors certain groups and dominant languages, that is , as a mechanism of power, because it denies equal access to political power and economic resources. In this view, language policy is a space for systems of inequality and also how these policies resist in unequal spaces (Tollefson, 2013).

So, according to Lagares (2018), in a period seen as “classic”, that occurs between the years of 1950 and 1960, the Linguistic Planning is understood as:

(...) a way of influencing the future of languages without, in any case, intending to predict them completely, according to a perfectly delimited project, since there is already a clear awareness at the moment that complex social dynamics can historical processes in different directions. The level of planning contemplated is that of the national State, in the service of

“development” projects oriented in theory to the whole society, linking the intervention on languages with the issue of social cohesion of the country (Lagares, 2018: 21).

In this classic period, “reflexes are basic, as it focuses on the corpus of languages, on the elaboration of graphical, grammatical and lexical forms of the language,” action plans “such as research, economic analysis” (Lagares, 2018: 21). On the reflexes that this Planning shatters, it is the “idea that linguistic diversity is an obstacle to the modernization of society and the economic development of countries” (Lagares, 2018: 21). Status issues come into play as decisions are made between the hierarchy of languages and which will be officially recognized as national languages.

Thus, in the context of the discussions that engender PL questions, the recent questions proposed by Lagares (2018) on the so-called glotopolytic construct can be of great value. Glotopolytic is understood as “any action on language in the most diverse spheres and levels, without pretending to make the terms planning or linguistic policy obsolete, but making explicit that every decision on language has 'glotopolytic effects'” (Lagares, 2018: 32, italics of the author).

Lagares (2018), in his theoretical support, mentions Guespin and Marcellesi (1986) as one of the foundational texts of glotopolytic questions. For these authors, according to Lagares (2018),

(...) a democratic language policy would require linguistic information in two directions. Agents who make decisions about languages should know that users need to participate in discussions and their own implementation, considering that language debates are part of clashes in which issues concerning the relationship between social identities and language practices interact. Users should also have elements to elaborate their representations of language (...) (Lagares, 2018: 33).

In the words of Guespin and Marcelli, the glotopolytic should be concerned “to act not only on the status of languages, but also on language practices and relations in the social individual, between thought and language,” as Lagares (2018: 33). And as discussed by Guespin and Marcelli (1986):

We are led successively to evoke both aspects of the interaction between language and society, but we want to insist on the interweaving of the two phenomena: every human society is linguistic, and every language practice is social. This has practical consequences: it is not enough for us to give ourselves a single object (the maintenance or transformation of a society conceived as a value in itself, over which we act through language, or the survival of an individual). overvalued language, on which pressure is exerted on society). The principles are abstract and fixational in both cases. The deep justification of the glotopolítica is not the alignment of linguistic or social practices with an abstract ideal of language or society; is the development of social personality. (Guespin & Marcellesi, 1986: 9, sic.).

Moreover, if we understand that social practices and language practices can be aligned with the glotopolytic question, taking into account that both practices can develop certain social personalities, it is almost a syllogism: if every society is a linguist, then every language

practice is social.

Glotopolytic, then, studies interventions in the space of language, understood in a broad sense, because they can be planned, explicit, voluntary, generated by agents, collective or individual, but can also be identified or produced “spontaneously” without clearly identifiable mediators. These interventions are practiced both in languages, in their varieties, in registers, in speeches, and in the various articulations of the verbal apparatus with other semiotic systems. Thus, any social and political change can be analyzed through its glotopolytic effects, by the way in which linguistic relations, from the point of view of the language system or concrete enunciative practices, are given and acted upon in society (Lagares, 2018).

Still, according to Spolsky (2007), anyone “(...) who uses language is regularly confronted with choices. A bilingual should choose which language to use. Many speakers have a choice of dialects. At a more refined level of analysis, a speaker or writer is regularly confronted with a variety of resources - sounds or spellings, lexical items, grammatical patterns - that are meaningful markers of languages, dialects, styles, or other varieties of language and which are grouped together define varieties of language. The goal of a theory of language policy is to account for the regular choices made by individual speakers based on the standards established in the speech community or communities of which they are members. One such policy is to maintain the existing status of a recognized variety, or more realistically, to resist a tendency for speakers of the variety to switch to using another variety (Spolsky, 2007: 2)”.

Thus, several contexts serve as a space for research in Language Policies, such as: teaching-learning curriculums, language certifications such as: CELP-BRAS, DELE, DELF, TOEFL etc., the acceptance of the use of a given language and dialect in professional spaces, such as: courts, the appropriateness to the discursive genre to which writing is proposed: contracts, recipes, medicine, etc., as in public spaces and deprived of formal education, such as the university, public/private schools etc.

So, can an PL be able to emerge from certain ideologies of language? can a policy generate language ideologies, or can a policy be interpreted and appropriated in ways that depend on language ideologies? In this sense, it is necessary to distinguish IL from PLs.

### **3. Languages Ideologies**

As soon as the issues of PLs and their theoretical-methodological designations have been described, it is understood that the links between language and society, particularly the reasons and interests underlying linguistic and social practices, do not circumvent IL issues. Thus, ideology (s) is not a simple task, proof of the many conceptions of the term debated in the literature (Woolard, 1998; Cameron, 2006; Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994; among others).

Ideologies are social constructions collectively, which include representations, through beliefs, opinions, ideas, etc., emerging not from the singular subject, but rather through the social fabric of communities/societies. Ideologies exist or coexist, in a way that gives a certain stability in the social life of the subjects, since they are, to a certain extent, immutable, since in certain historical-social moments they can have certain effects, and in others almost none, of according to the changes experienced by the societies in which they operate.

The concept of ideology, as will be used here, integrates the notions of power and social inequality (the latter being one of the effects of power); ideologies can thus explain the establishment of relations of power (domination, exclusion, etc.), their maintenance or transformation.

Through the discourses, ideologies act on social realities (cultural, economic, structures of political power, etc.), and these realities, in turn, organize discourses; ideologies are structured through discourses. The study of ideologies can therefore be done through the study of discourses. Attempting to the fact that ideologies overlap, if (between) intersect, and many ideologies can operate simultaneously in discourse, just as many discourses find themselves in an ideology. Ideologies are also action insofar as they generate behaviors and positions.

ILs are then defined as ideologies that particularly affect linguistic issues (corpus and status), ie, what is a language, a variety, a linguistic community, and so on. What is a “good” Brazilian? What is an “ideal” language or speaker? Cameron (2006) gives a clear definition of ILs describing them as:

(...) ideas and beliefs about what a language is, how it works and how it should work, what are widely accepted in particular communities, and what can be considered as a consequence for how languages are used and judged in reality. social practice of these communities (Cameron, 2006: 43).

Thus, ILs not only relate to linguistic issues, but link them to broader social issues, such as identity, education, economics, morals, and so on. and to so many other ideologies (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994; Woolard, 1998; Cameron, 2006). They present a framework of analysis through which it is possible to explore the links between linguistic practices and social forms and practices (Woolard, 1998, Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994).

In this sense, it is understood, basically, that the ILs act as systems of representations on diverse linguistic objects that go, for example, of the regional accent to the privileged reading mode in the school or in the Internet. These representations, with their strong value dimension, are placed in relation to ongoing processes, social positions or positions within a field.

#### **4. Considerations**

According to these questions, one must be attentive to the emergence of diverse questions that are crossed by LPs in relation to subjects. Beginning with the concept of language as an abstract system, which does not take into account time, subjects, space and socio-historical issues constructed. With regard to the system, for whom is this system? Whose languages does this system exclude? What are the actors that produce LP? What language do they speak? For who? In what relation of time and space? What is the historical constitution of these subjects? Who excludes/includes in this process?

The LP should consider the implicit, popular and unofficial beliefs, since they influence in a significant way the political results, since it is considered only hierarchical decisions of

power, this result is affected. For if every act of language is political, even if one does not have that awareness, it provides a certain position in the act of speech or writing, in front of its interlocutor, whether through written, spoken, imaginary, and so on. In this way, if one does not take into account the multiple facets of language, that is, language is a resource, from which subjects put to make themselves signified and act in the world, thus not taking this into account, one has an image distorted language.

Likewise, if PL has a regulatory, ordering and distribution function of forms and uses of language. So, come back some questions, such as: what is the relation of the subjects with the subjects that seek to regulate? What subjects are those that produce LP? in what time and space are they situated? How are they built and constituted historically?

This essay aimed at a brief general mapping on the area of language policies, with a general focus on Johnson's book, *Language Policy*, as well as other authors. In general, these definitions create some challenges for the field. Traditional notions of politics portray this as something that some governing entity or public policy and when we hear the word "politics," we tend to think of government policies or laws or some sort of regulation that comes from above, says Johnson (2013).

So, can a language policy emerge from certain ideologies of language? Can a policy generate language ideologies, or can a policy be interpreted and appropriated in ways that depend on language ideologies?

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