Language Policy and Planning in Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa: Some Common Issues

Richard B Baldauf Jr
Associate Professor and Director, Language Centre, University of Sydney, NSW 2006 Australia (rbaldauf@bigpond.com)

Robert B Kaplan
Professor Emeritus, Applied Linguistics, University of Southern California, PO Box 577, Port Angeles, WA 98362 USA (rkaplan@olypen.com)

Introduction

This volume brings together four language policy and planning studies related to southern Africa[1]. (See the 'Series Overview' at the end of this volume for a more general discussion of the nature of the series, Appendix A for the 22 questions each study set out to address, and Kaplan *et al*. 2000 for a discussion of our underlying concepts for the studies themselves.) In this paper, rather than trying to provide an introductory summary of the material covered in these studies, we will want to draw out and discuss some of the more general issues raised by these studies.

Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa represent a cluster in several senses:

- They are geographically proximate roughly along a north-south axis. They share common borders; that is Malawi shares a border with Mozambique, and Mozambique and Botswana share a border with South Africa.
- They are members of the Southern African Development Community (which integrates a total of 14 countries).
- They share a number of African languages among them.
- They share a number of common educational, social and economic problems.
- Three of them have English as a colonial language; one has Portuguese, but also uses English as an additional language.
- They all have autochthonous languages, some in common with one another, which require planning development.
- All are members of the Commonwealth of Nations group.
- All of them have a common concern in terms of languages of religion.
- All of them recognise the existence of a gap between official policy and actual practice.

There is also a major sociolinguistic and language planning and policy divide that separates them: South Africa with its greater population and resources, and the politicalization of language as a marker of ethnicity which began under the previous

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apartheid regime, has attracted much more scholarly interest and hands-on involvement by the government. As a result, there is a much larger published literature for South Africa than there is for Botswana, Malawi and Mozambique. A search of the relevant literature produced about 20 references each – related to language policy and planning – for the latter countries while more than 300 were found for South Africa. A selected list of recently published further reading – material not cited in the monographs that follow – is provided by country at the end of this paper.

Ideologies and Myths

Language policy and planning invariably occur in an environment circumscribed by language ideologies which emerge in specific historical and material circumstances (Blommaert, 1999; Pennycook, 1998); that is, such ideologies emerge out of a wider sociopolitical and historical framework of relationships of power, of forms of discrimination, and of nation building. Issues and debates concerning language commonly dominate discussions in the mass media, in government, and in a variety of other venues of public discourse. Language ideologies, while they are certainly not universal, are reflected in a number of prevalent myths pertaining to language education and, because language education is often the major or even sole mechanism for the instantiation of language policy, it is useful perhaps to state at least some of these myths:

- There is one, and only one, 'correct solution' to the choice of language(s) in education, and one and only one, 'correct solution' to the sequencing of instruction for purposes of initial literacy training and content instruction for all multilingual polities;
- Anyone who can speak a given language can successfully teach or teach via that language;
- Creoles are not real languages; consequently no Creole can be used as the medium of instruction;
- If a major goal is to develop the highest degree of proficiency and subject matter mastery via some language of wider communication, the more time spent educating the child via that language, the better;
- While time on task is a major issue, the ideal time to start language instruction is roughly at puberty (at middle school) because starting earlier would suggest that primary school children will not have completed the development of their feeling and sense of value in their first language (based on English text transmitted by letter to Kaplan from Namba Tatsuo referring to Ohno, Susumu, Morimoto Tatsuo and Suzuki Takao. (2001) *Nippon, Nihongo, Nihon-jin* [Japan, Japanese language, Japanese Volkgeist]).
- In multilingual polities (and even in those which are not multilingual), it is too expensive to develop materials and to train teachers in a number of different languages (after Tucker 2001: 333).
- There are clear boundaries between each of the autochthonous languages in a polity and each requires separate development so that it can be taught (but see Djité, 2000; Heugh, in press).
- Autochthonous languages are incapable of dealing with modern concepts and it is therefore necessary to use a language of wider communication – English, French, Portuguese – as the primary vehicle for education (Breton, 2003).

- In multilingual polities – ones having a large number of autochthonous languages – it is necessary to use a language of wider communication for educational purposes to reduce 'tribalism' and group conflict (Breton, 2003).
- It is important to teach languages of wider communication (especially English) widely in schools as a means of boosting the economy and life chances (Kaplan and Baldauf, 2003, especially Singapore, Chapter 8).

Issues and Problems of Methodology

Before looking at some of the explicit issues raised in the monographs themselves, it is important to mention briefly some of the issues and problems that studies developed in this genre raise. While providing a set of framing questions (See 'Series Overview', Appendix A) for these polity monographs has its advantages in terms of consistency and coverage, it also creates a number of tensions of which readers should be aware.

Issues of Resources

It is important to point out that, in some of the polity studies, so little sociolinguistic work is actually available, and the economic and social conditions are such (e.g., the civil wars currently raging or recently concluded in a number of African polities), that contributors are significantly constrained. In many polities, Côte d'Ivoire (Djité, 2000), for example, conditions and the state of academic research (i.e., not only the work published about the polity, but access to journals and recent books, computer facilities, time to do research, adequate salaries let alone, funds for travel and research projects, etc.) are such that many of the 22 questions suggested for these studies simply could not be adequately addressed. Moving from research to practice, it is also a matter of reality that, among the enormous number of competing demands on governmental coffers, language policy and planning does not always rank high. In some African states, the costs (monetary, human, and temporal) of civil war, rapidly varying commodity prices, human resources shortages, the AIDS epidemic, etc.) are so great that the relative priority of language planning is necessarily lowered (but, see Kaplan and Baldauf, 2003, especially Chapter 3 (pp. 31-46), for an example of political will overriding fiscal constraints). These factors mean that there are constraints on resources that significantly impact on any notion of an 'ideal' monograph that might be produced.

Framing Context

Beyond the 22 questions that authors have been urged to examine, we have urged each of the contributors to frame their study by taking an ecological stance (see, e.g., Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Mühlhäusler, 2000), but that turned out not to be entirely satisfactory because each of the contributors is in fact a specialist in the context of linguistic issues *in the polity in which s/he worked*; that is, the polity specialists were not always extensively cognizant of problems occurring across an ecological perception of language spread, but rather were constrained by the political boundaries within which they worked. It was, perhaps, unrealistic of us to expect a wider perception. However, while the ecological stance did not inevitably materialise across political boundaries, there is evidence in the various studies of the ecological perspective within the several polities studied. It is precisely to achieve a broader ecological view that areal volumes of the sort being undertaken here were conceived. We hope the further references at the end of this article will also contribute to providing that ecological view.

Perspectives: the Self vs the Other

Pennycook (1998) provides a critical analysis of English and the discourses of colonialism, especially the tension between views of 'the self' and 'the other', between the 'insider' and the 'outsider', the emic and the etic. His primary focus of analysis is on colonialism – both historic and in its Eurocentric neo-colonialist forms – and the positive manner in which Europeans portrayed themselves versus the colonised others. Following from this he points out that there is a need to look "more contextually … at the sites and causes of the development of colonial discourses on language…" as there is a "constant negotiation of colonial language policy images of the Self and the Other" where "culture and language were always being produced, developed and redefined" (1998: 128). While this dichotomy and interaction between the Self and the Other – which Pennycook illustrates with Hong Kong as an example – is evident in the monographs presented in this volume, it is also characteristic of the tension in perspectives that individual authors bring to their studies.

Some participating individuals, some of whom we consciously and intentionally invited, had actually worked in the language planning and policy environment in their respective polities. An outcome of our intentional plan (in inviting some contributors) and our unintentional plan (in accepting unsolicited contributions) resulted in an unanticipated problem. One volume of the previously published studies was criticized on the grounds that an author did not take sufficient cognizance of political issues underlying policy and planning (Stroud, 2001). But, when one is involved in putting 'theory' onto practice, we think this is an inevitable problem. To the extent that anyone has worked actively in the development and promulgation of policy and in the ensuing plans, s/he has necessarily been captured by the system doing the policy development and the planning; each such individual has been co-opted by the process. We do not, however, wish to create a false dichotomy; not all of our contributors were caught in this 'insider' trap. Some contributors have been able to look at the issues from the 'outside,' and have been fully cognizant of the political and social problems created by the policy/plans that have been developed. But, had we chosen only individuals more clearly aware of the political and social issues, then those individuals, generally working outside the formal system, would not have known as much about what the system was actually doing; such scholars would have been outsiders to the internal workings of the system. This is not to claim that contributors (and indeed the editors) are unaware that language policy is significantly a political activity (Baldauf & Kaplan, 2003); rather, we simply acknowledge that authors having had differing degrees of direct involvement in the language policy and planning which they describe are caught up in their own images of the Self and the Other. The result is that political and social issues are differently perceived in the various polity studies.

In the broader context within which we work (i.e. as editors of *Current Issues in Language Planning – CILP*), we believe, with perfect hindsight, that serendipitously, such a selection of contributors will exactly serve our larger intent – to help to develop a basis for theorising the discipline. The specialists, working from the inside, know (and do) report on *who did what, to whom, when*, *and for what purpose* in great detail. Given a series of polity monographs such as those presented here, we continue to believe that the other focus of *Current Issues in Language Planning* – the two 'issues' numbers each year focusing on topics like language ecology (CILP 2000 1:3), language revival (CILP 2001 2:2&3), post-colonialism (CILP 2002 3:3), language rights (CILP 2003 4:4) – will serve to bring to bear a leavening influence on the collected data. These numbers will pay greater attention to the political and social problems inevitably apparent in the policy studies themselves.

Discrepant Policy and Reality

Given the lack of resources and other difficulties described in the previous section, and the myths about language that still persist in the communities, it does not come as any surprise that all four of the studies in this volume show a significant discrepancy between the playing out of language matters in the polity and the policy / plan that has been put in place in that polity. In several instances, the "official" policy / plan is diametrically opposed to reality; languages are mandated that are barely spoken in the polity, and the evidence strongly suggests that "official" policy / planning is driven by political rather than by linguistic forces. It is possible, for example, that a language is "officialised" in the hope that aid funding from the European (often former colonial) power would come into play. Examples of these discrepancies are particularly evident in the relationship between the 'colonial' languages of wider communication and the autochthonous languages.

English

In **Malawi**, English is the official language; Chichewa in some form (spoken by about fifty per cent of the population) is the national language, and twelve other indigenous languages (and their varieties) are spoken. As Kayambazinthu points out, "…language planning practices (past and present) present an interesting case study of pervasive ad hoc and reactive planning, based more on self-interest and political whim than research."

In **Botswana**, English is the "officialized" language together with Setswana which (in some form) is spoken as a first language by some 80 per cent of the population. The Constitution is essentially silent on language issues, except that two sections specifically state that the ability to speak and read English is required to serve in the House of Chiefs and in the National Assembly. (In 1998, Setswana was formally authorized to be spoken in the House of Chiefs and in the National Assembly.) However, Setswana is not so much a language as a language-complex; the 8 'major tribes' use 8 mutually-intelligible varieties of Seswana. In addition, there are 11 other tribes that speak varieties close to Setswana, and 8 tribes that speak languages unrelated to Setswana. As Nyati-Ramahobo notes, "There is *tension between policy formulation and implementation*, and an imbalance in social justice….While pressure from civil-society has led government to make progressive policy decisions, there is no intrinsic motivation for their implementation…."

In **South Africa**, recently shrugging off apartheid, 11 of its estimated 25 languages have now been "officialized" in the Constitution. Nine of those eleven languages are African languages; the remaining two are Afrikaans and English. The government has compiled a liberal language policy. Kamwangamalu shows that *there is a mismatch between the language policy and language practices* – the former promoting multilingualism, the latter demonstrating a trend toward English monolingualism at least in virtually all of the higher domains.

Portuguese

In **Mozambique,** Portuguese is the "officialized" language, mandated in the Constitution; the remaining twenty languages are all Bantu languages. The nation is only ten years removed from a devastating 16-year civil war. Its current language policy (in the 1990 revised Constitution) requires that "the state shall value the national languages and promote their development and their growing usage as vehicular languages and in the

education of citizens." Lopes points out that "…the status of Bantu languages [in comparison with Portuguese] and the present efforts to develop and promote them in society have a long way to go." In sum, there is *a substantial gap between official policy and linguistic reality.*

Discrepancy Analysis

This brief summary distorts the situation because it ignores the effects of the presence of other languages in each of the polities as well as the ecological issues. In all of the polities discussed, the role of English needs to be considered; there is popular pressure to learn it in Mozambique, and a comparable popular pressure to diminish its influence in Botswana, Malawi and South Africa. In South Africa and Mozambique, there is a recognized need to consider Asian languages present in the immigrant population. And there is a growing need for a pan-African means of communication for economic and political purposes.

The efforts toward closing the gap between policy and practice have led all of the polities in this volume to see the gap-closing activity as vested in the education sector, and that in turn has caused all of the polities to seek 'standard' languages to be transmitted through the education sector. Indeed, if a language is to be disseminated through the education sector, it is necessary to have (or create) dictionaries, standard grammars, and (ideally) a standard corpus of canonical literature. But that standard language is no one's native language. A 'standard' language results, generally, from a complex set of historical processes intended precisely to produce standardisation; indeed, a 'standard' language may be defined as a set of discursive, cultural, and historical practices—a set of widely accepted communal solutions to discourse problems. A 'standard' language is a potent symbol of national unity—a phenomenon widely sought. The 'standard' language must be acquired through individual participation in the norms of usage, and these norms are commonly inculcated through the education sector (with the powerful assistance of canonical literatures and the media—print, broadcast and electronic). But the reality of the linguistic communities under discussion is marked by the normative use of a wide range of varieties in day to day communication—i.e., the use of slang, of jargon, of non-standard forms, of special codes, of dialects, even of different languages (as in code-switching). Consequently, a 'standard' language constitutes a purely ideological construct. The existence of such a construct creates the impression that linguistic unity exists, when reality reflects great linguistic diversity. The notion of the existence and dispersion of a 'standard' variety through a community suggests that linguistic unity is the societal norm; it also suggests a level of socio-economic and socio-political unity that in the African states is contrary to the reality of linguistic diversity (often reflected in socio-economic and political diversity). The (often legal) obligation to use a codified standard is likely to cause frustration among minority-language and dialect speakers, since the standardised language is for them non-dominant; minority-language and dialect speakers probably use a contact variety, likely to be at considerable variance from the 'standard' variety (e.g., Popular French vs. Standard French in Côte d'Ivoire).

> Language-in-education planning efforts in many polities…reflect the cultural views of the West. These views are collectively known as the 'plumbing' or 'conduit' or 'telegraphic' conception of communication—i.e., the translation of messages that exist in the sender's mind into speech signals (coded in linguistic form) which are converted back into the original message by the receiver. Thus, there is a perceived need to identify a single, 'standard' code, to

assure that this single code is optimally regular, simple, and 'modern' and to assure that there are optimal channels (postal services, road networks, rail networks, air services, telegraphs, telephones, newspapers, radio, television, the world-wide web, etc.) along which the signal can flow. The problem is that this metaphor is not a reliable description of how human beings communicate (Mühlhäusler, 1996: 207-208).

Furthermore, some confusion has developed between the meaning of the term *standard* (language) and the notion of *standardised* (education). As noted, a standard language is believed to be necessary for national unity. (The evidence for such a belief is, by the way, far from conclusive.) However, if the existence of a standard language presses the educational system to standardise educational practices, another discontinuity is created; educational systems are supposed to enhance independent thinking and creativity – necessary to social and economic development. It is undesirable to evolve an educational system that turns out students who are identical in their knowledge, skills, and thought processes. This problem is also evident in the polities studied.

Conclusions

In sum, while language-in-education planning is widespread across the polities discussed here, it seems clear:

- That language-in-education policies are rarely anchored in national language policies,
- That language-in-education policies are frequently ad hoc and sometimes driven by market forces,
- That language-in-education policies are subject to sudden and radical changes in direction in accord with unstable political agendas, and
- That the general condition of language-in-education policy is often fragmented and frequently simply ineffective – even wasteful of resources.

We hope that this first areal volume will better serve the needs of specialists. It is our intent to publish other areal volumes subsequently. We will do so in the hope that such volumes will be of interest to areal scholars and others interested in language policies and language planning in geographically coherent regions. (See the Series Overview elsewhere in this volume for more detail on our future plans.)

Note

1. The studies in this volume were previously published as follows: **Botswana** *Current Issues in Language Planning* (2000) 1, 243-300; **Malawi** *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (1998) 19, 369-439; **Mozambique** *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (1998) 19, 440-486 and **South Africa** *Current Issues in Language Planning* (2001) 2, 361-445. Authors were offered the opportunity to update their studies – to take into account major changes – with an addendum, but none thought it necessary to do so.

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