

## Brief considerations about language policy: An European assessment

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The rising of language policy worldwide is a consequence of a globalized world and the openness of borders. Even countries with a relative cultural homogeneity face nowadays new challenges regarding massive migration fluxes and the results of growing awareness for endangered languages and cultures, notably in Europe. This is being noticed around the Old Continent where diversity proves to be a distinct value since ever. In this paper we reflect on the scope of cultural identity and multilingualism to shed new light on language policy and consequently refresh our understanding of a key policy, which is already a decisive public policy for the European peoples.

**1. MANY ANGLES OF ANALYSIS IN LANGUAGE POLICY.** In the context of strong migration movements, language policy has been highlighted as one of the most important cultural policies, receiving, as an investment area, a major development. Indeed, the actions of promotion and internationalization of a given language, as well as preservation of languages, allows the maintenance of old relations and the implementation of new ones, both in the present and in the future. These initiatives permit the design of world representations, creating an identity reinforcement of what one language gets and produces, which operates as “self-vision” and “worldview” (symbolic value). The promotion of languages, such as the Portuguese, reflects a strategic value, since it is assumed that it is an instrument of national and transnational political unity, clarifying its position amidst other dominant languages and heightening the knowledge of the language as a reflection of a specific way of living and being of its speakers (Gama 2009, Gama 2010, Pinto 2001).

A strict approach to the concept and practices of language policy requires the attention to a wide range of aspects that, even being apparently parallel to their study, influence significantly the systematic apprehension of a linguistic reality, spatially and temporally well located. Thus, language policy constitutes a strongly rooted study field. Bernard Spolsky characterizes language policy as the study of regularities on the choices among the varieties of a language and adds:

*[it] includes not just the regular patterns of choice, but also beliefs about choices and the values of varieties and of variants, and also, most saliently, the effects made by some to change the choices and beliefs of others.* (Spolsky 2005: 2152)

The author clarifies that language policy exists even when it is not clearly defined and put into force by an authority. Many countries, institutions, and social groups do not have

formal or written language policies, whereby the nature of a language policy must result from the study of language uses and beliefs. Even when a recognized language policy exists, its effects on language use cannot be guaranteed or consistent (Spolsky 2005: 2153).

Language policy and planning were initially linked to the literary policy in the post-colonial states, in particular the selection and standardization of a national language. Those policies were criticized for treating multilingualism as a problem, promoting national languages as building tools and mechanisms for the unification of the nation, ignoring and discouraging linguistic diversity and minority languages. Table 1 summarizes the understanding of language policy and language planning, making clear the differences between the two concepts.

Domain	Reach	Direction
Policy	positions, principles, decisions, strategies	top-down, official policy for languages
Planning	specific measures, practices	bottom-up, first level measures to support languages

TABLE 1: Definitions of language policy and planning  
(adapted from Sallabank 2011: 278)

In the *language planning* domain two types of activities can be identified: Attempts to modify the language itself (*corpus planning*) and attempts to modify the environment in which the language is used (*status planning*). The latter refers to the attempts made to ensure political and official recognition of a language. It also includes the expansion of the domains in which the language is used, such as in the legal and governmental spheres and in the new media (Sallabank 2011). Following the argument of Rufz, Sallabank (2011) recalls three “orientations” regarding language policy:

1. *Language as a problem*: In this perspective, multilingualism can lead to a lack of social cohesion and ethnic conflict. Following this orientation, endangered languages are associated to poverty and disadvantage;
2. *Language as a right*: Full participation in the society through the mother tongue. This requires the provision of educational resources, translators, etc., and can therefore be expensive and cause conflicts;
3. *language as a resource*: Multilingualism increases the capacities of the society as a whole, enhances the status of subordinate groups, promotes local economy and culture, encourages awareness of other views and mutual respect, rather than domination. In this case, endangered language communities are seen as sources of uniqueness.

**2. LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE GLOBAL ERA.** Spolsky (2005) presents four factors as key determinants of a nation’s language policy: The sociolinguistic situation, national ideology, recognition of English as a global language and the knowledge of linguistic rights.

Gender issues, social status, and provenance (city vs. countryside) determine people’s views about endangered/minority languages and likewise influence language policies. Policies for the preservation of a language need to take into account gender, age, and economic

constraints and thereby find ways to help minority groups to promote themselves economically, while maintaining the typical social structure of the community to which they belong.

The Constitution of India, for instance, recognizes 18 languages (*scheduled languages*), the other languages that are not mentioned in that document are seen as “minority languages”. Defining the parameter for the classification of minority languages on the basis of their numerical strength (number of speakers) is not appropriate in the context of India. The numerical criterion (size of the speech community, i.e. the number of speakers) is inappropriate to describe the status of minority languages. One language may be spoken by a low percentage of people in a given state and be classified as an official language. In the Indian context, the domain criterion also fails because different languages are dominant in different domains. English, for example, is dominant in higher education and business (as the *lingua franca* of globalization), but not in religion (Pandharipande 2002). Another fact that complicates the definition of minority languages in India is related to the major reorganization of the states in accordance with the concentration of languages in different parts of the country. The reason behind this reorganization is connected to the purpose of minimizing the number of linguistic minorities; however, it produced the opposite effect, i.e. new minorities have emerged (Pandharipande 2002). In general, languages that do not have cultural, economic or political power tend to be included in the list of minority languages. Other authors recall that attention needs to be paid to the fact that a language policy is not an autonomous factor and that what appears to be ostensibly the “same” policy can lead to different results depending on the space where it occurs (Romaine 2002).

Language policies, as regulatory tools which address how languages should coexist and be used in specific economic, political, and social contexts, are always representations of different language ideologies, i.e. beliefs, visions, and conceptions of the role of a certain language held by the various social actors (most commonly institutional ones) (Krzyzanowski & Wodak 2011). For these authors, language ideologies must also be rebuilt and negotiated in debates in which language is central, like a topic, a target, and, in doing so, ideologies can be simultaneously articulated, formed, and implemented. These language ideology debates are taking place at different levels of public and semi-public spheres (Krzyzanowski & Wodak 2011: 119).

Language change is ultimately an adaptive response to changes in a given culture, what Salikoko Mufwene (2002) identifies as a socio-economic ecology. Arguments for language maintenance without arguments of corresponding changes in the current socio-economic ecologies of speakers seem to ignore the centrality of native speakers in the overall situation. Mufwene writes that in a globalized world “English is certainly a threat to other languages in policies where it functions as a vernacular, but not at all in countries where it has been adopted only to help the local economy interface with the worldwide economy. Thus it is not a threat to Japanese nor to Putonghua in Taiwan, although it seems to be a threat to French in francophone African countries, where French also has a hegemonic status” (Mufwene 2002: 189). For the author, globalization highlights the role of vitality of the socio-economic structure of a given language. It exists at least a partial correlation between the type and range of globalization in a scenario and the fact that the primary language of the economy is threatening other languages (Mufwene 2002: 189). Conversely, the attempt, for instance, to overestimate the space of Portuguese and the enforcement of its use by international, national, and municipal agencies of the official Portuguese speaking countries, mainly Brazil and Portugal, is part of the very logic of globalization that relegates Portuguese to a very particular localism (Breitenvieser 2010: 196).

Language policy is closely related to “the right to speak [one’s] own language” (Wright 2007). The linguistic rights of human beings are crucial for the understanding of language policy, since the effects of power in language practices represent an essential factor for the development of the language (Ricento 2006). Following Skutnabb-Kangas et al. (1995: 2), on the individual level, the observation of linguistic rights implies the right to:

- identify positively with the respective mother tongue (whether a minority or majority language) and see this identification respected by others;
- learn the mother tongue;
- use it in official contexts.

And, on the collective level:

- the right of existence of minority groups (the right to be different);
- the right to develop and enjoy one’s own language;
- the right of minorities to establish and maintain schools and other educational institutions with control of the curricula;
- autonomy in group-internal administrative issues.

Considering the Portuguese reality, Portugal has always been characterized as a culturally homogeneous country (Monteiro & Pinto 2005); a characterization supported by the fact that Portugal has a geographically reduced area, it has the oldest borders in Europe, and it does not accommodate significant ethnic minorities. There are, however, clear linguistic examples that contradict this homogeneity. For instance, the Minderico language, which emerged as a sociolect in a very specific context in Minde and turned into a full-fledged community language, and which is now a linguistic heritage whose importance and value is internationally recognized (cf. Ferreira in this volume), is a testimony of the weight of very specific socio-economic ecologies. Beyond that legacy, its recognition and preservation is a matter of rights, specifically of linguistic rights and by extension of human rights. The Minderico community is increasingly aware of this situation. Besides the revitalization work, the academic, public, and politic debates must continue and be strengthened in order to increase the national consciousness about the linguistic reality that Minderico represents.

Mirandese, an Astur-Leonese minority language also spoken in Portugal, almost exclusively in the Municipality of Miranda do Douro (cf. Ferreira et al. in this volume), had to make its own route (prolonged, indeed) to obtain recognition as a language. It came to pass with the Law 7/99 of January 29 (1999). According to the Portuguese Constitution, Mirandese is the official language in the Municipality of Miranda do Douro and the linguistic rights of the Mirandese community are now officially recognized.<sup>1</sup>

At this point, it is important to mention that Portugal has not ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992), which has entered into force in 1998. This fact shows on the one hand the lack of awareness of language diversity in the country and, on the other, makes the promotion of and support for minority languages in Portugal even more difficult. Other countries with a higher number of linguistic minorities proceed similarly, as is the case of France, Italy, Greece, or Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1997, the Portuguese sign language has been officially recognized in the Constitution of Portugal (art. 74).

According to Gal (2010), the European Union gradually became a typical *socio-linguistic regime* of the late modernity, which, although officially multilingual, interprets its multilingualism in a limited way. Therefore, Gal proposes that the EU should be considered a “top down regime of multilingual standardization that tries to manage increased diversity in the same way nation states managed non-standard varieties” (quoted by Krzyzanowski & Wodak 2011: 119). When analyzing the implications of the Lisbon Strategy in the EU’s multilingualism policy, Krzyzanowski & Wodak (2011) argue that policies for multilingualism oscillate between economic values (Knowledge-based Economy), ideologies, and traditional European cultural values, such as diversity and education. There is not a clear one-way development but rather the opposite, namely, multiculturalism policies are clearly close to macro strategies in the EU, which depend on the global economy and political circumstances. Often, multilingualism is correlated directly with political interests, which are themselves the targets of change because of other complex influences. Defined primarily as indispensable skills for the development of a European Knowledge-based Economy, language and multilingualism assumed the same role as other skills related to Knowledge-based Economy, such as the knowledge of information and the handling of information and communication technologies. Nevertheless, Krzyzanowski & Wodak (2011) conclude that the European approach to multilingualism and language policy has become increasingly a top-down and autopoietic approach, considering the period from its inception in the late 1990s to the present.<sup>2</sup> Non-economic arguments concerning these policies have been removed and references to society and social cohesion at different levels in the context of multilingualism and language policy have been rare. “Democratic” elements receive the same kind of treatment. This happens surprisingly in the period after 2006, when the democratic aspects of European communication with European citizens were deeply creased in many other EU policies (Krzyzanowski & Wodak 2011).

**3. CONCLUSION.** In the context of a global and connected world, with open borders and subject to a number of influences, language policy and planning in each country is intimately related to multilingualism, more specifically to multilingual networks, and not just to a single language and its development, as a necessary step to build a nation or global trade (Annamalai 2003: 116). Thus, the network should be built upon the functional relationship between languages. A language policy that does not accommodate social changes will be ineffective, while a policy that is not an instrument of social change will not be worth it. Annamalai argues that “a policy for multilingualism must recognize the changes in multilingual networking induced by social, political and economic forces and must at the same time arrest any trend towards monolingualism by the same forces” (Annamalai 2003: 127).

Beyond the work of politicians and bureaucrats (though important and relevant) concerning one language policy in a given territory, Fishman (2002) draws attention to the fact that the official documents and the Constitution *per se* are insufficient to achieve the respect for linguistic diversity. Indeed, more important than that is the observance of spontaneous and informal uses of a language – a concrete indicator of its social recognition.

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<sup>2</sup> The EU has currently 24 official languages, however only a limited number of those languages is considered working language in the European institutions. Focusing the analysis on the period until 2013, Gazzola (2006) makes an economic assessment of the publishing and translation costs the European Parliament would have in the case of including more working languages and concludes that multilingualism does not imply unsustainable increases in the budget of the institution.

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