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3 **Language education policy in late modernity: (socio)**
4 **linguistic ethnographies in the European Union**

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8 **Abstract** Focusing on developments in research on language education policy,
9 this introduction to the thematic special issue begins with a sketch of the new
10 problem space emerging at the intersection of intensified transnational mobility,
11 expanding economic neo-liberalisation and institutionalised of multilingualism. It
12 then identifies situated practice, commodification and declining state authority as
13 key perspectives and themes in the study of language policy, and outlines the
14 methods required to address these. After that, it provides an overview of the articles
15 in which these issues are addressed.

16
17 **Keywords** Language education policy · Late modernity · European Union ·
18 Multilingualism · Sociolinguistic ethnography

22 **Developments in research on language education policy**

23 This thematic issue dwells upon language education policy in relation to
24 contemporary processes of change. Based on ethnographic and socio-linguistic
25 approaches, the articles in this issue of *Language Policy* focus on the ways in which
26 communicative practices, institutional policies and wider socio-economic transfor-
27 mations are interwoven in the production of daily life, in different educational
28 communities. In so doing, the special issue is underpinned by the social and
29 linguistic/discursive turns adopted in social sciences since the mid-twentieth
30 century, which have resulted in social reality being understood as discursively
31 constructed, reproduced, naturalized and sometimes revised in social interaction, in
32 the course of large-scale historical, political and socio-economic configurations
33 (Cicourel 1964, Giddens 1984).

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34 In particular, we draw on a range of interdisciplinary sources from North
 35 American linguistic anthropology (Hymes 1968, 1974; Gumperz and Hymes 1972;
 36 Gumperz 1982; Irvine and Gal 2000; Agha 2007), UK-based linguistic ethnography
 37 (Creese 2008; Rampton et al. 2014), and European/Canadian socio-linguistics
 38 (Blommaert 1999; Pujolar 2001; Heller 2002; Duchêne 2009; Martín-Rojo 2010). In
 39 the area of language education, social and cultural perspectives provided by
 40 researchers in these fields have challenged well-established traditions. Moving away
 41 from cognitive theories which emphasise individual minds and prescriptive
 42 pedagogical models, these perspectives call for a focus on situated descriptions of
 43 language education practices wherein decisions about what languages to teach, to
 44 whom, when, why and how are not detached from the local, institutional and wider
 45 social conditions.

46 As a consequence of this change of focus, language education policy has seen
 47 growing interest during the last two decades in the study of ideologies enacted and
 48 negotiated in situated contexts where specific policies are locally implemented.
 49 Among such policies, those receiving major attention include the provision of
 50 emancipatory language education programmes teaching the language(s) of the host
 51 society to newcomers (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001; Moyer and Martín Rojo 2007;
 52 Martín-Rojo 2010; Codó and Patino-Santos 2014), the teaching of English as a
 53 necessary skill (i.e. commodity) for participation in the internationalized economy
 54 (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001; Block and Cameron 2002; Kubota and Lin 2009; Lo
 55 Bianco et al. 2009; Park and Wee 2012; Pérez-Milans 2013), and policies
 56 implemented by ethno-linguistic minorities in the context of wider nation-states
 57 (see, for instance, Heller 1999; Jaffe 1999).

58 This line of research has contributed to our understanding of the impact of
 59 mobility and economic globalization on language education policy. It has also shed
 60 light on the underlying mechanisms of “social structuration” (Giddens 1984) upon
 61 which modern nationalism is based. Nevertheless, there is still a need for in-depth
 62 exploration of the new local and institutional transformations emerging hand-in-
 63 hand with the dilemmas and contradictions that the so-called conditions of “late
 64 modernity” (Appadurai 1990; Bauman 1998) have posed to the prevailing notions
 65 of language, identity, culture and nation. These conditions, which involve
 66 widespread socio-economic, institutional, cultural and linguistic changes, include
 67 processes such as the intensification of transnational mobility, the expansion of
 68 economic neo-liberalisation and the institutionalisation of multilingualism (Codó
 69 and Pérez-Milans 2014; Tollefson and Pérez-Milans, forthcoming).

70 **Intensified transnational mobility, expanding economic neo-liberalisation** 71 **and the institutionalisation of multilingualism**

72 Transnational mobility refers to increasing cultural interconnectedness, population
 73 mixing and political dynamism emanating from contemporary “superdiversity”,
 74 leading to growing complexity and unpredictability of the way social life is
 75 arranged through daily practices (Vertovec 2007). In terms of linguistic and cultural
 76 practices, the intensification of transnational mobility has led to a gradual

77 destabilization of abstract notions of standard languages, uniform views of speakers
78 and stable group identities. Indeed, this process of destabilization resonates well
79 among many researchers who have begun to investigate such practices with
80 reference to fragmented repertoires. Rather than bounded abstract systems, the study
81 of contemporary communication requires a different approach whereby repertoires
82 traditionally associated with different and separate national ‘languages’ are used and
83 negotiated in more hybrid and dynamic ways (Blommaert and Rampton 2011;
84 Pennycook 2012; Canagarajah 2013; Rymes 2014).

85 Economic neo-liberalisation, on the other hand, involves selective deregulation,
86 internationalization and privatization of national economies (Harvey 2005) through
87 “a series of reforms, both at the level of institutions and in the management of firms,
88 aimed at four main goals: deepening the capitalist logic of profit-seeking in capital-
89 labor relationships; enhancing the productivity of labor and capital; globalizing
90 production, circulation and markets, seizing the opportunity of the most advanta-
91 geous conditions for profit-making everywhere; and marshalling the state’s support
92 for productivity gains and competitiveness of national economies, often to the
93 detriment of social protection and public interest regulations” (Castells 2010: 19).
94 These reforms encourage states or larger supra-national political entities like the
95 European Union to regulate the language and cultural skills of their populations in
96 order to achieve or maintain competitiveness in international markets (Duchêne
97 et al. 2013).

98 Under these neo-liberal conditions, educational institutions are required to adapt
99 their curricula and organization to conform to centralized policies, since the state
100 retains control over the distribution and allocation of symbolic resources through
101 monitoring, evaluation, measurement and standardization (Del Percio and Flubacher,
102 forthcoming). As Del Percio and Flubacher state, this is reinforced through ideas
103 of free competition and efficiency, and through a political discourse of autonomy
104 upon which schools become accountable for providing work forces with specific
105 sets of (linguistic and non-linguistic) skills (see also Urciuoli 2008; Heller 2010).
106 Thus, these institutions have to adjust centralized policies creatively (read:
107 “unpredictably” or with insufficient support from the state) to specific contexts
108 where new transnational institutions and corporations operate too.

109 As to the institutionalisation of multilingualism, nation-states are compelled to
110 reposition themselves and abandon the uniform ‘one state/one culture/one language’
111 discourses that underpinned the ideological framework of modern nationalism
112 (Anderson 1983; Billig 1995; Bauman and Briggs 2003). This is leading to an
113 ideological transition, from defining languages as tied to ethno-national membership
114 to conceptualising them as commodities in the globalised post-industrial/services-
115 based market (Blommaert 2010; Heller 2011). However, the new emphasis on
116 multilingualism and cultural diversity in contemporary societies co-exists with
117 earlier linguistic ideologies, giving rise to the circulation of heterogeneous official
118 discourses whereby languages are represented either as technical skills or as
119 bounded/separate entities tied to supposed ethno-national communities (Gal 1995;
120 Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin et al. 1998).

121 Altogether, these processes of change demand new sensitivities in the study of
122 language (education) policy, language ideology, bi-/multilingualism and/or identity.



123 These new sensitivities are well illustrated in three major shifts that have
124 particularly transformed the field during the last decade.

125 **Situated practice, commodification, and the decline of state authority**

126 First, the increasing destabilization of bounded, stable and consensual communities
127 and identities makes it necessary to have situated approaches to language, in
128 contrast to critical research carried out in a “top-down” fashion. These approaches
129 no longer rely on analytical methods that privilege the propositional content of
130 (verbal and written) texts as empirical foci and conceptualize context as a set of
131 “backgrounding facts” imposed too rapidly by the researchers onto people’s
132 meaning making practices (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000). Rather, such situated
133 approaches understand language in relation to social practice and they therefore take
134 meaning-making practices as a set of empirically trackable actions, experiences,
135 stances and expectations that are always enacted and negotiated in situated
136 encounters across space and time.

137 Second, the expansion of the global neo-liberalised, post-industrial and services-
138 based market requires contemporary social sciences to move away from the
139 celebration of bi-/multilingualism towards a closer look at its commodification. In
140 fact, recent studies have shown that bi-lingualism and multilingualism are still
141 institutionally constructed as parallel/separate monolingualisms (Heller 2007;
142 Blackledge and Creese 2010) in which the languages involved are attributed
143 distinct values according to historically constructed linguistic hierarchies derived in
144 many cases from former European colonial discourses (Fabian 1986; Errington
145 2001). In this way, ideas and practices of multilingualism intersect with issues of
146 socio-economic inequality and social class. That is to say, far from people across the
147 globe becoming mobile and multilingual citizens who enjoy a higher degree of
148 autonomy or freedom than ever, this new (super)diversified scenario gets articulated
149 under conditions of late capitalism where socio-economic inequality is reinforced
150 by the fact that different social groups have different degrees of control over the
151 production, distribution and valuation of linguistic and cultural resources (Duchêne
152 and Heller 2012; Block 2014).

153 In the space of second language education, the commodification of multilin-
154 gualism is deemed to be leading to a preliminary transition, away from English
155 being treated as the main prestigious language, towards a new panorama in which
156 English shares an institutionalized space with other languages from the wider world
157 (Fenoulhet and Rosi Solé 2010). Indeed, widespread earlier disregard for languages
158 from the wider world, which had resulted from the traditional Eurocentric/Western-
159 based international order, is now evolving via a new policy framework that places
160 more emphasis on dissemination of non-European languages even within Europe
161 (Commission of the European Communities COM [2008]566). That said, this
162 transition towards other languages from the wider world overlaps with the
163 continuing prestige of English, as well as with commodification of European
164 languages other than English in nationally regimented labour markets in Europe
165 (May 2012).

166 Third, the state's loss of its monopoly over the regulation of institutions' social/
 167 discursive organization invites more nuanced accounts where modern arrangements
 168 and institutional identities are no longer taken for granted. In education, this loss of
 169 state monopoly drives schools to accommodate consumerism and to conform to the
 170 functioning of a client-relationship management in which teachers do not
 171 necessarily embody the state's authority. As a result, it is harder to describe
 172 schools as discursive spaces where teachers are representatives of the institution/
 173 state and where students are social actors who can only resist or comply with the
 174 teachers' authority. Indeed, both teachers and students find themselves experiencing
 175 high degrees of uncertainty and anxiety, which may lead to the emergence of
 176 alternative social relationships and forms of cooperation, beyond simplified
 177 accounts reporting domination on the part of either the teachers or students
 178 (Rampton 2006; Harris et al. 2011; Pérez-Milans 2013).

179 **Research methodology**

180 Under these conditions and related shifts, the study of social life and institutional
 181 policies needs to be fine-tuned so that situated meaning-making practices and
 182 instability are placed emphatically at the centre of the analysis. (Socio)linguistic
 183 ethnography constitutes a suitable theoretical and methodological approach to this,
 184 because it avoids bounded representations of stable communities/identities and
 185 carries a strong orientation to the discovery of the local, uncertain, unpredictable
 186 and changeable positioning of the participants in interaction. Indeed, researchers in
 187 this tradition work with transcriptions of audio-recorded interactions and look
 188 closely at how participants build common frameworks of action/interpretation.

189 However, unlike some other traditions (Sacks et al. 1974), this type of enquiry is
 190 not carried out by permanently putting aside any connection between local
 191 interactions and other activities/texts observed in remote spaces and times. Instead,
 192 each recorded and transcribed interaction is taken as part of a web of social
 193 activities that participants develop in the course of their trajectories throughout the
 194 organizational logic of the institution in which such activities take place, in
 195 intersection with the trajectories of other material artifacts and discourses that are
 196 produced and circulate in the research site (see Pérez-Milans forthcoming, for
 197 further discussion on this). So this type of enquiry allows us to account for links
 198 between the situated practices analysed in fieldwork and the larger historical,
 199 political and socio-economic configurations that shape (and get shaped by) such
 200 practices.

201 **The papers in this collection**

202 The contributions in this volume follow this approach by empirically documenting
 203 the processes described above, in the context of the European Union. They discuss
 204 how different language education policies are taken up, negotiated and made sense
 205 of by social actors in diverse educational spaces affected by distinct socio-linguistic

206 and institutional regimes, and they focus on their socio-economic implications.
 207 Although based on different sets of data across different contexts, the contributions
 208 all address: (1) the impact that the current political economic transformations have
 209 on educational organizations and policies, with attention to some of the institutional
 210 and inter-personal consequences; (2) the specific logic by which language practices
 211 get regimented and evaluated in educational spaces; and (3) changes over time in
 212 ideological configurations and language valuation dynamics.

213 In the first article, Jürgen Jaspers examines data from a Brussels Dutch-medium
 214 school where a monolingual policy collides with the linguistic diversity of the pupils
 215 whose linguistic repertoires include resources associated with Dutch, French, Arabic
 216 and Turkish. Jaspers pays close attention to the discursive co-existence of the
 217 school's emphasis on Dutch on the one hand, and the creation of multilingual spaces
 218 on the other. Beyond dichotomized accounts constructing these two realms as
 219 contradictory, Jaspers' analysis shows a more complex and nuanced picture where
 220 institutional normativities and localised anxieties are reconciled from the perspec-
 221 tive of the teachers and students as they go through different communicative events.
 222 However, this reconciliation is not without costs. Although opening-up multilingual
 223 spaces proves to be a productive inter-personal strategy where teachers and students
 224 negotiate legitimacy and localised abstract curricula, Jaspers' case study also
 225 captures the ways in which wider-scale linguistic and educational hierarchies are
 226 enacted and reproduced in this field, with consequences for the students.

227 The second article, by Ana María Relaño-Pastor, focuses on the Spanish context
 228 of Madrid where a new English-Spanish bilingual programme has been recently
 229 institutionalized, linked into wider European language education policies empha-
 230 sizing the importance of English in the new globalized economy. Relaño-Pastor
 231 illustrates the ways in which the situated implementation of this policy contradicts
 232 official discourse in Madrid where English (and the English-Spanish bilingual
 233 programme) is represented as available for any Madrid student regardless of socio-
 234 economic background. Far from it, Relaño-Pastor's close description of interactions
 235 and participants' voices shows how the discursive construction of bilingualism is
 236 traversed by social and linguistic hierarchies which prevent certain students with
 237 migrant and working-class backgrounds from having access to the bilingual
 238 programme and to the linguistic and cultural capital with which it is associated.

239 Next, Miguel Pérez-Milans explores the institutionalization of a recent language
 240 education policy that has introduced Mandarin in the curriculum of public
 241 secondary schools in London, drawing on transnational collaboration between the
 242 British Council and the *Hanban* office in the People's Republic of China. Against
 243 the backdrop of this policy and collaboration, Pérez-Milans investigates the
 244 organizational logic of one of these schools by looking at the dilemmas emerging
 245 locally in daily discursive practices. These tensions concern the position of the
 246 Chinese division within the socio-linguistic hierarchy of the school's language
 247 sections, as well as the difficult balance between the standards required by the
 248 *Hanban* office to keep the external funding on the one hand, and the need of the
 249 Chinese division to attract students and fulfill the minimum intake on the other. In
 250 particular, the article offers a window on the ways in which school as an institution
 251 handles and makes sense of these tensions, and it pays specific attention to the

252 emergence of collusion in the classroom as an interactional strategy whereby
 253 teachers and students construct the fiction of smooth learning even though they all
 254 face significant difficulties fulfilling the standards set by the Chinese institution.

255 Finally, James W. Tollefson's commentary on this thematic issue frames the
 256 contributions within broader contemporary developments in the field of language
 257 policy research. He also draws in the US context as a point of comparison, inviting
 258 the identification and discussion of wider, cross-regional processes of change tied to
 259 conditions of late modernity.

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