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Micro language planning for multilingual education: Agency in local contexts

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Micro language planning for multilingual education: Agency in local contexts

This paper overviews some of domains of application of micro-level language planning approaches to foster multilingual education. It examines the language planning of local agents and the contexts in which their work contributes to multilingual education, either to expand or limit educational possibilities. It identifies four broad contexts of language planning activity in which local agents work: the local implementation of macro-level policy, contestation of macro-level policy, addressing local needs in the absence of macro policy and opening new possibilities for developing multilingualism. These contexts provide a way of framing the contribution that micro language planning work and local agents can make to multilingual education.

Keywords: micro language planning, multilingual education, agency

Introduction

Language planning scholarship began to recognise the role of the micro-level in language planning in the 1990s (e.g. Alexander, 1992; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997) and since that time there have been a number of studies of micro-level work in a number of contexts (see for example Baldauf, 2005, 2006; Chua & Baldauf, 2011). While micro-language planning can apply to many different areas of language planning, one of the most significant sites for such work is language-in-education planning (Stroud & Heugh, 2003). Micro language planning work is inherently diverse as it seeks to examine local responses to local needs and can be realised by a range of different types of actors (Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008). What is common in all this variability is that local actors assume agency in language work and establish processes through which perceived local language needs can be addressed using the resources available in their contexts. This paper has selected a number of cases of micro-level language planning that exemplify particular ways of working in multilingual education. The selection is not intended to be exhaustive but rather illustrative and to contextualise the contributions to this volume.

Micro-level planning for implementation

One way in which micro language planning has an important role in multilingual education is in the implementation of macro-level policies that make provision for the use of minority, non-dominant or other non-official languages in education. Such policies typically provide for the inclusion of such languages, either alongside or in the place of an official language at some point in schooling and make prescriptions about aspects of teaching such as the duration of use of the language, the areas of curriculum to be taught in the language, transition to official languages, etc. They may also provide for some form of professional learning for teachers to assist them in teaching in the language. Such policies therefore provide only the macro-level frame in which education is to be implemented. They do not address local issues and needs for particular languages or, in most cases, the pedagogical practices and adjustments that need to be made to implement a macro-policy. While some of the language planning activities involved in implementation may be dealt with through macro-level language planning bodies, there are other educationally specific areas of language planning that must be addressed locally at the micro-level. These relate specifically to the modes of implementation of education in a specific language or in a specific context.

Most studies of micro-language planning have dealt with local implementation of macro-level policy and show that local agency is important in implementing multilingual education, especially where the languages involved are non-dominant languages (Alexander, 1992). For example, Heugh and Mulumba (2014) report that in Uganda, macro-level policy has required the curriculum to be taught through local languages but that little has been done by central authorities to implement this policy. Through the work supported by a non-government organisation, local initiatives were developed that brought students home languages into the education domain. These initiatives included corpus planning work, materials development and teacher preparation. In this way, micro-level actions fulfilled

needs required to implement macro-level policy. Micro-level work was also important for some non-language dimensions of the educational program. The region described in this study was one in which conflict and social disruption had led to a rupture in the culture of schooling and its value. This meant that not only was there a need for practical language-based activities in local languages to implement educational policy but that communities needed to reconnect with education as a social practice that has value for them and for their lives. Through locally managed activities, communities were integrated into schooling practices and the development of home learning centres that provided spaces for adult learners as well as after school hours learning spaces of primary children. That is micro-level work has created contexts in which local languages are not only used in schooling, but in which a social space has been opened for education as a valued community practice.

Focusing on the tertiary level, Nkosi (this volume) examines how a program at a university in South Africa has attempted to implement the country's official language policy but introducing Zulu as a language of instruction in post-graduate courses in Education. In implementing Zulu as a language of instruction, participants not only had to manage issues relating directly to educational practice such as developing curricula and preparing materials but also had to take on agency for other language planning activities such as corpus planning – developing the ways to write up educational research in Zulu – and prestige planning – addressing community perceptions of African languages in education. The study reports that students taught in their first language benefitted educationally but also felt that they only needed education in Zulu because of their low level in English. The study is thus a reminder that implementing policies that seek to redress previous imbalances between languages is contextualised in a language ecology where previous beliefs and ideologies about language continue to persist.

The influence of local decision-making is not always supportive for language learning and actions taken at the micro-level may constrain the implementation of macro-level policies that favour multilingual education. Willoughby (this volume) investigates how macro language-in-education policies play out in the lived experience of heritage language learners in an Australian school. She argues that schools can be ambivalent places for heritage language learning that work to favour some languages and types of speakers over others. She also argues that educational practices that originate outside language policy can have a significant impact on how language learning occurs as practices around course content and scheduling can have a negative impact on students' decisions to study their heritage languages in the senior years. That is, although macro-level policy may favour the development of heritage languages through schooling, the educational practices of individual schools may limit the extent to which students can develop their multilingualism through education.

Schissel (this volume) shows how assessment policies at the macro-level in the United States are worked through at the micro-level for students for whom English is a second language. She examines how teachers in their school construct emergent bilinguals as learners and as test takers and show that these local discourses are consequential for how macro-level policy provisions are experienced by individual learners. This study shows that ways of responding to the assessment of such students may actually introduce unintended inequities into assessment processes if the specific needs of emergent bilinguals are not taken into consideration. She also argues that teachers' pedagogical practices in working with emergent bilinguals can provide models for policy development at the macro-level. She thus argues that micro level language planning is about more than implementation of macro-level policies but that it can also have a capacity to feedback to the macro-level and modify policy decisions, if it is attended to at higher levels.

In implementing macro-policy for multilingual education at the micro-level, there are complex relationships of agency shared between the macro and micro levels (Baldauf, 2006). The agency for the conceptualisation and shape of the policy rests at the macro-level. Implementers in this case are not usually given direct agency to set goals or to shape the overall agenda of the policy, although they may subvert macro-level formulations. Nonetheless, they have agency in the ways that the policy is realised in their particular local contexts through decision-making about the nature and shape of the education provided to learners and the role of languages in that education. In this case, their agency is often required to address gaps in macro-policy in which local needs and conditions are not considered and about which policy is silent forcing local implementers to assume agency to enact implementation. However, as Willoughby and Schissel show, local agency does not always have a positive effect on multilingual education and the actions of some local agents can constrain possibilities.

Contestation of macro-level policy

The relationship between macro and micro may in some cases involve resistance at the micro-level to macro-level policy. In these cases, macro-level policy and planning is contested or subverted by local groups, usually working outside mainstream structures. This is particularly the case in contexts where macro-level decisions about language exclude or restrict particular languages and so constrain the possibilities for multilingual education for some groups.

Several related cases of micro language planning can be seen in the reactions of territorial linguistic minority groups in France to French language-in-education policy. French language-in-education policy has had an overwhelmingly monolingual agenda. Strengthened by the declaration of French as the language of the Republic in a 1992

constitutional amendment, this monolingual agenda has seen regional minority languages such as Breton, Basque and Occitan largely excluded from schools. The only space allocated to these languages has in the past been a single hour per week provided by the Deixonne law (Gardin, 1975). One response to the limitations on space for minority languages in French education was the establishment from the 1970s of grass-roots cultural movements to establish immersion programs in regional languages such as Diwan (Breton), Calandretas (Occitan) and Ikastolak (Basque). The first of these programs to be established were the Diwan. The first Diwan was organised by a small group of Breton parents in 1977 as a self-conscious reaction against the refusal of the French government to include Breton as a language of education (Perazzi, 1998). The first Calandreta was established two years later as the outcome of a local community movement that had built momentum over a number of years prior to the founding of the school (Schick, 2000). The Basque Ikastolak founded in France were based on a Spanish model that itself had been established as a local form of resistance to Francoist language-in-education policy in Spain. The first school was established by a single individual who wanted Basque language education for her children (Nicholson, 2003) and represents a family-based activity that eventually grew into a wider schooling option.

The work of local actors in all of these movements involved not only establishing schools and recruiting teachers but also developing materials and organising translations of French curricula. In each case, local actors claimed agency in language planning as a contesting of French macro-level policy and its positioning of regional languages within education in France. The various school movements have gradually gained a level of state recognition and funding – that is, they have had some impact on macro-level educational policy – but remain outside mainstream educational provision.

Micro-language planning as resistance can have significant consequences for those involved simply because it is an act of resistance. This is the case with the teaching and learning of Kurdish in Turkey (Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes, 2008). Kurdish is technically legally available in private schools that are organised within the community but the practicalities of these are difficult. One reason for this is that the learning of the Kurdish language. Kurdish has been effectively banned in Turkey and those who have argued for it have even been subject to criminal prosecutions. As a result the teaching and learning of Kurdish has happened in informal locally organised groups of individuals who wish to maintain the language and culture in the face of government opposition. Those who have participated in or have promoted language learning have been seen as assisting terrorism (Haig, 2004).

In cases where micro language planning constitutes a form of resistance, local agents undertaken language education work as a form of counter-hegemonic action, contesting the language policies enacted by the dominant linguistic group in the society. It is arguably the case that such counter-hegemonic action can only ever develop in local contexts. Micro language planning has the capacity to open new spaces in the educational linguistic ecology where relations of dominance can be contested and where alternatives can be enacted. In some contexts, contesting dominance can involve sanctioning by the hegemonic group as an assertion of power in the face of contestation. However, it is also possible that such contestation can come to influence, at least to some extent, language planning decisions at the macro-level.

Micro-level planning to address local needs

Micro-level policy is needed to address specific local language education needs in the absence of macro-policy that addresses these needs. In this case, local actors (schools, communities, etc.) assume agency to construct and implement a language planning solution

to meet perceived local needs. Micro-level language planning for multilingual education is particularly significant for addressing language issues that relate to small communities as the specific language issues of such groups are less likely to be taken up at macro-level.

One case where micro-level language planning is common is in immigrant communities. Where communities establish themselves in a host country and there is no educational provision that includes teaching and learning of their home languages, communities may develop their own schools to foster language and cultural maintenance. In Australia during the nineteenth century, colonial governments were not actively involved in education until the 1870s and education was conducted mainly by church organisations and private individuals. One response to this was the establishment of schools targeting local immigrant communities whose languages were excluded in British education. Thus, where large enough communities existed to support such activities, early colonial schools included schools teaching in Welsh and Scots Gaelic (Clyne, 1991a). Similarly, communities of German immigrants in South Australia and Victoria established German language schools that in some cases persisted until legislation during the First World War banned the use of German (and other languages) as a medium of instruction (Clyne, 1991b). In these cases, a lack of policy at government level meant that community members needed to become agents of language planning to provide for the language needs they identified for their communities in the absence of macro-level policy.

The local agents for multilingual education need not only be members of minority communities, but can also be alliances of various actors in the local context. Möllering, Benholz and Mavruk (this volume) describe the development of a program in the city of Essen designed to meet the needs of immigrant background children. The project involved collaboration between a university and local immigrant communities to bring tertiary level education students into relationship as mentors with secondary school level students in ways

that give value to the students' multilingualism as a resource for learning. The project represents an educational intervention outside the normal school provision of education for immigrant background students in Germany. It sought to frame education outside the macro-policy focus on German as a second language in order to overcome some of the perceived limitations on immigrant students' education achievement. The project shows how local agency can change the ways that local systems operate and bring new resources into education for linguistic minority students. The project also shows the potential for such initiatives to have broader impact in that the Essen project has become a model for education provision that has extended from the local context to the regional level.

Taylor-Leech (2011, 2013) shows how local non-government organisations and actors in the key advisory body to the East Timorese Ministry of Education, took advantage of the discursive space afforded by pressure from the United Nations Global Partnership for Education to demonstrate progress towards achieving education for all (EFA) by 2015. Seizing the opportunity to engage in public debates about how to accelerate progress towards EFA, these actors organised a series of conferences, language-in-education missions and a language-in-education working group designed to bring multilingual mother-tongue based education to public attention and get Ministry of Education leaders involved in the issues. An important outcome of these debates was the inclusion in the National Educational Strategic Plan for 2011-2013 of a statement that children learn best in their first languages. A mother-tongue pilot program was subsequently established in three districts with the endorsement of the Ministry of Education. At the time of writing, this pilot program is nearing the end of its first year of implementation.

The micro-level of multilingual education also involves actions of individuals as learners within their communities. Christmas-Smith and Armstrong (this volume) describe an instance of individuals assuming agency to further their own naturalistic language learning in

a context of language revitalisation. They describe a situation in which adult language learners are members of a community in which all speakers of the target language (in this case Gaelic) are also speakers of the learners' first language (English). This brings into play a tension for these learners in that Gaelic-speakers are likely to shift to English (which facilitates communication) rather than to continue speaking in Gaelic (which facilitates learning). Christmas-Smith and Armstrong describe strategies that Gaelic learners put in place to manage their own language learning needs as a response to their local context. They further argue that educational providers need to include in their language educational provision teaching that enables learners to better manage their naturalistic learning needs bringing individual level language planning into relationship with institutional provision of education.

All of these cases demonstrate that where agency in language education is not exercised at the macro-level spaces open for multilingual education which can be filled by local micro-level agents. In this way micro language planning can take the form of local action in the interstices of policy. It is a response to a perceived local language education need that is not met because macro-level policy does not have a focus on the particular area of need. It also shows an independence from macro-level agents in developing new educational initiatives – that is, local actors assume agency for language planning rather than attempting to get macro-level agents to develop policy for a particular need. Such local efforts may affect macro-level language planning, but are not dependent on it to shape educational provision.

Micro-level policy to open new possibilities

A final way in which micro level policy may play a role is to develop new opportunities for language learning that do not exist within existing provision. In such cases, actors (often

individuals) become language planning agents seeking to develop their own multilingual capabilities in contexts where the particular forms of multilingualism they desire are not otherwise available. This is a little studied element in micro language planning research as it largely focuses on the activities of specific individuals and the educational decisions they make for themselves – that is, it lies at the most micro end of the micro-macro continuum. Almansour and Payne (this volume) describe this in their study of individual foreign language learners in Saudi Arabia. Government educational provision in the case seeks to assure the development of bilingualism in the form of the official language of the country (Arabic) and English, but does not provide opportunities for wider multilingualism. In order to have the possibility to learn additional languages, the learners described in this study need to plan their own language learning processes and locate their own possibilities. The ways that these individuals act as micro language planners involves the identification and use of technologies that enable them to become autonomous language learners to overcome the limitations of language learning in their local context.

This study shows that local desires for different repertoires of multilingualism can motivate individuals to take on agency to realise that desire. It reveals a very micro-level of language planning work, however such activities also exist among other micro level agents, for example, informal groups of learners organising themselves to learn a language that is not provided through macro-level institutions.

Conclusion

All of the contexts examined above involve local action in contexts where macro-level language-in-education policy does not apply. This lack of application may result from neglect of local contexts, opposition to particular languages in education (or more widely) or the presence of local needs outside the scope of current macro-level policy. While the initial aim

of micro language planning to support multilingualism may be local, such activities once developed have the capacity to inform and shape macro-level policy work. Thus, micro language planning can become ‘language planning from below’ (Alexander, 1992; Hogan-Brun, 2010) – that is local initiatives in education can influence the ways that languages are addressed by institutions at higher levels. In such cases, the agency in language planning is not top-down but bottom-up.

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