

Critical Review on “Historical and Theoretical Perspectives in Language Policy and Planning”

Yang Tianyun

School of Foreign Studies, Northwestern Polytechnical University, 710129

E-mail: 632586402@qq.com

Published: 30 October 2021

Copyright © Tianyun.

Abstract:

This article reviews the article “Historical and theoretical perspectives in language policy and planning” (Ricento, 2000) from the perspective of the division of language policy and planning (LPP) research stages. At first, a summary is done according to the article. Ricento (2000) divides LPP research into three stages from 1960s to 2000. Each stage has its own characteristics in LPP research. Secondly, this article analyses other articles which cite views of Ricento (2000). Some of articles agree with the framework presented by Ricento (2000) and borrow from it while others give different ways of division or put forward new characteristics of each stages on LPP. Thirdly, this article discusses these different points of view. In the last part, this article makes a conclusion and provides its own idea.

Key words: language policy and planning, critical review, historical and theoretical perspectives

1. Summary of main points

The article “Historical and theoretical perspectives in language policy and planning” explores the development and evolution of “language policy and planning (LPP)” since World War II. Having collected and analyzed related articles, the author introduces three kinds of influence factor in this field, which are the macro sociopolitical factors, epistemological factors and strategic factors. The macro sociopolitical factors refer to these supranational events. Epistemological factors are related to paradigms of knowledge and research. While, strategic factors discuss the clear or hidden purpose of researchers’ study. The development of LPP is divided into three stages by the author. Those three stages have different background and characteristics. The most striking features of the first stage are decolonization, structuralism and pragmatism. For the second stage, some themes at the first stage have continued as well as some new development appear. More and more scholars are aware of the negative effects and inherent limitations of existing theories and models. After that, since the establishment of a new world order, the rise of postmodernism and public’s concerns of human rights, the third stage comes. At the end of the article, the author gives prospects for LPP research in the future.

The study of language policy and planning (LPP) arose from 1960s with its unique historical background. After World War II, a number of countries got rid of colonization and were independent. Structuralism is dominant in epistemology. Also, the view that language problems could be solved by planning is accepted by the mainstream. All those factors induce the rise of the researches of LPP. Problems encountered by developing countries in the process of founding and rapidly development provides materials for sociolinguistics’ researches. Responding to the requests of emerging countries, most of researchers at this stage focused on the types and approaches of language planning. Also, the shifts of society and groups’ identity provide materials for linguistically related researchers. At the first stage, western linguists generally believed that linguistic diversity could hinder the national development while language homogeneity was related to modernization and westernization. Although some linguists like Rubin, Jernudd, Fisherman referred to some instinct problems of language planning, these critics are related to more complex and fundamental issues instead of language choices and identity.

The second stage of LPP is around from 1970s to 1980s. Differentiated from the first stage focusing on the standardization and modernization of LPP, scholars in the second stage place stress the social, economic and political effects of language contact. In this stage, some continuation of themes in the first as well as new development occur. “Neo-colonial” is always used to describe the economic and political structure of society in developing countries. To some extent, newly independent states are more dependent on colonial rule than ever before. The hierarchy and stratification of groups are considered as worthy themes by scholars and language and culture can help to study it. Cobarrubias (1983) asserted that some linguists, language planners, educators as well as lawmakers are not “philosophically neutral. (p.41)” Fishman (1983) pointed that some linguists still consider that language planning are “immoral, unprofessional and impossible. (p.382)” According to Tollefson (1991), a number of factors lead to the reflections and

direction of this field while the failure of modernization policy of the world is one of it. Linguistics and related social science has been developed from 1960s and gains a prominent place in 1980s. It influences the LPP research. One of the most critical development is challenging “the autonomous linguistics as a viable program” (Ricento, 2000, p.201). Notions like “native speaker”, “linguistics competence” are questioned. In this stage, some scholars like Pennycook (1994) points out that inputting western linguistics notions can lead to the formation of ideological attitudes. The ideology in language planning has been criticized by many scholars. In this stage, scholars pay attention to the negative effects and inherent limitations in language planning and models. Language planning were related to social and cultural inequality. Also, the choice of language has no way to do with igniting modernization.

The third stage is from mid-1980s to nowadays. In this period, influential global events include large-scale demographic migration, re-emergence of national identity, collapse of the Soviet Union as well as repatriation of colonies and so on. Regional alliances like European Union occurred, in which local language are forced to compete with supranational language like English and French. The emergence of capital globalization brings the domination of the media by a handful of multinational corporations. Some scholars point out that this centralization of control and dissemination of culture around the world poses a greater threat to independence than colonialism itself. Besides, electronics threatens independence more than colonialism itself. All those changes affect the status of large and small languages. Linguistic diversity is concerned by scholars. Supporters consider that linguistic diversity is related to biodiversity while opponents argue that the development of language is analogous to biological evolution. Also, the role of ideology in LPP is investigated in concrete fields like the background as well as themes of it. In the third stage, critical and postmodern theories play an important role. Ecology-of-language becomes a new paradigm.

In conclusion, LPP is an inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary research field comprising linguistics, politics, sociology and history, which is deeply influenced by macro sociopolitical forces. Development in critical social theory and postmodern theories promotes LPP research in research contents and research methods. Progress in language ecology and human rights help to shift the focus of LPP research. Besides, a number of LPP research has been related to its limitation. It remains to be seen whether the ecology of languages can be the research paradigm in this field. One of the critical tasks of LPP research is deal with “the issues of language and identity” (Ricento, 2000, p.208). Researchers should response to the reasons and effects of using a kind of specific language. Comparing to the research 40 years before, the language patterns in specific contexts and the effects macro sociopolitical forces have been better understood. However, a certain conceptual framework is waited to be developed.

2. Review of related articles

After this article, there are some related articles on LPP research have referred to this one. Some articles, which cite views of this article, add more convicting evidence to support these views. While, others offer quite different opinions from this article for comparison and discussion.

As for the division of LPP development stages, there are various opinions. In this article, Ricento (2000) gives three stages of LPP, The first stage starts in the 1960s. The second stage is from the early 1970s through the late 1980s. And the third stage is from the mid-1980s to 2000.

The article “Language Problems and Language Planning: A corpus-based historical investigation” (Liu, 2013) somewhat substantiates the view of Ricento (2000). By collecting issues on interlinguistics article and book reviews through 1977 to 2010, Liu finds that in the first period, “problem” is one of the most frequent topic word. However, the word “problem” is not the most frequent word in the next two stages. By using data analysis, it demonstrates the view of Ricento (2000) that the emphasis of first stage of LPP research is pragmatism and problem-solving orientation. Besides, this article also mentions that the word “education” is not in the list of the most frequent words in the first period of LPP research, while it does appear in both second and third stages and ranks high. It shows that there is a shift of research focus on LPP research. Education plays an increasingly important role on it. For analyzing the article “Language problems and language planning: a corpus-based historical investigation”, it can be seen that its division of LPP stages is similar with Ricento (2000). In addition, it gives data analysis and charts to prove it.

For the article “Gifting, service, and performance: three eras in minority-language media policy and practice” (Sari & Holmes , 2011), It gives three newly stages, which are the gifting era, service era and performance era. In the gifting era, the state is the critical agent and plays the role of a giver. It means the state occupies the commanding position and determines the existence of minority language. In the service era, it comes to a realization that such kind of monologue is not enough. With the development of community-based organization, the model of single language channel is broken up. The state is no longer the only voice channel. On this occasion, other community-based organizations begin to share voice channels with the state. In the performance era, language channels are more diversified without the limitation of locations and subjects. Non-professions and individuals are capable to multilingual content through different platforms. In this era, positive language policy become more and more apparent in the these small communities. It can be seen that although the LPP is still divided into three stages, the angle of division of the article “Gifting, service, and performance: three eras in minority-language media policy and practice” is different from the view of Ricento (2000).

According to Sari and Holmes, Ricento’s division seems unsuitable to explain the way of minority-language media development. They also mentions that Ricento’s framework mainly helps to explain LPP development in postwar context especially emphasizes on the development of English in Asian and African context. Besides the disparity, they particularly agrees with the division of Ricento (2000) on account of they share some same opinions in dominant ideologies, language characteristics and language conceptions with each other in each stage. Thus, it can be seen that those two division are in different analytical perspectives, while there are some common characteristics of stages shared by them.

For the article “ENEM and the language policy for English in the Brazilian context”(Andrea, 2019), the author draws on the framework of Ricento (2000) while it points out new basis for

division. It means it divides LPP research for three stages as well but the content of each stage varies. For Spolsky (2004) and Shohamy (2006), they not only take language-related laws and official programs into consideration, but also take other factors into account such as language attitudes in a community. They came up with a new term, which is “*de facto* language policy”. They explicate that LPP research should not be limited to declared and official statements. Actually, the practices of these policies depends on the effect of “*de facto* language policy”.

For the division of LPP by Ricento (2000), Zhao (2014) partly agrees with it. Besides, she supplements this division. In her opinion, LPP research should be divided into four stages. The fourth stage is from the beginning of 1990s to nowadays, which is the international development of language planning. In the first three stages, language planning basically developed by sovereign states within their territories, the target of language planning is mainly its national language. Yet, in the fourth stage, on account of internationalization of economic development, international migration, virtual world communication as well as increasing factors of language planning, the importance of foreign language is increasing. Thus, formulating LPP is vital in this era and the fourth stage of LPP research appear.

In the article “Language Policy and Planning: An Analysis of the Themes Present in Research in Brazil” (Socorro & Cynthia, 2019), an exception exists. This article points out that LPP in Brazil has not been developed until 1990s. It was not until the 21st century that relevant studies began to gradually carry out. Nevertheless, except for the divergence in development time of LPP research, the thematic interest in language is similar between Brazil and international language diffusion.

The article “Agency in language planning and policy” (Warwick, 2020) divides the LPP development into two stages. Differentiated from Ricento (2000), its division is from the perspective of agency. For Warwick, the first period of LPP is also from 1960s, which is “a period of decolonisation and development of independent states (Warwick, 2020, p.5). During this period, there are a number of problems related to language for newly independent states. Therefore, governmental action is the focus for LPP research while the concept of agency is overlooked. The second stage of LPP occurred from the mid-1980s to 1990s. In this period, scholars began to do LPP research critically. LPP was not considered as the product of government domination, it also could be something which are distributed in societies. “This idea that LPP is distributed led scholars to devote their attention to different levels of planning: the ‘macro’, ‘meso’, and ‘micro’.” (Warwick, 2020, p.7) Macro-level is in government dominant. The micro-level is in local communities dominant while meso-level is the stage between government-level and local community level. In both micro-level and meso-level, agency play a role in them.

Although Ricento (2000) gives a more detailed overview of the development of LPP, there are still some critics on this article. Wang (2017) concludes two points. Firstly, this article has English or Western orientation. Since the language of the article itself is English, it is inevitable to have the tendency of English-orientation such as stand in the English-speaking people’s shoes or have the western culture background. The “research community” mainly refers to the core circle consisting of six countries, the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Ireland and New Zealand.

Actually, this English-orientation tendency is just the manifestation of “Eurocentrism”, which is studied by LPP itself. Secondly, since LPP research is not as neutral as math, physics and biology, it can be influenced by the background and knowledge structure of its researchers. Ricento has the educational background in political science and educational linguistics, thus he chose the historical perspective in LPP research as a matter of course. However, it also filters the possibility for him to make efforts on other directions. It should be said that the political perspective is the most valuable perspective for researches on LPP involving macro level. Nevertheless, there are few concrete operational opinions for planning.

3. Discussion of views

“Historical and theoretical perspectives in language policy and planning” (Ricento, 2000) is the article that has reference significance in LPP research. By using three factors, the macro sociopolitical factor, the epistemological factor and the strategic factor, Ricento analyzes the rise of LPP research. He divides LPP research into three stages according to various characteristics of it. At the end of the article, he makes predictions about the current research and the research direction in the future.

For the perspective of this article, firstly, this article has holistic and global perspective for LPP research. Differentiating from other studies, LPP has interdisciplinary nature, which is affected by linguistics, politics, sociology, psychology, etc. Thus, analyzing in the perspective of historical and theoretical is an accurate entry point for LPP research. Secondly, this article is forward-looking for LPP research. At the end of the article, the author figures out the inadequacy of existing research. Also, he indicates the possible influence of ecology of language paradigms on LPP in the future study. Thirdly, this article is strictly and clearly logical. There are totally four parts of this article, three stages of LPP and the conclusion part. The author introduces these three stages in chronological order. In each stage, the author gives the historical, political and economic background as well as characteristics of it in detail. It brings those chaotic information to clear clues, which adds the readability of the article.

In addition to the merits of this article, some deficiencies exist either. Firstly, the division of LPP development is general. English-orientation or Western culture background exists in the article. It only takes the mainstream trends of LPP development into account. While, some exceptions like LPP in Brazil has not been mentioned. Secondly, since this article is an overview of the LPP development, it generalizes the characteristics of each LPP stage on the basis of previous research. Nevertheless, in the article, the author just cites previous researches without using statistical tools like charts or diagrams to summarize them in a clear and visual way. Thus, the persuasiveness of the article has slightly declined. Thirdly, since the author divides LPP research stages from the perspective of historical and theoretical, this division could have certain deficiencies and limitations. While, this point is not referred to in the article.

4. Conclusion

“Historical and theoretical perspectives in language policy and planning” (Ricento, 2000) summarizes the LPP research and contributes to the research in the future. Its division of three stages of LPP research has reference significance for later researchers. This article is in support of its time division of each stage. Nevertheless, the characteristics of each stage summarized by Ricento (2000) is not comprehensive. Also, since the inherent English-orientation standpoint and single research tool, some views of this article are not completely objective and reliable.

References:

- [1] Alastair Pennycook. (2004). Language Policy and the Ecological Turn. *Language Policy*, 3(3), 213-239.
- [2] Anthony J. Liddicoat. (2020). Agency in language planning and policy. *Current issues in Language Planning*, 1-31.
- [3] Andrea Barros Carvalho de Oliveria. (2019). ENEM and the language policy for English in Brazilian context. *Linguist*, 19(2), 361-383.
- [4] Belmar, G., & Glass, M. (2019). Virtual communities as breathing spaces for minority languages: Re-framing minority language use in social media. *Adeptus*, 14, 1-24.
- [5] Cobarrubias, Juan. (1983). Ethical issues in status planning. In Juan Cobarrubias and Joshua A. Fishman (Eds.). *Progress in Language Planning: International Perspectives*. (pp. 41-85). Berlin: Mouton.
- [6] Fishman, Joshua A. (1983). Progress in language planning: A few concluding sentiments. In Juan Cobarrubias and Joshua A. Fishman (Eds.) *Progress in Language Planning: International Perspectives*. (PP. 381-383).
- [7] Liu Haitao. (2013). A corpus-based historical investigation. *Language Problems and Language Planning*, 37(2), 151-177.
- [8] Rhian Hodges, Cynog Prys. (2019). The Community as a Language Planning Crossroads: Macro and Micro Language Planning in Communities in Wales. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 20(3), 207-225.
- [9] Socorro and Cynthia. (2019). An Analysis of the Themes Present in Research in Brazil. *Language Policy and Planning*, 19(2), 1-29.

- [10] Sari Pietikäinen, Helen Kelly Holmes.(2011). Gifting, service, and performance: three eras in minority-language media policy and practice. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 21(1), 51-70.
- [11] Shohamy, E. (2006). Hidden Agendas and New Approaches. *Language Policy*. New York: Routledge.
- [12] Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language Policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- [13] Thomas Ricento. (2000). Historical and theoretical perspectives in language policy and planning. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 4(2),196-213.
- [14] Tollefson, James W. (1991). Planning Language, *Planning Inequality*. New York: Longman.
- [15] Wring, S. (2004). Language Policy and Language planning: From nationalism to globalization. London, UK, Palgrave Macmillan.
- [16]王春辉.(2017).《语言政策与规划·理论与历史基础》述评. *语言战略研究*, (02), 91-96.
- [17]赵蓉晖. (2014). 中国外语规划与外语政策的基本问题. *云南师范大学学报(哲学社会科学版)*, 46(01), 1-7.