

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND POLICY

There is a close connection between language, identity and policy. Language is not only a means of communication but is also a system of signs and symbols. Language conveys content and at the same time is itself content. People transmit and express with their language not only thoughts, feelings, aspirations and expectations, but at the same time they express and define who they are and how they wish to be seen by others. To put it another way, language is not just a tool for transmitting values, norms and feelings, but is, in and of itself, a partner in this process. Language is an important means of socialization of the individual and the collective. Therefore, our view of language is broad, and we examine it as an open system which influences and is influenced by nonlinguistic factors. The use of one language or another can allude to differences which exist not only in the language but also in the social structure on the one hand, and our perception of others and ourselves on the other hand.

Spolsky and Shohamy (1999a: 41) propose a useful distinction between three things: language practices, language ideology and language policy.¹ Language practices are the actual use of the linguistic repertoire; that is to say the choices among language varieties and languages available to a community. Language ideology is expressed mainly in the perceptions concerning language and its use. Policy is the means by which the government or other public bodies seek to influence or to change elements in the language itself, in language use or in the

¹ The concept of language policy is relatively new. On its area and linkage to other areas see the finely detailed introduction by Spolsky and Shohamy (1999a). Spolsky and Shohamy examine the subject by using as a framework the question used by Cooper (1984) on the subject of language spread: "Who plans what for whom and why?"

status of a language. Language policy is thus the effort to change or influence language practices. Language policy tries to change the status of the language structure, its acquisition or its study within the country or its spread to other countries. Language policy can be expressed in official documents. For example, it could be anchored in the constitution, or in a language law, or in a government document or in an administrative regulation (Spolsky and Shohamy, 1999b: 43).² In order to carry out the policy a body or several bodies are needed – whether it is the government, institutes, groups or individuals. In our case the Israeli establishment is the relevant and most influential body for setting language education policy in the Arab community in Israel.

There are various reasons for establishing a language policy. Spolsky and Shohamy (1999a: 52) say, “One seemingly simple approach to finding a rationale for a language policy might be to assert some absolute linguistic rights [of the various groups]...” Of course there are countries in the world which are more tolerant of diversity than others according to the point of view of the dominant group on the one hand and the point of view of the citizenry on the other. For example, Switzerland is a good example of a country which recognizes the language rights of four official languages (French, German, Italian and Romansh) which form the principal ethnic groups in the country. On the other hand, liberal France recognizes French as the only official language despite the fact that there are many groups living there who speak other languages (for example, the language of the periphery like Breton and Occitan and of the Arabic-speaking immigrants from North Africa who are citizens of France and who are estimated to number millions). Turkey is another example of a country which is seen by the world as oppressing the Kurdish people in all areas including language. The Kurdish population in Turkey is estimated to be about 15 million (almost 20% of the total population of Turkey) and their Kurdish language is not recognized as an official language in schools. From this we learn that language policy can express language ideology.

Another reason for a language policy is to enable access to information and to cultural knowledge. The study of English, and to a lesser extent, other world languages, is intended to provide access to knowledge, especially in technology and science.

An additional important reason for a language policy is economic. In the reality of the 21st century the economies of the world are connected to each other, and therefore there is motivation to learn the languages of countries economically powerful, especially English.³ Language in this sense is perceived

² French is possibly the best example. See Ager (1999).

³ Many studies show today the latent economic value in the fluency of immigrants in the language of their new country (for example: Arcand 1996; Chiswick and Miller 1994; Coulmas 1991).

as a national asset like the other assets and natural resources of the country (Brecht et al. 1995).

In addition to the reasons presented above, which are pragmatic and practical, there are reasons connected with symbols, or to be more exact, with identity. In this case the goal of the language policy is to gain greater prestige for the national language and to strengthen its linkage to the nation. In the case of liberation and nationalist movements, the flag and the language are the most useful symbols for emphasizing the linkage to the nation and the aspiration for independence (Fishman et al. 1968; Fishman et al. 1985).

Four examples will clarify this issue. After the defeat of Turkey in World War I, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk aspired to bring about far-reaching changes within the country in order to modernize it. The first aspects of the change were realized in language. First of all, the Arabic alphabet was replaced by the Latin alphabet, sending a clear message of breaking with the East and joining the West. A second step was to purify Turkish from Arabic and Persian elements representing the Islamic world.

When the independence of Pakistan from India was decided in 1947, it was proclaimed that Urdu would be one of the main official languages of the country. In practice the linguistic differences between Urdu and Hindi were minimal. The Pakistanis use the Perso-Arabic alphabet and at the same time increased the use of Arabic and Persian elements in their language. In this way, a language change strengthened a political partition.

A third example is the Zionist Movement. Its motto was "Hebrew, speak Hebrew!" (Haramati, 1997). This expressed aspiration for a change from the old Diasporan identity. In this context Shohamy claims (1996, 250):

From the ideological point of view the Hebrew language fulfills a central function in the State of Israel as a result of its association with Zionism, the movement for the return of the Jews to their land and for the creation of a new and independent nation. With the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel, there was a strong movement for the revival of the Hebrew language and its establishment as a living language. The revival of the Hebrew language – its change from a written language which was used mainly for prayer, to a spoken language used in all areas of life – performed a central function in the creation of the new nation.

The final example is the Arab world. With the rise of national consciousness in the Arab world at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, two main language alternatives stood before the various states in the Arab world. One was that each country should raise its local vernacular into a standardized norm, and the other was to modernize the classical language. The first possibility signaled national separation and the development of new and different national entities. The second possibility would crystallize anew what was shared by the

Arab peoples (what was called Pan-Arabism). The second possibility won out over the first linguistically (Suleiman 1997), but the political issue remains open.

There is a close connection between the three components. The ideology of the state influences language ideology and thus language policy. In Israel, Jews are the dominant group. The definition and perception of Israel as a Jewish-Zionistic State finds expression in many areas of life, including language.⁴ In the view of Shohamy (1996: 251) the language policy of the State of Israel is motivated more by ideology than by needs. Before the rise of the state, from an official point of view (on the level of policy) the three languages of Palestine were English, Arabic and Hebrew, listed in that order. In practice, Arabic was the most widespread, with English used for government and Hebrew used only within the Jewish community. After the establishment of Israel, the Jews sought to change the language dominance and practice. The first step that the new state took was the removing of English from the list of official languages. This theoretically left Hebrew and Arabic as the two official languages. However, as we will see later, Israeli law gives preference to Hebrew over Arabic.

2. THE LINGUISTIC HEGEMONY IN ISRAEL AND THE PLACE OF ARABIC

From the Arab conquest in the 7th century of the Common Era, Arabic became the dominant language in Palestine. At the same time other languages fulfilled important functions. In Ottoman Palestine Turkish was the official language of the government, and it was learned by local people who came in contact with the Turkish officials or who served as officials (Ayish et al. 1983). A not insignificant number of European languages (such as French, Italian, German, Russian, Greek) had a religious status and also other languages were studied in order to communicate with the Christian pilgrims (Gonzales, 1992). European missionaries set up schools in the large cities such as Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Jaffa and Nazareth and taught English, Italian, German, Spanish and Russian (Maoz, 1975). Multilingualism was especially common in these large cities. For example, in Jerusalem at the end of the 19th century, in addition to Arabic other languages used included Turkish, Greek, Yiddish, English, German, Latin and Aramaic. Many people, especially those living in cities, were bilingual or multilingual (Spolsky & Cooper, 1991).

The end of the Ottoman rule in Palestine in 1917 brought about far-reaching changes in all areas including language. The British Mandate⁵ in Palestine

⁴ This will be discussed at length in Chapter 2.

⁵ Following the end of World War I, Palestine was placed for an interim period under the British Mandate, which formally began in 1922. The British Mandate was a turbulent

strengthened the status of Hebrew, by then established as the revived language of the Jewish community, and it became an official language alongside Arabic and English. In private schools Arabic, French and Italian were also taught.

During the British Mandatory period in Palestine English was the main language of government. However, in spite of the fact that the communities, Arab and Jewish, had separate school systems, there was language contact, generally with the Jews learning Arabic. English served both the Arab and Jewish communities as a language of wider communication.

However, after the establishment of Israel, the sociolinguistic landscape has changed tremendously. Spolsky and Shohamy (1999a: 5-6) describe in general the language practices in the Israel of today as follows:

Most Israelis understand and speak Hebrew. The exceptions are older Arabs and recent immigrants, and of course the tourists and foreign workers. Most Israeli Palestinian Arabs speak Arabic as their first language and use it at home and in their towns and villages, but they use Hebrew at work and in other settings. Recent immigrants still use their immigrant languages in the home and the immediate neighborhood. Many longer-settled immigrants speak their own languages occasionally in homes and the community settings. Code switching is common among all the groups. Among *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) Jews, Hasidim (members of sects, created originally in the late eighteenth century in Eastern Europe, who from tight enclaves around a prestigious religious leader or Rebbe) especially but also some Ashkenazim (Jews from Germany and Poland and their descendants) continue to use Yiddish in education and other settings. Tourists and foreign workers use their own languages and when they cannot use them or Hebrew, try English as a substitute. Most government business and economic life is conducted in Hebrew, except in some localities. Most schooling is conducted in Hebrew. The two exceptions are the Israeli schools in the Arab sector which use Arabic and the Hasidic *haredi* schools, which encourage their pupils to switch from Hebrew to Yiddish. Many people use English.

Hebrew is the dominant language in the country and Arabic is an important language only for the Arab minority and hardly plays any central role in the national public sphere. This was not the case before the establishment of the state. This change is correlated with the political and demographic change. The Jews became a majority and sovereign in the part of divided Palestine, and they sought to make the dominant identity of Israel, if not the sole one, a Jewish one, and Hebrew became a dominant language of the country.

period marked by incessant violence between Palestinians and Jews both of whom opposed the Mandate. The Mandate on Palestine ended on May 15, 1948 and the establishment of Israel ensued.

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