

## PREFACE

I was speaking recently with a neighbour about the nature of data in our respective scholarly fields. He is an archaeologist who carefully excavates sites, noting the location of every potsherd that he finds. He next carries out chemical analysis of the items, and uses statistical techniques to determine the original source of the clay. He then compares these empirical data with information recorded in the Talmud about Galilean villages and is then ready to make generalizations about the probable trade relations between contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish villages. I tried to explain the problems we face in language policy. Some countries record their language policy in their constitutions or in law; others don't. Some follow their written policies; others clearly don't. Some countries can provide data about the number of people who speak various languages. Others don't ask that question in their national census. When the question is asked, it is asked differently: in the United States, for instance, they ask how many people grew up in a home where a language other than English was spoken; in Canada, they ask how many people are proficient in English. How, given all this uncertainty about basic data, can we attempt to derive generalisations of the reliability that my archaeologist friend expects?

The first sociolinguists who tackled questions concerning language policy and language planning were troubled somewhat by these questions, but were more concerned with solving what had been identified as language problems of developing nations. Some of their work, such as the pioneering studies of the language situation in East Africa, made major efforts to start building valid and reliable databases. A second wave of scholars in the field became more concerned with developing models of linguistic human rights on the basis of which they could encourage international groups to adopt specific policies. What was missing, however, was a systematic attempt to gather usable data on language policies at the national level. This was essentially the task that Robert Kaplan and Richard Baldauf took on when they started their journal, *Current Issues in Language Planning*, and a related book series in 2000. They believed, and this book series that Elana Shohamy

and I edit, with its related journal, *Language Policy*, attests to a similar belief, that it is impossible to develop wise and effective methods of implementing language policy without a clear notion of the variation that occurs and of the solid generalizations that can be derived from a careful study of actual cases.

This background explains my pleasure at the inclusion of this volume by Kaplan and Baldauf in the Kluwer series, a pleasure increased by the fact that Kaplan and I have been in regular academic and professional contact for nearly 40 years, during which time our interest moved from teaching English as a foreign language through applied linguistics to language policy.

The present volume is an important contribution to the rapidly growing body of documentation and exploration of the nature of language policy and management. It concentrates on a region of the world loosely defined as the Pacific Basin. They are wisely selective in their choice of cases, for even the fourteen polities that they choose show considerable political and linguistic diversity. On the basis of their careful and well-documented analysis of these cases, an over-arching theme emerges. Effective language management is possible, but rare. Governments seldom have the time or the inclination or the resources or the wisdom to take into account the nature, potential, and difficulties of language policy and of the complex social, economic, political, religious, demographic, and ethnic context in which it occurs. As a result, partial and unanticipated results are frequent. Strong central governments (such as Singapore and North Korea in this volume) can concentrate efforts on a particular policy with relative success. Just as Mussolini is said to have made the trains run on time, so Stalin was able to produce a revolution in the level of literacy and in the status of the Russian language in the Soviet Union. So too did Singapore succeed in encouraging major changes in the language situation, raising the status, knowledge, and use of English, suppressing the various Chinese languages and dialects and replacing them with Mandarin, reducing linguistic complexity and variation, and producing a linguistically more homogeneous society. For many, the success of this language policy was assumed to have helped bring about economic expansion. So too did North Korea, like the Stalinist Soviet Union it emulated, succeed in remaking its language to fit its ideology.

Of course we may want to ask whether these results are desirable and likely to be permanent. And at the same time we may wonder whether the difficulties more democratic societies face in managing language and planning its use are ultimately a good or bad thing.

But these more general questions cannot be tackled until we have built up a solid and accepted body of analyses of language policy as it actually occurs in the many different polities of the modern world. The importance of Kaplan and Baldauf's work is that through their editing, and here, through their own scholarship and writing, we are now firmly on the way to having a body of good data on which to work.

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