

Chapter 2

Review of Literature on Planning for Language

Abstract This chapter provides a framework for studying the Speak Mandarin Campaign in Singapore. It draws together the following disparate themes of language planning activities inherent in government involvement: the goals of language planning, language planning in new and emerging states, forces against government intervention in language planning, the macrosociological and the microlinguistic perspectives on language planning, status planning as well as the top-down versus bottom-up approach to language planning. Some of these themes are not exclusive to each other and there are instances where they overlap. To enhance our understanding of how individual dialect speakers perceive the use of different languages in multilingual Singapore, there will also be a discussion on the sociolinguistics of language use.

Keywords Policies • Practice • Government • Ideology • Management • Society • Individual

2.1 Language Planning: Work of Government

Weinstein (1980) explicitly attributes language planning to the efforts by a government authority by explicitly stating that language planning is a government-authorized, long-term, sustained, and conscious effort to alter a language's function in a society. Jernudd and Gupta (1971) observe that the recognition of language as a societal resource resulted in governmental intervention in language planning. As suggested by Jernudd and Gupta (1971, p. 20): Our understanding of language planning implies that decision-makers choose a satisfactory, or even optimal course of action but within limits of given amounts of resources and only in order to reach the goals that have been approved by the political authority. They aspire to find effective solutions to their planning tasks.

According to Ager (2001), the ability to use a language as a major economic resource requires the government to coordinate the planning of language for societal development. In addition, language planning by government is also motivated by problems in language use. Kaplan and Baldauf state that some of the problems that require language planning are rather complex, ranging from a desire to modernize a language to a need to standardize a language to achieve political unification. However, not all scholars agree that government involvement in language planning will necessarily lead to social and political progress. As Edwards (1994, p. 189) explains: If we accept that language planning involves the selection and codification of a language variety, then we should realize that the implementation of language planning is usually dependent upon powerful policy makers. Bloomaert (1996) observes that language policies and practices implemented by official language planners usually develop within the context of a set of deep and far ranging ideological presuppositions, and thus are never purely rational, economic, or benevolent choices for the good of society.

Krishna and Abiodun (2002) specified four typical ideologies that may motivate actual decision-making by the government in language planning in any given society: linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralisation, vernacularisation, and internationalism. Linguistic assimilation is the learning of the dominant language. This is best illustrated in the learning of English in the US, although the constitution does not specify an official language. On the other hand, linguistic pluralism is the coexistence of different languages. For instance, Switzerland maintains four official languages with equal status: German, French, Italian, and Romansch. Vernacularisation is the restoration or elaboration of an indigenous language and its subsequent adoption as an official language. Hebrew in Israel is a case. Internationalism is the adoption of a nonindigenous language of wider communication for the purposes of education and trade. An example is the official language status accorded to English in Singapore (Krishna and Abiodun 2002, p. 243) due to its role as a wider language of communication, trade, and commerce. In Singapore, language planning is based on the ideological assumption that language is a problem and thus necessitates governmental intervention in language planning. Silver and Bokhorst-Heng (2016) reported that language is viewed as a problem when there is a perception that students are not mastering the official language to the level required by the educational system. The SMC was launched in 1979 as official language planners in Singapore believed that it would be impossible for Singaporeans to achieve a high level of Mandarin if they continued to learn a range of dialects (Speak Mandarin Campaign 2015).

In addition, language planning in the new and emerging countries is shaped by globalization. As a result of globalization, the choice of a language is not dictated by a local planning authority, but by forces outside the control of national political makers. The current spread of Mandarin is the result of globalization with the emergence of China as an economic powerhouse. As a result, Mandarin Chinese was given a higher profile in Singapore as it was perceived that China would be a lucrative strategic and economic partner (Tan 2009). Since 1985, as a result of the growth of China as an economic powerhouse, the SMC began to chart a new course with the slogan, “Speak Mandarin. It’s an asset.” The government believed that

knowing Mandarin would give Singapore a competitive edge over Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong as well as help to improve and facilitate trade with China. The global spread of Mandarin also has cultural implications for Singapore. On the future importance of Mandarin, former foreign minister George Yeo stated that it is important for Chinese Singaporeans to continue to use Mandarin to preserve their cultural roots. They should be proud to be the inheritors of 5000 years of Chinese civilization, the longest continuous civilization in human history (Latif and Lee 2016). He warned that if young Chinese Singaporeans allow their mother tongue (Mandarin) to degenerate into a second language, they would lose “much of their internal strength and become a weak people with shallow roots.” (p. 284). However, it is uncertain to what extent current young generations of Chinese Singaporeans view Mandarin as a repository of Chinese cultural values.

Another societal force that works against governmental intervention in language planning is individual choice and decision in language use. According to Pakir, ‘invisible language planning’ may arise when individuals interfere nondeliberately with planned changes to the systems of a language code (Pakir 1994, p. 165). The individuals identified by Pakir are parents, children, and teachers. Tollefson (1991, p. 36) cogently argues that individuals may resist language planning efforts by governmental authority as language change involves real people living in history and their personal ideologies may not correspond to the economic logic of cost or benefit.

2.2 Two Perspectives to Language Planning: The Macrosociological and the Microlinguistic

In the literature of language planning, there are two perspectives to language planning: macrosociological language planning and microlinguistic language planning. Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) define macrosociological language planning as the body of ideas, laws and regulations, change rules, beliefs and practices intended to achieve a planned change within a community. Some of the macrosociological goals of language planning include language purification, language revival, language reform, language standardization, language spread, lexical modernization, terminological unification, and language maintenance (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997, p. 59). Ager (2001) observes that many macrosociological goals of language planning are carried out to achieve rather abstract objectives related to national policy goals. Kuo and Jernudd (1994, p. 83) suggest that macrosociological language planning is motivated by ideological beliefs and thus justify the need for the governmental intervention in a proactive fashion.

On the other hand, the microlinguistic perspective on language planning constitutes correction of inadequacies that are noted by individuals, and does not require that language problems have already occurred in discourse to create a demand for language planning (Jernudd and Neustupny 1987). Neustupny (1994) points out that because this approach explores the link between individual conduct

in discourse and group behavior in communication, this approach is also microsociologically oriented. This study adopts both the macrolinguistic and microlinguistic perspectives to language planning. For a national language planning policy like the SMC, there is a need to come to terms with the linguistic needs at the microlinguistic level. As Chua and Baldauf (2011) suggested, a ‘micro’ approach will require official language planners to factor in the various areas of language learning such as the acquisition, retention, and use of language. It is also important to consider the motivation of individuals in learning Mandarin and parents’ attitudes toward Mandarin. At the family level, parents must be willing and able to transmit the language to their children.

2.3 Language Planning and Language Management

Most theories of language planning have concentrated exclusively on solving language problems but failed to consider language planning in the more general context of language management. Spolsky (2004) defines language management as the establishment of an explicit plan or policy, usually written in a formal document about language use. However, Spolsky cautions that the existence of an explicit policy does not guarantee that language management will be implemented and will be successful if implemented. Spolsky explains that language management efforts may go beyond or contradict the set of beliefs and values that underlie a community’s use of language and the actual practice of language use. Ricento (2000) observes that language planning conceived as language management will not result in the intended outcome as there are many uncontrollable variables involved. Ricento argues that language planning should focus on the status and relations of speech communities in defined contexts, in particular why a language has a particular status and the consequences of this status for individuals and the communities (Ricento 2000). There are two types of language policies that arise from language planning by government: status planning and corpus planning. Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) define status planning as language planning activities that reflect social issues. They also suggest that status planning involves the positioning of languages in relation to each other. In the case of Singapore, the Republic of Singapore Independence Act of 1965 decreed that Mandarin shall be one of the four official languages in Singapore. However, although the Singapore government has granted an official status to Mandarin, Zhao and Liu (2010) observed that over the years, Mandarin has lost its prestige due to the unbridled dominance of English as an official and administrative language. They cogently argued that the ascription of Mandarin as the official mother tongue of Chinese Singaporeans would not arrest the decline status of the Mandarin Chinese. Instead they believed that there is a need to strike a balance between English and Mandarin Chinese through the wider use of the language in government departments and other public domains. However, the Singapore government has to tread gingerly the interests of the Chinese community. As Singapore is a multiracial nation, other minority ethnic

groups may view the promotion of Mandarin as a preferential treatment accorded to the Chinese ethnic group.

According to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), there are two approaches adopted in the implementation of language planning: top-down versus bottom-up. Most traditional language planning activities were implemented using the ‘top-down’ approach, which involves decision-making at the national level, and governments solving complex problems as their point of departure. However, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) believe that language planning and policy should ideally follow a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach as they believe that no amount of language planning can ‘force people’ to change their linguistic habit. The Singapore government is aware of the need to adopt a ‘bottom-up’ approach to promote the SMC. To ensure that the campaign is effective at the grassroots level, the SMC committee has enlisted the help of private organizations and prominent leaders in the Chinese community.

2.4 Sociolinguistics of Language Use

To enhance our understanding of individual choice in a bilingual or multilingual society, there is a need to review some relevant concepts associated with the sociolinguistics of language use: domains of language use, code switching, and language shift and maintenance. In a multilingual society, an individual may use different languages in different situations known as domains of language use. There are various domains of language use such as family, friendship, religion, education, and administration. Code switching is a common occurrence in many bilingual or multilingual societies such as Africa or India or amongst immigrants living in Europe or the United States. Code switching can be defined as the use of 2 or 3 in the same conversation or utterance. There are other factors why people chose a particular code when they speak: participants, situations, content of discourse, and functions of interactions (Grosjean 1982). According to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), there are various forces at work in a language planning activity. As Garcia (2009, p. 80) reminds us, language shift or maintenance does not happen in a vacuum; it occurs when there is coexistence of more than one language, or when there are differences in power, value, and status conferred on languages. May (2012) observes that in multilingual societies, a majority language, usually synonymous with greater political power, privilege, and social prestige, will eventually replace the range and functions of a minority language.

Due to the internalization over time of negative attitudes toward their ethnic mother tongue, younger generation of Singaporeans tend to regard English as a language of use and preference. Since gaining independence, the Singapore government has pursued a bilingual school policy. Chinese students have to learn English as a ‘First Language’ and Chinese as a ‘Second Language.’ At the initial implementation of the English-knowing bilingual policy, the functional allocation of English and the ethnic mother tongue was clearly defined. However, the

functional allocation has now slipped with English increasingly gaining more domains and the ethnic mother tongue gradually employed in fewer domains in the Singapore society (Ng 2016). Despite the concerns over the lack of interest amongst Chinese students in learning the mother tongue subject in schools, an overwhelmingly large majority of the population continues to support the socio-economic importance of English.

2.5 Language and Identity

It is important to understand the link between language, identity, and culture in terms of how speakers allocate their linguistic resources for identity construction, maintenance, and change (Tollefson and Tsui 2007). Leung et al. (1997) suggest that there are three types of relationships that language identity has with the means of communication: language expertise, language affiliation, and language inheritance. Language expertise is the knowledge of a language while language affiliation is the individual's attitudes and affective connection to a language, dialect, or sociolect (Leung et al. 1997). Language affiliation is about the language of the family one is born into or the community one is associated with. Although an individual may inherit a language or dialect, there is no guarantee of a positive affiliation toward the language as one can inherit a language or dialect and yet have no affiliations with it.

Another important concept related to language identity is the mother tongue as the basis for sociolinguistic identity. The mother tongue is defined as the language used to decide whether one is a native speaker (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). The mother tongue is also the language a person has learned from birth or within the critical period, and the language a person speaks the best. It is often the basis for sociolinguistic identity. In some countries, the mother tongue refers to the language of one's ethnic group. However, in the context of Singapore, the mother tongue is defined as the language of one's paternal ancestry, rather than the language of one's socialization experience (Tan 2007). Singapore's language planning policy tends to ignore an individual's linguistic experience on the premise that linguistic ownership is basically a public concern that justifies intervention on the part of the government. However, in recent years, there have been concerns that Chinese students are losing their proficiency in their mother tongue language (Ng 2014). Despite recent government initiatives to maintain the use of the mother tongue language, young Chinese Singaporeans continue to regard English as a language of habitual use.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter discusses language planning framed within the context of governmental involvement. Language is perceived as a societal resource and thus necessitates government intervention in the management of language resources. Some

language planning practices by government may be motivated by ideological beliefs such as linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralism, vernacularisation, and internationalism. In addition, language planning can also be influenced by globalization and individuals may interfere in language planning by government. There is a suggestion by some scholars (Ricento 2000; Kuo and Jernudd 1994) that both the microlinguistic (the sociolinguistics of language) and the macrosociological approaches (the sociolinguistics of society) need to be integrated and should be complementary for successful implementation of language planning policies.

The Singapore government has adopted ‘a bottom-up’ approach to ensure the SMC is effective. However, in order for Mandarin to be consolidated as a language for social interactions within the Chinese community, the government will have to ensure that Mandarin is established as a language used by dialect-speaking Chinese in all spheres of life. There is also a need to raise the prestige of Mandarin as a premier language in addition to English. However, although official rhetoric has constantly emphasized the importance of Mandarin in maintaining close economic and political ties with China, it is uncertain whether the lure of China can nurture an environment that will sustain the learning and use of Mandarin beyond the formal school-going years (Ng 2014). Official language planners in Singapore now faces a daunting task in maintaining a higher profile of Chineseness in Singapore’s society and ensuring large segments of the Chinese Singaporean population that Mandarin has enduring relevance in the local linguistic landscape. The SMC is a fascinating story of how political leaders in Singapore tried to change a deeply entrenched sociolinguistic habit of Chinese Singaporeans through deliberate language planning.

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