

LANGUAGE PLANNING: HEGEMONY OR SOCIAL JUSTICE?

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The practices of Language Planning and Policy Making is highly polemical in multilingual communities. In this paper we will examine Language Planning in terms of the principles of "Language Rights" and "Language Hegemony". The issues discussed in this paper are widespread throughout the world.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we are going to review two articles in relation to Language Planning and 'Language Rights' in the United States of America, California. In these two opposing articles, 'for' and 'against' arguments are raised in relation to the latest 'English Language Amendment/ Proposition 63' in California. While Eduardo Hernandez-Chavez¹ (1988) raises issues against Proposition 63, Connie Dyste² (1989) argues mainly for the Proposition.

In the history of multilingual societies, the struggle for survival of the minority languages against the dominance of the majority language is a never ending story and United States is a typical example for that situation. In this struggle Language Planning and Policy Making plays an important role in the structure of power and (in)equality throughout the world, especially in multilingual societies like the U.S.A., Canada, Australia, U.K., and former USSR.

Language Planning is defined by Tollefson³ (1991) as the planners' conscious efforts to influence the structure or function of language/s. These deliberate efforts might involve language purification, language revival (Hebrew), language reform (Turkish), language standardization (Swahili), and language modernization (Swedish)

¹Hernandez-Chavez, E. 1988. 'Language Policy and Language Rights in the United States' in T. Skutnabb-Kangas & J. Cummins (eds.) *Minority Education: From Shame to Struggle*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

²Dyste, C. 1989. 'Proposition 63: The California English Language Amendment', *Applied Linguistics*, 10-3.

³Tollefson, J.W. 1991. *Planning Language, Planning Inequality*. London: Longman.

(Eastman, 1983)¹. Therefore language planning practices are viewed from different perspectives in monolingual and multilingual societies. It is clear that depending on the situation in a country or in a speech community language planning may take different forms.

On the other hand, Language Policy is defined as "the institutionalization of language as a basis for distinctions among social groups or classes" (Tollefson, 1991). Language policy is seen as a mechanism for the establishment of "hegemony" by the dominant group/s. As claimed by Apple and Muysken² (1987), language planning does not take place in a social vacuum. It is affected by many factors like: *social demographic factors* implicating the number of languages spoken, the number of their speakers, geographical distribution; *linguistic factors* implicating the status of the language/s (degree of international use, literary tradition, etc.); the *socio-psychological factors* concerning the attitudes of people towards a language, social meanings attached to various languages; *the political factors* which are the most influential in language planning; and finally, *religious factors* the use of local languages in the spread of religion, for instance, the spread of Arabic through Islam (Wardhaugh, 1987)³. Those five factors proposed by Apple & Muysken (1987: 56-57) are pertaining to '*Status planning*' (decision procedures) but it is only the first step in language planning as there are also *Corpus Planning* (Codification and Standardization procedures); *Implementation* (educational spread); and finally, *Elaboration* (functional development).

On the other hand, Kaplan (cited in Baldauf 1988: 16)⁴ points out that language planning is always open to the influence of key individuals, bureaucratic structures and institutions, which act as 'intervening variables' in the language planning process. Some of those variables are stated as perceived economic demand, instrumental benefits (source of information, scientific exchange), nationalism, ethnic identity, religion, historical factors, the growth of urbanization, and bureaucracies and education (Baldauf, 1988). Like Apple & Muysken's *factors*, Kaplan's *intervening variables* relate very closely to status planning (decision procedures).

¹Eastman, C. 1983. *Language Planning: An Introduction*. San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp.

²Appel, R. & P. Muysken. 1988. *Language Contact and Bilingualism*. London: Edward Arnold.

³Wardhaugh, R. 1987. *Languages in Competition: Dominance, Diversity, and Decline*. London: Basil Blackwell.

⁴Baldauf, R.B. & A. Luke. 1988. *Language Planning and Education in Australasia and the South Pacific*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

However, our main concern will be demonstrating the manipulable nature of language as it is subject to social and political pressures. The articles chosen for this discussion illustrate the *Hegemonic Principle* of language planning (Dyste, 1989) and *Social Justice Principle* (Hernandez-Chavez, 1988).

Hegemony Principle is discussed by Tollefson (1991) along with Skutnabb-Kangas (1986)¹, and Phillipson (1988)² from a minority perspective. Tollefson claimed that "*people who speak the preferred variety deserve to be in positions of authority and power and to control political and economic institutions. (...) To the extent that this feeling of naturalness of language use becomes pervasive, the dominant group has established hegemony, which is the successful production of ideology.*"

Achievement of hegemony is most controversial in multilingual and industrialized societies; whereas the hegemony of certain languages, namely English, is not only tolerated by the 'developing' countries but also considered a legitimate model for society (Tollefson, 1991). However, in countries like the USA, U.K., and Australia the struggle of ethnic groups to maintain their mother tongue is very closely tied to economic and political policies of those countries. Even though Giles (1977)³ and his followers claim that ethnolinguistic vitality of the groups determine the survival of minority languages, Tollefson (1991) suggests that the survival of minority languages is not simply a function of the 'internal vitality' of minority groups, but rather the strength of the dominant group and the historical consequences of hegemony. Fishman (1989)⁴ also comments on the matter that

there is no doubt in my mind that language and ethnicity in America can not make it on their own, in terms of public policy and at public expense, both because they are too weak and also because the opposition to them is ready-made and therefore ever-ready.

On the other hand, Hernandez-Chavez's (1988) paper calls into question the social-justice issue of Language Planning mainly on the humanitarian grounds. Skutnabb-

¹Skutnabb-Kangas, T. & R. Phillipson. 1986. 'Denial of Linguistic Rights: The New Mental Slavery' paper presented at 11th World Congress of Sociology, New Delhi, India.

²Phillipson, R. 1988. 'Linguicism: structures and ideologies in Linguistic Imperialism' in T. Skutnabb-Kangas & J. Cummins (eds.) *Minority Education: From Shame to Struggle*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

³Giles, H. (ed.) 1977. *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*. London: Academic Press.

⁴Fishman, J. 1988. *Language & Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Kangas (1986) claims that "*different languages have different political rights, not by virtue of any inherent linguistic characteristics, but dependent on the power relationships between the speakers of those languages.*" She claims that unless minority languages have official use (as the medium of instruction in schools), they will not survive; that is why, there has to be legislation openly promoting minority languages within a 'maintenance-oriented' framework. Similarly, Phillipson (1989) claims that *Linguicism* is the very threat to Language Rights of minorities because "*the ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between groups are defined on the basis of language*", that of hegemony.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDIES UNDER CONSIDERATION

As summarized in detail both by Dyste (1989) and Hernandez-Chavez (1988), there have been so many attempts to regulate the role of language since California ceded from Mexico to the U.S.A. in 1849. The Treaty made in that time promised that English and Spanish would be given equal status in the operations of government and education in that region. However, after one and a half a century, the English Language is chosen to be the official language of the State, which is the first legislature act in the history of the United State. In other States, English is given a symbolic recognition; but Proposition 63 is an official legislation, the role of which is defined as follows:

It requires the Legislature to take all steps necessary to ensure that the role of English as the common language of the state of California is preserved and enhanced, and to make no law which diminishes or ignores the role of English as the common language of the State of California. (Dyste, 1989).

However, the most important aspect of the Proposition 63 is that rather than being a top-down act, the legislation was initiated by certain pressure groups and voted by the majority of the public on the grounds that English must be the only dominant language in California. On the other hand, as discussed in detail by Hernandez-Chavez (1988), in the history of the U.S.A., there have been many cases of the use of minority languages in public places, schools, courts, etc. being banned due to various reasons. Mainly in times of crises, banning of minority languages and discriminatory moves were very common.

Arguments for Proposition 63

Dyste (1989) argues for Proposition 63 by claiming that **unless English is given the official status, America's future might be in jeopardy due to ethnic strife**. She gives a long account of the history of the arguments for English to be the official language of California. Dyste structures her argument around the concept of **National Unity**. Dyste's argument can be summarized as follows:

- Σ the U.S.A. has always been a monolingual, English-speaking country; bilingual education and bilingual voting rights threaten dominant state of English language by introducing language divisions which will gradually displace English;
- Σ today's immigrants' are different from those of the past as they come from Latin America and Asia and they are unwilling to learn English;
- Σ use of ethnic languages other than English delays the economic, cultural and linguistic assimilation of those immigrants;
- Σ multilingualism threatens the political and cultural unity of the U.S.A.

Arguments Against Proposition 63

In his arguments against Proposition 63, Hernandez-Chavez raises some issues mainly on the social justice principle and humanitarian grounds. He claims that language on a cultural level is

"the symbolic expression of community encoding a group's values, its folkways and its history. Socially, language is the most powerful means of interaction and communication; and it is through language that an individual or a group seeks and attains participation in society. The denial of a people's development and use of its native tongue is thus a denial of its participation in society and of its very peoplehood."

Hernandez-Chavez defines language rights as the right of a people to learn, to keep and use its own language in all manner of public and private affairs and that to do so is a human right. However, he adds, the dominant group controls all the institutions and develops mechanisms to limit the access of minority groups to services, and

opportunities available to people. Because of the barriers, he claims, ethnic group members can not participate in all manner of life; and finally, he adds that since the minority groups can not attain a level of proficiency, their right to participate in life and enjoy the same rights as others is ignored. He adds that even if they acquire a high competence in the dominant group's language, some other barriers to full access will be faced.

In his final analysis, Hernandez-Chavez highlights the importance of bilingual education for ethnic groups. He believes mother tongue teaching would function as transition to English and the purpose is more effective teaching of English. However, he adds, the opponents of bilingual education claims that it is simply maintaining the languages and cultures of ethnic minorities at public expense. Moreover, he claims, both the proponents and opponents of bilingual education ignore the fact that learning one's native tongue is a right. Finally, he argues that if the native language has not been developed, the child loses a powerful means of learning. In short, the child under these conditions is denied the right to an equal educational opportunity equally as important, the failure to develop the home language is often a cause of alienation between children, their parents and their community.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen the arguments for and against can be grouped around the social justice 'equity' principle and hegemony principle of Language Planning. The arguments for the banning of minority languages claimed that minority language teaching might be a potential threat to the status of English which could lead to turmoil in the country, and the only solution is making English the official language of the State and forcing ethnic groups to learn English by banning languages other than English. They also believe that bilingual education is a barrier to full participation and complete assimilation for ethnic children.

On the other hand, the arguments against Proposition 63 claim that speaking one's mother tongue is a human right and the use of a child's language is something to which s/he is morally entitled to. It is important to note that Proposition 63 passed by a margin of 73 percent to 27 percent which shows strong preference for the hegemony of English among people. People voted and by doing that they announced that languages other than English must be banned. The strongest supporters of Proposition 63 were "*whites, the less educated, and conservatives; while the opponents were Hispanics and Asians, highly educated, and Liberals.*"

It is quite clear that even in a country like the U.S.A., where Human Rights are valued the most, languages other than English can be banned. And in doing that they claimed that **the political and cultural unity of the State is threatened.**

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