

Uniformity and Diversity in Language Policy

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Uniformity and Diversity in Language Policy

Global Perspectives

Edited by
Catrin Norrby and John Hajek

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Acknowledgements

The first ideas for this book arose out of a workshop that we organised on language policy in practice which was held in September 2008 within the School of Languages and Linguistics at the University of Melbourne in Australia. The workshop was initially arranged around the visit of Sally Boyd from Sweden to the School. We then invited a number of local researchers to present their work on the same topic – across a wide range of different contexts. The workshop was very successful and generated substantial interest amongst all participants, including the audience. As a result, a permanent record of our presentations and discussions seemed an appropriate outcome. Those who presented at the workshop subsequently agreed to contribute to our volume, as did a select number of Australian and international contributors who were invited to share their expertise on language policy issues.

We wish to acknowledge the support of our School and Faculty which both sponsored Sally Boyd's visit through the Faculty Visitors Scheme and, in particular, that of the Research Unit for Multilingualism and Cross-cultural Communication, which formally hosted the workshop. We are also grateful to the Swedish Institute's financial contribution towards the event.

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Finally, we thank each of the contributors to this volume. It really has been a wonderful experience working with the many colleagues who

were willing to share with us their expertise with respect to language policy. It is our hope that readers will find the book's broad take on language policy manifest in many different guises and forms interesting and thought-provoking.

The Editors

General Introduction

In various Western societies around the world, the past decades have witnessed a shift from language policies in which a single, national language has been promoted to policies in which other, usually minority (Indigenous and migrant), languages have been increasingly taken into account. This volume has two main aims. It compares and contrasts language policies – recent and past – and their practical outcomes in various settings, including, but not, restricted to the following countries: Australia, the Baltic States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Northern Ireland, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. It also explores the increasingly dominant role of English in many speech communities, and how English as a global force interacts with national, transnational or local interests in a variety of contexts.

The volume sheds new light on compelling and challenging situations in a range of speech communities that vary in size and power in a global context. In particular, it addresses the extent to which language policy discourses tend towards language uniformity or diversity. ‘Language policy’ is examined in its various manifestations – public or private, or even commercially driven. The contributions scrutinise how policies are not only implemented but also resisted, contested and even manipulated. In other words, the volume brings together research on language policies across a range of communities within everyday reality as evidenced in how language policy works in practice – in the educational sector, the corporate world and in day-to-day interactions between people in various settings. The contributions draw on different but complimentary methodologies, using quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The volume consists of 16 chapters divided into three parts, each representing a specific focus on language policy. In Part 1 – *Language Policy at the Official Level* – the emphasis is on the most recent developments in official language policy through legislation in a number of countries. A theme common to all contributions in this first part is that of tension – tension between majority language(s) and minority languages of different size and status, but also tension created by the

power of English and its impact on the linguistic landscape of some of the communities described here.

Part 1 opens with an exploration by Jane Warren and Leigh Oakes of the role of French as a force for unity in Quebec, Canada. As is the case in other Western democracies, Quebec is home to a culturally and linguistically diverse population. In addition to the majority French–Canadian group, there is an increasingly diverse range of migrant groups, as well as Aboriginal and Anglophone minorities with long-standing demands for recognition. However, unlike other Western societies, Quebec’s lack of independent statehood, as a French-speaking province within an English–French bilingual Canadian state, means that it has to constantly affirm its Francophone identity. The authors examine current official discourse, which emphasises the unifying force of the French language as a means of fostering a sense of belonging among Quebec’s minorities, and the extent to which this has been embraced by the minority groups themselves. The authors argue that outside the French–Canadian majority, the generations of young Quebecers of immigrant background represent the best chance for the future of French in Quebec.

Chapter 2, by Sally Boyd, critically examines the recently adopted (July 2009) language law for Sweden and compares its aims and rationale with the situation in other countries in the European Union. Swedish language legislation is a direct response to increasing pressure from English as a superposed language in high-status contexts and the increasing language diversity represented by five official historical minority languages and close to 200 migrant languages. The law declares Swedish to be the principal language of the country, confirms the status of the historical minority languages and Swedish sign language, and requires public authorities and bodies to use Swedish as their primary language. It also stipulates that Swedish is the official language of Sweden in international contexts and gives public authorities responsibility for individuals’ right to language. One of Boyd’s conclusions is that the law is inconsistent: despite its explicit aim to protect language diversity, it has monolingual individuals and contexts as the norm. By aiming to reinforce the position of Swedish vis-à-vis English, the law may in fact have negative consequences for speakers of languages not recognised to be part of the Swedish cultural heritage, that is the languages of recent migrants and their children.

The topic of Chapter 3, presented and analysed by Uldis Ozolins, is recent language policy in the post-independent Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) where the political aim has been to reverse the

previous dominance of Russian by implementing language policies that make the national language the sole official language in each country. In Estonia and Latvia, language legislation has been taken one step further by making basic competence in the national language a condition for citizenship, a matter that has consequences for the substantial number of Russian speakers who settled there during the Soviet era. Seen as essential post-colonial measures by the Baltic States after a long period of Soviet occupation, these policies are endlessly criticised by Moscow as discriminatory. However, Ozolin's analysis of the contemporary Baltic sociolinguistic situation reveals a willingness to learn and use the national languages in question on the part of many Russian speakers and a marked degree of linguistic tolerance from all sections of the population, belying the political rhetoric that focuses on conflict.

Chapter 4 shifts the perspective to language policy in an English-dominant community – Australia. Paulin G. Djité presents an overview of the different phases of Australian language policy dating back to the 1870s and charts the shift from an assimilationist focus to a policy of inclusion and linguistic diversity characteristic of the public discourse of the late 1970s, which culminated in the National Language Policy implemented in 1987. However, the period since the mid-1990s is in sharp contrast to the enthusiasm generated in earlier decades, and language policy is no longer high on the public agenda. There are several reasons for the changing climate, and the chapter investigates how the changing ideological context of language policy as well as economic concerns can help explain the disabling and narrowing changes in recent years.

In the final chapter of Part 1, Leigh Oakes offers an analysis of the changing nature of official French language policy. France has a long and difficult history of coming to terms with its regional languages, as evidenced most recently by reactions to the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Following an intense public debate in the late 1990s, the government signed the Charter but never ratified it on account of an adverse ruling by the Constitutional Council barely a month afterwards. Oakes reviews developments since then and examines the official position on regional languages in the new Sarkozy era and the debate in 2008 that culminated in their being included in the Constitution. The chapter also considers how regional languages are helping France to rethink its republican values so as to make the latter better suited to the realities of the 21st century.

In Part 2 – *Language Policy in Practice: Indigenous and Migrant Languages in Education* – the focus of inquiry shifts to the practical implementation