The Position of English in National Education Language Planning in Malawi

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Abstract

Language planning is used to refer to an explicit choice among alternatives (Fasold 1984: 261) or as "a deliberate language change planned by institutions established for such activities" (Rubin 1884: 4). This process needs a policy that implies a language problem exists that needs rectifying, or an organized pursuit of solutions to language problems existing at the national level. The paper, therefore, discusses what language planning is, why to plan and the position of colonial languages such as English which function as official languages, in most of the developing countries, how they affect education and other developmental activities in these countries.

Theoretical issues in language planning

The definitions stated above about language planning imply that either there have been various alternatives that have been evaluated and one has been chosen as the best (Haugen, 1966:52 and Jernudd, 1973: 17) or that a consensus has been reached. However, consensus in issues of language for nation has some limited analytical value because decisions regarding policies do not always depend on consensus, but involves power and conflict sometimes. In a multilingual country, each language group takes its language as the best; a consensus would therefore, become difficult. This makes policy decisions more of a conflict. According to German (1973: 73), language policy is refers to program of action on the role and status of a language in a given community. This program involves the maintenance, extension or restriction of the range of uses of the language for particular functions. A language plan is, hence, a vehicle for implementing a language policy. Cooper (1989: 45) considers language planning as a deliberate effort to influence the behaviour of others with regard to the acquisition, structure or functional allocation of their language codes. The merit of Cooper's definition is based in the conscious behavioural terms or principles that planners intend to push on the users. Language planning, according to Tollefson (1981: 175), applies to a wide range of processes in terms of a planned change to the structure (corpus) and status of a language. The former, which is driven by the latter, deals with changing the shape of the language such as standardizing its pronunciation, orthography, grammar, and dictionaries, etc. While the latter deals with changing the attitude of the speakers towards a language. This, therefore, means corpus planning is linguistic based while status planning is basically political (Kaplan, 1991).

A language policy involves two aspects, thus; a set of processes leading to the formulation of the policy and a set of steps to be taken to

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implement the policy. Language policy formulation involves decisions taken at different levels, both higher and lower (Bamgbose, 1989: 2). The former are decisions made at the governmental level in terms of what will be used in schools. The latter are consequential decisions taken by ministries, government officials or private institutions, such as commissions, publishing houses, media houses, private schools or business firms.

Processes of language planning

Scholars distinguish between decision-making or language determination and policy implementation. The four steps in the process of language planning have been suggested by Neustupny (1970: 4) are- policy making (or the selection of a national language), codification; through spelling and grammar rules, elaboration by expanding the language and cultivation through the preparation of style manuals. The distinction between language determination and language development is also cited by Jernudd (1973: 16-17). The former involves mode to select variations within a language or dialect for specific purposes while the latter deals with the working out of the means and strategies that will bring the desired results. For example, preparations of textbooks, vocabulary lists, grammars and orthography rules are part of the language development. Ferguson (1964: 31-32) cites language development under three major categories such as graphisation, standardization and modernization, in which graphisation refers to the adoption of a writing system and the establishment of spelling and other orthographic conventions. Standardization is the acceptance of one variety of language throughout the speech community. Modernization is the process of making language equal to other developed languages as a medium of communication. These activities fall into broad category of corpus planning (Kloss: 1969).

However, Fasold (1984) argues that the notion of modernization is worrisome as it implies that some languages are underdeveloped than others. This is quite untrue as all languages at one time or another borrow from other languages to expand

their vocabulary and not to modernize themselves. Modernization is, therefore, used to mean lexical expansion to cater for scientific and technological lexical items. It has been clear from the definitions that a distinction should be made between language planning, formulation of a policy and its implementation.

As for the status planning and significance of one language against others, three types of language policies have been distinguished by Kloss (1971: 25, 1985: 2-3). In the first place, it is the official languages recognized by the government for particular function; secondly, the education policy that relates to the language recognized by the educational institutions for use as a medium of instruction and as subjects of the study at the various levels of public and private schools and colleges; thirdly, general language policy that covers an official government recognition or tolerance of languages used in mass communication by natives of the country.

Thus, for countries that adopt an ex-colonial language for official purposes along side an indigenous language as a national official language, the national language becomes the language, chosen as a symbol of peoples identify as citizens of that country. This achieves the goal of nationalism (Fishman, 1968: 7). The official language is chosen for nationalism purposes, or what Garvin (1973: 30-1) calls *the participatory functions* in world cultural developments such as science and technology, international business and diplomacy.

Why language planning?

Policy cannot be isolated from the environment in which it takes place. It does not exist in a vacuum. The understanding of the environment is necessary as needs for policy actions are generated in the environment and transmitted through a political system. Language planning works have provided a framework for understanding motivations for planning and the relationship between language planning and socio-economic planning. The question of why we should plan languages and the goals behind it are addressed by Fishman (1971). He suggests that multilingual countries

mostly the developing nations are confronted with the requirements of the two conflicting needs of nationalism and nationism (Fishman, 1968: 6-7). Nationalism, according to him, is considered as the new nations need to search its own ethnic identity as it tries to overcome local, tribal, and religious as well as other communal loyalties that clash with loyalty to the state. Nationalism is the macro-aspect of solidarity, so typically expressed via the national flags, anthems and perhaps a national language. Nationism refers to the need to acquire authenticity and national efficiency with its neighbors or on the international scene. Communication systems, education and commerce express sings of cultural nationism (Bell, 1976: 168-169). The definitions and boundaries of nationalism and nationism clearly show the interaction of the official and indigenous languages and their perceived roles at a macro-level, they also obscure the diachronic changes to functional allocations of languages in country such as Nepal where Nepali and probably English have co-existed for over a hundred years. In this situation, one cannot, at a macro-level, have such a sharp demarcation between the use of Nepali and English as usage depends also on who has acquired both languages, with what level of competence and in what context. My experience is that the elevation of one language in a multilingual nation to official circles is more divisive than integrative because such leads to ethnic conflicts.

Kelman (1971) addresses the question of why nations choose a language through development of a relationship between language and nation. His theory is based on what he refers to as instrumental and sentimental attachment to the language. By instrumental, he means the benefits one gains from society by using the language while sentimental refers to one's emotional history with the language. Sentimental attachments measure how the language represents the individual. Both attachments are based on social and individual ideas, participation and social norms (ibid.).

The Ford Foundation states that language determines the transmission of cultural aspect and should provide an essential link to the individual and group roots of personal identity and social community. Language determines the deeper structures of social change and development. Languages also, distinguish ethnic identity, social status or membership (Gumperz and Hymes, 1972). Conversely, they also serve as measures of preservation of social differences (Eastman, 1983). These comments show that policy formulation should consider the attitudes of ethnic groups towards their languages and language. Choices should not be justified only under languages with a literary heritage or lingua francas with a grate tradition. In other ways, the use of minority languages and their role in education, economic development and other aspects of community life need to be considered for the sake of their users and their needs. Language planning must be associated with efforts on behalf of language rights and must be implemented in a fashion which encourages minorities to regulate their own lives and to help shape the policies that affect them, rather than merely being the 'objects of' policies coming from the outside or 'above'.

Language in education policy

Policies are normally disseminate through the education sector that determines how the national language and official language are to be taught, the amount of time devoted to the national language instruction in the national curriculum, what other languages will be included in the curriculum, how they will be taught and what fraction of the curricular day will be devoted to the learning of those other languages. Language planning for educational purposes has received much attention in Africa and elsewhere. The leading organization of African oneness (The African Union) has taken it upon itself to promeote the use of the African languages by declaring the year 2006 as The Year of the African Languages. This is to encourage the people of Africa to be proud of their languages. However, most African languages tend to be marginalized and lose out in the competition with European languages. In Malawi, and elsewhere, proficiency in English is essential for upward social mobility and privileged positions according to Phillipson (1992: 28). He further laments that just as schools

were the principal instruments for traditional cultures, it is such schools which are stifling local languages and imposing alien tongues and values. This clearly shows that schools function as ideological vehicles of the legitimate language, English, as an official language which is considered a symbol of transforming ones social position and as such it is directly convertible into what Bourdien (1977, 1983) calls cultural and economic capital**.** The elite who has inverted their time and money into education profit from their time by holding high paying jobs, unlike the uneducated. Thus, English is a socio-economic status market.

There is a general consensus among the elite that there is no common indigenous cultural heritage that can act as a unifying or integrative force for national unity as happens in Ghana, Liberia (English), Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau (Portuguese) and Cameroon (English-and French). This realization leads to the adoption of the colonial masters' language for both nationism and nationalism. In multilingual countries, this is the likely possible choice and the policy is enforced through the educational policy. The immediate effects of this policy are, that firstly, can lead to co-ordinate bilingualism. Secondly, it stratifies the population into two categories: the young ones get absorbed in the process of modernization and the languages associated with it and the old people cling to the old system and its language, thirdly, local languages are supposed and relegated to the secondary status and underdeveloped as they are viewed as transitory, that is, stepping stone to the ultimate goal of learning the imported language. Fourthly, biculturalism becomes a significant phenomenon of the new nation whereby the cultural influences of the adopted language of modern technology either co-exist or mix with the indigenous culture.

Other scholars have, however, cautioned against total vernaculisation vis-à-vis colonial languages, especially if the chosen vernacular is not tied with immediate important issues in the local population (Eastman, 1983: 71), world events, science and technology, employment and the general up-ward mobility. The whole community for integrative,

economic and political power as the case of Swahili-Tanzania, should support vernacularisation. The planners of vernacularisation should clearly spell out the economic and cultural benefits of using such languages. Ideally, there is no use in elevating a vernacular if it does not elevate people's social mobility and economic standing.

Having focused on theories of language planning it is imperative to acknowledge that the theories do not sometimes give one an opportunity to examine the various attributes, complexities and factors that determine a particular look at a given country (Colonna and Strine, 1991). There is the danger of describing language policies that have different socio-historical differences using the same rational theories. In this case, the real problems and impetus that lead people or governments to adopt different policies may be obscured behind systematic approach. It is necessary to examine economic, cultural, political, religions factors and other socio-linguistics factors. The important part played by the imported languages, ethnic pride and cleavages and the distribution of functions between imported and local languages need addressing. The identification and recognition of the relationship between what is being planned and the individuals who are going to benefit from it should be born in mind. Instances of policy failure due to lack of consultation and research into people's actual use of languages are well documented. For example, in Israel, the Academy had to modernize Hebrew by creating new vocabulary, some efforts were successful, but not all (Hoffman, 1974; 1976). Similar problems were experienced in Malaysia as the academies struggled to invert a greater lexicon in Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia to allow science and technology to be taught in those languages.

Conclusion

The success or failure of a language in education program depends on public enthusiasm and support, and the motives of those most closely targeted by the policy. This paper has attempted to present some of the important considerations to language policy formulation, the need for socio-linguistic surveys. It

has also stated that language planning takes place in a socio-economic and political environment. Therefore, need for consultation and negotiations are necessary.

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