

Developing Multilingual Education Policies

Theory, Research, Practice



Michal Tannenbaum and Elana Shohamy

DEVELOPING MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION POLICIES

Multilingual policies are increasingly important and required in educational settings worldwide, yet a solid experimental body of theory, research, and practice providing guidance for the development of policies is lacking. The Israeli context presented in this book serves as a case study or a model that could be used by bodies or entities seeking to devise a multilingual policy.

The authors begin by addressing the general notion of a multilingual education policy with specific reference to the Israeli context. The book then focuses on specific challenges confronting the new policy that have been explored in empirical studies, and concludes with a proposed framework for a new multilingual education policy related to the core theoretical topics and empirical findings discussed in the previous chapters. This framework includes principles and strategies for implementing the process described in the book in other contexts, ensuring wide applicability and relevance.

Developing Multilingual Education Policies: Theory, Research, Practice is an essential read for all involved in language policy and planning within applied linguistics and education.

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*To Alma, Liya, Ella, Daniel, and to the future ones to join us . . .
May you live in a diverse, open, pluralistic, multilingual world.*



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INTRODUCTION

A journey towards a new multilingual policy

In this book, we share our journey over the last five years—and still in progress—towards a new multilingual education policy in Israel. This project is based on principles of engaged language policy and combines a top-down national agenda with bottom-up school and community needs. We adopted a research-based policy, attempting to address several controversial questions that remain unresolved in the literature on language policy and multilingualism.

Multilingual policies have become increasingly relevant worldwide. Globalization, new and multiple types of immigration, new perspectives on translanguaging, the increasing importance of maintenance of minority languages—all are significant factors affecting the ways language policies are viewed and implemented in educational systems and nations at large. While some countries and local entities are already engaged in the development of multilingual policies in schools, others aspire to do so but are uncertain about the procedures and the methods of planning, creating, and introducing such policies. At times, the very meaning of *multilingualism* is unclear, let alone the concept of *multilingual policy*. Indeed, the various existing types of multilingual policies are determined by different elements, including the specific political regime, the history of the community in question, ideology regarding language hegemony, and ethnolinguistic diversity. The literature currently available on this topic is quite limited, especially in terms of principles, research, and guidelines for developing, implementing, and evaluating such policies.

This book reports on the process we underwent in the course of developing a plan for a new multilingual education policy in Israel. We link key theoretical perspectives pertaining to the construct of multilingualism, fundamental challenges confronting multilingual policies, and empirical studies that address controversial issues. Finally, we propose a set of principles for implementing a multilingual education policy.

2 Introduction

In 2016, the Chief Scientist of the Israeli Ministry of Education issued a call to submit proposals for the development of a new multilingual education policy in Israel. The Ministry's call followed global changes and internal developments in Israel, including growing recognition of the loss of many languages that had been spoken in Israel over the years. In response, we submitted a research proposal that was accepted, granting us the authority and the funding to develop and implement such a policy.

Over the years, the two of us have shared many common interests, working together at the Program for Multilingual Education at Tel Aviv University. In this program, we taught courses about language policy, immigration, emotional aspects of multilingualism, and more, researching and supervising students on these topics. This call, however, brought us together to merge our different interests and research paths. Michal focused on family language policy, emotional and psychological gains and costs associated with language maintenance and language shift among immigrants, issues of identity and language as applied to minority groups, and meeting points between language and the arts from a multimodality perspective. Elana worked for many years on language policy and its hidden agendas, language learning among immigrants, critical language testing, linguistic landscape, language and social justice, and the relevance of all these topics to education. Both of us conducted a significant part of our work in Israel, focusing on different language communities—Arabs, ultra-Orthodox Jews, immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, Iran, and many others.

Our research interests are also anchored in our upbringing and family backgrounds. Michal was born in Israel to immigrant parents, Zionists who came as young adults from Argentina (mother) and South Africa (father), and met in Jerusalem. Based on their language repertoire at the time, English became their language of communication, but once Michal was born, their family language policy was to speak only in Hebrew with her and later with her sister. Spanish was nonexistent, and as for Yiddish, the grandparents' language on both sides, it remained only a sentimental language. This story reflects a phenomenon common to an entire generation in the Israeli context: First-generation Israelis born to immigrant parents from many lands and languages growing up with a Hebrew-only ideology and practice. The immigrant parents used Hebrew with their children, which was a new language for them, and continued to use their L1s with their parents, who in turn did not know any Hebrew, thus creating schisms between generations.

Elana grew up in a home where Yiddish, English, and Hebrew were present. Yiddish was the language of the grandparents, English of the parents, and Hebrew of the children, who acquired it at school where it was the only legitimate language of instruction. Hebrew was the ideological language, which everybody had to learn and use in public spaces, the symbol of patriotism and national belonging, and a tool for creating the collective identity. For her maternal grandfather, Yiddish was his native language. Yet, he had learned textual Hebrew in Ukraine (his homeland), which proved instrumental for his acquisition of spoken Hebrew on coming to Palestine in 1930. Although he was a *Yiddishist*, he “surrendered” to spoken Hebrew

after his arrival. After becoming mayor of a new town, he used Hebrew in public spaces and at work but continued to read, write, and speak Yiddish at home. Her maternal grandmother, who, like many other girls at the time, was denied a formal education, used Yiddish all her life, and her Hebrew was minimal. Her father, who came to Israel in 1950 from the US, never mastered Hebrew. As a child, she witnessed the distinction between those who, like her mother and grandfather, fully participated in the new Israeli society, as opposed to those who, like her grandmother and father, were left out, victims of the Hebrew language.

We were both greatly interested in the Ministry's call and thought we could bring our insights and experience to the study of multilingualism as an asset for individuals and wider circles of family, community, and society. Developing a new multilingual education policy would allow us to emphasize the virtues of pluralism, justice, and well-being, all of them part of what we had done before.

The Israeli context presented in this book serves as a case study or a model that could be used by bodies or entities seeking to devise a multilingual policy. We assume that differences will be found between these entities, contingent on factors such as the nature and ideology of their educational systems, ethnic and political tensions, the specific characteristics of migration, and the languages involved.

The book begins by addressing the general notion of a multilingual education policy with specific reference to the Israeli context (Part I). It then focuses on specific challenges confronting the new policy that were explored in empirical studies (Part II) and concludes with a proposed framework for a new multilingual education policy related to the core theoretical topics and empirical findings discussed in the previous chapters. This framework includes principles and strategies for implementing in other contexts the process described in the book (Part III).

Our goal in this book is to share our experiences and facilitate a dialogue with scholars and professionals around the world who are, or will be, involved in developing and implementing language policies. We wish to create a vibrant community that will promote theoretical and practical developments and mutual exchanges of research and experiences to further multilingualism and social justice.



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PART I

Language policy, multilingualism, and education

A language is a compendium of the history, geography, material and spiritual life, the vices and virtues, not only of those who speak it, but also of those who have spoken it through the centuries. The words, the grammar, the syntax are a chisel that shapes our thought. . . . I prefer linguistic nationality as a point of departure for dialogue, an effort to cross over the limit, to look beyond the border—beyond all borders . . . I am Italian, completely and with pride. But if I could, I would descend into all languages and let myself be permeated by them all. . . . We can be much more than what we happen to be.

—Elena Ferrante, “Linguistic nationality”
Incidental Inventions, 23–24

Language education policies are formulated in multiple domains and at different levels of governance. When developing new policies, then, both the *construct* at the core of the policy and the *context* of its execution need to be addressed. In Chapter 1 we discuss what multilingual education policy means at present and deconstruct it by analyzing its various components: the notion of *language* in its broad sense, the theoretical and practical aspects of *multilingualism*, the top-down, bottom-up, and engaged approaches to *language policy*, and *education* as the specific domain of policy making. Chapter 2 explores the *context*—Israeli society, which is used in the book as a case study. Finally, Chapter 3 focuses on *advocacy*, a crucial prerequisite in the actualization of any policy. Advocacy actions intended to promote a multilingual education policy reform indeed culminated in a call by the Ministry of Education for a proposal to develop such a policy, as described at the end of Part I.



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A NEW APPROACH TO LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICIES

“Language education policy” applies to the domain where decisions on language issues and practices affect or interact with education systems. In this chapter, we discuss current developments in language policy and conceptions of language(s) as they interact with multilingualism in educational systems.

Language policy as a domain of inquiry and development

Language policy is conceptualized as “the language practices, language beliefs and ideology, and the explicit policies and plans resulting from language-management or planning activities that attempt to modify the practices and ideologies of a community” (Spolsky, 2004, p. 39). Over time, the definitions of what constitutes a language policy have expanded from concern with matters relevant to nation-states, such as the usage of languages in official documents or state laws, to policies in a range of entities and domains, such as municipalities, educational systems, hospitals, media, families, and workplace (Spolsky, 2009). These domains have their own implicit or explicit policy manifestations, carried out through rules and regulations, educational curricula, tests, and language use in the public space (Olshtain & Nissim-Amitai, 2004; Shohamy, 2006).

One view of language policy introduced by De Swaan (2001) refers to the model of the global language system. In this model, language is viewed as an economic good whose value increases the more it is used. The use of specific languages, then, is controlled by market forces rather than by policy makers, so that the languages most widely used in terms of the number of speakers will dominate the global system without any need for regulations. This free market model, however, does not acknowledge that languages, beyond their role as tools for international communication or economic mobility, entail emotional, social, and cultural factors involved in the construction of national and ethnic identities (Fishman,

2006; Flores & Beardsmore, 2015; García & Lin, 2017). Allowing the languages most widely used to dominate the world without taking measures to promote and maintain non-dominant languages could lead to radical injustices against different language communities and to the erasure of their language and culture (Nongogo, 2007). A laissez-faire approach to language policy could also severely hinder non-dominant-language speakers' opportunities for social equity, justice, and access to domains of participation and engagement in society (Shohamy, 2014).

Multilingual policies have become increasingly relevant in various places in the world as reflecting sociolinguistic developments. Globalization, new trends of immigration and mobility, loss and attrition of languages, post-colonialism, and growing attention to the global North and South reflect significant shifts in the perception and implementation of language policies. While explicit language policymaking is prevalent in top-down national and international communication, scholars have debated the capacity of language policy to affect actual changes in sociolinguistic practices. These have led to significant debates as to whether language policy should *impose* top-down regulations and manipulation of what nations perceive as ideological, or *reflect* the level of the existing linguistic diversity in a bottom-up manner (Deumert & Storch, 2021; Menken & García, 2016; Shohamy, 2006).

A third approach to language policy, referred to as *engaged language policy*, was proposed by Davis in a special issue of *Language Policy* (2014) that also included a series of cases implementing this approach. Phyak and Bui (2014) report on indigenous and minority youths in Vietnam and Nepal who resisted, negotiated, and transformed a new nationalist language policy. Schecter et al. (2014) offer an enlightened social critique of the policies of immigrants in Toronto and Madrid and describe a scenario of language variation policymaking, which is committed to principles of transnationalism, inclusion, and human rights. Coelho and Henze (2014) report on rural Nicaraguan teachers openly opposing the national education policy. Pease-Alvarez and Thompson (2014) studied teachers working together to resist standardization and change the education policy. Finally, Langman (2014) reports on translanguaging, identity, and learning by science teachers as engaged language planners. Further, in a book by Menken and García (2010), the authors describe a number of local bottom-up language policy initiatives where teachers and communities resisted and “talked back” to local policies.

This approach, then, refers to a transformative dialogue, an interactive process of policy development that builds on top-down and bottom-up flows and dialogical interactions with schools, communities, and the nation at large. It represents a shift from a top-down national policy to a “recognition of the complex interplay of ideologies and institutional practices that are consequently informed by local policy” (Davis, 2014, p. 83). This approach resonates in Johnson's (2013) identification of multiple agents that play a role in determining language education policies, including parents, school board members, government agencies, teachers, principals, and students, as well as government policymakers, ministries of education, and academic researchers. All these agents influence the determination and