Course: Sociolinguistics

Language Planning

Language planning, to start with, is considered to be a usefull process that offers an insight into the nature of language, into the attitudes of people towards language, and the way such attitudes may have a great impact on people’s use of the language itself and on the form of such language.

Defining Language Planning

Language planning is often defined as the conscious predictive approach to changes in language and language use. A proper planning of language requires adequate information about the socio-linguistic habits of the target population and about the social basis for language policy in order to have productive directions of changes.

Language planning (and language policies are both associated), is concerned with the policies both explicit and implicit that have great effect on what languages are spoken in specific societies when, how, and by whom and for what purposes as well as the values and rights associated with those languages. If one wants to speak about some of the main aims of language planning that can be achieved in the Arab world, for example, we say that it aims to achieve four main goals: (a) unification, (b) universalization, (c) arabization and (d) nationalization.

Language policy then is a variety of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and the practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the societies, groups, or systems. This is the definition given by Kaplan & Baldauf (1990). In this definition, one can understand that language planning is an amalgamation of abstract and concrete
items that include the ideas rules and practices with the basic aim of elevating or appraising one language or some languages on behalf of others at both social and administrative levels.

Another definition (in Fishman 1971) language planning is an activity most reasonably undertaken by the government to promote systematic linguistic change in some community of speakers. The government, via such action, intends to maintain civil order and communication and to orient the entire society toward some direction deemed good or useful. In this respect, language planning, as already argued, is decision making, or decision taking about language and about any problems related to that language. Because of this concern of language planners, four terms keep appearing throughout discussion of language planning. These are (a) literacy, (b) standard language, (c) official language, (d) national language.

(a) **Literacy**: the term can be used to refer to both literacy of individuals or speech communities. One might insist to use the term individual literacy and group literacy to distinguish these two senses. Literacy on both levels is matter of degree: an individual can be illiterate to a certain extent.

(b) **Standard language** is a codified form of a language accepted and serving as a model to the large speech community.

(c) **Official language**: An official language is a language that is recognised by some governmental authority that assigns it a special legal status in a particular country or state. Typically, a country's official language refers to the language used within its government - its courts, parliament, administration, etc. - to run its operations and conduct its business.

(d) **National language**: it has two senses: The first is emotionally neutral and it indicates that a given language serves the entire territory of a Nation rather than just some original part or ethnic Community or ethnic subdivisions. This is what is meant by lingua National in Latin opposed to Lingua Indigena. The second has an emotionally more powerful sense and it indicates that language functions as a national symbol and
this is the sense in which the term is commonly used in emergent countries. It is then often contrasted with the language of the former colonial overlord.

One can classify the four groups of languages into two main groups: a written and standard language, and an official and national language. Both written language and standard language can be characterized in terms of linguistic variables and are a matter of degree, while official and national languages are generally characterized in terms of yes/no decisions and the language is either an official language or not, as it cannot be something in between.

**Processes and procedures**

Most linguists agree that language planning has as its central focus the identification of language problems, the focus on a language code, its choice and standardization. When we speak about language problems, we have to understand these problems within "other" perspectives and to see them as related to the level of communication, as suggested by Roger Shuy (1973). Indeed, when considering language problems, we must bear in mind some important aspects, such as the following 3 aspects:

1. The interrelationship between language code and speech.
2. The relation between language code and other social patterns.
3. The relation between verbal and nonverbal communication.

According to Macnamara (1966), if we restrict the investigation and analysis of language problems to only the linguistic items such as vocabulary and orthography, there will be a danger of not referring to, and not improving, the system of communication, because it is not analyzed in relation to some other problems. Such is the case because the basic problems are those of common communication. Different accounts provide different types of typologies of language problems. One typology has been suggested by Rubin (1971), and it includes problems related to linguistic form and they involve:

(a) The selection of "Norm"
(b) The identification of the norm
(c) The linguistic function or elaboration of the function
(d) The acceptance by intended population.

Another typology is suggested in Jernudd – Neustupný, (1987). According to them, there are two basic approaches to language problems:
(a) The policy approach,
(b) The cultivation approach.

The distinction between (a) and (b) is a matter of focus. In the first, there is a focus on language code, that is to say policy, and in the second one, the focus is on the speaking mechanism, that is to say, the cultivation process. Problems included in the cultivation approach are questions of correctness. And here a cultivation approach is found in modern industrialized societies. And there are problems related to efficiency, with linguistic levels full-filling specialized functions and problems of style constraints on communication.

On the basis of such problems, different theories have attempted to give different types of language planning aims. We consider the aims suggested by Rubin (1971) who classifies these aims as follows:

(a) **Extra linguistic** aims have to do with the use of a given language and this the concern of sociologists, political scientists and education planners.
(b) **Semilingualistic** aims have to do with changes in the writing, spelling and pronunciation of the language.
(c) **Linguistic** aims have to do with the vocabulary extension or enlargement, and the vocabulary standardization and adaptation of special diversified styles.

**Why plan language?**

Linguists and language planners claim that we need to plan language to make it more regular and systematic, so as to facilitate communication by making language more economic. Some people do accept this view, but other theorists are rather inclined to argue that regulations might lead to the destruction of normal thought processes in a strong fear, but not too difficult to establish. This is appointed by Rubin.
With the identification of language problems and identification of the nature of such problems as their main aim, language planners always set as basic goal in this endeavor finding out productive ways in improving types of treatment of language problems. We find that in the literature there are at least four ways in which the treatment patterns of language problems differ:

1. **Systematicity**: related to the extent to which problems are treated as an ordered system of items.

2. **Theoretical elaboration**: Some treatments are more meaningfully based on sociological and linguistic models, while others are not.

3. **Depth**: Getting to the nature of the problem rather than being biased by prejudices.

4. **Rationality**: affective neutrality (opposed to affectiveness), specificity of goals and solutions (opposed to diffuse), universalism (opposed to particularism), effectiveness (opposed to quality), and long-term goals (opposed to short-term goals).

For this, language planning includes three main steps: (a) language determination, which variety shall be developed or adapted for specific functions, (b) language development decisions concerning the standardization and unification of language used by means of grammar, spelling, manuals and word lists and (c) implementation attempts to influence language use by propagandizing the results of decisions on language determination and development. Lewis says that no policy will be successful which does not do one of the three things:

1. Conform to the attitudes expressed.
2. Persuade those who seem to reject the policy.
3. Remove the causes of disagreement.

Besides the political factors, policy makers or language planners need to base their attempts on attitudes, behavioral patterns and resources. They have to take into consideration people’s attitudes because language policy has to be implemented in the social world of attitudes of those directly concerned - the users.

A study was conducted in Morocco by Bentahila (1983) And it proved that Morroccans have favorable views towards French as the medium of instruction: it is
used in press in radio and in the television. French is associated in Morocco with education and this is why most people do not favor arabisation. They value French because of some instrumental reasons. It gives access to education, to science and to better jobs. It also gives access to the Western World and further promotes the country’s modernization.

Some explanations have also been provided on the failure of arabisation in North African Countries, Morocco included. The failure is considered to emanate from a disagreement between different policy makers. These are traditionalists, modernists, nationalists and bureaucrats. The problems of or the obstacles to arabisation have been related to different factors (see Bentahila (1983), Rubin (1971), Fasold (1984) among others. The factors are: (a) lack of suitably trained teachers and lack of available texts books, (b) constant change in Ministries and governments, (c) arabization process involves pupils and ignores teachers who have no special training and are not really equipped for the change, (d) planners are politically motivated rather than educationally so and no consultation with different constituents of the government and especially those directly affected, and (e) political and ideological conflicts - a problem seemingly common to all the North African countries- influence language planners who are primarily motivated by nationalistic political and economic purposes while the Practical needs of the people tend to be neglected or completely ignored. (argued by Rubin (1971:127).