

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PLANNING

ROBERT B. KAPLAN

University of Southern California

There are several complex issues to be considered in the formulation of language policy and literacy policy: first, the question of what language planning is and who does it; second, the question embedded in the history of human language and in the evolution of written language as well as in the functions that written language has over time taken over; and third, in the L2 situation, the question of the fit between the sub-varieties of each language and the functions allocated to the various sub-varieties. The problem is particularly complex in the domain of literacy, since a generalized literacy in an L2 introduced to a minority population does not in any way guarantee that the minority population will acquire access to the power language—that sub-variety which empowers native speakers of the L2 to manipulate the power structure to accomplish social and political ends, the absence of which in the minority population insures their disempowerment.

In their interesting article on the problems of orality and literacy among the Toba of Chaco Province, Argentina, Messineo and Wright (1989) make several very important points: namely that Spanish literacy does not accord well with Toba oracy and that the richness in social, cultural, and political aspects of Toba phenomenology may not be expressible in Spanish while the richness of Spanish literacy may have little meaning for the Toba people. In making these points, the authors have focused on a problem that lies at the heart of language planning and at the center of the formulation of language policy and literacy¹ policy.

¹The terms *literate* and *illiterate* are being used here as though they represented the sole extremes of a continuum. In actual fact, there are many terms that should be invoked, and each term needs to be applied in the context of a particular language; e.g., an individual living in Los Angeles may be able to read and write Spanish at a basic level, may be able to read and write English at the literary level, may be able to read Latin at a level adequate to participation in Church services, may be able to use a computer, may be able to use mathematics at the level of geometry, algebra, and trigonometry but not calculus, may be able to read a little in Portuguese and French. Such an individual may be said to be *literate* in all of those languages, but obviously the single term *literate* does not suffice to describe the various skills the individual possesses. By the same token, the same individual may be said to be *illiterate* or *semi-literate* in several of the languages named, but the single term *illiterate* does not suffice to describe with any degree of accuracy what this individual actually is able to do, and in addition it carries a regrettable stigma. Children who have yet to learn literacy in a literate society may be designated *pre-literate*, adults who acquired literacy early in life but who have lost it for lack of anything to read may be called *post-literate*, and individuals who have comparable shared literacy in two languages may be called *bi-literate* (or conceivably *multiliterate* if more than two languages are implicated).

INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND

Language planning is, by definition, an attempt by some group to intervene in language development and to alter the language development of some population of speakers in a particular direction, usually conceived as somehow intended to improve the conditions of that population whose language is being planned. Because the speaker populations involved generally tend to be minorities embedded within a larger population and because the activities subsumed in such planning tend to be extremely complex, it is usually government at some level that is involved in the planning activity. Governments customarily engage in several kinds of planning.

Two broad areas of planning fall under the jurisdiction of governments in this context: *natural-resource development planning* and *human-resource development planning*. *Natural-resource development planning* normally implicates efforts to develop natural resources for the good of the whole population; thus, governments build dams to control water distribution and to increase the availability of hydro-electric power, or they promulgate regulations over private-sector exploitation of such commodities as aluminum, gold, oil, silver, and tin, or they promulgate regulations affecting the discharge of wastes into the environment, and so on. *Human-resource development planning* is more complex in the sense that it takes longer (e.g., it may take a decade to build a dam, but it takes several generations to effect language change) and deals with a far more sensitive domain—the manipulation of human attitudes and attributes. Furthermore, governments are less experienced at human-resource development planning than they are at natural-resource development planning; natural resources have long been perceived as sources of wealth, while human beings, for most of the course of recorded history, have been left to their own devices. Only in rare instances—for example, in the matter of slavery, and of course in the maintenance of a military force—have governments tended to become directly involved in human-resource development planning activities. However, in the 20th century—one marked by extraordinary dislocations of population and by radical shortening of communication lines—governments have become increasingly involved in human-resource development planning. The century has also been characterized by the assumption that human-resource development planning is not only the proper concern of government but that national development implicates human-resource development planning virtually to the same extent that it implicates natural-resource development planning (Kaplan 1989).

One of the areas in which governmental activity has become obtrusive is the area of language activity. Sometime in the recent past, governments have accepted the notion that monolingualism is desirable in a polity because it facilitates the promulgation of the myth of a common ancestry, encourages unity within the population, and increases the

Individuals who possess sufficient competence to read safety signs, and addresses, or who are able to read in a very narrow subject area (e.g., chemistry) in which they are fully literate in some other language, but who cannot read a newspaper or a basic textbook in any other subject may be designated *semi-literate* or *functionally literate*. The point is, simply, that the dichotomy *literate* vs. *illiterate* is too coarse to be of much use in serious discussion of the issues.

government's ability to communicate with all the people, presumably to augment government's ability to control a variety of societal phenomena. In the history of western Europe, the notion of monolingual states took hold in the 16th and 17th centuries, but despite their efforts at monolingualism, England still has to deal with the dissidence of the Irish, the Scots and the Welsh, France with the Basques and the Bretons, and Germany with the Danes, the Frisians, and others; the Balkan states are, of course, marked by a pattern of multilingual instability, and the ex-colonial territories, in Africa and Asia, exist within boundaries arbitrarily drawn by Europeans which inevitably created extremely multilingual states (e.g., Cameroon with something like 250 languages). These newer states have struggled, since independence, with the problem of a national language. Particularly in societies in which the citizenry votes, there has been perceived a need to have all citizens able to read about the issues, to understand both the issues and the positions of individual candidates, and to participate actively in the process of selecting their leaders by voice and vote, almost always in a single language (e.g., the plebiscite promised by the UN to determine the will of the people of Namibia was long delayed because it was impossible to determine in which language it would be held). In these instances, governments have promulgated not only the matter of monolingualism but also of literacy. Concurrently, in those societies which are heavily dependent on literate interactions, the idea has sprung up that illiteracy is an evil and that, like a contagious disease, it can be stamped out in the population —thus, a negative view of illiteracy is widely held, quite at odds with the human condition, and a metaphor is in wide use which is quite at odds with reality (Scribner 1984). Reality can perhaps be suggested by the following quotation from an important study by Patthey-Chavez:

In a sense, all of language aims to establish joint cognition by externalizing the inner meditations of individual human beings. Individual experiences are reproduced verbally, and through these means are shared and universalized. But their externalization through verbal reproduction [oral or written] is, of course, only half the story: without attentive listeners, experiences are lost, not shared. Thus the verbal externalization of human experiences and human thoughts is *de facto* a dialectic between listeners and speakers. Viewed in these terms, the oft-noticed elusiveness (or flight) of meaning begins to make sense: meaning between people is simply never complete until the dialectic of meaning-making between co-articulators is engaged in, *and the linguistic tool is suited to its dialectic function* [emphasis added, RBK]. Meaning is incomplete because it is only completed during meaning-making interaction. Language is maximally adaptive: its very fuzziness allows it to be used over and over in a wide variety of contexts, by users who shape their language to their many communicative purposes. At the same time, the use of a shared code between interlocutors assures a certain historical continuity, a rootedness in a common past, while the necessity to negotiate meaning again in each interaction forces the active participation of meaning makers in the maintenance of that past (1990, Ch. 2, p. 6; cf., Holquist (1981), Leont'ev (1981), Luria (1978), Vygotsky (1986)).

The real-world problem to which this quotation calls attention is the lack of fit between the language of a minority group and the monolingual form which a government may be attempting to superimpose on the whole society but particularly on that minority group. It is possible to posit the notion that *each language is the ideal means for a community*

of speakers to deal with the phenomenological world in which it lives and with each other. But such a code may be totally unsuited for a particular embedded community to deal with the phenomenological world of the dominant community. The problem inherent in the question of fit between two linguistic systems is easily demonstrated in actual situations: the problem is shared by the Aboriginal people of Australia living in an English-dominant environment (Eggington 1990), by the Native-American people of North America and also by Black Americans living in the English-dominant environments of the United States and Canada (Ogbu 1988), by the *Indios* living in the Spanish-dominant environment of Mexico (Heath 1972, Patthey 1989), and by literally dozens of other populations spread across Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America (including the case of the Toba noted earlier).

WHAT IS THE PRECISE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM?

There are several strands to the problem. It may be useful to try to disambiguate them (cf. Kaplan 1986a, 1986b, 1984). First, there is the matter of the history of human language. For something in the order of the past four and a half million years, humanids have been learning to use language. Our earliest humanid ancestors, the Australopithecines whose remains have been found in the Olduvai Gorge in Africa, apparently shared several characteristics with modern human beings: they were communal hunters; they were nomadic; they were territorial; and they had the most slowly developing young in the animal kingdom. The practice of communal hunting requires the development of some sort of fairly sophisticated call system; after all, communal hunters must be able to signal each other through space of their exact location, their direction and speed of movement, their relationship to the game being hunted, and their intentions. The characteristic of nomadism together with the characteristic of territoriality requires the development of an ability to abstract the map of the territory occupied and to carry that map around in the mind; it further requires the ability to apply the map to new territories as the group moves following the game on which it depends. The characteristic of a slowly developing young derives from the fact that, while even newly born elephants are ready to move with the herd within a very short time after their birth, human offspring need to be tended and protected for several years. This characteristic creates a need for some sort of communal specialization (e.g., those who hunt and those who stay behind to care for the very young and the very old) and some sort of communication system that will permit teaching the young before they are physically ready to participate in adult activities. All of these characteristics combined to create an evolutionary pressure for language.

Despite that pressure, human language as we know it developed very slowly over a very long period of time. The archeological evidence (size of brain cavity, size and shape of the buccal cavity) suggests that human speech as we think of it did not evolve until about 100,000 years ago. However, that evolutionary development was gradually built-in to the human genetic system. All human beings within the normative ranges speak; indeed, we identify those who are abnormal by virtue of the fact that they cannot speak at all or that their speech is somehow obviously marked as atypical. For long periods of human history, such aberrant individuals were destroyed; they were removed from the gene pool of potentially interbreeding populations, and the

resulting selection pressure increased the probability of the evolution of language as a characteristic of the species². Certainly, at the present time, both in theory and within the limits of observation, no human population has ever been recorded that does not have speech, and speech is a characteristic of normative populations around the world. All human children within the normative ranges appear to be born with a biologically conditioned predisposition to acquire language. Apparently, the only thing necessary to trigger that predisposition is the presence in the environment of a language. Once triggered, the predisposition causes children to acquire language in a manner that seems self-appetitive, self-rewarding, and consequently self-motivating; indeed, it is extremely difficult to arrest the process once it has been started. Adults seem equally conditioned to support children in this process of acquisition through such structures as those defined in mother/child communication. In fact, within the first couple of years of life, children acquire, essentially of their own volition, the entire linguistic system of a language, needing only minor adjustment which occurs in their socialization to their culture—or perhaps of two languages; this is a feat which appears not to be replicable at any other time in life.

But this discussion relates only to spoken language. Several post-biological evolutionary stages have occurred. They are *post-biological* because they did not occur across all human populations and obviously have not become part of the human evolutionary baggage; human beings are not born with the ability to read and write, and literacy must be learned anew in every generation. They have occurred over a relatively short time, in historical terms. The first of these post-biological phenomena occurred on the order of 10,000 years ago, when some sub-set of human beings invented *writing*—or, to put in another way, introduced a critical new technology at least as significant as the invention of the wheel. It is important to note that different groups, at about the same time, discovered various ways of representing speech visually—pictographic representations, syllabic representations, alphabetic representations. It is also important to note that the ability to represent language visually has not, over time, dispersed through the entire human species but remains limited, though the limits are constantly expanding. The second post-biological event occurred about 1,000 years ago, when some smaller sub-set of human beings invented the capability to represent speech in writing quickly—that is, they invented *printing*. In one sense, of course, printing is merely a technology, but the availability of that technology created a situation in which visual representation of language could be disseminated over time and space relatively more quickly and efficiently to a much larger segment of the population. The most recent of these post-biological phenomena has occurred within the life-time of most readers of this text. It was the invention of *electronic word-processing*. Again, this change may be viewed as merely a technological development, but it has such significance for some segments of the human species that it cannot be dismissed as a mere technological improvement, and it has the potential to divide human populations in critical ways (cf. Kaplan 1988: 41-42; 1986b).

²One of the most dramatic punishments that human beings could inflict on each other was the cutting out of the tongue; such an act removed the individual so abused from human contact, particularly in the time before literacy was widespread. Indeed, such a punishment created a monster so repugnant to other human beings that the likelihood of interbreeding was substantially diminished.

The availability of these technologies has had the most important implications for language itself and for some users of language. In societies in which information is not visually maintained but rather is maintained in oral memory, facts are variable and truth is mutable. The owner of memory must retrieve information variably, depending on the audience for whom the retrieval occurs, the circumstances under which it occurs, and the condition of the owner of the memory. Once language can be visually represented, it can be retrieved any number of times, in precisely the same way, over time and space. Readers of this text can, if they know Classical Greek—if they have access to the code—read Plato in the original, exactly as it was presented some thousands of years ago, some thousands of miles away. Once language can be visually encoded, it becomes fixed; facts become invariable (because they can be looked up) and truth becomes immutable (because the facts on which it is based are invariable).

Some scholars (e.g., Goody and Watt 1988, Havelock 1988, Ong 1988, 1967) have claimed that there is a great psychological divide between those who are literate and those who are not. This seems to me a gross overstatement of the case. It is not necessary to posit a psychological divide to recognize that literacy makes certain special contributions to communities which have it. Ong (1967) has probably correctly identified a taxonomy of cultures with respect to literacy: *orate cultures* (which depend exclusively on spoken language), *transitional cultures* (which fall into two categories: those which are making initial steps toward literacy and those which are residual-oral, being largely dependent on written language but having retained some key oral registers), *literate cultures* (those primarily dependent on written language), and *post-literate cultures* (those which, having been literate for some time, have been invaded by a secondary oracy through such media as radio and television in which it appears that text is orate but it is in fact written and read to make it appear oral—cf. the television news in most countries). It can be demonstrated that written language has taken on certain functions that oral language does not serve (e.g., Bazerman 1983, Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987, Bizzell 1982). It can also be demonstrated that there are significant differences between written and spoken registers, at least in English, at the present time (Biber 1988, Grabe 1987). It is possible to speculate, though the evidence is not conclusive, that orate societies do not have access to all of the functions available in literate societies, or at least do not have access in precisely the same way or to the same extent. Eggington (1990) offers the comparisons displayed in Table 1 with respect to such functions as decision making, negotiation, and contract making.

Eggington considers three functions—decision making, negotiating, and contract making—but a case can be made for a great many more functions, and other features can be generalized. For example, it is clear that when information must be retained in memory, text has to be constructed in such a way as to facilitate memorization; not only are such features as repetition and additive relationships common, but a great many tropes, rhythm, rhyme, and various other features normally characterized as *conversational* occur. Further, not only is written text likely to be differently structured, but the existence of written text makes possible extensive commentary on text (e.g., the commentaries on the written texts of the Bible or on the written texts of Shakespeare's plays)—an added body of text which far exceeds the length of the original and which constitutes a context in which the original can be verified, discussed, and interpreted.

Table 1
VARIABILITY IN ORAL CULTURE AND LITERATE CULTURE POWER VALUES

Oral Culture	Literate Culture
<p><i>Decision Making</i> One only knows what one can recall.</p> <p>Power discourse is spoken only by those who have the right to speak and the right to decide.</p> <p><i>Negotiation</i> The spoken word in negotiations is considered carefully. It constitutes the only message. It must have a high perceived truth value.</p> <p>Issues are resolved quickly through personal, face-to-face negotiation with practical limitations on the size of the negotiating network.</p> <p><i>Contract Making</i> Once agreed upon, a spoken contract between those who have the right to speak is locked in memory.</p> <p>Power discourse must be stored in memory. Consequently, it is structured in such a way that it is easy to retain it in memory and to recall it. Thus, additive relationships and repetition are favored in such discourse.</p> <p>There is a general past or present orientation in the discourse.</p>	<p>One has access to all information, once it has been recorded.</p> <p>Power discourse is written by those representing power institutions. Institutions make decisions, not individuals.</p> <p>The spoken word is not as carefully articulated as the written word. It is not the final message. It does not need to have a high perceived truth value. The truth value of an utterance exists only when the message is written and the written version is subjected to scrutiny. [English speakers say "Get it in writing!" and "Show it to me in writing!"] The only verifiable truth lies in the written text.</p> <p>Issues are resolved slowly through depersonalized committees and legal structures with little practical limit on the size of the negotiating network.</p> <p>Once agreed upon, a spoken contract is only validateable through the renegotiation of a written contract. That contract, or demand, becomes more powerful when it is "published" by institutions and locked in institutional archival memory.</p> <p>Power discourse is packed with complex subordinated and nominalized language, in which processes, qualities, quantities, logical relationships, and assessments are expressed as nouns or adjectives (Martin 1990).</p> <p>There is a major focus (a <i>promisory</i> focus) on the future in the discourse.</p>

THE FAILURES IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

There are several problems to discuss in the context of language planning and language policy. First, governments have not, generally, recognized the degree to which a language issue permeates a society; consequently, they have tended to require solutions through the education sector. That is, schools have been asked to teach the

national language to everybody. But the obvious problems here are that not everybody goes to school in some societies; that even if everybody goes to school, everybody does not do so at one time so that inculcation through the school system requires several generations, and that the education sector does not have the resources to permeate the culture.

This latter problem is particularly intractable. Various segments of a society may conduct their own educational functions; e.g., the military, as well as entities concerned with religion, foreign trade, tourism, international cooperation, etc. These educational functions may be at odds with the functions of the education sector; e.g., the education may, as in the case of Australia (LoBianco 1987), teach the common European languages (i.e., French, German, Spanish), but the needs of the foreign trade entities may lie with quite different languages (i.e., Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese). In such an environment, the education sector may be unable to respond even when it wishes to do so because it does not command an appropriate cadre of trained teachers and does not have easy access to appropriate materials and assessment instruments. Under the best of circumstances, the education sector is likely to lack the fiscal resources to engage in pre-service and in-service teacher training to establish or maintain appropriate language and pedagogical competence; it may lack the ability to develop curriculum and pedagogical and assessment resources and even to disseminate existing materials through the system; it certainly lacks the ability to modify parental attitudes and to create incentives for language learning across the society, and it often cannot resolve the conflicts over the relative curricular priority of various disciplines in terms of national needs.

But these are comparatively trivial problems, particularly in the context of literacy teaching. Here there are two overwhelming problems. In some instances, although literacy may be inculcated in some segment of the population, no literature exists over which literacy can be applied. That has certainly been the case in Ethiopia and the Sudan, where huge efforts have been made to promulgate the national language, but literacy loss is very high because, beyond the school materials through which literacy is taught, there is virtually nothing else to read, and there is, among a population living at the subsistence level, little motivation to use literacy under the best of circumstances (Freire 1970).

The second problem has to do with the language that is taught, and it is in the context of this question that the process/product dichotomy can be profitably discussed. Where process literacy is employed, it is a common practice to encourage learners to keep journals intended to facilitate the teaching of the writing of narratives and descriptions. There is ample evidence in the literature that the skills involved in creating narrative and descriptive text is of little use (Martin 1990) in the creation of what Eggington has identified as "power" language. As he puts it:

...programs which attempt to raise literacy levels of individuals from predominantly oral societies can succeed [only] to a certain extent. Individual functional literacy may be achieved. However, often functional literacy can be defined as attaining a degree of literacy in society which would allow one to function in that society to the extent that the societal power structures will permit. Functional literacy alone will not provide individual and group power to an oppressed [or isolated] people... There are many oral or oral-residual nonnative

English-speaking minority groups who daily face examples of institutional racism and insensitivity. These people are disempowered, but they lack the tools to combat the oppression they may feel... The adaptation of key literate-culture values would enable these people to mount a campaign that might eventually lead to the minority group's gaining more control over their lives... [Language teachers]... can do much more than teach basic survival or functional literacy skills. [They] can teach the "secret" language, the literacy of power. (1990:16)

In the case of the Toba, some level of literacy in Spanish may have been achieved, but there are likely to be two serious problems. On the one hand, Spanish literacy may not be retained; although Spanish has a rich literary tradition, the texts available in Spanish may have little meaning for the Toba people because those texts represent a culture alien to them. On the other hand, it is likely that the Spanish literacy available to the Toba people is not a literacy which includes the language of power. In this case, frustration is simply increased because individual members of the Toba community have access to Spanish but despite that access they perceive themselves powerless to influence their own affairs since Spanish-speakers use a Spanish which the Toba do not control to modify the structures of their society. This is not a new problem; it has already been studied in Mexico (Heath 1972, Patthey 1989) and elsewhere, but the fact that it is understood does not prevent it from being reiterated.

The other side of the coin is the development of a capability to represent the Toba language in written form. Quite aside from the technical difficulties involved in such a project (e.g., the difficulty of finding an appropriate orthography that represents the phonological reality of the language, the difficulty of identifying the lexicon and of capturing the morphology, the difficulty of describing the grammar, and the difficulty of achieving sufficient consensus among native speakers to permit a standardized pedagogical grammar and a dictionary to be compiled and published, the cost of publication and dissemination, etc.), there is the possibility that some registers are not normally present in Toba. This raises the problem of adaptation of the language and its ambient culture to the kinds of phenomenological realities relevant in Spanish. At this point, one is no longer concerned with a linguistic matter; once the description of the language exists, the problem becomes social and political. And, since it is likely, over time, that Toba and Spanish will undergo natural internal change at different rates and in different directions, it will undoubtedly be necessary to think of a language academy which will constantly keep track of changes and steer the lesser language in ways that will allow it to maintain a proper fit with the major language with which it must interact to survive. If one is thinking of a language academy, one must think of the individuals who will work in such an academy; there is limited probability that Toba people will be prepared to undertake such work immediately (except as informants) and as a consequence it remains likely that the fate of the Toba, even in this intimate domain, will be in the hands of others (who may be right-thinking and altruistic, but who are not Toba).

And thus the problem of the dichotomy between process and product instruction remains unresolved; it does not change only because instruction concerns literacy in an L2 rather than literate competence in an L1. While there is much to be said for process instruction, the fact remains that, at least in the context of power language, product is

terribly important because novice literates who want to access the structures of a literate culture need to understand the forms and functions of such genres as *meeting minutes*, *reports to government*, *legal appeals* and the panoply of other genres that in fact permit access to the power structure and without which novice literates remain merely functionally literate. Perhaps equally important is the recognition of the depersonalization of language in the power context. Toba children will come to school fully possessed of the private language of the family and the community; in all likelihood, schooling will increase their sophistication in that private language and may give them access to a comparable code in Spanish, but it is unlikely that it will give them access to the depersonalized institutional code of the power structure, both because the education system is not designed to achieve that goal and because it is not in the immediate interests of Spanish speakers to have the Toba become competent in that code. The fact remains, as Patthey-Chavez (1990:Ch.2, p. 6) has suggested, that "...the linguistic tool is [not] suited to its dialectic function".

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