32 Language Planning

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Every nation does, in fact, have a language policy regulating which languages are spoken in which situations. In many countries this policy is explicit, often a constitutional provision naming a number of languages and their respective roles. This is the situation in Indonesia, India, Ireland, and Canada among others. Other nations may specify the domains of languages by specific laws; this is what France has done. In still other nations such as the United States, language policy may be largely implicit. There is no law, for instance, stating that acts of the United States Congress shall be published in English, but this is and has been the invariant practice for over the 200 years that the nation has existed.[1]

Language policies can be classified into three major approaches: monolingualism, equal multilingualism, and national / regional language systems. France has followed the first since the seventeenth century, Belgium had adopted the second in the twentieth century, and India has moved to the third since independence. Of the three, only the first comes about implicitly, the other two are always established by legislation. Of course classification into one of these three schemes is not always easy. Spain's language policy, for example, officially constituted as a national / regional language situation very much resembles an equal bilingualism scheme, at least as far as the relationship that exists between Spanish and Catalan. Paraguay's constitution provides for equality between Spanish and Guaraní but, in fact the nation functions much as if Spanish were the sole national language.

There appear to be four major factors at work in the selection of a national language. These are: nationalism, ethnic self-interest, linguistic demographics, and the prestige of languages involved. Often there is a combination of the first two, with the second frequently masquerading as the first.

For a case where nationalism was dominant and ethnic self-interest nonexistent, consider Indonesia. The pertinent facts are that there are hundreds of languages spoken in Indonesia, of which Javanese is the native language of somewhere over half, and less than two-thirds[2] of Indonesians are native speakers of Javanese.

In 1928, during Dutch colonial rule, a Congress of National Youth in Indonesia committed itself to the slogan *Indonesia – satu bangsa, satu bahasa, satu tana* (Indonesia – one people, one language, one fatherland). The *satu bahasa* chosen, Malay, was renamed Bahasa Indonesia. It was primarily a trade language used widely in the archipelago but the native language of but a minute fraction of the population of Indonesia. Thus the Indonesian nationalist movement consciously chose a national language which was not that of the largest or most influential indigenous ethnic group but, rather, one which was neutral among the various ethnic groups of the country.[3] During World War II, Bahasa Indonesia was used as a language of administration by the Japanese occupation government. This necessitated an accelerated modernization of the language, as Japanese sponsored groups created needed vocabulary and began the process of standardization. At the end of the war, Bahasa Indonesia was in place as a national language of administration.[4] Upon independence, after World War II, Bahasa Indonesia was, indeed, chosen as the national language. The effect of this decision was to remove language almost entirely from the political arena except, as planned by the conferees, as an instrument of national unity. In addition, knowledge of Bahasa Indonesia has spread widely and it is increasingly becoming a first language of a sizeable portion of the population of Indonesia. It has also been a positive factor in increasing literacy in the nation. In 1945, at the end of the Japanese occupation, the literacy rate was 20.7 percent.[5] In 1986, it had reached 72 percent.

One negative factor is that with the great success of the language policy, Bahasa Indonesia is increasingly threatening the existence of many of the smaller languages of the nation and is even weakening the position of Javanese, a language with approximately 60 million native speakers.

A somewhat similar, although more extreme, situation exists in Israel. When Hebrew was chosen by the nationalist movement as the national language for the hoped-for independent state, it was spoken as a first language by nobody. It has become the first language of an overwhelming majority of Jews born in Israel since independence. Here too, communal first languages such as Yiddish and Jewish dialects of Arabic are dying out, although there are no signs of lesser use of Arabic among the substantial non-Jewish Arabic speaking population.

Compare the experience of Indonesia with that of India. Like Indonesia, India is linguistically heterogeneous with hundreds of languages spoken within the nation. However, unlike what happened in Indonesia, the Indian independence movement decided to adopt a major indigenous language as the national language. The choice, after much debate was Hindi. Hindi is the first language of over half, but less than two-thirds of the people of India, making its demographics resemble those of Javanese in Indonesia. This choice has been noticeably less successful than the adoption of Bahasa Indonesia. Speakers of other major languages of India, languages with millions of speakers and centuries of literary tradition, have seen the choice of Hindi as the national language both as a promotion of the interests of Hindi speakers at the cost of

non-Hindi speakers and as an insult to their languages. Language policy has been a central and divisive element of Indian politics since. Violence has occurred in response to attempts to implement the constitutional provisions and the political map of India has been changed with the redrawing of state lines to reflect linguistic loyalties. The current compromise allows Indian states to choose their own language for state purposes, asserts Hindi as a national language and the language with which Indians are expected to relate to the nation, and provides for a special position for English, the former colonial language, in the realm of education and for intergroup communication.

The comparison of Indonesia with India suggests an interesting generalization: nations such as the US, Sweden, and Portugal have been reasonably successful with language policies which dictate that the nation will be officially or de facto monolingual in the language spoken as a first language by a large majority (call it more than 80 percent) of the population. Nations such as Indonesia, and many of the nations of subsaharan Africa have been successfully monolingual in a language which very few citizens speak as a first language. Clearly major benefits are bestowed upon native speakers of the national language: they will have an advantage to the extent that school and civil service tests are given in their language. These benefits will translate into improved educational and career paths. Where the language chosen as the national language is spoken natively by a large majority of a nation's population, speakers of other languages may agree that the choice is obvious. Where the language chosen as the national language is spoken natively by an infinitesimal proportion of the nation's population, all linguistic groups are equally handicapped and no group has reason to think itself the victim of linguistic discrimination.

An alternative approach to having a single official language is to have a small number of languages as co-official languages on the basis of constitutional equality. In American discussions of language policy for the United States, three nations which are officially bilingual, Belgium, Sri Lanka, and Canada, are often held up as horrible examples of the dangers of a multilingual policy.[6] All are officially bilingual. An examination of these nations' language policies, however, reveals that the lesson is the exact opposite of the one drawn by US English and similar groups advocating a policy of intolerance towards languages other than English in the US.

When Belgium[7] became an independent nation in 1831, the constitution provided that French would be the language of legislation, justice, secondary and higher education, and the armed forces. Notwithstanding this, individuals were guaranteed the right to use the language of their choice, although clearly a native speaker of Flemish[8] would have to speak French as well if (s)he wished an education or to take part in national life. Already by 1840 this enforced monolingualism was the object of a petition signed by 10,000 Flemish speakers asking that the courts and government to the provincial level in Flanders conduct their business in Flemish. This petition was not given serious consideration. The next century and a quarter were marked by continual efforts

by Flemish speakers to establish the equality of Flemish to French within Belgium. In response to this assertion of linguistic nationalism by the Flemish, French speakers became increasingly protective of French in their part of the country.[9]

The situation was resolved in the 1960s when a linguistic dividing line was drawn, separating the country into Flemish and French speaking sections.[10] Along with constitutional reforms giving each section of the country significant areas of self-government, these actions seem to have created a modus vivendi under which the Belgian nation can continue as a single unit.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from the history of Sri Lanka since it attained independence in 1947. The population of Sri Lanka is composed principally of two ethnic groups, usually identified by their respective languages, Sinhala speakers and Tamil speakers, with the former holding an approximately two to one numerical advantage over the latter. Under British rule, the language of education and administration was English. With independence, the Sinhala portion of the population moved to transform its numerical preponderance into economic and cultural hegemony. In 1956 a law was passed declaring Sinhala the national language. Further laws in the next five years provided that Sinhalese be used in civil service exams, education, and administration in the predominately Tamil northern and eastern provinces and that legal decisions be in Sinhalese even in predominantly Tamil speaking areas. Although the violent reaction of the Tamil speakers to this move convinced the majority to write a new law in 1966 providing some protection for the status of the Tamil language in predominately Tamil areas, the damage had been done (and not wholly repaired). This attempt to impose the language of one ethnic group on the other, was one of the prime causes of the civil war on the island.

In an attempt to end communal strife based on linguistic rivalry, the draft constitution proposed by the current government provides that the official languages of the nation shall be Sinhala and Tamil while the national languages shall be Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Every citizen of the country is to be guaranteed the right to transact business with the government in any one of the national languages and to an education in Sinhala or Tamil, with English authorized where available. It is clear that Sri Lanka is an example of the divisive force of imposed monolingualism and that the tolerance and encouragement of language rights is seen by the government as contributing to the establishment of a peaceful, united nation.

A third example is the case of Canada. In 1763, by the Treaty of Paris, France ceded its rights in what is now Canada to the British. A provision of that treaty protected the cultural and linguistic rights of French inhabitants of the ceded territory. The Act of Union promulgated by Great Britain in 1867, granting dominion status to Canada preserved those rights, and they were part of the "unwritten constitution" of Canada until Canada adopted a written constitution, also incorporating the linguistic rights of its francophone population. At least since the 1960s there has been an active movement in Quebec advocating independence for the province, and in the 1995 referendum independence was

defeated by only a few percentage points. Canada would seem to be a clear case illustrating the dangers to national unity of toleration of linguistic minorities.

However, the situation looks somewhat different if we compare the situation in Canada with that in the British Isles. Specifically, if we compare the approach of the Canadian government to the linguistic and cultural minority which they ruled, the French, with the approach of the British government to the linguistic and cultural minority which they ruled, the Irish. From the time of Cromwell, British governments had ruled Ireland in English and were either indifferent or hostile to Gaelic, the language of the vast majority of the Irish people at the beginning of this period. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Irish had overwhelmingly become first language speakers of English; by 1922 less than 5 percent of the population of the island spoke Gaelic.

The results of this Englishization were not what its advocates might have wished. The year 1922 was also when the Irish Free State was established, creating an Ireland independent of British rule. Not only had the imposition of a single language not contributed to unity of the British isles, but the nearly 100 percent successful effort to eradicate Gaelic was one of the major grievances used to rally people to the rebel cause. The fate of Gaelic loomed so large in the nationalist cause that the Irish constitution declared Gaelic to be the first national language and the government of Ireland has expended a great deal of energy and resources trying to revitalize the language.[11]

The end result of this experiment with two language policies is that the union of Ireland with England is severed with no prospect of reunion while the union of Quebec with the rest of Canada, while troubled, continues. Indeed, just as nationalists in Ireland regarded the fate of Gaelic as a major nationalist issue, the future of French was and is one of the major concerns of francophones in Canada. It is easy to see that a more aggressively anti-French policy on the part of the majority anglophones would make the continued adherence of Quebec to the Canadian union untenable.

Another possible answer to the linguistic problems of multilingual nations is to maintain a policy whereby a number of languages are authorized for official use in specific geographical areas of a nation, but one language has special status as the "national language" and is expected to be known by the entire nation's population and used for matters of national concern. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, India is probably the most prominent example of this approach.[12]

As mentioned above, the original plan, envisioned in the constitution, would have made Hindi the national language, spoken as a first or second language by all citizens of the country. Opposition, sometimes violent, from speakers of other languages to this empowerment of Hindi, has resulted in a modus vivendi known as the three language policy. Under this policy, every Indian is expected to know at least three languages, English and Hindi as the national languages plus their state language, where this is not Hindi. For residents of states in which Hindi is the state language, they are to learn another Indian language, preferably one from the south of India.[13] The object of this policy is to equalize

the linguistic burdens between Hindi speakers and other Indians, and, at the same time, equip every Indian with languages to communicate with the national government.

In practice this policy, while providing a framework within which the nation can function, is implemented in a manner far from what was envisioned. Increasingly, the non-Hindi states, especially the Dravidian ones, are functioning monolingually in their state languages while minimizing the role of Hindi. This has the effect of creating a series of monolingual[14] entities, coexisting in one federal unit. In this, India might best be compared with the officially bilingual states that we looked at, Belgium and Canada, with the differences that there are considerably more languages in play in India and that the other two nations have a constitutional commitment to the equality of the regional languages while the Indian constitution asserts the primacy of Hindi.

Much the same situation has arisen in Spain, albeit with many fewer languages. On the death of Franco, a new constitution was adopted providing for regional language status for Basque and Catalan.[15] At least in Catalonia, this has meant that education and regional government have become increasingly monolingually Catalan and the use of Spanish is being narrowed.

Interestingly, many of the nations which are successful on the basis of legal equality for two or several languages such as Canada, Belgium, and Switzerland and the most successful of the national language / regional language countries such as India and Spain use a system of either de jure (Switzerland, Belgium, and Spain) or de facto (Canada and India) regionally defined monolingualism.

It is clear from the above that demographic factors are important in determining language policy. We have seen that monolingual policies work best when the language chosen is either the first language of a large majority of the speakers in a country or the first language of an insignificant portion of the population. Similarly, legal equality among two or more languages is associated with countries such as Canada where there are a small number of languages which together are spoken by the vast majority of the population. National language–regional language situations are harder to define. The most prominent of these, India and the former Soviet Union, seem to come about in countries with large numbers of languages spoken by significant portions of the population. However, Spain offers us an example in which only three languages are involved.

However, there is more to explain. At first glance, India and Nigeria are similar. Both are former British colonies with linguistically diverse populations. India has chosen a national language–regional language policy while Nigeria has gone to official monolingualism in a non-indigenous language: English. Further, neither country has seriously considered the language policy of the other. The differentiating factor would seem to be the prestige of the indigenous languages, some feeling of the speakers of the language that it is worthy of being the national language. This prestige is tied to a language having a written literary tradition. In India, all eleven languages which function as state

languages have a written tradition of centuries, while, for example, none of the indigenous languages of Nigeria do.

The importance of the prestige factor is shown when we consider the situation in Senegal, Burundi, and Paraguay. What they have in common is that although in each case there is an indigenous language spoken by a large majority of the population, Wolof, Kirundi, and Guaraní, the countries are officially monolingual in languages spoken natively by a very small percentage of the population, French in the first two instances and Spanish in the third. None of the three majority languages, Wolof, Kirundi, or Guaraní, have a written tradition which predates colonization.

The factor of prestige is further emphasized when we observe that, notwithstanding the fact there are hundreds of languages spoken in the 53 independent nations of Africa, one of the four languages with long literary traditions: Arabic, English, French, or Portuguese, is a national language of every nation on the continent, despite the fact that the three European languages have virtually no native speakers in most of these countries. In most of these countries they are the sole national language. Clearly, it is not a coincidence that the three European languages are those of the major colonial powers in Africa; but more than colonial tradition is involved. The countries of North Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya have forsaken the colonial languages, French in the first three cases and Italian in the last, for an indigenous language, Arabic. Arabic, of course, has tremendous prestige as the holy language of Islam as well as a long and important literary tradition.

Another factor helping to determine the prestige of a given linguistic variety is the extent to which speakers of various linguistic varieties regard them as separate languages or as dialects of one another. To a great extent, this is not a linguistic question. Varieties which are not mutually intelligible, such as Mandarin and Cantonese, are generally regarded as dialects of the same language, which is itself identified with Mandarin, while varieties which are virtually identical, such as Hindi and Urdu, are not. It is, indeed, possible for two varieties to be so distinct that they must be considered different languages, despite proximity and political unity. This becomes clear if we consider Basque and standard Spanish versus Sicilian and standard Italian. In both cases the former variety is spoken by an ethnic minority within a nation state. But Sicilian is generally considered a dialect of Italian while nobody has ever claimed Basque to be a dialect of Spanish. Clearly Basque is sufficiently distinct from Spanish both typologically and genetically as to make a claim of a language / dialect relationship foolish on the surface. On the other hand, although Sicilian and standard Italian are not mutually intelligible, they are closely related both typologically and genetically.

In terms of language policy there are serious consequences to the assignment of two varieties to a single language or distinct languages. Varieties that are regarded as distinct languages are often objects of nationalist sentiment while dialects are usually regarded simply as incorrect forms of the dominant linguistic variety. In China, for instance, the linguistic varieties that are

genetically close to Mandarin are regarded as dialects of Chinese and have no constitutional protection. On the other hand, the constitution provides that the government should protect and encourage varieties such as Mongolian and Tibetan, which are considered distinct languages. The government thus publishes materials for the fewer than three million speakers of the Mongolian language in China, while providing no such accommodation for more than 77 million speakers of what is regarded as the Wu dialect of Chinese.[16] This neglect of the dialects seems to be accepted as the proper state of affairs both by speakers of Mandarin, the dominant variety, and speakers of the other varieties.

Similarly, in Italy, Lombard, Neapolitan, Piedmontese, and Sicilian are all distinct enough from standard Italian to be non-mutually intelligible, but they are all considered dialects of Italian and questions of their status are not prominent on the political agenda of Italy.[17]

The potential for what is regarded as a language to be a vehicle for nationalist aspirations has been recognized for centuries. As part of his plan to unify the French nation Richelieu established a government policy of imposing standard French upon the nation and reducing the other Romance varieties spoken in France to the status of dialects of French. It has been continued to this day. Similarly, the rulers of Spain attempted for centuries to establish a standard language–dialect relationship between the Spanish of Castile and the other genetically related language varieties in what is now Spain. As noted above, they have been less successful than the French government. Despite several centuries of official policy which has treated Catalan as a dialect of Spanish, the Catalan people maintained their belief that it is a separate language and have in recent years succeeded in having their view enshrined in the constitution.

One further example of the importance of a variety being classified as a language or dialect comes from the recent American controversy over African-American Vernacular English, also known as Ebonics. The Oakland School board fired the first shots in the Ebonics War by issuing a policy advocating that teachers in its predominately African-American schools should have some familiarity with the speech variety of many of their students. Their document also asserted that Ebonics was a language. Opponents of Ebonics were equally firm in their assertion that Ebonics was a dialect of English. Linguists who were questioned on the subject often found the first question to be "is Ebonics a language?" Examining the debate on the subject it is clear that an affirmative answer to this question was an assertion that Ebonics was a worthy subject of study and possible use. A negative answer suggested that Ebonics, being merely a dialect, was essentially a series of mistakes to be corrected.

In sum, then, national language policies can be based upon recognition of a single variety as the sole national language, recognition of two or more varieties on a legally equal basis, or recognition of a single major variety throughout the nation along with official status for other varieties in specified portions of the nation. Any of these policies may be accompanied with greater or lesser toleration of other languages within legal and educational spheres. A successful

language policy will consider both the demographic facts of language distribution within the nation and the prestige afforded each of the competing linguistic varieties.

NOTES

1 This is not to deny that a number of laws have been proposed or passed in the last two centuries, nor that judicial opinions and bureaucratic regulations have been issued, but that, in the main, the United States has had little language law compared with many other countries.

2 I regret being vague, but language statistics are notoriously difficult to compile in the best of situations, and more so where there are lots of languages and many remote areas and peoples. I will use approximate numbers in this paper to avoid giving the reader a spurious sense of exactitude. Where, as with the number of Irish speakers in the Republic of Ireland, there are more reliable figures, I will use less approximate language.

3 Compare this with India and the Philippines: in India the nationalist movement chose Hindi, the largest indigenous language to be the national language after independence, with results which will be discussed later in this chapter, and in the Philippines the nationalist movement chose to base the national language on Tagalog, the language of the most influential indigenous ethnic group.

4 Interestingly, much the same process took place in the Philippines, where Pilipino, a standardized form of Tagalog, was used during the Japanese occupation and was thus shaped for use by the national government at the end of colonial rule.

5 This literacy rate accords with earlier figures and is not an aberration caused by the war.

6 Usually officially bi- or multilingual countries such as Switzerland, Finland, and Singapore which are not subject to high degrees of inter-ethnic stress are ignored in these discussions. It is too soon to judge the success of the constitutional provision in the Republic of South Africa which establishes 11 languages on a coequal status, but it is hard to be optimistic about the chances of a nation actually functioning with so many legally equal national languages. The problems are exacerbated by the relative lack of development of nine of the languages after years of neglect under the previous regime. It should be noted that the actual motivation of these groups, that of maintaining the position of English speakers *vis-à-vis* speakers of other languages is revealed not only in some explicit statements by present and past leaders of the movement, but also by the horror with which they view laws passed in Quebec to protect the position of the French language. Laws similar to those they advocate for the US if one would only substitute *English* for *French* in the laws' wording.

7 Most of the information on the history of the language struggle in Belgium is taken from Rita Moore-Robinson's chapter in Stephen B. Wickman, ed., *Belgium: A Country Study*, The American University, 1984.

8 Flemish is the variety of Dutch spoken in Belgium.

9 This is not to assert that linguistic issues were the only ones in the conflict between Flanders and Wallonia,

but, as in many cases, other issues were symbolized by linguistic ones, and the linguistic issues contributed to a general hardening of the lines.

10 Actually a German speaking section was also established to accommodate the approximately 3 percent of the population which is German speaking.

11 Unfortunately, this effort has not been crowned with success as the Irish people, having one usable language, English, have not felt a need to learn another. The number of Gaelic speakers at last count was approximately the same 5 percent that it was in 1922. Of course, given the decline in the number of speakers prior to that date, halting the decline may be counted as a partial victory.

12 India actually maintains two languages of wider communication, Hindi and English, alongside the languages used for official purposes on a regional basis.

13 The four major languages of the south of India are of the Dravidian language family, where the bulk of the languages of the north of India are Indo-European and genetically close to Hindi.

14 Ignoring here the role of English.

15 Galician, too, received some official status, but the area has lagged behind the others in promoting the use of the regional language.

16 Of course the nature of the Chinese writing system allows for texts to be written in Mandarin to be read with the lexicon of the various dialects, but the syntax of written material is Mandarin.

17 In the past few years, northern separatist groups have made some appeal for the recognition of Lombard as the language of their proposed new nation, but this does not seem to have been a major issue.