

1 Introduction: The Practice of Language Policy Research

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Applied linguistics is an intellectual space – a transdiscipline – where theories and methods from multiple fields intersect around language issues (Halliday 2001). Language policy, as Spolsky has pointed out, is a “paradigmatic example of applied linguistics in that it must draw on a range of academic fields to develop practical plans to modify language practices and beliefs” as well as to investigate policy processes empirically (Spolsky 2005, 31). Theories and methods are not merely imported from this range of academic fields, but refined and strategically combined in order to conduct research that is problem-centered, or issue-focused (Hult 2010a). Specialists in language policy and planning (LPP) have drawn upon a broad constellation of research methods that have roots in diverse disciplines such as anthropology, law, linguistics, political science, social psychology, and sociology (of language), among others, in order to conduct inquiry on problems or issues related to policy formation, interpretation, implementation, resistance, and evaluation.

Beginning in the 1960s, early language planning was primarily something that a handful of scholars *did*, and only later became an object of study (Spolsky 2005). These early scholars were called upon to develop strategies and frameworks for language-planning initiatives and produced many of the theoretical frameworks that we use today, very notably the distinction between status planning (focused on the functions of language) and corpus planning (focused on the forms of language), and, later, acquisition planning (focused on language learning) (see review in Hornberger 2006).

The 1980s and 1990s saw a growing group of critical scholars who explicitly engaged with language planning as a hegemonic mechanism potentially imbued with dominant and marginalizing discourses (e.g. Ruiz 1984; Tollefson 1991). Tollefson,

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for example, proposed the historical-structural approach, which focuses on the historical and sociopolitical processes that lead to the development of language policies. Around the same time, sociolinguistic researchers who utilized ethnography began to take an interest in LPP. Hornberger's (1988) ethnographic investigation of language planning and bilingual education in Peru is one of the first to examine how language planning impacted language use in schools and communities.

Since the 1990s, and especially beginning in the 2000s, there has been a rapidly increasing number of researchers who utilize ethnographic and discourse-analytic methods to examine LPP processes "on the ground," so to speak, with a focus on how policy texts and discourses relate to language practices in schools and communities (e.g. Davis 1994; Freeman 1998; King 2001). While this line of LPP research is prominent, as evidenced by recent edited volumes (e.g. McCarty 2011; Menken and García 2010), many other scholars have applied a broad spectrum of research methods from their respective fields to LPP studies, including economics (Grin 2003), political science (May 2001), and law (Leibowitz 1984; de Varennes 1996), among many others.

Over the last half-century of inquiry, then, research methods have been taken beyond their disciplinary foundations and honed specifically for LPP investigations. Thus, the field of LPP is maturing as scholars are paying more and more attention to diverse and critical ways of approaching LPP issues and, concomitantly, to research rigor (Johnson 2013; Menken and García 2010; Ricento 2006). As such, we believe the time is right for a volume that consolidates research approaches to LPP.

Our initial motivation for developing this book emerged from two distinct experiences: (1) during our dissertation fieldwork we felt a need for a resource like this book, and (2) our supervision of students leads us to believe that they, as well, would benefit from a book that helps them design and conduct language policy studies. Although students take qualitative and quantitative research methods courses during MA and PhD coursework, their application to studies of LPP is often left unexamined. It would, of course, be difficult for any college or department to offer advanced research methods courses in every domain in which students might do thesis or dissertation work. Indeed, part of the process of conducting independent work is to build on a general foundation of research methods to develop the details of a specific study. To this end, students in the early stages of developing a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation embark on substantial reading of methodological literature, in addition to other relevant topical and theoretical sources, to begin framing their own original studies.

In guiding our students, we have found it easy to recommend texts that address core principles and social theory related to language policy (e.g. Cooper 1989; Kaplan and Baldauf 1997; Ricento 2006; Shohmay 2006; Spolsky 2004, 2009); however, suggesting foundational texts on research design in language policy is much more challenging. There are many excellent methods texts in general areas such as discourse analysis, ethnography, and sociolinguistics, and empirical studies of language policy abound in journals and edited volumes. Going from general research methods to designing one's own *language policy* study, though, can be a long conceptual leap for novice researchers – this book is intended as a springboard.

As Nancy Hornberger (2013; this volume) points out, in contrast to theoretically or disciplinary-driven research where methods follow more directly, researchers

engaging with problem-centered or issue-focused inquiry must rely on “methodological rich points.” These are points of reflection at all stages of the research process where one considers whether or not one has access to the most appropriate method(s) in relation to one’s research question(s). Such reflection requires a critical awareness of what methods are available, the kinds of research questions for which they are epistemologically appropriate, and the sorts of data and analysis they facilitate. Without such a methodological overview, there is a risk that a novice researcher will design a study using only the methods to which they were exposed in methods courses, forcing them to fit research questions for which the methods are less than ideal or, perhaps worse, altering the research questions to fit the methods instead of the issue or problem in need of investigation. Alternatively, students must invest considerable time and energy on their own to gain the scope of methodological perspective needed to select appropriate methods and extrapolate their potential applications to LPP issues.

Accordingly, we have designed the present volume as an attempt to offer readers a bird’s eye view of a range of research methods as they can be applied to LPP. Inspired by our own students’ needs, we have kept the novice reader in mind at all phases of developing the book. In selecting topics, we have considered both the fundamentals of approaching LPP as a domain of inquiry and specific methods for designing and implementing a study. All chapters, written by leading language policy researchers known for their attention to methodological rigor, are intended as entry points for readers with little or no familiarity with the topics. As such, the contributions in this volume are not meant to be comprehensive in their coverage, but rather to provide the reader with an overview of key methods and methodologies to consider thereby helping the reader make informed methodological decisions as they conceptualize LPP studies and continue to read more deeply about specific methods.

The first section includes five chapters that address fundamental considerations when embarking on a language policy study. These include issues that arise during the conceptualization and implementation stages of inquiry such as the deliberate critical thinking process of selecting research methods as well as reflexive issues related to researcher positionality and ethics when investigating sociopolitical issues around language policy. The first three chapters, thus, offer guidance on how to develop a language policy study and then how to carry it out in a responsible manner. The section also includes chapters that address, respectively, two fields of scholarship that have an especially salient connection to politics and policy: political theory and law. While these are by no means the only scholarly perspectives from which to approach language policy, political theory and law are two fields that place politics and policy as the focus of inquiry (and they are also fields in which politicians and legislators often have training), making them useful to understand, whether one chooses to embrace a political or legal orientation or to follow one of the many other traditions of inquiry.

The second section, in turn, comprises thirteen chapters, focusing on different methods for language policy investigation from a diverse range of epistemological and disciplinary traditions. The chapters in this section are written as basic how-to guides for planning and implementing studies. Each is organized with the same structure to facilitate comparison, helping readers easily determine what each method offers and how different methods might complement each other. As readers

will quickly notice, many of these methods can work together, and we have tried to illuminate these connections with cross-references throughout. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction that situates the method intellectually and explains its relevance to language policy. Next, the development of research questions is considered with special attention to the kinds of questions that align with the method. Methods for data collection and analysis are then discussed, emphasizing the practice of conducting research. Each chapter concludes with a brief case study that illustrates how the method has been applied in an LPP study along with a short list of sources for further reading about the method.

The final section of the volume is an appendix that offers advice about public engagement with language policy initiatives and debates. Language policy researchers often wish to make a positive social impact in addition to, or as part of, their inquiry. As scholars, we receive training in research but seldom in the professional skills needed for successful engagement with public policy. With this in mind, the four appendix contributors offer advice based on their own experience with engagement in sectors that are of special interest to LPP researchers: communities and schools, political debate, government, and media. Each contribution offers hands-on tips for how to get involved and how to interact productively with policy stakeholders.

As language policy continues to diversify as a field, its strength going forward lies in the methodological rigor of well-conceptualized and systematically conducted studies. It is in this way that the field will make its most meaningful social contributions through research that can inform the creation and sound implementation of equitable language policies. In all, it is our hope that the present volume will contribute to the rigor of the field by offering a practical methodological toolkit for students who are new to language policy and a reference for established LPP researchers.

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