

## POSTPRINT

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**Language policy (research and practice in applied linguistics)**, by David Cassels Johnson, Houndmills, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, xvi + 291 pp., £63.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-230-25169-4/£19.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-230-25170-0

A volume entitled ‘Language Policy’ inevitably triggers the question as to why a book with such a title is needed: what is the added value to ongoing debates on language policy, language planning, language management, and similar concepts in sociolinguistics and related fields in the light of existing volumes of (almost) the same title which have been published in English in recent years (e.g. Shohamy, 2006: *Language Policy*; Spolsky, 2004: *Language Policy*; Wright, 2003: *Language Policy and Language Planning*), of introductory overview collections (Ricento, 2006 (Ed.): *An Introduction to Language Policy*; Spolsky, 2012 (Ed.): *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy*), or of older volumes such as Kaplan and Baldauf (1997: *Language planning from practice to theory*) which are still valuable as systematic introductions to the field for broader audiences. Which new perspectives are raised, and do they justify the publication of such a volume beyond the legitimate interest of Palgrave Macmillan to add a more recent volume to its ‘Research and Practice in Applied Linguistics’ series (which undoubtedly helps to spread knowledge about concepts and debates within the field, and which, from the perspective of scholars working in the field, is of course of usefulness in its own right)?

According to the general editors’ preface (pp. xiii–xiv), the series intends to ‘identify some of the key researchable areas in the field and provide workable examples of research projects’ and to ‘illustrate the message that in Applied Linguistics there can be no good professional practice that isn’t based on good research’ and vice versa. Thus, the main interest of the reader of David Cassels Johnson’s volume ‘Language Policy’ – besides an update on most current academic debates on language policy – might be to see how the author establishes this link between research and a practical application of language policy issues. In order to achieve this connection, the book is divided into seven chapters within III parts, in addition to which there is an eighth chapter in Part IV entitled ‘Resources’ which consists not only of a list of references, but which is also a valuable collection of titles of important books and journals, of organizations, conferences, policy documents, and web sites of relevance to students and researchers of language policy (even though these resources are limited to publications and documents in English and from English-speaking countries). In total, the (paperback version of the) book comprises xvi + 291 densely printed pages, its format is user friendly, and the price of GBP 19,99 plus delivery (if ordered directly from the publisher) makes it affordable to broader audiences (alternatively, there is also a hardcover and an electronic version). Paper, print, and the haptic notion are of a standard which can be expected from a publisher such as Palgrave Macmillan.

Part I (‘Laying the Groundwork’) starts in Chapter 1 with a solid overview and discussion of current definitions of language policy and related terms, taking into account the most

important concepts from history and the present day. Even though this is – given the limited space of such a book – necessarily at some points somewhat arbitrary, this chapter provides a useful introduction to understanding the different perceptions which the term ‘language policy’ might evoke. Part of the focus of this discussion is laid on McCarty’s (2011) perception of language policy as a complex sociocultural process and on Tollefson’s (1991) positioning of language policy within critical theory (pp. 6–7). These foci indicate Johnson’s view on language policy which corresponds to today’s widely accepted perceptions that language policy not only consists of government or other top-down activities, but it also ‘exists across many different layers or levels’ (p. 7). However, Johnson rejects the idea that language practices and ideologies – even if they are closely intertwined – necessarily have to be subsumed under the term ‘language policy’, as other important authors (notably Spolsky, 2004) do. The introductory discussion results in Johnson’s own – rather lengthy – definition of language policy as a

policy mechanism that impacts the structure, function, use, or acquisition of language and includes: 1. Official regulations (...); 2. Unofficial, covert, de facto, and implicit mechanisms, connected to language beliefs and practices (...); 3. Not just products but processes (...); 4. Policy texts and discourses across multiple contexts and layers of policy activity (...). (p. 9)

Chapter 2 adds to the theoretical background by highlighting important steps in the history of language policy research, in line with similar chapters by, for example, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) or Jernudd/Nekvapil (2012) (in the ‘Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy’, Spolsky (Ed., 2012)). This again is very useful to readers inexperienced in the field and readers with solid previous knowledge too, even though this chapter likewise tends to be slightly eclectic at times (again, to a certain degree this seems to be necessary in the light of the extensive writings in the field throughout the past years). Approaches which are discussed in separate sub-chapters are critical language policy, ethnography of language policy, reversing language shift and linguistic imperialism, ecology of language, and educational language policy (the latter given particular attention due to the author’s background in the educational sector). There is a certain focus on critical language policy in the tradition of Tollefson (p. 40) which is taken up regularly, indicating how the author positions himself in the debate and anticipating how a ‘critical’ view is dominant in most parts of the book. In a sense, this helps to remind the readers about the general attitude underlying the book, even though, in particular in the light of the book’s intention of providing an overview and an introduction to the field, it would at times be desirable to see a clearer distinction between a presentation and discussion of concepts by other authors and the personal preferences of the author.

Part II (‘Findings’) at first (Chapter 3) summarizes and discusses eight case studies by different authors from various parts of the world (Wales, Mozambique, France, Laos, Sweden, China, Israel, and the USA). It thereby exemplifies the diversity of existing language policies and of language policy research. To discuss existing studies at length on a meta-level and thereby explain different contexts, theories, and methods comprise a fruitful way of introducing the reader to the wider spectrum of language policies. It also clearly reveals the differences between official language policies and practices by speech communities and stresses how different methods should be considered complementary in language policy research. Again, it is noticeable in this chapter that the author has a background in education – there is a strong focus on language policies in education, in particular with regard to classroom discourse, sometimes to the detriment of cases from other domains. In addition to presenting case-study examples, however, the value of the

chapter is revealed in a sense that *en passant* it presents and discusses additional important concepts which had not been mentioned in the first two chapters. For instance, it includes a discussion of ‘discourse planning’ (p. 82) as a relatively recent concept introduced to the range of basic language policy categories (in line with LoBianco, 2005) or of concordancing and collocating as two important techniques within corpus linguistic approaches to language policy which have received rather little attention in language policy research so far (p. 89). The focus of the book on discussions of, for example, how language policy reflects and is shaped by the practising of ideological hegemony again shows the author’s own theoretical background, as exemplified also in statements such as ‘we need substantive methods for drawing connections between particular language ideologies and particular language policies’ (p. 93) or by the summarizing remark that a connection between the critical focus on power and the ethnographic focus on agency of individuals is needed. In total, however, and in spite of some thematic limitations, Chapter 3 is one of the strongest chapters in the book: it enables the reader to get an insight into how intertwined ideologies, linguistic practices, and numerous actors within the creation, appropriation, and implementation of language policy can be. That the author clearly positions himself in the field is not to the detriment of his argumentation – even for readers who prefer different approaches, the collection of examples and the summarizing methodological remarks are of high value.

Chapter 4 links up with the case studies presented in Chapter 3 by drawing a number of generalizing conclusions. These culminate in the attempt to ‘proffer a list of 12 general findings’ (p. 95) which are strongly highlighted and may be considered one of the major results of the book and one of the major added values to the debate. Even if the author does not always explain precisely why he extracts exactly these issues as summarizing conclusions from his review of literature of the field, this is a highly interesting attempt to provide points of departure for further language policy analysis. At the same time, the 12 statements are sufficiently controversial as to possibly facilitate a thorough debate among language policy researchers within the context of the perceived ‘new wave of language policy and planning’ (p. 95, a quote taken over from Hult, 2012) which might contribute to consolidating the field and building the over-arching theory which is still missing in language policy research. Upon closer examination, some of the 12 findings might indeed have the potential to serve as fundamental theorems, even though they seem also to be partially stating the obvious. Findings 1 (‘Language policy agents have power’), 2 (‘Language policy power is differentially allocated among *arbiters* and *implementers*’), and 3 (‘Governing bodies use language policies for control’) establish the link between language policy, power, and control, in accordance with the ideological outline of the book. Findings 4 (‘National multilingual language policies *can* and *do* open spaces for multilingual education and minority languages’) and 5 (‘Local multilingual language policies *can* and *do* open spaces for multilingual education and minority languages’) focus on the necessary interplay of different levels of decision-making. Some findings appear quite spectacular and have far-reaching implications for an understanding of language policies, for example, findings 10 (‘National language policies are not necessarily ideologically consistent’) and 11 (‘Policy intentions are especially difficult to ascertain’); they emphasize the differences between cause and effect, intentional and accidental outcomes of language policy activities, and focus on actual practices and the relationship between languages and their speakers. Among those statements, however, which seem to be rather trivial are findings 7 (‘Macro multilingual language policies are not necessarily enough’) and 8 (‘Local multilingual language policies are not necessarily enough either’), which are related to findings 6 (‘Top-down and bottom-up are relative’) and 9 (‘Meso-level language policies matter’). The

latter is closely related to the American context and is possibly less understandable to non-American readers, since the meso-level is here defined as policies by the individual US states, whereas other countries might have considerably different experiences (in addition to the fact that one might also argue that policies by subdivisions of a federal system such as US or Australian states, German Länder, and Canadian provinces are rather macro than meso policies). Finding 12 ('Language policy constitutes its own genre') is finally rather doubtful – or again trivial, if one considers the specialized language of any field to constitute a 'genre' on its own. It also should be noted that within the explanations of the findings, there is again a strong focus on the educational sector. In total, however, these 12 findings are a useful, even if at times not uncontroversial, summary of the results of existing language policy studies which might pave the way for a new wave of discussing the 'essentials' of language policy research.

Chapter 5 ('Research approaches and methods') builds the bridge to the more practical part of the book. The author acknowledges that not all possible research methods were included in the discussion, which necessarily leaves some important approaches undiscussed. The sub-chapters are devoted to historical-textual analysis, political theory and law, media discourse, ethnography, and (critical) discourse analysis, with the latter being the longest part in this chapter. Again, this is a very valuable part of the book: it includes an explanation of a number of important concepts and, by providing case-study evidence, discusses advantages and disadvantages of the approaches available on the market. The chapter is summarized in a table (pp. 168–169) which aims at establishing an 'interdisciplinary method for analyzing language policy' by classifying policy activities into the four categories of 'creation', 'interpretation', 'appropriation', and 'instantiation'. These four categories are defined according to the agents of interest and suitable research methods, and Johnson does not fail to mention that 'the language policy research method adopted will depend on the research questions and the focus of the research' (p. 168). This 'over-arching framework' may indeed provide a useful guideline for anyone interested in closer examination of a certain aspect of language policy.

With the highly thought-provoking and well-summarized previous chapters in mind, it is then, however, with disappointment that one perceives the remaining parts of the book. Chapter 6 exemplifies language policy research by focusing on the method of 'action research'. It thereby again takes up an example from the educational sector, focusing on 'critical' science and explicitly aiming at providing a framework which includes an element of social change as one of the aims of the activity (p. 172). Unfortunately, the chapter is in many respects the weakest of the book. The example method is somewhat unusual, since not many research projects on language policy have applied the 'action research' approach. The method in itself might be worth closer examination and its systematic application certainly allows for valuable insights and understandings of a language policy situation. Yet, it involves a change of perspective: whereas the preceding chapters essentially dealt with the researcher's perspective, this chapter now takes a position of someone actively involved in language policy creation and implementation. Even if the author is aware of this (as highlighted in the announcement quoted earlier), not all readers will necessarily wish to leave the researcher's or analyst's role, and the chapter thereby raises the question of who its intended target audience actually is. Also, even if someone might wish to get involved in research and possibly social change in the sense of 'action research', it will strike most readers as rather unlikely conducting a study which requires the allocation of such an enormous amount of resources and which involves such a high number of people and activities as part of a major research project. In total, it is

therefore quite disappointing that the space dedicated in the book to providing guidance for applying a research model in practice has been used for a rather special and rare method which will be of little practical value to most readers.

After the specific example provided in Chapter 6, Chapter 7 again broadens the perspective by discussing the practical application of doing research on language policy in the sense of a more general guidance. Johnson here makes a suggestion for a typical research trajectory – a highly relevant part of the book and arguably one of its major achievements, not least with regard to the series' aim to create a link between research and application. There is a slightly overlong section on ethical issues which distracts attention from the main focus of developing a research project, but the general guideline with the positioning of the researcher, the necessity of a solid literature review, and then – most importantly – the three steps of creation, interpretation, and appropriation of a research project may be a useful guideline indeed. There is a certain inconsistency, in that Chapter 7 frequently speaks about the necessity to analyze certain texts (such as government policy documents), whereas the previous chapters stressed the importance of analyzing discourses which would include more than just written documents – yet, the practical examples given and the example research questions (which, however, are missing for the sub-chapter on appropriation) are very valuable. Also the long part on data collection and analysis seems very helpful.

The major problem with Chapter 7, however (and to a lesser degree this also applies to the content-wise more problematic Chapter 6), is that these last parts of the book do not really function as texts. They are rather collections of text boxes with lists of important factors (which in themselves are very useful), but in many cases these text boxes remain entirely without comment. In contrast to the previous chapters, there is very little text cohesion, which leaves the reader somewhat puzzled and which requires a lot of interpretation as to how the different parts may add up to each other. In total, Chapter 7 unfortunately provides the impression of a rather unfinished draft, as if the author needed to meet a deadline and was not able to stick to his own previously established standards of argumentation and of textual composition. Along the same lines, it is noteworthy that there is neither a concluding sub-chapter of Chapter 7, nor a summary of the main findings of the book as a whole in the last part of Chapter 7 or in a separate conclusion. This is a serious setback with regard to the quality of the total book, since many of the issues raised in Chapter 7 – even though some of them again seem slightly eclectic – are very useful. The book thereby prevents itself from achieving its aim to contribute to a solid methodological guideline for language policy research.

In summary, therefore, David Cassels Johnson's introductory overview volume 'Language Policy' raises some new perspectives; it summarizes a number of theoretical developments including most recent debates, and suggests several interesting fundamental theorems as the basis for further debate which are thereby a valuable and potentially influential contribution to the long-lasting consolidation process of the field. Yet, readers should also not expect to experience a reinvention of the wheel. The book continues the tradition of volumes such as those by Wright, Spolsky, or Shohamy and thereby adds to the existing literature; however, in particular the (larger scale) Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy (Spolsky Ed., 2012) provides a by far more detailed overview of the field. To get back to the ultimate question of the added value for the scientific community, it is in particular Johnson's dedicated 'critical' approach which adds a different angle to the debate, including its focus on discourse planning as a relatively new part of language policy (research). The parts on research methods and the guidelines on how to conduct research projects (and possibly how to get involved in policy creation), in spite of the setbacks

mentioned, render the book useful not only for scholars and students, but also for policy-makers of all kinds including grassroots initiatives. The highlighting of concepts, quotes, and definitions in text boxes throughout the book additionally also allows for its encyclopedic use.

In spite of this generally positive evaluation, however, there are also a number of rather critical issues which need to be addressed, some of which might have been easy to avoid. The most surprising setback is the poor textual quality of the somewhat ‘unfinished’ Chapters 6 and 7 and the lack of a conclusion or summary which would deserve this name, even though the ideas presented in the book might even well be suited to facilitating the suggestion of a summarizing model of language policy research. For an evaluation of the book it is also important to keep in mind the ‘critical’ focus of the author, which results in some authors and theories receiving little or no attention, whereas others are overemphasized. Also, the focus on education – arguably caused by the professional background of the author – often leaves rather little space for other aspects. Keeping the author’s educational background in mind, it is also surprising that the practical service to students and other newcomers to the field is rather limited – there are no questions or chapter-to-chapter exercises for repetition and discussion, or practical tasks for the readers, which would make the volume even more suitable as an introduction to the field. In addition, it is noteworthy that the book’s index is extremely short and essentially fails to fulfill its function.

Other setbacks include the fact that there are only references in English (except for one in French). References focus on some of the ‘usual suspects’ of ‘critical’ linguistics, thereby providing a limited picture of the field. It would have given the book more credibility if, for instance, the long European tradition of research on language policy and multilingualism had been included to a greater degree, with scholars such as Jeroen Darquennes, Durk Gorter, Jiří Nekvapil, Peter Nelde, Miquel Strubell, Lars Vikør, or Tomasz Wicherkiewicz, just to name a few (who have partly published in English). Even if the case-study examples quoted in the text stem from many different parts the world, this necessarily limits the perspective and raises the question as to whether the author did not wish or was not able to include examples from language policy debates from other countries. The large number of examples from the USA additionally makes the reading sometimes more difficult for people who are less familiar with the US system of education, politics, etc., where a better explanation of some of the structures would have been quite helpful. In this context it is interesting to note that the reading recommendations only consist of texts given in English, which not only provides a limited perspective, but which also lends support to the dominance of English in academic circles – this in itself being an instance of language policy which a ‘critical’ author might have wished to avoid.

Some individual issues which might have been worth discussing in more detail refer to claims which would need to be better explained, or which are doubtful in themselves. For instance, the statement that sees teaching as a ‘marginalized profession’ (p. 170) would need explanation for readers who are less familiar with discourses on education; and this claim is also somewhat in contradiction to the important role that teachers are assigned to in language policy-shaping throughout the book. Another issue is that the overwhelming majority of examples throughout the book are from language-policy fields which would traditionally be assigned as part of status planning. In spite of the quote from Jaffe (2011) (repeated on p. 29) and also the perception by authors such as Fishman (2006) in a sense that corpus and status planning are always necessarily intertwined, at least some examples from corpus planning in the classical sense would have been desirable, in particular since this distinction continues to dominate in language policy-making in reality and many organizations are still defined by this separation of activities.

Despite these critical aspects, however, David Cassels Johnson's 'Language Policy' is a useful addition to the field as an introduction and contribution to theory-building which takes up many recent debates in academic language policy circles. Its readership will in particular consist of scholars and advanced students, whereas for less advanced students or an interested lay-audience a less theoretical and at times less dense text might at times have been more adequate. The latter comment also applies to the international (non-English-native) readership of books by publishers such as Palgrave Macmillan. Additionally, readers should therefore not forget to consult other existing introductions to the field of language policy – in both English and other languages that are available to them – in order to obtain a wider insight, both from an ideological point of view and in order to do justice to traditions of language policy (research) in other countries.

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