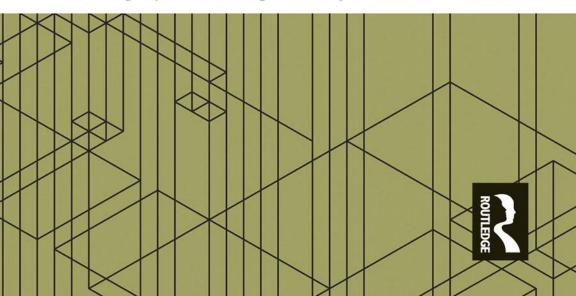# RESEARCHING AGENCY IN LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING

Edited by
Gregory Paul Glasgow and Jeremie Bouchard

Routledge

Researching Agency in Language Policy and Planning

This concise collection features seven studies on agency in language policy and planning across five different national contexts. Building on themes explored in *Agency in Language Policy and Planning*, this volume highlights the complex relationship between agency and broader ideological discourses, integrating social theory towards contributing to and enhancing growing scholarship on language policy and planning. This book will be of particular interest to students and scholars in language policy and planning, language and education, critical sociolinguistics and applied linguistics.

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Introduction

Gregory Paul Glasgow and
Jeremie Bouchard

Originally viewed as a macro-level endeavor, where governmental planners decided on how language is used, taught, learned and developed in social life, language policy and planning (LPP) has emerged as both an interdisciplinary and specialized field in the mid-twentieth century (Garcia & Menken, 2010). As a sub-discipline of sociolinguistics, LPP scholarship continues to grow amidst a stage of unprecedented human movement, information flow and multicultural/multilingual practice. The field has evolved in its associated epistemologies (Johnson & Ricento, 2013; Ricento, 2000), and yielded sociocultural and ethnographic insight into (a) tensions between macro-level discourses and practices potentially promoting prescriptive ideas about language use, function and acquisition in social contexts, and (b) micro-level realities where official planning efforts may fall short of stated objectives. Indeed, the rapidity of social change will necessitate the need for future LPP research to develop more sophisticated theoretical and methodological approaches towards examining the full complexity of linguistic phenomena embedded in broader sociological contexts in late modernity. This short edited volume is a modest attempt at meeting this need.

As we highlighted in our companion volume, *Agency in Language Policy and Planning: Critical Inquiries* (Bouchard & Glasgow, forthcoming), LPP scholarship has presented LPP as different processes along a continuum stretching from potentially hegemonic mechanisms to complex interactions between structural, cultural and agentive forces. These various conceptualizations can be situated roughly within four major phases of LPP research (Ricento, 2000): the *neoclassical* phase, which saw LPP scholars providing technical and expert support to government officials in matters related to language; the *historical-structural* approach, which considers the historical processes of language planning as inextricably connected to structural forces promoting the interests of dominant and powerful socio-political actors (Tollefson, 1991); the *critical language policy* (CLP) approach to LPP research, which attempts to unpack and counter structures of oppression within LPP worlds; and the *ethnography of language policy* (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007), based on the

notion that "researchers need to go beyond studies that focus only on the global, national and institutional dimension of policymaking and on the political and ideological processes" driving them (Martin-Jones & da Costa Cabral, 2018, p. 8). The ethnography of LPP phase—within which the seven studies in the current volumes are situated—foregrounds the role of agency. In addition to this epistemological emphasis, however, LPP researchers recognize the dangers in exclusively mapping out agentive processes, which would provide a view of agency as operating somehow independently from its sociocultural context and structure. In a recent state-of-the-art handbook on LPP, Pérez-Milans and Tollefson (2018) point out the need not merely to resolve the paradox of coexistence between historical-structural forces and social actors' processes but more specifically to sharpen existing approaches towards addressing the paradox itself. In doing so, they acknowledge the "inchoate tension" (Johnson & Johnson, 2015, p. 223) between the two. Recognizing that critical realism seeks for structure and agency to be "analyzed separately, because structure precedes agency in social structure reproduction" (p. 5), Pérez-Milans and Tollefson (2018) stress that LPP research should not limit itself to the study of discursive realities in LPP but also focus "more explicitly on material realities understood not merely as disembodied life forms embedded in discursive systems, but rather as concrete human beings with substantial and inescapable material needs" (Pérez-Milans & Tollefson, 2018, p. 5). Without presenting the work conducted in both *Agency in Language Policy and Planning* and this volume as comprehensive and conclusive attempts at overcoming this paradox, we feel confident in claiming that, in these two volumes, the complex relationship between agency and structure within specific LPP contexts has been explored successfully because due consideration was paid to the distinct and emergent properties of these two layers of the social realm.

Drawing partly from our work in *Agency in Language Policy and Planning*, the studies in this companion volume align themselves within the ethnography of LPP approach and explore the actions of language policy agents and how they navigate policy contexts, which may or may not constrain their capacity to act. These studies acknowledge the intersection between structure, culture and agency while simultaneously providing critical insight into the particular LPP contexts under scrutiny. This echoes to some extent Johnson and Johnson's (2015) view of the CLP framework as inclusive, allowing for the examination of both structure and agency through a variety of research methods and approaches.

As suggested in the title, the current volume is concerned more specifically with methodological issues driving agency in LPP research. While *Agency in Language Policy and Planning* attempted to bring further sophistication of existing theories on agency in LPP, the chapters in this volume place a stronger emphasis on concrete strategies for conducting this type of research. Yet, as solid methodology requires solid theoretical

work, we invite the reader to both consult the companion volume and focus on how the chapter contributors in this volume move from theory to methodology, then to analysis, and finally back to theory. At the same time, we do want to acknowledge that research methodology is but one concern for the chapter contributors in this volume. Although methodology is foundational to any research program, it is important to step back, look at the broader picture and recognize that the central purposes of research on agency in LPP are for researchers to (a) provide clear and comprehensive accounts of the LPP worlds under investigation (including agency), (b) reflect on a multitude of issues (linguistic, sociological, political, philosophical, etc.) embedded in their work and (c) provide strategies towards emancipation—that is, the dismantling of structures of oppression and power inequalities within LPP worlds.

LPP Research Methods and Implications for Researching Agency

Due to its complex and ideologically fraught nature (Lawton, 2016), LPP research is recognized broadly as interdisciplinary scholarship. While Barakos and Unger (2016) associate this quality with the new wave of LPP research, Tollefson (2008) rightfully points out that this interdisciplinarity should not be the exception but rather the norm in LPP research at large. To date, however, while there have been substantive contributions to the topic of research methodology in LPP (Hult & Johnson, 2015; Johnson, 2013, 2018; Kamwangamalu, 2011; Ricento, 2006), no volume to date has explicitly framed this discussion within agency in LPP research. Even if LPP research has undergone considerable epistemological shifts, it is crucial for us to understand what these shifts mean to the development of new methodological trends (Johnson, 2018), and more importantly, what the challenges are in coordinating various research strategies to arrive at solid and informative conclusions. In this sense, Unger (2016, p. 98) is well justified in underlying "not only the benefits of thinking of policy as multi-layered social action, but also the challenges involved in working with multi-layered and very different data sets that may require different linguistic, discursive or content-based analytical approaches".

As with ethnographers in general, LPP researchers adopting ethnographic means of research rely on data collected from survey questionnaires, census and demographic surveys, linguistic databases, policy documents, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, field notes, audio- and video recordings and photographs (Hornberger, 2015). To this list, we would add classroom observation, participant observation, reflexive journals, ethnographic fieldwork, focus group deliberations, sociolinguistic surveys, language curricula, textbooks and lesson plans, articles in various media outlets, parliamentary debates, and of course multimodal

and mediated sources of discourse. Also, with online communication now occupying a greater place in human life, original approaches to data collection and analysis in LPP research are sure to emerge, a good example of which is provided by Huang (2016), who uses instant messaging–based interviews. Although the list of methods in research on agency in LPP is extensive, researchers should remind themselves that no single method suffices to account for the complexity of agency in LPP. Drawing from Unger's statement earlier, what matters most is the combination of multiple approaches to analyzing data at different layers of the LPP world, ranging both within and somewhere between agency and structure.

While the subject of methodology in LPP scholarship is vast and in need of further expansion, in this very concise volume, we merely wish to highlight core methods of data collection and analysis of prevalence in LPP research to date and indicate their relevance to research on agency in LPP. While other volumes have pointed towards new avenues of investigation, including nexus analysis, critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics and LPP in new media (Hult & Johnson, 2015), we discuss three well-known approaches of research methodology we believe are central to research on agency in LPP, strategies employed by the chapter contributors in this volume: ethnography, quantitative data gathering and analysis, and discourse analytic approaches to LPP research.

Ethnography

Canagarajah (2006, p. 153) points out that "while LPP is about how things 'ought to be', ethnography is about what 'is' ". Except for Tan (Chapter 3), all chapter contributors in this volume adopt methods aligned with traditional ethnographic observation, including language surveys. (e.g., Hatoss in Chapter 2, Boucher-Yip in Chapter 4 and Ollerhead in Chapter 7).

One major critique of ethnography is its penchant for particular epistemological biases privileging the actions of individuals in context over structural factors, a tendency that can potentially warp interpretations of the discourses and actions of agents within local communities (Canagarajah, 2006; Kamwangamalu, 2011). This is why it is essential for participant observers to situate evidence of agentive processes not necessarily as nested within structure but certainly in relation with broader structural and cultural forces, which act as constraints and enablements upon agentive movements. In addition, researchers adopting ethnographic means should aim towards embeddedness within the communities being studied, while also incorporating reflexive analysis in their overall work. McCarty (2015) argues that it is important for researchers to keep in mind how they arrive at their interpretations and how they determine the point of view of the participants, all essential steps in assessing agency.

Indeed, reflexivity and embeddedness within communities are closely related phenomena with serious implications for research on agency in LPP. Parallel to this concern is the need for methodological triangulation. As shall be demonstrated in the chapters to follow, the study of agency in LPP—as a fundamentally interdisciplinary type of research—not only is best served through the adoption of ethnographic means of research but also requires the combination of multiple approaches to data collection and analysis, and this should include reflexive engagement on the part of researchers.

Quantitative Data

Although the tendency in social research is to make a clear distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods, it is important to acknowledge the very basic fact that these two share a dialectical relationship. Specifically, the design of quantitative research strategies requires qualitative deliberation, if not merely to justify why certain analytical categories are more relevant than others. Likewise, it is extremely difficult for qualitative research to make convincing claims about ontological processes without the provision of empirically gathered statistical data about these very processes. It is therefore more accurate to look at data and methods as being either prominently quantitative or qualitative, as opposed to being either one or the other. In the chapters that follow, this intricate balance between quantitative and qualitative is evident.

In the early neoclassical phase of LPP research, when language planners were viewed as rational agents solving complex language problems within emerging postcolonial nations (Ricento, 2000), large-scale language use surveys constituted a principal tool for data gathering and analysis. Survey data was—and is still—seen as able to capture a large amount of data at one time. Surveys are employed in psycho-sociological research in LPP (Baker, 2006), which can measure attitudes to language, conduct census surveys, capture language use, implement language-performance testing and investigate social network language use, all of which may have implications for questions related to agency. One issue is whether self-reported data can truly reflect language use (Kamwanga-malu, 2011), an issue that again has important implications for research on agency. While participants may respond to survey questions in a manner deemed to be truthful, perceptions of behavior and actual behavior—all of which are manifestations of agency—may not be convergent. This is why some contributors have felt the need to triangulate survey data with other types of data.

Various strategies are used by chapter contributors to analyze quantitative data. These often include the initial transcription and coding of data

using MAXQDA software, SPSS software and Nvivo software. Once this essentially qualitative data was transformed into codes—which can then be analyzed as quantitative data—contributors adopted thematic analysis, content analysis and directed content analysis, all of which involve some degree of epistemological extrapolation from the original data set when specific data units can be linked to specific agency-related questions. Clearly, however, much of the data analyzed in the following seven chapters is of a discursive nature. While we merely summarize the issue in the following section, we invite readers to consult Barakos and Unger's (2016) insightful edited volume, which looks at a range of issues grounding the analysis of discursive data in LPP research.

Discourse Analytic Research Methods in LPP

Linguistic analysis of discourse in LPP is a well-established research approach. Analyzing discursive data to reveal agentive processes in local settings—specifically how they converge and/or diverge from macro-level policy intentions—has become a standard in LPP scholarship. These analyses often require multilayered (or according to Wodak (2006), multimethodical) approaches that ensure triangulation. Some steps suggested by Wodak (2006) include the formulation of research questions and hypotheses, ethnographic research on the context of the policy in question, decisions about methodologies chosen, selection of categories for textual analysis, and choices of linguistic units for the analysis of texts and discourses. Data under investigation range from historical and official policy documents to transcripts of face-to-face interviews. A close, critical reading of policy documents can unearth ideologies, while micro-level analysis can examine the opinions and perspectives of people and the broad range of linguistic and semiotic means used to express them (Tollefson, 2015). Similarly, Johnson (2015) proposes a four-level, contextual approach to analyzing LPP: text-internal analysis examining language and syntax, intertextual connections between past and present policy discourses, extralinguistic social variables and sociohistorical and political contexts, including "the beliefs and actions of language policy agents" (p. 170). In Chapter 1 by Šimičić and Chapter 2 by Hatoss, discursive analyses of agency revealed in interview transcripts constitute primary strategies. At the same time, however, the challenge of gathering large samples through interviews is significant, which means that data from interview transcripts clearly need to be triangulated with other types of data to strengthen validity and reliability.

In sum, while the study of agency in LPP demonstrates a clear tendency towards the adoption of ethnographic means of data gathering and analysis, it also depends quite heavily on triangulation to increase validity and reliability. Whether the methods chosen are ethnography, (critical) discourse analysis, survey research or a combination of the

aforementioned, however, there is a clear need in our field to expand beyond established approaches. As Tollefson (2015) states, the explanatory power of LPP research has been constrained by the traditional macro-micro-level distinction, and LPP scholarship needs to come up with more creative ways to examine LPP phenomena at a variety of levels or scales. One intriguing area of inquiry in which such phenomena should be explored is *linguistic landscape analysis* (LLS), as discussed by Šimicic and Tan in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, respectively. According to Blommaert and Maly (2014, p. 1), LLS considers "the presence of publicly visible bits of written language: billboards, roads and safety signs, shop signs, graffiti and all sorts of other inscriptions in the public space". This can potentially open new possibilities in LPP research to "detect and interpret social change and transformation" (Blommaert & Maly 2014, p. 2), while simultaneously revealing new and valuable insight into agency in LPP.

Summary of Chapters

The chapters in this volume come from a variety of researchers in the LPP field, focus on a range of topics (from diaspora communities to linguistic landscapes), and employ a variety of research approaches to the study of agency. The following summary of these chapters draws attention to the different ways in which agency in LPP is researched.

In Chapter 1, Šimičić analyzes the negotiation of linguistic identity in two minority settings in Italy and Croatia not recognized as national minorities in their respective nations. The author employs ethnographic approaches, including focus groups, individual interviews and participant observation, and specifically considers representations of agency in discourse as a principal analytical tool. Šimičić examines agentive responses to language management initiatives for both communities, even though they are not legally recognized national minorities in both countries. The author shows how agency unfolds and varies in both contexts, taking into consideration the ideological and political affiliations of groups within the communities.

Hatoss, in Chapter 2, explores agency in the language planning initiatives and motivations of heritage language maintenance in the South Sudanese diaspora of Australia. Through a mixed-methods research design employing sociolinguistic surveys, semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations, the chapter contributes to current developments in theorizing micro-level language planning, captured in Hatoss's suggestion that agency in language choices may be enabled or constrained by external, extralinguistic factors. Empirical data in this chapter is used to display a dynamic relationship between agency identity, motivation and solidarity of the South Sudanese in maintaining their mother tongue in Australia and passing it on to the next generation.

Chapter 3, by Tan, situates the readers in the Malaysian context and employs linguistic landscape analysis. The author observes street names in locations such as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang, and contrasts approaches taken in these locations by government and city councils towards the implementation of street naming, shifting language use back to Malay from colonial English names. But in these communities, Tan notes how agency often comes in the form of resistance (e.g., new street names being vandalized). However, the author notes that the dominant form of resistance in this context is more passive and mainly comes in the form of the persistent use of previous colonial names rather than post-independence names. He also shows how language practices and urban spaces interact in dynamic ways.

In Chapter 4, Boucher-Yip describes the reported language use of the Semai, the largest indigenous group in Peninsular Malaysia. Semai bilingual speakers are faced with choices in language behavior that will determine whether the Semai language will be maintained. Through methodological triangulation consisting of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and participant observation, the chapter explores the agentive role of the Semai community in maintenance and acquisition planning, and highlights the initiatives of individuals, families, groups and the community in heritage language maintenance. Boucher-Yip argues that more needs to be done at multiple LPP levels to ensure minority language survival in pluralistic contexts such as Malaysia.

Chapter 5, by Hamid, Nguyen, Nguyen and Phan, combines three recently completed doctoral studies on agency and language-in-education policy conducted in three universities in Vietnam. The first study draws on data from interviews and classroom observations and examines English teacher agency aimed at fostering learner autonomy. The second study examines English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in academic programs within the context of internationalizing higher education. The third study analyzes qualitative data collected over a six-month period that revealed intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions in the way agency is exercised by university teachers. Together, Hamid et al. examine the nature of agency as exercised by English language and content area academics in enacting three forms of language-in-education policy in higher education in Vietnam: (1) a policy to develop learner autonomy to transform students into critical, responsible and life-long learners; (2) an EMI policy to enhance students' content knowledge and English proficiency; and (3) an assessment policy that draws on the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) for Languages to measure Vietnamese students' English proficiency.

Chapter 6, by Molina, explores a second language teacher education (SLTE) program at the University of San Diego in which teacher candidates participate in practicum experiences within a community based English language program (CBELP). The author collected data through

document analysis of teaching artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, candidate reflections) and thematic analysis of data gathered from observations, whole group debriefing sessions and qualitative interviews conducted with each candidate. Molina draws on sociocultural theory to understand the process of how these candidates mediate their experiences, as well as ecological perspectives to understand how teacher candidates make sense of their work and agency in context. She illustrates how teacher candidates navigate their sense of agency by transitioning from students to practitioners embedded within broader educational and social systems.

In Chapter 7, Ollerhead explores agency as part of policy aimed at increasing linguistic diversity in Australian secondary schools. Her data draws upon a qualitative, ethnographically oriented case study project carried out with teachers, pre-service teachers and students in an intensive English school that caters to the needs of migrant populations. Taking into consideration the constraints of an intensive English immersion program, Ollerhead discusses how teachers understand and enact translanguaging and trans-semiotizing pedagogy in order to enable learners to respond authentically and agentively to learning opportunities in the classroom. Ollerhead also considers institutional policy conditions that lead to incongruities between the rich language resources multilingual teachers and students bring to the classroom and the manifestation of a monolingual 'English-only' habitus reflected in language-in-education policy in Australia. She concludes by contending that translanguaging teaching strategies in classrooms can indeed foster positive and emancipatory agentive responses to restrictive English-dominant language policy in Australia.

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