

Foreword

When I started to study language policy, the field was still largely under the influence of what Jernudd and Nekvapil (2012) called the classic period, the 1960s, when several linguists tried to help new independent nations to develop a language policy that would suit a postcolonial situation. Language policy then meant national language planning, what some classify as a top-down process. In our own first efforts in the field (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999), we too tried to prescribe Israel national policy, but given the source of the funding of our research, we aimed to propose a workable language education policy, seeing the school as a significant domain. In continuing studies, I later acknowledged the relevance of different levels and domains, so that in Spolsky (2009) I suggested that the common failures of State language management was ignoring the policies at other levels, ranging from the family through education and religion and work to government.

Two developments took me further. I learned about the concept of self-management of the Prague linguists who drew attention to how individual workers in German-owned industry in Czechoslovakia tried to gain competence in the language of their employers (Neustupný & Nekvapil, 2003). And my middle grandson, at the age of five or six, refused to shift from the English of his parents to the Hebrew that his older siblings had already acquired at school. Therefore, in my latest book (Spolsky, 2021), I start not with the nation but with the individual speaker, working through all the levels up to the nation.

This explains why I am so happy to be invited to write a foreword for this book by Trang Nguyen, *Individual Language Policy*, a pioneering study focusing on the language practices, beliefs and management of bilingual minority Vietnamese youth. Drawing on a wide and thorough grasp of research in language policy, she sets out to describe the way that, despite external pressure, these young people maintain their loyalty to and use of their indigenous non-standard home languages, drawing on their developing language repertoires to fit into their changing domains and environments.

From informal interviews with several youths and supplementary talks with some of their parents, she derives a picture of the way their competence in the second language, Vietnamese, grows, and the varied situations in which they use it and their home languages. To this, she adds

evidence of their learning and use of global English. The resulting description provides a vivid picture of the pressures that young speakers of indigenous minority varieties encounter in the wider modern world.

Apart from its interest in showing the current state of minority varieties in Vietnam, this book will hopefully encourage more studies which focus on the language policy of individuals, for it is at the individual level that the success or failure of a language policy is finally revealed. We need more studies like this, studies that show language practice, beliefs and management and the individuals concerned. Thus, we will learn about the early and late adopters (Cooper, 1989) who show the forces behind language maintenance and shift, and be able to go beyond analysis and criticism to proposing language management that can contribute to healthy multilingualism and maintenance of heritage language varieties.

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References

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