

National language planning, why (not)?

Bente Bakmand

Abstract

This paper will focus on national political views on the appropriateness of language planning in relation to respectively the status, the corpus and the acquisition of various languages. In the light of concrete 'language policy events' and the debates - parliamentary, in the media and in academic discourse - in relation to these, the aim of the paper is to discuss which domains within language matters are considered objects of national political intervention and for which reasons. French language policy which is relatively explicit will be compared with more implicit Danish language policy. The interrelations of ideologically and pragmatically founded reasons for intervening in various language matters will be discussed: In an internationally oriented world, where cultural and linguistic pluralism prevail at the expense of national homogeneity, which role is left for national language policy, if any? Can a phenomenon which traditionally has been considered mainly as a tool for uniting nations possibly become a tool for granting and improving democracy in modern Western European societies' internal and external communication? Or should national governments once and for all leave such matters to individual choices, EU language policies or market forces? Answering in depth to these broad questions is not the ambition of the paper, whereas outlining tendencies in the ongoing political discourses connected to the issue is the aim, in the light of the approaches in the scientific study of language planning and language policy.

keywords: language policy events, national political intervention, tool of democracy, French language policy, Danish language planning, parliamentary/media/academic debates, cultural pluralism, national homogeneity.

In this paper, I will focus on political views held at the national level about the feasibility of language planning in relation to respectively the status, corpus and acquisition of various languages. In the light of concrete "language policy events" and various debates that they have raised at the parliamentary level, in the media and in the academic sphere, the aim of my presentation is to discuss which domains within language matters are considered objects of national political intervention and for which reasons. The reflexion will be conducted in a comparative perspective.

French language policy, which is relatively explicit, will be compared with more implicit Danish language policy. The relations between ideological and pragmatic reasons for intervening in various language matters will be discussed. I will raise questions like:

- Within a framework of globalization and internationalisation where cultural and linguistic pluralism prevail in contrast to national homogeneity, what role is left for national language policy?
- Can a practice which has traditionally been considered mainly as a tool of creating homogeneous nations possibly be an instrument of granting and improving democracy in modern Western European societies?
- Or should national governments once and for all leave such matters to individual choices, EU institutions or market forces?

The ambition of this paper is not to answer in depth these broad questions, yet it is my aim to outline some dominant trends in the ongoing political discourses connected to the issue. I will relate these tendencies to the approaches in the scientific study of language planning and language policy.

LANGUAGE PLANNING IN THEORY

One way of distinguishing "language policy" from "language planning" is to consider "language policy" as the expression of the ideological orientations and views, and "language planning" as the actual proposal that makes up their implementation. In this session, I will introduce some of the most important concepts relevant to the issue.

In the literature concerned with "language planning", the American-Norwegian sociolinguist Einar Haugen is often mentioned as the person who gave birth to the concept. In the article "Language planning in Modern Norway", which was widely acknowledged after its second edition in 1968, Haugen introduced and attempted to define the concept in this way "...an activity of preparing a normative orthography, grammar, and dictionary for the guidance of writers and speakers in a non-homogeneous speech community" (Haugen 1968(1959):673). And this activity, in the specific case of modern Norway, was closely linked to the country's separation from Denmark. What follows from this definition is that language policy was seen as "corpus planning only", meaning restricted to the standardization of a language. This would in most cases refer to the one and only national language.

In the late sixties and early seventies, the scientific interest in language planning mainly applied to a third world context where the establishment of one standardized national language was regarded - from a Western European perspective - as a prerequisite for modernization, if not as the main tool for uniting and building up a nation. From this follows a tendency to consider language planning as an activity which has as its main goal to solve problems and to provoke changes in the society concerned. Two decades - and quite a lot of attempts to define - after Haugen introduced his definition of "language planning" the sociolinguist Robert L. Cooper proposed another one which was somewhat more modern: "language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their codes" (Cooper 1989:45). Before ending up with this broad definition, Cooper goes through 12 earlier definitions of the term by relating them all to the question: "...who plans what for whom and why". This is how the question of what functions are attributed to what languages is touched upon, a question which has prevailed ever since the birth of the discipline. Cooper's definition differs from former ones (such as for instance Fishman 1968, Rubin and Jernudd 1971) in as far as it does not consider language planning to be necessarily oriented towards problem-solving (a goal that in many third-world countries has failed so far) and in as far as it does not necessarily have "progress" as its main end. Accordingly, it restricts neither the planners, nor those who will be affected by the planning. Thus, Cooper is on the one hand questioning the western european philosophy of "evolution and modernization" and on the other hand the monopol of a state to do language planning. And he is deliberately not referring to one (national) language, but to language or languages as such, and hereby opening the door to another understanding of what "the natural state of things" is: adopting a multilingual perspective rather than a monolingual one. Einar Haugen himself has indeed contributed to this development, he was the one to introduce in the 70's the concept of "language ecology" which certainly reflects a multilingual perspective (Haugen 1972).

In order to be able to understand, describe and analyse "linguistic situations", Cooper operationalizes "language planning" by dividing it into three sub-dimensions, which are nevertheless closely interrelated and interdependent: Corpus planning which refers to intervention in the forms of a language, status planning which concerns choices in terms of status of a language vis-a-vis other languages (official, national etc.) - and acquisition planning which concerns the teaching and learning of languages - national as well as second and foreign languages.

Whereas status planning can serve to turn a language into a prestigious one, corpus planning elaborates on the potential functions in ensuring that the language dealt with has the necessary terminology to function as the medium of administration, education, etc. Acquisition planning can be - and often is - regarded as a subordinate dimension of status planning. Referring to the analytical tripartition of Cooper, and thus placing acquisition planning on the same level as status and corpus planning can be seen as a way of stressing its importance. In the rich scientific literature concerned with these matters, there is a general tendency to regard status planning as "the most interesting dimension" today.

I wish to stress a need to look into corpus and acquisition planning also. It is the contention of my paper that knowledge in all parts of language planning and maybe especially in the interrelations of the three dimensions is of great importance: is there any logic, any underlying rationale that binds together the status, the corpus and the acquisition planning of western european nation-states today? For instance, it would make sense to presume that it will have an influence on planning which foreign languages to teach in school

whether the national language is of wider or minor international spread. Just as it would make sense to consider that it influences the way corpus planning is brought out whether the language in question is or is not national language in other states in other parts of the world.

LANGUAGE PLANNING IN FRANCE

Before the establishment of "national western european languages", they were merely state languages, meaning that they were the administrative idioms used in the central administration of european states. It was not until the 18th and the 19th century that national movements paved the way for what was to become an almost unquestionable tie between the nation and the national language. According to Benedict Anderson, author of "Imagined Communities", what first and foremost made the difference between national languages and the old administrative languages was that they were no more than that: "...languages used by and for officialdoms for their own inner convenience. There was no idea of systematically imposing the language on the dynasts' various subject population" (Anderson 1983:42). And as he remarks in a footnote: "An agreeable confirmation of this point is provided by Fran(ois I (French king(, who (...) banned all printing of books in 1535 and made French the language of his courts four years later!" (op.cit.).

Hence, French became the official language of France in 1539 by "l'Ordonnance de Villers-Cotteret". This event is by many regarded as the first French step towards an extremely centralistic, monolingual interventionism in language matters. The fact that only a small part of the population mastered the French language at that time is considered a paradox and a proof of the deliberate attempt to suppress other languages - and thereby of course language speakers - that was to become one of the consequences of this policy.

The primary goal of this famous law was to get rid of Latin in official administration, but since there was a new tendency in some regions of France to produce local official documents in the regional language (Breton, Alsacien, Occitan etc.) it is probable that the law had secondary goals regarding these local languages as well. In any case, the law can be seen as a first sign of official awareness of the existence of more than one language in France. Obviously, it was considered as a problem (Gardy and Lafont 1981:79). However, one should look at this in the light of the fact that in the 16th century well-defined, standardized national languages did not yet exist, neither in France, nor in the rest of Europe. Multilingualism was the norm - and the elites - meaning then the kings - did not yet see it as something they could benefit from to make the administrative language available to the people of the kingdom. About one century later the French Academy was founded. This was one of the very first institution of its kind in Europe and its duty was - in 1635: "to observe and to guard the French language, to guide it and to keep it under control" (Bengtsson 1968: 29). This is how the idea about French language policy favouring a fixed language was born. And this is how both status (by the Villers-Cotteret ordinance) and corpus planning (by the establishment of l'Académie Fran(aise) was institutionalized in France - thus laying the foundation for an explicit language policy (see Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1994 for a discussion of explicitness vs. implicitness of language policy).

It is not my goal neither to defend the French language nor the French people, but what I would nevertheless like to draw attention to is that the official French attitude towards linguistic interventionism of today is perhaps not as one-sided as we often think it is: several voices speak in contemporary France. Similarly in Denmark, the official attitude towards language matters might be neither as "laissez-faire" nor as tolerant as it is often presented. And often, to consider a laissez-faire attitude co-terminous with a tolerant attitude would be questionable.

RECENT LANGUAGE PLANNING IN FRANCE

Broadly speaking, the arguments for engaging in language policy can be either pragmatically or ideologically founded. Underlying these two types of language policy are two different views of language: in the case of pragmatic interventionism, language is considered as a mere instrument of communication, whereas in the case of ideological language policy, language is considered the symbol of values external to language itself: symbolic of a particular ideology (Brulard 1997: 37). In fact, language policy is often both ideological and pragmatic (or instrumental) and there is a complementary relationship; in some cases, however, the two positions are in contradiction and one of them prevails at the expense of the other. Sometimes an approach can be considered as a purely ideological one by some, while others would consider it as mainly pragmatic.

The debate concerning recent French language planning is an obvious example of this dual nature and function of language planning and of the extent to which language planning initiatives can be understood and presented differently.

I am referring to "the loi Toubon" of 1994. This law is an attempt to implement a political vision: a sentence that was added to the French constitution when the Maastricht Treaty was ratified in 1992: "The French language is the language of the Republic". The loi Toubon is an example of corpus planning since it aims at making the use of specific French terminology compulsory in a number of domains, and it is an example of status planning in the sense that it is aimed at regaining lost or partly lost territory, by making the use of French compulsory in several domains of society, namely: Consumer information including advertising, work contracts and information etc., education at all levels and the language use of politicians and anyone who officially represents the Republic. These are all domains considered likely to affect the consciousness of the people, not only linguistically.

The author of the law, Jacques Toubon, who was then right-wing minister of francophony, presented it as a way of ensuring the democratic right of every French citizen to speak and to write French on French territory and to be able to understand any message communicated in public. What was considered the most controversial part of the draft of the law was the corpus planning part: The intention of replacing anglicisms by new French terms elaborated by various terminology commissions under the various ministries and gathered in a dictionary: The "Dictionnaire des termes officiels". According to the original draft, the use of these terms should be compulsory not only for those people representing the Republic, "the public sphere", but also for the media and thus to some extent in the private sphere. Nevertheless, this last obligation was abolished by the Constitutional Council since it was judged to be in violation with the universal principles of Human Rights.

The bill triggered a lot of debate both in and outside France. As a matter of fact, the law is but an extension and an attempt to strengthen "the loi Bas-Lauriol" of 1975 which had not then aroused much attention. This is probably not so much because of the text of the law itself but more a matter of external factors. The political debates concerning the referendum about the Maastricht Treaty, where the result was a very weak "yes" - comparable to the very weak Danish "no" which at the second try became a weak yes - were still quite present in the minds of the French people. Just as in Denmark, politicians representing the extreme right wing had been presenting the European Union as a threat to national unity. At the same time, two recent laws "the lois Pasqua", which have made it more difficult to obtain a residence permit in France, had brought immigrant issues and national identity on the agenda.

Some people go to the extreme of calling the loi Toubon an act of "linguistic purification" (Libération, 13th April 1994) with a clear reference to ethnic purification: systematic cleansing of people with a different cultural, political or religious background (Durand 1996:75).

What the threat consists in leaves no doubt: The words that in "Dictionnaire des termes officiels" are called "impropres" ... "improper" and which should be replaced by recently invented French terms are almost without exception of Anglo-American origin. Those who are against the law while considering it as an expression of xenophobia often defend what the Director of the Danish Language Council professor Erik Hansen calls "a laissez-faire attitude" towards language and language change: The state has no right to intervene in people's use of language since language belongs to and is formed by its users. Everyone has the right to express him- or herself freely. In response to this critique Mr Toubon would say that language has always been considered as the business of the French state. Just as he would stress the consumer aspect of the law and some people's snobbery for the English language. I quote Mr Toubon from "Le Monde": "It really astonishes me when those who pretend to defend the people tell me that nothing is more beautiful than to use words which are incomprehensible for 95 percent of the population" (Le Monde, 23th March 1994). He stresses the democratic character of the law, its intention is to ensure the right - not the duty - of the French people to use their national tongue in France.

Toubon tries to present the law as an act of pragmatic or instrumental interventionism: In this logic, the purpose of the law is to ensure the use of French in the public sphere of France and to make the French language more transparent: hence to ensure more efficient communication - to solve communicational problems. The underlying premise is that French is the most efficient means of communication in any "public situation" in France: The language spoken by the majority of the population. No one would question that, I

suppose, and what is more, the law illustrates that something has been learned since the Villers-Cotter' t Ordonnance in 1539: Several articles of the law aim at ensuring that there should be no discriminatory effects on linguistic minorities within France: As an example, work contracts should be in French but when the employee has another mother tongue a translation can be required, and it is the latter that has legal validity. One could say that to some degree, the right to the French language has been extended to also cover the right to other mother tongues.

When it comes to the corpus planning aspect of the law, ideological arguments seem to make more sense than pragmatic or instrumental ones. To claim that a language can be more or less transparent would certainly not make sense to everybody. Sociolinguists would claim that this reflects an ignorance of the social nature of language and of the deep gap between spoken and written language. There can be no doubt that the wish to abolish anglicisms in the French language is ideologically founded: It reflects a will to diminish Anglo-American influence as such and to honor French traditions and customs. As mentioned above it is not unusual that language planning is both pragmatically and ideologically motivated. But the polemic concerning the loi Toubon is an example of how these two approaches are often polarized during debates. In the media, suspicion was raised on the instrumental, pragmatic intentions of mister Toubon and much more attention was given to his ideological vision. During the debate, he was often quoted for this and similar declarations: "It is an important duty for all those people in the world who fancy our values to protect and defend the French language: the language of freedom, equality and democracy" (Le Monde, 5th May 1994).

RECENT LANGUAGE PLANNING IN DENMARK

Fascism or cleansing, treatment of symptoms only, fundamental democratic rights, nostalgia of a glorious past, a law without content... Many interpretations of what the loi Toubon is or is an expression of have been proposed. However, one thing can be concluded: the debates that it triggered reflect a fundamental need to put language matters on the political agenda.

Recently, language matters have also been discussed in Denmark, however to a lesser degree and more in the academic sphere than in the political arena. And just as in France, the influence of the English language on our national language has been the cause. Linguists have been discussing whether this is something we should not pay any attention to or whether it is now time to intervene. Last spring, the Danish Language Council organised a conference entitled: "The English influence on Danish - a good or a bad thing?" Varying views were expressed regarding the influence of English at different levels and its relative importance. There seemed to be an almost common agreement in that active corpus planning is neither possible nor feasible in Denmark even if the Anglo-American influence is considered to be increasing. Although it was agreed that it would be rather ridiculous and pointless to try to abolish anglicisms in the Danish language since this would be only touching the surface of the phenomenon, the option of status planning was not really discussed.

I will now investigate two domains of language planning in Denmark that have very explicit directions in France: namely, first, consumer information and, second, the corpus planning concerning the national language.

"The Marketing law" is an obvious example of the well-known Danish laissez-faire trend in language matters: A very low degree of formalisation and a very weak set of rules concerning language use. Only the first two paragraphs of this law can apply to language use. It says that "... acts which are against good marketing practice are not allowed" and that when presenting an article "any information that is either uncertain, inappropriate or insufficient should not be given" (Markedsføringsloven). Hence it is open to interpretation what "good marketing practice" is, as well as when information is uncertain, inappropriate or insufficient. As we can see, these paragraphs apply to the content of customer information, and not to the language used and thus it does not specify whether for instance consumer instructions in English would be considered appropriate. It is thus the decisions taken by the consumerombudsmand which will form the jurisprudence. However it should be added that in practice consumer information is in most cases given in a "Scandinavian language" at least when it comes to presentations of merchandise. This is partly a result of recent EU regulation. As we can see, consumer information is in Denmark not considered to be of interest to the Danish Language Council.

The second question that I will investigate concerns the policy of the Danish Language Council. By investigating its current framework, one can trace a trend which is quite contradictory with the above

mentioned "laissez-faire attitude": Two new laws came into effect in August 1997 and they can be seen as attempts to render both status and corpus planning more explicit. "Retskrivningsloven" can be seen as an act of status planning in as far as it concerns the number of persons who are obliged to make use of the Danish norm as it is defined in the dictionary "retskrivningsordbogen". From being the norm compulsory in the school system its use was in 1948 extended to the state administration and by the recent law this has been extended to the courts and to any local administrative level. In practice however, this can be seen as an act to maintain the status quo, since the use of the Danish standard is widespread both at the local level and in the courts. But if we draw a comparison with French language policy, it is likely that putting things into law and rendering things explicit will be considered to influence future directions. The recent Danish law concerning the use of the norm can thus be seen as an act of retrospective planning which is considered likely to maintain the norm and which is also considered likely to influence the linguistic hierarchy in the Danish society.

The other recent law "Sprognævnsloven" concerns the activities of the Danish Language Council. It is hence setting up the directions for corpus planning. These are well known principles that have been followed for several decades, but they have now been gathered in one law. When adding new words to the dictionary of standard Danish, the Language Council can follow one of two principles: Either "the traditionalist principle", meaning following traditional Danish norms thus normalisation, or the "language-in-use-principle", meaning following the orthography that has become practice in daily use. It is often a matter of how recent the occurrence of the word is which principle is being followed. Though this law does not show a direct wish to abolish English words, it can be seen as a sign of an increasing concern about the occurrence of Anglicisms. And it can also be seen as an attempt to unite ideology and pragmatism: The law states that the Language Council should "pay regard to the functioning of the Danish language as holder of tradition and cultural continuity and as a mirror of contemporary culture and society" (Retskrivningsloven). But it should be noted that the Danish practice is far from the active French corpus planning which includes the inventing of new words in many domains of contemporary French. Anglicisms are not really considered a threat to national unity in Denmark.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Finally, bearing in mind the questions I raised in my introduction, I would like to address the two following issues:

- Should acquisition planning be a natural part of overall language policy?
- Within contemporary western European nations, can one say that cultural and linguistic diversity is being managed or would it be more appropriate to say that it is being neglected?

In answer to the first question, I will argue that it would be an exaggeration to see the loi Toubon as an example of acquisition planning. And I will argue this, even though the law indeed establishes French as "the official language of education in France" and even if it has an article which concerns foreign language teaching and where it is recommended that every French pupil should learn at least two foreign languages. What I mean is that these are the kind of declarations which do express an ideology, but they stay at the policy level. Declarations which do not necessarily imply a veritable strengthening of foreign language teaching, at least not in the short term.

From my analysis it should be clear that the close relations between status and corpus planning are unquestionable. However it is symptomatic in France as well as in Denmark that the teaching and learning of languages is not considered to be a natural part of that planning, it is considered to belong to another area, the education area. And there seems not to be an underlying rationale that binds together the actual language planning and the didactic and pedagogical choices in the official teaching and learning of languages.

The management of cultural and linguistic diversity is certainly a relevant issue within contemporary western nation states. According to my analysis one would be tempted to say that indeed linguistic diversity seems to be neglected in Denmark and France today, that this is basically considered a threat that demands protectionist acts. "Defending the national language" can indeed be seen as an act of defending linguistic diversity and granting democracy - as long as the national language is not English. However, I would like to stress that by challenging stereotypes regarding Danish tolerance and French intolerance vis-a-vis language diversity, it has been my intention to show that several voices speak, several attitudes are fighting to gain

territory, both in Denmark and France. And as a final remark I would like to mention a recent step taken by Lionel Jospin, the French primary minister, towards the ratification of the European Council's Charter on Minority and Regional Languages. In the media, this initiative has been interpreted as a sign of a change in the traditional French position when it comes to language matters, a tendency "de l'archaïsme à la modernité" (Le Monde, third July 1998). I quote from Le Monde: "...The change of position by France is also due to the construction of Europe, the acceptance of regional languages is likely to be indicative of modernity, whereas the stubborn sticking to the national language only is likely to become a sign of archaism" (op.cit.).

Of course this is just one sign of a potential new trend, and so far it is uncertain whether the ratification of the European Charter is compatible with the above mentioned second paragraph in the Constitution: "French is the language of the Republic". But if regional languages are to be endowed with real status, this is likely to provoke some changes in the conception of language matters in France, in particular when it comes to learning and teaching of languages. A door might be opened for a spread of bilingual education: "this bilingualism is indeed an asset" according to a comment in Libération, "since it opens the pupils towards other languages" (Libération, third February 1998).

Literature

Anderson, Benedict 1983. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.

Bakmand, Bente 1996. *Frankrig og sproget*. Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag.

Bekendtgørelse om Dansk Sprognævns virksomhed og sammensætning, af 4. september 1997.

Bengtsson, Sverker 1968. *La défense organisée de la langue française*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Uppsaliensis.

Brulard, In's 1997. The loi Toubon: linguistic interventionism and Human Rights. In: Perry, Sheila and Cross, Maire (eds.). *Voices of France - Social, political and cultural identity*. London: Pinter. 36-46.

Cooper, Robert L. 1989. *Language Planning and Social Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Délégation Générale à la Langue Française 1994. *Dictionnaire des termes officiels*. Paris.

Durand, Jacques 1996. Linguistic Purification, the French Nation-State and the Linguist. Hoffman Charlotte (ed.). *Language, Culture and Communication in Contemporary Europe*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 75-93.

Fishman Joshua A., Ferguson, Charles A. and Das Gupta, Jyotirinda (eds.) 1968. *Language Problems of Developing Nations*. New York: Wiley.

Gardy, Philippe and Lafont, Robert 1981. La diglossie comme conflit : l'exemple occitan. In: *Langages*. No 61. Paris: Larousse. 75-91.

Hansen, Erik 1991: Sprogpolitik. In: Jørgensen, Jens Normann (ed.). *Det danske sprogs status År 2001 - er dansk et truet sprog?* København: Danmarks Lærerhøjskole. 31-43.

Haugen, Einar 1968(1959). *Language Planning in Modern Norway*. In: Fishman, Joshua A (ed.). *Readings in the Sociology of Languages*. Paris: Mouton de Gruyter. 673-687.

Haugen, Einar (1972). *The Ecology of Language*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Haugen, Einar 1987. *Blessings of Babel: Bilingualism and Language Planning*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Le Monde, 23-03-1994.

Le Monde, 05-05-1994.

Libération, 13-04-1994.

Loi no 94-665 du 4 août 1994 relative à l'emploi de la langue française.

Lov nr. 428 af 1. juni 1994, Markedsføringsloven.

Lov nr. 320 af 14. maj 1997, Sprognævnsløven.

Lov nr. 332 af 14. maj 1997, Retskrivningsloven.

Rubin, Joan and Jernudd, Bjørn H. (eds.) 1971. *Can Language Be Planned*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.

Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove and Phillipson, Robert (eds.) 1994. *Linguistic human rights : overcoming linguistic discrimination*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Intercultural Communication, ISSN 1404-1634, 2000, April, issue 3.

Editor: Prof. Jens Allwood

URL: <http://www.immi.se/intercultural/>.